

one thing, you would have time to read all the discussion books we pick!)

B_e_g_g_a_r_s_i_n_S_p_a_i_n is available in mass-market paperback, as well as in the Monmouth County Library in Manalapan and the Old Bridge

THE MT VOID

Page 2

Library. [-ecl]

2. Well, I guess it is time for me to play the curmudgeon again. Society needs its curmudgeons to point out what a stupid silly mess we have gotten ourselves into. Without my little weekly columns my poor benighted readers would not realize all that is wrong with the world. And you know what would happen then? You might just fall into the trap of thinking that life is good. We get a constant barrage from society telling us everything from "life is just a bowl of cherries" to news programs telling you that your lifestyle is really better and more pleasant than that of lots of people in the world. They try to tell you that we actually have a good form of government here because politicians have to keep the people happy and cannot decree we all have to wear the same funny hats or that everybody has to go off and live on a farm for five years to find out how farmers live. We don't have to get up, denounce our former ways of thinking, and take on an imposed set of values. (At least the U.S. Government can't force you to do that. I won't say there aren't cases where corporations have decided that is a nifty innovative management technique.) Without people to point out the negatives in life, we might fall into mistaken, Pollyanna-ish philosophies. A slight digression about another curmudgeon. I loved it when a commentator on the local very-left-wing radio station--supposedly dedicated to opposing tyranny--complained that the government was wrong in wanting to revoke China's most-favored-nation status over the issue of human rights. He said we shouldn't try to impose our values on them. He usually is railing against the Government and its tyranny, but when it comes to a choice of siding with the Government or with tyranny, I see which side he picks. One of the things I am curmudgeonly about is the poor class of curmudgeons we are getting today. I miss Dorothy

Parker and H. L. Menken, even if they were before my time. Of course the greatest American curmudgeon of all was the great Mark Twain. He belongs right up there with Samuel Clemens!]

But I wonder what has turned me into a curmudgeon. I wasn't always a curmudgeon, you know. I have not been always what you see in me today. Years ago I was just an Angry Young Man. Somehow he evolved out of a peeved teenager. I suppose I should have considered a career as a curmudgeon back when I an adolescent prone to snits. I may have even been an uncooperative toddler, but I will tell you, I was one t_e_r_r_i_f_i_c baby. Nobody noticed.

Well, that's not true. My Aunt Rose noticed. But she was a cheek-pincher, so who cared what she thought. "Oh, you're so cute!" she would say as she grabbed a hunk of loose flesh on the side of my face and compressed it to the size of a small lozenge. Ah, but she was a woman ahead of her time. First, she could see

THE MT VOID

Page 3

qualities in me that remain true my entire life. I was cute and I am still. Nobody notices. My other memory of her was that in addition to great taste she also had this TV with a little four-inch screen. This was from forty years before the Japanese started making their little personal TVs.

Well, I was going to talk about something else, but you kept me talking for so long about myself I just didn't get to it. Next week maybe.

3. Don Blosser offers the following information:

"Star Wars" is Alive and Well in Saturday Morning Cartoons!!

I may have missed this review already, but if not, here goes.

It just struck me last night, "Star Wars" is alive and well.

Tune in to Channel 5 (7?) on Saturday mornings from 8 to 9 , or 9

to 10. I'm not too certain about the time or channel. At that time, I'm half-awake and wrestling with my daughter trying to get her fed, dressed, washed, and pottied so she can go skating in Jackson.

Anyhow, "Star Wars" is alive and well. It's not called "Star Wars" though, but "The Adventures of Sonic the Hedge Hog." For those of you familiar with the Weekday morning series that shows from 7:00 to 7:30 on channel 5 (7?, see above remarks), the difference is night and day. The weekday versions are humorous and light-hearted cartoonish. The villains are comic and the comedy is slapstick.

The Saturday morning version features the same major characters: Dr. Ivo Robotnik and Sonic the Hedgehog. But with a somber and sinister mood. Robotnik is not bumbling, nor are his robots. Sonic has a cast of supporting characters calling themselves the "Freedom Fighters." As in the weekday series, Robotnik is out to conquer Sonic's home planet Mobius.

Saturday Morning's Robotnik speaks with a menacing tone, one arm is mechanical. His domain is the great machine, be it a tank, plane, or industrial park. Robotnik's goal is to conquer Mobius and turn it into a giant toxic dump surrounded by vile polluting factories making who knows what. He has one living sycophant, Snively, a pipsqueak nerd. The rest of Robotnik's minions are robots who look a lot like Darth Vader's and the Emperor's Star Troopers. Any of Mobius citizen's, mostly furry forest creatures, that Robotnik captures, he transforms into robot slaves with no memory of their past. Robotnik comes across as a combination of Darth Vader and

the Emperor. Snively is a cartoon equivalent of the Empire's scientists and lackeys.

Sonic is "built for speed" and his favorite expression before he speeds off leaving a blazing trail is "let's juice." Sonic combines Han Solo and Luke Skywalker. His main buddy is "Tails" a 4-year-old fox with two tails. Tails counter-rotates his tails allowing him to take off and fly. Yoda and Obi Wan are represented by Sonic's Uncle Chuck, who was robotized by Robotnik. Uncle Chuck "foresaw" the struggles against Robotnik and created golden "Power

Rings" to aid Sonic. A "Power Ring" appears once every 24-hours in a forest pool and can only be used by Sonic to multiply his powers. In one episode Robotnik got a "Power Ring" and used it to power a "Hedge Hog Detector" to locate and track Sonic moving at super-sonic speed. The "Freedom Fighters" are various forest creatures including an opossum (Princess Sally, the brains and an electronic and mechanical genius), a half-rabbit half-robot (Bunny, the strong-armed strong woman), a Frenchified squirrel (Francois, a sniveler who needs constant encouragement to continue the struggle), and a walrus-like (???) character (???, the general handy-man and genial all around supporting character), and Tails.

If you have kids and they're under eight, then you've probably seen and heard both weekday and weekend versions of Sonic. You don't need to be reminded of all this. For those of you without, I just thought you'd like to know that "Star Wars" is alive and well on Saturday morning. [-db]

4. HOTEL ANDROMEDA by Jack Chalker (Ace, ISBN 0-441-00010-X, 1994, 248pp, US\$4.99) (a book review by Evelyn C. Leeper):

If this is the kind of book you like, then you will like this book.

Jack Chalker collects (has commissioned, one suspects) twelve stories of alien goings-on in an intergalactic hotel. There may be a serious story in here, but the ones I sampled seemed of the variety that plays better as a Marx Brothers comedy on screen than on the printed page. The most prestigious author included is Kristine Kathryn Rusch; other well-known contributors include Esther M. Friesner and Janet Kagan. The goal, so far as I can tell, is entertainment without concern for content, or even a plot, but it didn't grab me enough to make me plow through it. It is, of course, remotely conceivable that picking this up immediately after finishing J_a_n_e_E_y_r_e was too much of a shock to my system, but it didn't seem to deliver the sort of G_r_a_n_d_H_o_t_e_l story I was expecting.

Then again, I don't read Terry Pratchett either.

5. BELLE EPOQUE (a film review by Mark R. Leeper):

Capsule review: If one understands Spanish and the Spanish Civil War, there might be more substance to this film than there initially appears. But United States audiences will find this a feather-light situation comedy about an army deserter who gets involved with a family with four sexy daughters.

Rating: +1 (-4 to +4).

This year's Academy Award for best foreign film went to the Spanish film B_e_l_l_e_E_p_o_q_u_e. In competition with films of much weightier content, the film that won was a little flip of a movie, little more than an extended "Farmer's Daughter" story set in rural Spain during the early 1930s. In a time when three factions, the Carlists, the Monarchists, and the Republicans are fighting each other for possession of the country, Fernando (played by young Jorge Sanz), a handsome young soldier, deserts his company. As the film opens he is arrested by two rather odd Civil Guardsmen whose disagreement over what to do with him leaves him free again. Then he comes to a village where a free-thinking villager Manolo (Fernando Fernan Gomez) offers him a place to stay for the night. In the morning Fernando plans to head for Madrid until he sees the arrival by train of Manolo's four beautiful daughters. Fernando decides to stay around to enjoy more hospitality and to get to know the four daughters a little better. What follows is a pleasant little tale of romantic entanglements with each of the four daughters.

There are few surprises for American audiences in this film. Though it has been said that the liberal attitudes the family has is very atypical of the Spanish in the 30s, they are much less shocking to Americans in the 90s so this film conceivably had more impact in its native country than it will have in the United States. What we see as a background to the story as just a village of moderately interesting characters perhaps might have shocked the Spanish audiences. For example there is a woman who has decided to dress and behave like a man. Not so shocking to us, but it reportedly was considered outrageous behavior in Spain. One man seems content to share his wife with her lover, with whom he remains on good terms. Again not common in the United States but not shocking either.

There also seems to be some political undercurrent to what is going on, though it is not well explained. One character's suicide may be related to the war, though it is not sufficiently explained by

the subtitles. An alert ear will note that there are some differences between what is being said in Spanish and the subtitle translation.

Fernando Trueba directed this story with touches that are a little reminiscent of both S_i_r_e_n_s and any number of pleasant countryside films, mostly from France. B_e_l_l_e_E_p_o_q_u_e has a feel of being close to nature in an idyllic small rural village. While it is pleasant enough for an hour or so, it is an odd choice for best foreign language film of 1993. For those who enjoy light French pastoral comedies, I would rate it a +1 on the -4 to +4 scale.

6. Lunacon '94 (part 1 of 3) (an abbreviated con report by Evelyn C. Leeper):

This is an abbreviated con report, since we attended Lunacon only on Saturday. As a result, I'm not sure what the attendance was, etc. I a m sure that no one but I would call a 10,000-word convention abbreviated!

_ H_ o_ t_ e_ l

The hotel this year was the Rye Brook Hilton. It _ s_ t_ i_ l_ l seems as though Lunacon moves every few years or so. This "New York" convention hasn't been in New York City for quite a while, and has often left the state as well. The space was adequate, but the hotel layout was so confusing that it took me a while just to find registration!

_ D_ e_ a_ l_ e_ r_ s'_ _ R_ o_ o_ m_ s

There were two dealers rooms across the hall from each other. There were also additional guest rooms used for dealers rooms ("Dealers Row") on an adjoining corridor. (This was also true in 1991, in a completely different hotel.) There was more non-book stuff than _ I was interested in, but even though I had just been to

Boskone last month, I did find a few books I was looking for.

_ A_ r_ t_ S_ h_ o_ w

There was an art show; I didn't get to it.

_ P_ r_ o_ g_ r_ a_ m_ m_ i_ n_ g

I feel like I was in a whirlwind--in eight hours I did three panels and attended three others. There was certainly no lack of good panels during the day, though the evening looked somewhat sparse if

THE MT VOID

Page 7

you weren't interested in the masquerade. There were some Sunday panels I wish I could have attended as well.

_ N_ o_ t_ e_ w_ o_ r_ t_ h_ y_ (_ a_ n_ d_ N_ o_ t_ W_ o_ r_ t_ h_ y)
Saturday, 10 AM

Marvin Kaye (mod), Keith De Candido, Elisa De Carlo,
Evelyn Leeper, Gordon Van Gelder

The panel began with introductions. Keith De Candido is connected with the Manhattan cable show "The Chronic Rift." Elisa De Carlo wrote T_h_e_D_e_v_i_l_Y_o_u_S_a_y and S_t_r_o_n_g_S_p_i_r_i_t_s (which I recommended). Marvin Kaye mentioned the latest book he edited, T_h_e_G_a_m_e_I_s_A_f_o_o_t (of Sherlock Holmes pastiches), and his next, T_h_e_H_i_s_t_r_i_o_n_i_c_H_o_l_m_e_s. I introduced myself as well, but you all know me.

Kaye began by saying that he did most of his science fiction, fantasy, and horror reading for the column he writes for a horror magazine (B_l_e_a_k_H_o_u_s_e?). He reads more mysteries than science fiction because he reads mysteries to judge the Nero Wolfe award in that field. He did recommend Morgan Llywelyn's E_l_e_m_e_n_t_a_l_s and Paula Volsky's W_o_l_f_o_f_W_i_n_t_e_r, as well as Patricia Mullen's S_t_o_n_e_M_o_v_e_r_s, which described as "an extensive epic."

De Carlo liked the latest "Star Trek" novel (which she couldn't remember the title of), and didn't like Z_e_u_s_a_n_d_C_o_m_p_a_n_y, even

though it was from her own publisher. She then drifted somewhat off-topic by noting that her publisher refused to put good reviews

for S t r o n g S p i r i t s on the first page of T h e D e v i l Y o u S a y.

I strongly recommended Michael Bishop's B r i t t l e I n n i n g s, and also Norman Spinrad's D e u s X, Harry Turtledove's G u n s o f t h e

S o u t h, Alan

Lightman's E i n s t e i n' s D r e a m s, Jack Womack's

E l v i s s e y, and Kim

Stanley Robinson's R e d M a r s. My biggest disappointment of the past

year was Larry Niven and Jerry Pournelle's G r i p p i n g H a n d. De

Candido said that book had been commissioned by Pocket Books rather

than being something they wanted to write on their own. I pointed

out that in "Niven's Laws" Larry Niven says, "It is a sin to waste

the reader's time," and that in those terms I would call this book

a sin.

De Candido then promoted "Brian Froud's Faerielands," a four-book

series that he is producing for Bantam, with artwork by Froud and

stories by Charles De Lint (T h e W i l d W o o d), Patricia McKillip,

Midori Snyder, and Terri Windling. I didn't like the first book

very much--it was beautifully produced, but the story was weak--but

decided it would not be tactful to say so. I did say that it was

enjoyable to hold a well-made book (and that is certainly true).

Kaye asked what impact reviews and critics had on the sales of

books (taking the panel into the almost inevitable marketing

direction rather than doing more recommendations, in part because

most of the panelists had forgotten to bring their lists). He

began by saying that the best novel he wrote last year was reviewed

by K i r k u s and "they weren't even snotty." He didn't say what

effect this had, making it a somewhat random comment. De Candido

said that many magazines (such as the L i b r a r y J o u r n a l) are read by

a very small segment of the population, and even those magazines

ignore a large number of books, especially original paperback

publications. (P u b l i s h e r s W e e k l y does review them, but in a

separate section.) On the other hand, a review in the newspaper of

the home town of the author can make a substantial difference in

sales there, because of the "local" factor. Similarly, reviews in small press magazines that specialize in the area of the book can be very valuable.

Leo Duroshenko in the audience said that L_o_c_u_s seemed to like everything it reviewed. De Candido disputed this, saying it depended on circumstances. A_n_s_i_b_l_e_8_0 reported that at the 1993 World Fantasy Con "[David Drake] liked the panel 'in which David Hartwell and Charlie Brown proved that the reviews in L_o_c_u_s are worthless to the general reader by Charlie's intent rather than his ineptitude. I suppose watching someone burn himself alive could be interesting in the same fashion.'" I don't know the details, but would love to hear them!

I mentioned the statistic quoted by Mark Olson at the Boskone "Small Press" panel, which was that a good review increases sales only about five or six percent. (That's for a small press book, where the clientele is probably more knowledgeable. For a mass-market book, it would probably be an even smaller percentage, unless the review appears in the N_e_w_Y_o_r_k_T_i_m_e_s_B_o_o_k R_e_v_i_e_w or someplace similar.)

Kaye said that he would rather have a review that hated the book but understood what he was trying to do than a review that liked the book but missed the point. (I suspect many authors would have a different opinion.) I noted that even a negative review can sell a book, as I have had people tell me that they know if I dislike a book, they will like it, and vice versa. If nothing else, a negative review does tell the reader that the book is out there, and if it is in a specialty niche (for example, a Sherlock Holmes pastiche or an alternate history), then that knowledge can often outweigh the negativeness of the review. And of course if the reviews are very short (as they are in S_c_i_e_n_c_e_F_i_c_t_i_o_n C_h_r_o_n_i_c_l_e and some other magazines) then there is little room for more than a bare-bones description anyway.

De Candido said that part of the problem is the volume of books out there; some books just get lost. He is particularly irked when a reviewer doesn't review the new book in a series, saying "We've reviewed this series already." (Of course, often the series is more a product than a book, and there is little point to using

space to review the fourth book which is pretty much like the first three, when there are new and different books to review.) De Candido has some personal interest in having reviewers review each book in a series, because he is involved in producing many series for Byron Preiss, including the aforementioned "Faerielands" series, the "Robots in Time" series I have recently reviewed, and the "Dinosaurs in Time" series. De Candido said that they get a lot of letters from children who love the latter series: whole classes read it, they send pictures they've drawn of the dinosaurs, and so on. Still, the series phenomenon is not one I am greatly enamored of. When I receive review copies, I often get half a dozen books at one time that are all of the sort "book 4 of the Ring of Time series" or "the first of the exciting new Cauldron of Fear series." I see this as an infinity of mirrors, stretching off, and have little desire to launch myself into the middle of a series, or to start what could be a life-long commitment. (Kaye says that every time he tries to read anything Michael Moorcock, he emerges half a dozen books later to discover he still hasn't caught up.) Though De Candido says that some series try to make each book self-contained, most do not, and this leads to dilemmas for reviewers. I mean, I liked Harry Turtledove's W_o_r_l_d_w_a_r:_I_n_t_h_e_B_a_l_a_n_c_e but it's the first quarter of a story that was chopped into four pieces to be sold as four books, and I can't honestly recommend to readers that they spend \$84 for this story. And De Candido said that Byron Preiss would be doing anthologies and novels of Marvel superheroes, including a Spiderman novel by Diane Duane. (Pardon me if I don't get all excited.) De Carlo said that rumor has been going around for a while that the ultimate best-selling book would be titled T_h_e_D_r_a_g_o_n,_t_h_e_U_n_i_c_o_r_n,_a_n_d_t_h_e_V_a_m_p_i_r_e, and Van Gelder said that the Science Fiction Book Club would buy it.

There was a lot of discussion off-topic having to do with promoting and selling books. De Carlo said that she had to do her own publicity tour for her first book, for which she was not reimbursed, because the publishers tend to promote the bigger (thicker) books. She also noted it was ignored by P_u_b_l_i_s_h_e_r_s_W_e_e_k_l_y, to which De Candido responded that they split their reviews at that magazine, and there's a shortage of people who can do intelligent reviews of science fiction. De Carlo also complained about her books not being put on display at conventions, not being able to do readings at large stores (they say, "We don't do readings of little paperbacks"), having to ask to be assigned a publicist, and having to photocopy her own reviewer's galleys to get them sent out. I observed that perhaps one way to choose good book was to choose small (thin) books: since everyone has such a bias towards thick books, if a thin book actually does get published, it really must be good. In particular, I recommended the Bantam Spectra novella series (such as Spinrad's D_e_u_s_X which I

had mentioned earlier). De Candido said that shorter novels are often aimed towards teenagers but can be charming for adults. Kaye

seconded that and recommended in particular Caroline Stevermer's
_ C_ o_ l_ l_ e_ g_ e_ o_ f_ M_ a_ g_ i_ c_ k_ s and the works of Teddy Slater, Daniel
Pinkwater,
and John Bellairs. (I read very little "young adult" science
fiction; I started out by reading adult science fiction short
stories.)

Since publishers seem to prefer thicker books, it was suggested
that authors should request wide margins and thick paper. An
audience member said that a larger point size would also be a good
idea, especially for readers with less than perfect eyesight. Even
now publishers use different sizes of type, though they tend to be
within a small range. In my experience, only very thick classic
novels (such as _ M_ o_ b_ y_ D_ i_ c_ k) use a noticeably smaller point size, but
even something not obvious to the average reader could make a
difference to people with poor eyesight.

The authors on the panel talked more about promotional tours. Kaye
said he was scheduled to do two readings in Barnes & Nobles. He
complained that these were not in the one nearest him on the Upper
West Side, even though at that one they did have three other
novelists scheduled, including one who is "terrible." (But he did
say they have good coffee.) He said that one of the things you
learn in publishing and writing seminars is how to get the
publishers take over after you've finished writing. Some
publishers are good at promoting novels; others are not. De
Candido said that Tor was very good at promoting, in part because
they started as a "labor of love" and needed to promote. In any
case, authors have some influence in whom publishers send review
copies to (at least in my experience) and should encourage them to
send to some of the "smaller" magazines that the publisher might
not think of automatically. (I noted that the readership of

_ r_ e_ c_ a_ r_ t_ s_ s_ f_ r_ e_ v_ i_ e_ w_ s on Usenet is 54,000 and of
_ r_ e_ c_ a_ r_ t_ s_ b_ o_ o_ k_ s
120,000, giving them considerably wider distribution than _ L_ o_ c_ u_ s,
for example.) Kaye said that the winner of the Nero Award last
year was a novel the publisher didn't want to bother to submit, and

that the publisher had to be asked several times.

There was also a brief listing of authors who live in Ireland--this was clearly a panel that could not stay on-topic.

There were other recommendations given toward the end. De Candido recommended Emma Bull's F_i_n_d_e_r as a rock and roll urban fantasy, which led Kaye to say that his most recent book, F_a_n_t_a_s_t_i_q_u_e, patterned on Berlioz's "Symphony Fantastique," down to the lengths of the chapters corresponding to the lengths of the movements. (I observed that if this was the case, he shouldn't be surprised if reviewers didn't realize what he was doing, but he said there was a prefatory note explaining it.) The various books in the "Fairy Tale" series were recommended; I especially liked the most recent,

B_r_i_a_r_R_o_s_e by Jane Yolen, and also recommended S_n_o_w
W_h_i_t_e, B_l_o_o_d
R_e_d edited by Ellen Datlow and Terri Windling. While not

THE MT VOID

Page 11

officially in the series, it is similarly thematically and has a similar Tom Canty cover. Also mentioned was D_r_i_n_k_D_o_w_n_t_h_e
M_o_o_n,

de Lint's sequel to his J_a_c_k_t_h_e_G_i_a_n_t_K_i_l_l_e_r. Van Gelder

recommended T_h_e_W_e_l_l-F_a_v_o_r_e_d_M_a_n by Elizabeth Willey and T_h_e

E_l_e_m_e_n_t_o_f_F_i_r_e by Martha Wells. Kaye said that T_h_e
E_n_e_m_y_W_i_t_h_i_n

in the "Ravenoff" series by Christy Golden was better done than he generally encounters. De Candido suggested Rosemary Edgehill's
S_p_e_a_k_D_a_g_g_e_r_s_t_o_H_e. (Rosemary Edgehill is also known as Eluki

bes Shahr.) Another recommendation was T_h_e_G_o_l_d_e_n by Lucius Shepard.

[End of Part 1]

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The world is a comedy for those who think and a
tragedy for those who feel.

-- Horace Walpole

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