



1. A reminder: Though the issue is mailed out by Evelyn Leeper, the lead editorial is always written by Mark Leeper. Responses regarding it will get to him faster if sent directly to Mark.Leeper@att.com. Each review is labeled with the author's

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name.

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2. The next meeting will be to discuss the last of the Hugo nominees, William Gibson's V\_i\_r\_t\_u\_a\_l\_L\_i\_g\_h\_t. This book is available in paperback. After this, we will return to some more classic titles (see schedule above). Note that some of the dates were printed incorrectly in the last issue, and have been corrected here.

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3. If anyone in New Jersey can record WBAI (99.5 FM) from 4 AM to 6 AM on Tuesday, Aug 30, I would greatly appreciate it. I would like to get parts 4-6 of a 6-part BBC science fiction series, "Aliens of the Mind." The program actually runs alternate weeks from 3:30 AM to 6 AM but they start with about 40-50 minutes of the most gawd-awful music they can find. (Obviously unless you are a real night owl, this would mean setting up a timer on Monday evening. If you already have your VCR set up to do simulcast recording, that would work.)

If anyone can do this, let Evelyn or me know before Tuesday, August 23, and we can provide you with the necessary blank tapes. And of course, we can make you a copy of the first three parts if you want to hear them.

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4. When August with its sweet showers comes, Evelyn and I like to

go the Renaissance Festival. It is a ninety-minute drive each way, but it is a sort of tradition. These festivals have themselves become a tradition in many parts of the country. Novato, California, had one we have gone to. it is sort of a literary equivalent of a county fare, or at least should be. It is also a place where all sorts of handicrafts vendors show their wares, where you can get a turkey leg to go, a glass of mead, cappuccino, or even falafel.

The nearest Renaissance Festival I know of is in Tuxedo, New York. It is a sort of a fair dedicated to English literature of the 16th Century. Of course in the United States most people don't know what exactly is and is not Renaissance or what literature is and is not English. The result is the festival will have, along with its enactment of Shakespeare, plays based on stories by Boccaccio or Chaucer or anyone else they can get away with. The people working at the festival dress in period clothing and talk in whences and

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forsooths. Generally it is a pretty good time.

The festival has one centerpiece for the literary-minded, another for the sports-minded. The latter is a joust. I am sure it is not a full-fledged with knights knocking each other off of horses, but I have admittedly never attended the joust. The literary centerpiece of the Tuxedo festival is a Shakespeare play. Last year it was A\_M\_i\_d\_s\_u\_m\_m\_e\_r\_N\_i\_g\_h't's\_D\_r\_e\_a\_m and this year the play was T\_h\_e\_M\_e\_r\_r\_y\_W\_i\_v\_e\_s\_o\_f\_W\_i\_n\_d\_s\_o\_r. I suspect it is always a comedy, though do not have a large sampling. While much of the entertainment is not all that well done--usually it owes more to vaudeville than to classical drama--the Shakespeare play is performed by members of Actors' Equity and they do a professional job. Evelyn and I generally figure we are paying for the play and consider the rest to be free warm-up act. Part of this warmup is usually a ribald play, either based on a fabliau by Chaucer or some sexy story by Boccaccio. Generally the sort of story they pick is not all that different from the stories that cable shows every month or so at midnight--the only difference is that the stuff on the cable shows nudity and is a sort of pretentious soft-core porn. At the festival the actors are content to let the works convey the story, and that way they are not shut down.

This year the warm-up play was "The Merchant's Tale" by Geoffrey Chaucer ... not a very good story. It involves an old knight who marries a young woman who is more interested in the knight's handsome young squire. Chaucer contrives to have the young two-some in a tree with the knight looking on. Yet by guile the knight is tricked into disbelieving what he has seen. Much of T\_h\_e\_C\_a\_n\_t\_e\_r\_b\_u\_r\_y\_T\_a\_l\_e\_s is more on the level of dirty jokes than of serious literature. There was one clever piece of set design. There are two beds that have pictures painted on the upside where the pictures cannot be seen. When the action moves out to the orchard, the beds are turned on end to reveal paintings of trees in the orchard. The prop becomes the backdrop. There even seem to be steps hidden from the audience so that action can even take place up in the tree. Even for the minor plays there are professional actors who in this case are better than the material, in spite of its classic sources.

There are all sorts of little skits going on throughout the fairgrounds. There will be a procession of the Queen here or a juggler there. They are less than careful to keep all the names from the 16th Century. They have Robin Hood wandering around and someone else will take a name from the Round Table. We seem to be someplace where all of pre-18th Century English history has fallen together to a single point in time, but you can still buy fajitas and iced cappuccino. The idea that you can eat a fajita, paid for with a Visa card, and watch Merlin rub shoulders with Robin Hood gives the proceedings dubious Elizabethanality. In some ways they would make it less authentic if they could, I am sure. With

honest-to-gosh real horses wandering around, it is still necessary to watch your step on some of the paths. But they do have someone come around and clean up such messes.

Of course, there are many of the usual vendors one might expect. One is selling historical-style hats, and many sell jewelry. There is a vendor selling so-called "New Age" books, here with some sort of tacit admission that New Age thought is really old, and in fact old superstition. There is also a vendor devoted to face-painting. I have my doubts about the authenticity of this particular

Elizabethan service. It strikes me as being neither Elizabethan nor a service. Another vendor rents Elizabethan costumes or the sort the staff wears. I wonder if McDonalds could make money renting out aprons and hats. In any case at the fair, of course you find some people coming in home-made costumes also. We passed one woman who was trying to train others to repeat her motto, "I am not half dead, I am half alive. Be optimistic." That was on our way to see the second dramatic presentation, this one aimed at children. It was the Bennington Puppets in "The Magic Ring." The story is based on the N\_i\_b\_e\_l\_u\_n\_g\_e\_n\_l\_i\_e\_d, just like Wagner's "Ring of the Nibelungs." In this case the ring gives immortality, but in the short play it is stolen from "sea sprites" whose conversation implies an intellect so light it is surprising their heads did not go bobbing to the surface of the water. The fault is clearly not the sprites' but whoever was foolish enough to entrust anything of value to them. The ring is stolen by Alberich who is subsequently eaten by a dragon in trying to hide his prize. Siegfried is then called upon to get the ring back from the dragon. Alberich had a problem with his puppet joints so his left elbow stuck up next to his ear. It was clear the puppeteer was trying to untangle it but it would not come un-kinked. So Alberich was a bit more deformed than usual. The verbal part of the play was pre-recorded with music (not Wagner), narration and dialog. The problem with this was that they knew all too well in advance that the puppeteers might have problems setting up scenes and so they left long musical intervals between the scenes. That tended to slow the pacing down. To make a long story short, they took a very short story and made it seem long. While the puppets came recommended by a friend, the presentation was lackluster and at times even dull with many false moves. The presentation showed the kind of indifference one gets when a rote task has been repeated too often.

Following the puppet show we went early to the Shakespeare play, T\_h\_e\_M\_e\_r\_r\_y\_w\_i\_v\_e\_s\_o\_f\_W\_i\_n\_d\_s\_o\_r. At least two of the actors were familiar from last year's production of A\_M\_i\_d\_s\_u\_m\_m\_e\_r\_N\_i\_g\_h\_t's\_D\_r\_e\_a\_m. As far as the dignity of Shakespeare's plays, this one gets a sort of mid-range respectability. It has no great themes and is not wildly imaginative. It was written, it is thought, just to please Queen Elizabeth who said she wanted to see a third play with Falstaff. It is said to have the least poetry of any of the Bard's plays. It is, in fact, just a sort of a situation comedy in which

Falstaff woos two rich women at the same time, but they have their revenge on him. The plot gives plenty of opportunity for horseplay on stage and comic histrionics. I was front row close to the center which had the advantage of putting much of the action almost in my lap. It had its downside, however. There is a scene in which Falstaff is startled in the middle of a drink of ale. He sprays it out. I and the woman across the center aisle took the brunt of the action when the actor under-estimated his spray power. And it wasn't just a drop or two either. There was no warning that "this play gets you wet" but I certainly was.

Well, with that somewhat over-lusty entertainment over, we decided to as usual forego the joust. and bid a fond farewell to this unorthodox Elizabethan England, with a bit of Arthurian and Johnian and Elizabeth-2ian England as well as Clintonian United States mixed in.

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5. I am sorry to say that Peter Cushing has passed away. He was a British actor who specialized in fantasy and horror films, making many films for Hammer Films of Britain. His best-known role was as the Grand Moff Tarkin in STAR WARS. Cushing made a lot of good films and he made a lot of films good. Even in bad films he always gave the best performance possible. A partial filmography follows:

Abominable Snowman of the Himalayas, The (aka Abominable Snowman)  
Alexander the Great [Memnon]  
Asylum  
At the Earth's Core  
Black Knight, The  
Brides of Dracula, The  
Creeping Flesh, The  
Curse of Frankenstein, The  
Daleks - Invasion Earth 2150 A.D. (aka Invasion Earth 2150 A.D.)  
Dr. Phibes Rises Again  
Dr. Terror's House of Horrors [Doctor Schreck]  
Dr. Who and the Daleks  
Dracula A.D. 1972 (aka Dracula Today)  
Evil of Frankenstein, The  
Frankenstein and the Monster from Hell [Baron Frankenstein]  
Frankenstein Created Woman  
Frankenstein Must Be Destroyed! [Baron Frankenstein]  
From Beyond the Grave  
Gorgon, The  
Great Houdinis, The (TV)  
Hamlet (1948) [Osric]  
Helen Keller: The Miracle Continues (TV) [Professor Charles Copeland]  
Hellfire Club, The  
Horror Express [Dr. Wells]  
Horror of Dracula (aka Dracula (1958)) [Doctor Van Helsing]

Hound of the Baskervilles, The (1959) [Sherlock Holmes]  
 House That Dripped Blood, The  
 Howards of Virginia, The  
 Island of Terror  
 Island of the Burning Doomed (aka Island of the Burning Damned)  
 John Paul Jones  
 Legend of the Werewolf  
 Magic Fire  
 Man in the Iron Mask, The (1939)  
 Man Who Finally Died, The  
 Moulin Rouge [Racing Fan]  
 Mummy's Shroud, The (voice)  
 Mummy, The (1959)  
 Night Creatures (1962) (aka Captain Clegg) [Doctor Blyss]  
 Revenge of Frankenstein, The  
 Risk, The (1961)  
 She (1965)  
 Sherlock Holmes and the Masks of Death (TV)  
 Skull, The [Maitland]  
 Star Wars [Grand Moff Tarkin]  
 Sword of Sherwood Forest  
 Sword of the Valiant  
 Tale of Two Cities, A (1980) (TV)  
 Tales from the Crypt [Grimsdyke]  
 Torture Garden  
 Twins of Evil [Gustav Weil]  
 Uncanny, The  
 Vampire Lovers, The

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6. OTHERNESS by David Brin (Bantam Spectra, ISBN 0-553-29528-4, 1994, 368pp US\$5.99) (a book review by Evelyn C. Leeper):

This is Brin's second collection (his first being T\_h\_e\_R\_i\_v\_e\_r\_o\_f\_T\_i\_m\_e, also available from Bantam), and contains thirteen stories, five essays, and three articles entitled "Story Notes." The latter are a departure from the usual "preface each story with an introductory paragraph" approach. Instead, they combine the

commentary for all the stories and essays in each section ("Transitions," "Contact," and "Cosmos"; the sections "Continuity" and "Otherness" have no story notes). For some reason, the notes are in the \_ m \_ i \_ d \_ d \_ l \_ e of the sections. Maybe Brin wants to make his comments after the reader has finished some of the stories but before she has started others. However, it breaks the flow of reading the book, sort of like heading down a straight road only to discover it suddenly makes an abrupt ninety-degree turn. (Of course, maybe the whole idea is that a collection \_ s \_ h \_ o \_ u \_ l \_ d \_ n' \_ t flow the same way as a novel. After all, the stories were all written at different times. Maybe they should be read that way too.)

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But Brin (or someone) has gathered and grouped the stories here, and so we have to look at what we have. The first section, "Transitions," contains the stories "The Giving Plague" (nominated for a Hugo), "Myth Number 21," "Mr. Pak's Preschool," and "Detritus Affected," along with story notes and the essay "The Dogma of Otherness." "Myth Number 21" is not even really a story, but a 250-word "drabble" from his novel \_ E \_ a \_ r \_ t \_ h. A "drabble" is supposedly a super-short story. The problem is, this isn't a story. The other stories are indeed about transitions, and Brin is a good story-teller, if at times a bit preachy. The latter characteristic comes through even more in the essays, of course, though he does point out the interesting paradox in "valuing diversity" and "cultural relativity." His focus reminds me of Kim Stanley Robinson, although their approaches to the issues of environmentalism and human relationships are very different. (Robinson has more emphasis on history as a character and a force than Brin has, for example.)

The second section, "Contact," contains the stories "Sshhhh," "Those Eyes," "Bonding to Genji," and "The Warm Space"; the essays "What to Say to a UFO" and "Whose Millennium?"; and story notes. All of these are alien contact stories, though not necessarily first contact stories. "Sshhhh" seems inspired by something similar to what produced "The Giving Plague"--a similar concept underlies them both. "The Warm Space" reads like a story John W. Campbell would have loved, but unlike most of Brin's other work. It's also the oldest piece here, so the difference is understandable. What "Whose Millennium?" is doing in the "Contact"



section is not clear unless Brin thinks of it as being about human-God contact.

The next section, "Continuity," has no story notes, just two stories--"NatuLife (R)" and "Piecework"--and the essay "Science versus Magic." (The "(R)" would be an "R" in a circle if I could do that in ASCII.) The stories are about the continuity of the human race, but the essay seems to be here because (to paraphrase the old joke) "everything gotta be somewhere."

In the "Cosmos" section, Brin seems to leave his story-telling roots behind and move into concentrating on style in "Bubbles," "Ambiguity," and "What Continues ... and What Fails ...." I found these less rewarding than the earlier stories, but your mileage may vary.

The final article, "The New Meme," is in part an elaboration on his earlier essay "The Dogma of Otherness" in which Brin proposes five basic memes of civilization: feudalism, machismo, paranoia, the East, and Otherness. (Brin is certainly not a slavish follower of parallel constructions in English.) My major problem with this essay is that it tries to cover two concepts, which are in large part independent: that of memes, and that of the basic competing

world-views. Each should probably have its own separate essay.

Brin is a major author and his stories are usually worth reading. But the confusing structure and spotty quality make it hard to recommend this collection except to readers who are already Brin fans.

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7. SUMMER OF LOVE by Lisa Mason (Bantam Spectra, ISBN 0-553-37330-7, June 1994, 400pp, US\$12.95) (a book review by Evelyn C. Leeper):

Why is this a science fiction novel?

Yes, I know it's because a time traveler from the 25th Century has

come to San Francisco in the summer of 1967 to ensure that certain events occur which will save the world from total ecological catastrophe. But since this part of the plot is the worst executed and most predictable aspect of the whole novel, and since it could be removed entirely without hurting the rest of the novel--in fact, probably improving it--one wonders why it's there. My guess is that Mason tried to sell a straight "Summer of Love" novel and couldn't find a publisher for it, so she added the science fiction element to make it more marketable.

The result is an odd book, which is reasonably good as a look back at the "Summer of Love" in both its good and its bad aspects (at least as far as I can tell--I spent the summer of 1967 in Chicopee, Massachusetts, doing volunteer work in the library), but fails badly as a science fiction novel. It's full of references to "Star Trek" and other science fiction, including references to all the works it's imitating, so in case you didn't realize it was predictable, it reminds you! Recommended if you want to read about San Francisco in 1967 (and can ignore the science fictional aspect), but   n  o  t as a science fiction novel.

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8. CORE by Paul Preuss (AvoNova, ISBN 0-380-71182-6, August 1994, 394pp, US\$5.99) (a book review by Mark R. Leeper):

It seems like a long time since I had seen a hard science book that is about--predominantly about--geology. Paul Preuss's   C  o  r  e looks from the blurbs to be an updating of   J  o  u  r  n  e  y  t  o  t  h  e  C  e  n  t  e  r  o  f  t  h  e  E  a  r  t  h with an expedition to the fiery bowels of the earth. In fact the exact words are "a reborn dream of an incredible expedition to the center of the Earth. In fact, that is misleading. It is really about digging a core hole deep into the Earth. (Preuss obviously runs the risk of having his book reviewed with the phrase

"one long bore.") This project can only be completed with the author inventing a substance strong enough to withstand the pressures of the dig, Hudderite, named for Cyrus Hudder, the father

of Leiden Hudder, the main character. The use of geology rather than physics or biology as a science to build the story around and the introduction of new super-materials like "Hudderite" give the novel a marvelous pulpish feel that somewhat compensates for not being taken on a journey into the core.

What is not as well handled is the basic mystery of the father and son relationship. It seems that Cyrus Hudder committed suicide under mysterious circumstances and Leiden is as interested in finding out what happened to Pop as he is in digging into the Earth. The story keeps jumping around in time, telling the history of both Leiden and Cyrus. The story is also artificially tied into current event to add excitement that the author apparently assumes would be missing from the scientific part of the story. There is mystery here, but nothing greatly unpredictable. One suspects that Preuss thinks that modern audiences are less interested in scientific discovery than in pyrotechnics.

Another problem I had with the book was its setting of some events in 1985 that clearly did not happen then. In specific there is a lethal solar flare. The copyright date is 1993 with a first printing in this edition in August, 1994. (Odd, as of this writing it is still only July.) I suppose it is fashionable these days to write alternate histories, but you would think the author would have more alternation than that. In spite of that one small problem \_ C\_ o\_ r\_ e is a lot more like novels written in the 60s than the 90s, which as far as I am concerned is not a bad thing.

Preuss seems to have done his homework and along with the basic story the reader does get a small education in geology. He also has given some thought as to the corollary application of a big whole in the ground. The cover quotes "New York Newsday" as saying that the book has believable characters. Personally I found them to be just a bit pulpish, but recognize that I probably am willing to sacrifice my demands for characters if I am entertained, learn something, and have an imaginative science plot. To that end I would say that \_ C\_ o\_ r\_ e, with its faults (no pun intended) is still one of the more enjoyable books I have read in a while.

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9. WEIRD TALES FROM SHAKESPEARE edited by Katharine Kerr and Martin H. Greenberg (DAW, ISBN 0-88677-605-8, July 1994, 318pp, US\$4.99)  
and ALIEN PREGNANT BY ELVIS edited by Esther M. Friesner and Martin H. Greenberg (DAW, ISBN 0-88677-610-4, June 1994, 319pp, US\$4.99)  
(book reviews by Evelyn C. Leeper):

The idea of "theme" anthologies is certainly nothing new. But they are usually on more mundane or predictable themes--first contact, alternate Presidents, even cats and horses. And it used to be that anthologies were of older stories culled from magazines, stories that were written because the authors wanted to write them. Now they're commissioned--twenty-three authors are told, "I'm looking for stories on a Shakespearean theme." (Actually, it's more than twenty-three--I forget the multiplier someone once said was needed to get the right number of usable stories.) The result of this newer mode of operation is often a collection of stories that would not have sold in the open, undirected market. Not that the stories are necessarily bad, mind you, but they are getting points for being on-topic that get them accepted in anthologies but wouldn't help otherwise. Resnick seems to do the best job of keeping the story quality up in his anthologies (maybe that's why he is nominated for the Best Editor Hugo this year).

Now I would have expected thirty-eight stories in W\_e\_i\_r\_d\_T\_a\_l\_e\_s\_f\_r\_o\_m\_S\_h\_a\_k\_e\_s\_p\_e\_a\_r\_e, but I guess Kerr couldn't get anyone to agree to write a science fiction or fantasy story based on C\_o\_r\_i\_o\_l\_a\_n\_u\_s. Nor is this "the alternate Shakespeare," though both Kerr's introduction and the back cover blurb make that claim. The first section could have gone that way, with its stories with the Bard as a character, but none of them are alternate histories. These are among the best stories in the book with Diana L. Paxon's "Augmentation of Dust" especially worthy of note. (Nitpick to the editors: pick one version of the author's name and stick to it. Is it "Diana Paxon" or "Diana L. Paxon"?)

Section two deals with the tragedies: H\_e\_n\_r\_y\_I\_V, P\_a\_r\_t\_I\_I from the Welsh point of view, H\_a\_m\_l\_e\_t from Gertrude's point of view, K\_i\_n\_g\_L\_e\_a\_r from the Fool's point of view, K\_i\_n\_g\_L\_e\_a\_r in a computer, K\_i\_n\_g\_L\_e\_a\_r on an alien planet. After a while the pattern (either retell the story from another point of view, do L\_e\_a\_r, or both) begins to wear.

The introduction to the next section implies that the comedies are being covered, but instead it's a selection of humorous stories about non-comedies: H\_a\_m\_l\_e\_t from the point of view of the skull, another story about William Shakespeare, T\_i\_t\_u\_s\_A\_n\_d\_r\_o\_n\_i\_c\_u\_s done for an alien audience, a vampiric R\_o\_m\_e\_o\_a\_n\_d\_J\_u\_l\_i\_e\_t, and Shakespeare in general from the point of view of Hollywood. Of these only the last--Mike Resnick's "The Summer of My Discontent"--tickled m\_y

funny bone.

Section four has unusual workings of Shakespeare's themes: \_ T\_ h\_ e  
\_ T\_ e\_ m\_ p\_ e\_ s\_ t from Caliban's point of view, \_ t\_ w\_ o re-workings of the  
Rosalind/Orlando theme, a genuine alternate \_ R\_ o\_ m\_ e\_ o\_ a\_ n\_ d\_ J\_ u\_ l\_ i\_ e\_ t, and a  
look at \_ A\_ M\_ i\_ d\_ s\_ u\_ m\_ m\_ e\_ r\_ N\_ i\_ g\_ h\_ t'\_ s\_ D\_ r\_ e\_ a\_ m. Section  
five is a look at the  
future (but several stories in other sections did that already):  
another Shakespeare performed for aliens and two very good pieces-

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-Gregory Benford's "Not of an Age" and Adrienne Martine-Barnes's  
"The Elements So Mixed."

You may have noticed that the only stories I thought worthy of note  
were those with Shakespeare as a character (either on- or off-  
stage)--stories about how he got started as a writer, his universal  
appeal, etc. Whenever authors try to re-tell Shakespeare's  
plays ... well, let's just say they're no Shakespeares. Authors  
such as Barry Malzberg and Brian Aldiss don't turn in clunkers, of  
course, but even their talent suffers by comparison to Shakespeare.  
Some ideas sound better in the conception than they turn out to be  
in their execution and \_ W\_ e\_ i\_ r\_ d\_ T\_ a\_ l\_ e\_ s\_ f\_ r\_ o\_ m  
\_ S\_ h\_ a\_ k\_ e\_ s\_ p\_ e\_ a\_ r\_ e may be one of  
them. (If you are a specialist on Shakespeare your mileage will  
almost certainly vary, though in which direction I cannot tell.)

And to coin a phrase, from the sublime to the ridiculous....

\_ A\_ l\_ i\_ e\_ n\_ P\_ r\_ e\_ g\_ n\_ a\_ n\_ t\_ b\_ y\_ E\_ l\_ v\_ i\_ s is an anthology of  
thirty-six stories

commissioned on the theme of tabloid journalism. The problem here  
is that the tabloids are so bizarre that trying to top them is  
pretty much an exercise in futility. (Anyone who has been reading  
Mark Leeper's comments on various news stories knows that this is  
rapidly becoming true of "real" news as well.) The best stories  
here don't try. Lawrence Watt-Evans's "The Bride of Bigfoot" is  
about what might happen if someone took these stories seriously  
(with echoes of Kim Stanley Robinson and \_ H\_ a\_ r\_ r\_ y\_ a\_ n\_ d\_ t\_ h\_ e  
\_ H\_ e\_ n\_ d\_ e\_ r\_ s\_ o\_ n\_ s).  
"Bob" Bes Shahar's "Is Your Coworker a Space Alien?" is a much more

serious look at the question than you'll find in the \_ W \_ e \_ e \_ k \_ l \_ y \_ W \_ o \_ r \_ l \_ d  
\_ N \_ e \_ w \_ s. Thomas F. Monteleone's "Group Phenomena" could have been  
written by Fredric Brown John DeChancie's "Hitler Clone in  
Argentina Plots Falklands Reprise" has a definite "Twilight Zone"  
feel, and Bruce Boston's "How Alien He Really Was" is the flip-side  
of a well-known "Twilight Zone" episode.

I assume "Saving Sam's Used UFO's" (Kate Daniel) is right down the  
road from Harry's All-Night Hamburgers. Greg Cox's "Danny's  
Excellent Adventure" is cute, but Dan Quayle jokes are wearing a  
bit thin. Of the rest--well, they ranged from unmemorable to  
unreadable.

Well, as they say, it seemed like a good idea at the time....

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#### 10. DOOMSDAY GUN (a film review by Mark R. Leeper):

Capsule review: Once again HBO's docu-dramas prove  
that there are good films being made for cable. The  
story of Gerald Bull and his attempts to build a  
super-gun for Saddam Hussein's pre-war Iraq was

under-reported in the press, in spite of the natural  
fascination of the material. This film is a sort of  
\_ T \_ u \_ c \_ k \_ e \_ r-meets-Tom-Clancy based on fact. Rating: +2  
(-4 to +4)

I think I have a special fondness for HBO docudramas. They  
generally have a good feel for how to make recent history  
engrossing and dramatic. Whether they choose to base it on pre-  
existing material, as they did in last years adaptation of Randy  
Shilts's \_ A \_ n \_ d \_ t \_ h \_ e \_ B \_ a \_ n \_ d \_ P \_ l \_ a \_ y \_ e \_ d \_ O \_ n, or whether they write  
their own  
story based on research as they did with \_ D \_ e \_ a \_ d \_ A \_ h \_ e \_ a \_ d, their quality  
is generally more than a rival for what is playing in the theaters.

With \_ D \_ e \_ a \_ d \_ A \_ h \_ e \_ a \_ d they had their work cut out for them. This was the

story of the Exxon Valdez disaster and the politics of what followed. It is not easy to make that material really engrossing, and they managed.  D o o m s d a y G u n suffers from no such handicap. The story of Gerald Bull and his super-gun already has the makings to be Tucker-meets-Tom-Clancy. Add to that the fact that the story was really was under-reported in the press and you have a fairly engrossing piece of entertainment.

Frank Langella plays Gerald Bull, a child-man with a fascination with large artillery pieces and the engineering intellect to build the guns that he dreams about. His inspiration since boyhood has been Jules Verne's  F r o m t h e E a r t h t o t h e M o o n with its cannon large enough to send a shell and its passengers to the moon. The Canadian has built guns for the United States and many of its allies, including Israel, whom he helped to defend the Golan Heights. After a falling out with the Americans he decides that he will sell his services and that of his small organization to the highest bidder ("except the Russians"). The highest bidder turns out to be Saddam Hussein who is militarizing and fortifying Iraq. Alan Arkin plays an Israeli intelligence officer with the uncomfortable job of convincing a friend and former ally not to build his gun and place it in the hands of Hussein. Meanwhile Bull has to get the industrialized nations to build the parts he needs under the noses of their own intelligence agencies. Then there is the larger story of how much governments' intelligence agencies knew and even had complicity in the arming of Iraq.

If you go into  D o o m s d a y G u n expecting  C l e a r a n d P r e s e n t D a n g e r, you are sure to be disappointed. But if you are expecting a modest little made-for-cable film, you will probably be very pleasantly surprised.  D o o m s d a y G u n ranks very well with what is in release in theaters. If you consider all the boxing matches and stand-up comics ad nauseum that made-for-cable fare is becoming on the "premium" services,  D o o m s d a y G u n at least shows that some quality material is still being made. I would give  D o o m s d a y G u n a +2 on the -4 to +4 scale.

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11. THE SLINGSHOT (a film review by Mark R. Leeper):

Capsule review: This is the story of a very bright boy growing up in Stockholm early this century. The Socialist activism of both his parents and the fact his mother is Jewish make him the butt of bullying from all directions. Still he manages to survive and bounce back. Rating: +2 (-4 to +4)

Roland is a boy growing up in Stockholm in the 1920s (or so) with just about everything going against him. His father is a Socialist, his mother is a Russian Jew fighting an illegal battle for family planning. Roland's father is an autocrat with little empathy for the boy. Roland's teachers are anti-Semitic and anti-Socialist and have little use for the boy except as a bad example and as a target for occasional sadistic corporal punishment. Roland's schoolmates cheat, exploit, and play cruel tricks on young Roland. And in spite of all this, Roland has an irrepressible spirit. He sometimes does fight back, but chooses his fights where he thinks they will do the most good. He also has an ingenious and a creative mind. The story always has the feel of an autobiography of somebody who achieved something great later in life. In fact, it is the adaptation of a semi-autobiographical novel by Roland Schutt, so we know he at least became a novelist. The book was adapted for the screen and directed by Ake Sandgren.

T h e S l i n g s h o t takes its title from one of many applications young Roland finds for the condoms that his mother illegally distributes. Without understanding the actual purpose for the devices, he is able to see in them and improvise several unexpected uses, each only getting him into deeper trouble. One keeps expecting somebody to notice the genius of the ten-year-old, much as the boy comes to be appreciated in M y L i f e a s a D o g, but this is not a film with simple answers and obvious scenes. Roland's rewards will be far more abstract and not so dependent on others.

Jesper Salen stars as Roland and manages a better performance with more depth than many better-recognized actors in this country give. Many actors his age just read lines and go through some motions for the camera. Jesper's acting is intelligent and convincing. You always have a feeling that there really are intelligent mental processes behind his actions. Stallen Skarsgard plays Fritiof, the father who thinks himself a great liberal thinker but who runs his family like a despot.

While the film leaves the character of Zipa (Basia Frydman) at the stereotypical loving mother level, we do get to know a lot more of Roland's father. He is harsh and demanding of his sons. He is determined not to let a spinal condition, which is slowly taking





I find an account of the adventure of the Paradol Chamber, of the Amateur Mendicant Society, who held a luxurious club in the lower vault of a furniture warehouse, of the facts connected with the loss of the British bark Sophy Anderson, of the singular adventures of the Grice Patersons in the island of Uffa, and finally of the Camberwell poisoning case." There isn't much mystery here--other than a red herring. In this case, the case was kept secret to protect the family honor of the principals.

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"The Case of the Remarkable Worm" is based on another reference in "The Problem of Thor Bridge": "A third case worthy of note is that of Isadora Persano, the well-known journalist and duellist, who was found stark staring mad with a match box in front of him which contained a remarkable worm said to be unknown to science." Again, the mystery is minimal (except perhaps how a man got the female first name "Isadora") and like many other renditions of this apocryphal tale, ends up making Watson's canonical reference to it totally inaccurate. This one was supposedly kept secret because it was one of Holmes's failures, but other failures had been published, so that is not entirely convincing.

"The Case of the Exalted Client" is based on yet another reference in "The Problem of Thor Bridge": "Apart from these unfathomed cases, there are some which involve the secrets of private families to an extent which would mean consternation in many exalted quarters if it were thought possible that they might find their way into print. I need not say that such a breach of confidence is unthinkable, and that these records will be separated and destroyed now that my friend has time to turn his energies to the matter." (Although apparently they were not.) This is perhaps the weakest of the seven stories with apparent holes in logic that are never explained.

"The Case of the Notorious Canary Trainer" is based on a reference in "The Adventure of Black Peter": "In this memorable year '95, a curious and incongruous succession of cases had engaged his attention, ranging from his famous investigation of the sudden death of Cardinal Tosca--an inquiry which was carried out by him at the express desire of His Holiness the Pope--down to his arrest of

Wilson, the notorious canary-trainer, which removed a plague-spot from the East End of London." Again, we have a story predictable from almost the very beginning, due in large part to the introductory explanation of why the story has been kept secret.

"The Case of the Itinerant Yeggman" is based on a reference in "The Adventure of the Sussex Vampire": "'Voyage of the Gloria Scott,' he read. 'That was a bad business. I have some recollection that you made a record of it, Watson, though I was unable to congratulate you upon the result. Victor Lynch, the forger. Venomous lizard or gila. Remarkable case, that! Vittoria, the circus belle. Vanderbilt and the Yeggman. ...'" This is another concealed failure, though here at least Holmes says he doesn't want a certain party to realize he's on to him, giving at least some reason to hold back publication.

"The Case of the Abandoned Lighthouse" is based on a reference in "The Adventure of the Veiled Lodger": "I deprecate, however, in the strongest way the attempts which have been made lately to get at and to destroy these papers. The source of these outrages is known, and if they are repeated I have Mr. Holmes's authority for

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saying that the whole story concerning the politician, the lighthouse, and the trained cormorant will be given to the public. There is at least one reader who will understand." Here the reason for secrecy is national security, yet by today's standards the whole scenario is ludicrous and even then better methods to pass information could have been employed.

One nice touch in the stories is that occasionally when Holmes asks Watson if the latter can leave his practice for a day, Watson says he cannot. On the whole, the characterizations are reasonably true to the Canon and the settings have the right feel (though I question if Watson would accompany a guest to Mrs Hudson's rooms to get her some tea). But the thinness of the mysteries makes it hard to recommend this book.

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Some men are born mediocre, some men achieve mediocrity,  
and some men have mediocrity thrust upon them.

-- Joseph Heller