
2. I am once again thrust into the realm of controversy and as much as I hate to do it, I would not feel I have done my duty if I didn't clear my mind on this weighty issue of American tyranny. I

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had an experience with American Jerk Chicken recently and have decided it is time to take a stand against American Jerks.

There is a dish known as Jamaican "Jerk" Chicken. I have never exposed myself to this delicacy, but it has a reputation for being very hot and spicy. This stuff is supposedly for the brave only. And when I saw the item on a menu of a local restaurant I was really impressed ... temporarily. Screwing up my courage I ordered this delicacy ready for an exciting experience. And guess what? It had a few little pepper flakes on it, but for the most part it was just plain roasted chicken. Well, what did I expect? Did I expect a spicy foreign dish would get a fair day in court with an American jury? Well, let's look at the record.

Time and time again in places like Chinese restaurants I have heard some American Jerk, someone who doesn't like things spicier than farina, at the next table complaining loudly about how hot the dish he has gotten was. I suppose he bit into one of the red peppers that I occasionally eat straight as a snack. This farina fan gets a taste of it and has to make a scene. Now I don't know a single Chinese restaurant that ever refused to cook a dish mild, if a customer asked for it that way. And almost all have a little red asterisk to a dish to warn the faint-hearted farina fan that a dish is spicy. But American Jerks don't take the time to read. And one thing that a restaurant owner wants to avoid at all costs is angry customers yelling about the food. Most capitulate by assuming that if someone is not of the same ethnicity of the restaurant, the food should be pallid. This is blatant racism, but it is understandable. They have stereotyped all Americans as farina fans because we have so many.

Then there are Indian restaurants. I have considered dying my skin before going to Indian Restaurants or ordering over the phone with an Indian accent so they think I am Indian. Now Indian cuisine

tends not to be a really spicy cuisine on the real scale of things-- at least not compared to the way I like food!--but it is much better than standard American porridge-level cuisine. It's mild compared to, say, what I would create at home if it did not gross out Evelyn. Indian food is comparatively mild. But again you have the rule that if you are not of the particular ethnic group, they have been burned too many times by vociferous Americans. The Indian restaurant near where I live has a list in the kitchen. If you are neither Indian or on the list, they assume you can't take it.

The capper is that there are now north of the border Jalapeno peppers. Americans (a word I am abusing, I admit, by saying Americans as opposed to Mexicans) like Nachos, but don't like the fiery, burning, and generally terrific taste of Jalapenos. So now there are new mild Jalapeno peppers. Isn't that a bear! You can't even trust a Jalapeno pepper anymore. Cyril Kornbluth's "Marching

Morons" is not just on schedule, it is actually ahead of schedule. If you don't know the story it is about a world in which rather than make a car that will go faster, they modify speedometers to just say the cars are going faster. The car must be fast if it says it is, right? And these Nachos must be authentic if they have all those peppers.

I tell you it gets harder and harder to burn out your mouth and destroy your digestion these days.

3. Dateline 18 July 94:

NASA and the Red Cross issued an urgent request for supplies to aid the injured and displaced on Jupiter. The continuing series of comet impacts have destroyed many villages and prime farming ground.

Urgently needed items include: purified methane, antenna and bugeye warmers, and ice packs (which the Jovians use as heating pads, of

course). Local supplies of methane and ammonia are largely contaminated and help is needed as soon as possible. Send all supplies to your local launch pad.

[Thanks to Janice Gelb for passing this on.]

4. SEANCE FOR A VAMPIRE by Fred Saberhagen (Tor, ISBN 0-312-85562-1, 1994, 288pp, US\$21.95) (a book review by Evelyn C. Leeper):

This is the sixth novel in Saberhagen's "Dracula" series, which starts with T_h_e_H_o_l_m_e_s_D_r_a_c_u_l_a_F_i_l_e (in which Count Dracula meets Sherlock Holmes). Actually, it's the seventh, since Dracula refers back to Saberhagen's D_r_a_c_u_l_a_T_a_p_e_s, making that now officially part of the series. (I think of it as book zero, sort of like Tolkien's H_o_b_b_i_t is book zero of his "Lord of the Rings" trilogy). The other books in the series are A_n_O_l_d_F_r_i_e_n_d_o_f_t_h_e_F_a_m_i_l_y, T_h_o_r_n, D_o_m_i_n_i_o_n, and M_a_t_t_e_r_o_f_T_a_s_t_e.

In S_e_a_n_c_e_f_o_r_a_V_a_m_p_i_r_e, Holmes is called in by a friend whose wife

may be being deluded by mediums. Well, the mediums are certainly fake, but the friend's drowned daughter shows up at one of the seances anyway, and Holmes calls in Dracula for some expert advice. Their search for the truth eventually leads them to St. Petersburg, and there the story grinds to a halt while we are given a complete travelogue of the city, including mention of all the major buildings and details such as which side of the road people drive

on and that water needs to be boiled because of a cholera epidemic. I kept waiting for these things to matter, but they never did. Did Saberhagen make a trip to St. Petersburg that he wanted to write off as a business expense?

It's a pity, really, because until the story goes to St. Petersburg, it moves along fairly briskly, in spite of

switching between Dracula and Watson as narrator, often in mid-chapter. But Saberhagen manages to let the reader know in the first few sentences after a transition who is speaking.

And I have a couple of technical quibbles. Dracula says he has a problem with running water, yet another vampire apparently has no problem concealing himself in the same stream Dracula wants to avoid. And would a vampire really stay in a house which displayed large crosses on the tables? I know Saberhagen has changed the mythos a bit, but the first is an internal inconsistency and the second is also fairly blatant.

In spite of these complaints, though, S_e_a_n_c_e_f_o_r_a_V_a_m_p_i_r_e is still better than some of the middle books of the series, and a return to the engaging style of the first couple. I would recommend this, but wait for the paperback.

5. THE BEEKEEPER'S APPRENTICE by Laurie R. King (St. Martin's Press, ISBN 0-312-10423-5, 1994, 347pp, US\$21.95) (a book review by Evelyn C. Leeper):

Mary Russell is fifteen years old when she accidentally meets Sherlock Holmes in Sussex. Holmes sees in her, if not a kindred spirit, at least a kindred intellect, and proceeds to take her under his wing as an "apprentice" in the field of detection. T_h_e_B_e_e_k_e_e_p_e_r's_A_p_p_r_e_n_t_i_c_e is the story of this training period and the cases that arise during it.

As a mystery novel this might pass muster, but as a Sherlock Holmes novel I found it disappointing. Russell is not as close to Holmes as Watson was, so this story has Holmes more distant than Watson's tales. For example, there are several sections in which Holmes doesn't appear. This appears in Watson's stories too (e.g., T_h_e_H_o_u_n_d_o_f_t_h_e_B_a_s_k_e_r_v_i_l_l_e_s) but not often. Also, I never found Mary

Russell convincing. Perhaps it was at the beginning, when Russell identifies herself to Sherlock Holmes as a "feminist, but not a man-hater." Since the term "feminist" is so far as I can tell an anachronism here ("suffragette" might be more likely), I found myself immediately wary of this as a politically correct Holmes story, and in many ways it was not unlike Carole Nelson Douglas's "Irene Adler" stories.

I also found the plot line disjointed. There were some introductory events, a mystery, a resolution, more background, and then another mystery which turns out to be connected to the first. As a result, the story jumps around more than flows.

There are good historical touches, particularly of life in England during and after World War I, and parts of _ T_ h_ e_ B_ e_ e_ k_ e_ e_ p_ e_ r_ s_ _ A_ p_ p_ r_ e_ n_ t_ i_ c_ e are not without interest. But on the whole I found the book disappointing and cannot recommend it.

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Nature is a hanging judge.
-- Anonymous

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