



society we still get a major chain "investing in antiquity," as they say of book selling. I am not sure of the quality of most of what they sell. But they have to do all sorts of weird things to encourage sales. They were offering a special sale price of a book called M\_a\_r\_y\_S\_h\_e\_l\_l\_e\_y'\_s\_F\_r\_a\_n\_k\_e\_n\_s\_t\_e\_i\_n... by Leonore Fleischer. I

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think that is a terrific name, by the way. I think that means she is a lion-like dealer in meat, a noble butcher. Anyway the noble butcher brings my attention to an interesting linguistic paradox. It is a case of opposite meaning.

It is similar to a famous story about double negatives--let me digress for a moment. I forget whom the principals of the story were but a lecturer on linguistics was saying that double negatives bring in ambiguities. "I don't have nothing" could have two opposite meanings. It is used by some people to mean nothing is what I don't have, and by others to mean that nothing is what I do have. The lecturer said that multiple positives never create ambiguity because they reinforce each other. Some well-known person in the back of the room responded with a condescending "Yeah! Yeah! Yeah!"

Now back to our comment. If the bookstore was selling a book called F\_r\_a\_n\_k\_e\_n\_s\_t\_e\_i\_n, the buyer would, of course, expect the contents to be the novel by Mary Shelley. You cannot get closer to something being the person's own thing than by making it be that person's very words. But since the title is not F\_r\_a\_n\_k\_e\_n\_s\_t\_e\_i\_n, but M\_a\_r\_y\_S\_h\_e\_l\_l\_e\_y'\_s\_F\_r\_a\_n\_k\_e\_n\_s\_t\_e\_i\_n, the reader is being told that this is actually not Mary Shelley's F\_r\_a\_n\_k\_e\_n\_s\_t\_e\_i\_n. It is actually some noble butcher's version of Kenneth Branagh's film version of Mary Shelley's F\_r\_a\_n\_k\_e\_n\_s\_t\_e\_i\_n. That is a book that Mary Shelley never knew about, lucky for poor Mary.

So why do I mention it? Well, I guess I had some space to fill and I didn't have nothing to say. [-mrl]

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2. STAR TREK GENERATIONS (a film review by Mark R. Leeper):

Capsule review: The next First Generation "Star Trek" film is also the first Next Generation "Star Trek" film. A physical phenomenon that does nasty things to time (and even worse things to logic) is loose in the universe. Kirk gets to meet Picard and the two fight a world-chewing villain. This one is a feast for the eye and a famine for the brain. Rating: high -1 (-4 to +4) [This review contains some spoilers of the early parts of the film. Spoilers of later parts of the film are saved for an afterword. You have to excuse me for not taking "Star Trek" very seriously. Of late I find I am just a "Babylon 5" sort of guy.]

There are two kinds of "Star Trek" fans. There is the kind who like action and special effects and the kind who like a well-

thought-out science fiction idea. The most popular "Star Trek" films are the ones aimed at audiences who want to turn off their minds and just have a roller-coaster ride. In a small unofficial poll the best-liked "Star Trek" film is S\_t\_a\_r\_T\_r\_e\_k\_I\_I: T\_h\_e\_W\_r\_a\_t\_h\_o\_f\_K\_h\_a\_n. That film is built around a completely absurd plot device called the "Genesis Effect" that seemed to create and instantly evolve life on barren planets, moving suns in place as needed. The film did have good action and special effects, however, and many of the fans were not troubled by the film being built around a poorly-conceived premise. S\_t\_a\_r\_T\_r\_e\_k\_G\_e\_n\_e\_r\_a\_t\_i\_o\_n\_s should please the people who liked W\_r\_a\_t\_h\_o\_f\_K\_h\_a\_n and should irritate the set of fans who were irritated at that film. This time the story is built around something called the "Nexus." This thing is described as a scientific phenomenon, but as used in the film it is pure pixie and fairy dust.

As the film opens, Captain Kirk and other members of the Corpulent Space Corps are guests aboard a brand new Enterprise under the fledgling Captain Harriman. The ship is not really provisioned to travel, but then this maiden voyage is intended only as a three-hour cruise. We all know, however, that the Enterprise's enterprises never run smoothly. This Enterprise is unexpectedly

called to a rescue mission. Things do not go well for Harriman and most embarrassing of all for the new captain is that old Captain Kirk is, for the first time in his career, sort of killed. Unfortunately, Spock is not along to help Kirk through that trying first death. Meanwhile, 78 years later, the Next Generation crew is involved with a similar rescue. Curiously, they seem to rescue one of the same people that the earlier Enterprise rescued. He is one Dr. Soran (played by Malcolm McDowell), an inhuman non-human with his own plans for the weird temporal phenomenon that chews planets, attacks Starships Enterprise, and especially likes to suck up captains.

This is a film with a plot that goes in for quantity rather than quality. One film that is less than two hours long involves two Enterprise crews, renegade Klingons, enemy Romulans, an interstellar temporal thingee, a sailing ship, Jean-Luc Picard's family, a Christmas tree with odd ornaments, a new chip that greatly modifies Data, two different Enterprises on the brink of destruction, Captain Kirk's long lost love, some very funny-looking eggs, and a mad scientist. That is just a bit too much for everything to gel. What works the best are the acting--which most of these people can do in their sleep--and those special-effects action sequences. The space battle scenes are always impressive on the big screen, though hardly original. One sequence involving the Enterprise and the planet Veridian III actually is breath-taking. Not all the visuals work out so well, however. When blown up to ten feet across, Data's make-up looks not enough like the covering of a machine and way too much like clown's greasepaint. But in general the look is more polished than the script deserved. To

have so many nice special effects lavished on the film and yet to have such a poorly thought-out script is a very negative indication of the filmmakers' opinion of their audience. Unfortunately the "Star Trek" people probably do know their audience only too well.

This film is a triumph of style over substance. It is far more an exercise in sci-fi than science fiction. I give it a high -1 on the -4 to +4 scale. I have to be honest and say that I walked out of the theater thinking this film was at least decent, but as the film started to gel in my mind and I realized some of the gaping

holes in what I had seen, I realized this script had far too many problems to get near a camera.

SPOILER SPOILER SPOILER SPOILER SPOILER SPOILER

I would like to say a little more about why this thing called the Nexus has no place in a science fiction film. The Nexus seems to have attributes usually ascribed only to Heaven. It is a physical phenomenon that seems to pluck people out of our universe and somehow plop each person right into the best of all possible parallel universes for that person. There the castaway has things like a ready-made family. Picard has a wife and children who are not at all surprised to see him suddenly appear. Kirk, who has been in the Nexus for 78 years, seems to have just arrived. Kirk and Picard apparently manage to escape the Nexus only by wishing to be elsewhere. (Perhaps they clicked their heels together and said "There's no place like Veridian.") The concept is great for fantasy fans but has little to do with physics or any other science. It is an idea full of contradictions that seems to have been contrived only to give Soran a motive for his crimes--so it is a nice place to be--and to have Kirk and Picard come together in time--so it is a temporal phenomenon. Room is certainly left for a sequel since the interstellar transtemporal space ribbon is still zapping around out there were no one has gone before. Of course leaving room for a sequel in a "Star Trek" film is redundant.

Besides the foolishness of the main premise--and the fact that 47 people are pulled out of the heaven-like Nexus and 78 years later the Federation seems to have forgotten that the Nexus exists--there are other problems in the script. In one sequence Picard is crawling only very slowly through the hole in the rocks and is fired upon. There is no way he could have moved fast enough to get out of the way of the explosion, yet he sustains not even a scratch. A rocket fired from Veridian III to its sun seems to hit its target in seconds. In fact, based on timing we see, the filmmakers apparently thought the sun was a small ball less than a mile overhead--this is a giant step backward in cosmology. The bug in Geordi LaForge's glasses is still broadcasting. Will he ever discover it? All these touches seem speak more of the first draft of a script than of a finished product. To have so many people working on the film and not to have anyone asking basic questions

like "how do the captains get from the Nexus back to Veridian III?" indicates to me a very cynical attitude of the Star Trek organization--and this is the product of an organization, not just a few script-writers--toward science fiction fans. They have taken the attitude that their audience cares about visuals and not intelligence or even the basics of continuity in scriptwriting. [-mrl]

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3. GREENTHIEVES by Alan Dean Foster (Ace, ISBN 0-441-00104-1, 1994, 248pp, \$5.50) (a book review by Evelyn C. Leeper):

A hard-boiled detective story interspersed with a philosophical discussion of human beings and their foibles? Hey, I don't write them, I just review them.

Alan Dean Foster is not generally considered one of the leading philosophers of the science fiction community. And many of the opinions expressed as asides by the artificial intelligence in this novel are not new. But they are far and away the most interesting, and perhaps best-written part of the book.

Compare this speech from the philosophizing AI:

"Mechanicals don't share your ghoulish delight in the lurid details of dismemberment and destruction. I'm endlessly fascinated by your visceral fascination to viscera, by your inability to turn away from scenes that you know are going to disgust you. It's as if you enjoy upsetting yourselves. ... Right now there's a fire in the residence down the street from you. Tell me you're not going to go and look."

with the following description of one of the detectives:

"She had shed the snakeskin in favor of a one-piece suit of bioengineered silk. It was a toss-up as to which fit tighter, the most notable difference being that the silk had pockets. It was held together by static seals in back and the prayers of two top designers in front."

I realize it's a tradition in hard-boiled detective novels, but I found this treatment of women annoying. So far as I can recall, there were four women in the novel: the aforementioned detective, two hookers, and an old woman running a hotel. As if all this weren't bad enough, the male humanoid robot goes around seducing female humanoid robots!

The solution to the mystery was also disappointing, and a bit too deus ex machina to suit me. Were it not for the side comments by

the philosopher-AI there would be nothing here to recommend this. But good as that part is, it is not enough to overcome the rest. Maybe next time Foster will concentrate most on that aspect and get rid of the gross stereotypes in the rest of the novel. He's a good enough writer that he doesn't need them. [-ecl]

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4. THE CHILD QUEEN by Nancy MacKenzie (Del Rey, ISBN 0-345-38244-7, 1994, 295pp, \$4.99) (a book review by Evelyn C. Leeper):

I am not normally a reader of Arthurian literature (though I recently read Tennyson's I\_d\_y\_l\_l\_s\_o\_f\_t\_h\_e\_K\_i\_n\_g and Twain's C\_o\_n\_n\_e\_c\_t\_i\_c\_u\_t\_Y\_a\_n\_k\_e\_e\_i\_n\_K\_i\_n\_g\_A\_r\_t\_h\_u\_r'\_s\_C\_o\_u\_r\_t, as well as a time-travel novel in which a robot goes back to Arthur's Britain), but this is Del Rey's "Discovery of the Year," so I decided to give it a try. While it didn't make me run out and read yet more Arthurian works, it was engaging and gave a different slant on the legend (at least to me).

I understand that telling the story from Guinevere's point of view is not actually new, but I don't recall having read such a version before. T\_h\_e\_C\_h\_i\_l\_d\_Q\_u\_e\_e\_n covers the period from Guinevere's birth to the marriage of Lancelot and Elaine, right before the calling back of Mordred. (A sequel, T\_h\_e\_H\_i\_g\_h\_Q\_u\_e\_e\_n, is listed on the inside front cover as coming out this winter, but T\_h\_e\_C\_h\_i\_l\_d\_Q\_u\_e\_e\_n can be read on its own.)

The style is a compromise between the archaic phrasings of Malory and Tennyson, and the colloquial language of Twain. There is a fair amount of "I called Ailsa to me and bade her shake out my blue gown" but it is just enough to give the story a distant feel without making it impossible to read. McKenzie, like every other author in the Arthurian sub-genre, tells a slightly different story than anyone else (who of course all disagree with each other anyway). Is it accurate to the sources? I can't completely judge. It did seem to cover the clonfict between Christianity and the pre-existing religion, and there was an attention to the details of

living in that period that is often missing from historical fantasies. I guess the bottom line is that I did enjoy reading it, and will probably read the sequel. [-ecl]

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5. ALL-CONSUMING FIRE by Andy Lane (Doctor Who Books, ISBN 0-426-20415-8, 1994, 304pp, \$5.95) (a book review by Evelyn C. Leeper):

This is primarily a Dr. Who book, and only secondarily a Sherlock Holmes book. Sherlockians who know nothing of Dr. Who will probably not enjoy this book very much, since the situation is one

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that Dr. Who would find himself him rather than one Holmes would normally be involved in, and the references and in-jokes are Whovian rather than Holmesian.

Well, not all the jokes are Whovian. Lane has Holmes using Groucho Marx jokes (definitely an anachronism). There are also lots of references to our time period (including Iain Banks's books and Kolchak the Night Stalker).

The plot is definitely more Dr. Who than Sherlock Holmes: Holmes is called in to solve a crime involving the theft of certain books from the esoteric library of Saint John the Beheaded (yes, he was beheaded, but I've never heard him called that). These books apparently have the secret of how to create or find doorways to other worlds, or perhaps other universes. Not surprisingly, they run into the Doctor, who is also investigating these doorways.

As a television tie-in which also includes Sherlock Holmes, it's not bad. It's what I think of as a "beach book"--it won't win the Pulitzer, or even the Hugo, but it will entertain you. I mentioned that it mentioned Kolchak: it also reminds one of Kolchak in its juxtaposition of the supernatural, or at least the alien, with the very mundane.

While it does mostly avoid the howlers that fill some Holmes pastiches, there is still some very sloppy copy-editing. On page



160, for example, the Doctor's companion says, "Of course, the Hindus couldn't touch pork and the Muslims couldn't touch beef." It's the other way around.

Still, this is a minor problem in an otherwise entertaining book.  
[-ecl]

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6. GLOBALHEAD by Bruce Sterling (Bantam Spectra, ISBN 0-553-56281-9, 1994, 339pp, \$5.99) (a book review by Evelyn C. Leeper):

This collection of thirteen stories was published in hardcover by Mark Zeising, but this is the first edition available to a wide audience. And a good collection it is, too, with two Hugo nominees ("Our Neural Chernobyl" and "Dori Bangs") and one Nebula nominee ("Dori Bangs"). Thank goodness a few publishers are still publishing single-author collections. (Sterling has been nominated for eight Hugos and nine Nebulas, but strangely enough, has never won either.)

\_ G \_ l \_ o \_ b \_ a \_ l \_ h \_ e \_ a \_ d is not the name of any of the individual stories, but is rather a description of Sterling himself, one of the few science fiction authors who tries to write from a global perspective. (Ian

McDonald is another.) "Storming the Cosmos," for example, takes place entirely inside the Soviet Union, with all its characters from within its borders; Sterling and his co-author Rudy Rucker have no need of American or British characters "to give the readers someone to identify with." The readers are expected to identify with a character because that character is a human being, not because he or she is of a particular nationality. In "Jim and Irene" Sterling does give us an American in addition to the Russian, but they are equal characters. The same duality is in "The Unthinkable," with its echoes of "A Walk in the Woods." And while "Hollywood Kremlin" is set entirely in Azerbaijan, its main character also appears in "Are You for 86?," a story set in a future United States. (The stories appear consecutively in the book.)

We get a similar global outlook in "The Compassionate, the Digital," and "We See Things Differently," which use the Islamic world as their background. "The Gulf Wars" is set in the Mideasts of the past and present.

The last straddles the line between the stories I have already mentioned and those even more foreign, those far removed in time as well as in space. There's "The Sword of Damocles" set in ancient Greece, or at least some Hollywood image of it (and the Hollywoodization is intentional). "The Shores of Bohemia" is set in a far-future Europe. And though "Dori Bangs" is set in the recent United States, it's a world that did not exist--as you will see.

There are a couple of stories set in the United States; "Our Neural Chernobyl" and "The Moral Bullet" are each set in a future United States where all is not well. But one of Sterling's special strengths is his ability to make us understand a foreign (alien) culture. His point is not that we are all alike, however; "We Look at Things Differently" is a direct rebuttal to that suggestion. But we \_ c \_ a \_ n undersand each other, at least in part, and it is that level of feeling that Sterling brings to his stories. [-ecl]

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7. DEALS WITH THE DEVIL edited by Mike Resnick, Martin H. Greenberg, and Oren D. Estleman (DAW, ISBN 0-88677-623-6, 1994, 362pp, \$4.99) (a book review by Evelyn C. Leeper):

In his introduction, Mike Resnick talks about how there haven't been any deals-with-the-devil anthologies since the 1950s, when publishers yelled, "Enough already!" I can understand why: I like reading them, but even so, thirty-six in a single volume is a bit like an entire cake made of frosting. (Whether this number is a reference to the Lamed Vuv of the Dann story I leave to the reader

Of course, part of this is a function of the reviewer's curse: the average reader can decide to read a story a day, or one a week, or whatever. Not that she's likely to, but she can. A reviewer, however, has some time constraints; people prefer to see the reviews \_ b \_ e \_ f \_ o \_ r \_ e the book goes out of print.

There are some good stories here, as there always are in a Resnick anthology. The problem is that to find them you have to read a lot of stories that all start to look alike after while, even more so than alternate outlaws. Groundhog Day, anyone?

The result is that such fine stories as Michelle Sagara's "Winter" may go unnoticed (though its number two spot may get it read before people over-dose). And to a great extent "Winter" is good in ways independent of its being a deal-with-the-devil story, much the same as David Gerrold "What Goes Around" (in \_ A \_ l \_ t \_ e \_ r \_ n \_ a \_ t \_ e \_ O \_ u \_ t \_ l \_ a \_ w \_ s) is good in ways orthogonal to the purported premise.

David Gerrold also turns in a good story here, "The Seminar from Hell," which will strike a chord with anyone who has seminar experience.

The rest of the stories range from competent to mediocre, without a lot of originality or individual character. There are a few that make use of the idea that so many people are going to Hell on their own that the Devil doesn't need to work at getting souls. There are a few that play with definitions of Hell. There are a few that work on the precise wording of the deal itself. And so on ... most of the core "gimmicks" have been used before. They're wrapped in new paper, but they're still pretty much the same package. Individually, in a magazine or a more general anthology (which apparently has almost completely disappeared as a form), these would have been amusing, diverting, clever, or whatever the author was trying for. Here, alas, they are swamped by each other.

I can recommend this anthology, but only with the proviso that you space out your reading of the stories. [-ecl]

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9. RELUCTANT VOYAGERS by Elisabeth Vonarburg (translated by Jane Brierley) (Bantam, ISBN 0-553-56242-8, 1995, 480pp, \$5.99) (a book review by Evelyn C. Leeper):

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Publishing an "alternate Canada" novel in the United States is quite an act of faith by Bantam: they obviously assume that readers know enough about the real one to know where this one is different.

This is not only an alternate history, or perhaps more accurately, not entirely an alternate history. Catherine wakes up one morning in Montreal, but a Montreal not quite as she remembered it. Familiar streets suddenly look unfamiliar--but when Catherine returns later in the day, everything is back the way it was. She has problems remembering history--someone will mention "the Northerners," and she won't know what they are talking about. But when she looks it up at the library, it all sounds familiar, as if she had always known it, and indeed she feels as though she \_ h \_ a \_ s always known it, except for that unexplained lapse.

To the reader of alternate histories, it is even more confusing. At first, it seems as if the changes between Catherine's world and our own happened in the late 18th Century, but then we find there have been other changes, far earlier and more basic, and the alternate history aspect seems to be highly inconsistent. Vonarburg does eventually resolve all this, but not in a way likely to please those expecting a standard alternate history story.

Even as a straightforward science fiction story, \_ R \_ e \_ l \_ u \_ c \_ t \_ a \_ n \_ t  
\_ V \_ o \_ y \_ a \_ g \_ e \_ r \_ s  
is not completely satisfying, having too much of a deus ex machina ending. Since Catherine has already been having strange dreams, it doesn't take brilliant insight to realize that these have something to do with the mysterious goings-on, but even so, the explanation was (to me) unsatisfactory.

It's possible that the problem is in the translation. Maybe Vonarburg has written in a style that doesn't translate very well. But for whatever reason, I could never really connect this book. [-ecl]

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10. SEVENTEEN STEPS TO 221B by James Edward Holroyd (Otto Penzler, ISBN 1-883402-72-7, 1994 (1967c), 182pp, \$8) (a book review by Evelyn C. Leeper):

This collection has seventeen essays (and stories--some of these works must be classified as actual fiction rather than just literary speculation) plus an "annex," or quiz (for which no answers are given). It was originally published in 1967 and has been brought back into print has been brought back into print by Otto Penzler Books. (As an aside, at a recent science fiction convention, the claim was made that out-of-print anthologies were very unlikely to come back into print, due to the complex issues in getting all the rights. Somehow, Otto Penzler has overcome this.)

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The assortment, in addition to covering both the fiction and the non-fiction areas, ranges from the humorous (Maurice Baring's "Diary of Sherlock Holmes") to the more serious (Dorothy Sayers's well-known analysis "The Dates in 'The Red-Headed League'"), and everything in between.

My personal preference is toward the analyses of the stories rather than such extrapolations as W. S. Bristowe's "Truth about Moriarty," but even the latter are well-constructed and faithful to the spirit of Holmes (unlike many more recent, revisionist works). As with the whole line of "Otto Penzler's Sherlock Holmes Library," this is worth any Sherlockian's time. (This one is probably also worth his or her money as well, which I cannot say of all of them. Maybe I'm crass, but charging \$8 for a book under 100 pages--which some of them are--seems unreasonable to me.) [-ecl]

Mark Leeper

MT 3D-441 908-957-5619  
m.r.leeper@att.com

History, n. An account mostly false, of events  
unimportant, which are brought about by rulers  
mostly knaves, and soldiers mostly fools.

--Ambrose Bierce