

Serial Killer Thrillers

MANHUNTER (1986) dir. by Michael Mann

NO WAY TO TREAT A LADY (1968) dir. by Jack Smight

THE MT VOID

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Thomas Harris's S_i_l_e_n_c_e_o_f_t_h_e_L_a_m_b_s is the sequel to an earlier novel, R_e_d_D_r_a_g_o_n. Another director from another studio made the film version of R_e_d_D_r_a_g_o_n. Michael Mann directed MANHUNTER, which features Will Graham, the agent who originally captured Dr. Lecter and who intentionally went crazy in the process. Now Will Graham has to become a psychopath to catch a serial killer who kills whole families. At least as far as violence this film is very restrained. This is a film very much in demand and rather hard to find. For my tastes it goes a little overboard in style, but it also is a good detective story.

Much lighter in tone is NO WAY TO TREAT A LADY, a comedy suspense film starring George Segal, Rod Steiger, and Lee Remick. Somebody is out there killing nice little old ladies, and searching him down is Lieutenant Morris Brummel, a Jewish cop hen-pecked by his mother. This is an adaptation of a novel by William Goldman. It really is a lot of fun.

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The foolish and the dead alone never change their opinion.
-- James Russell Lowell

STRANGE THINGS IN CLOSE UP by Howard Waldrop
Legend, 1990, ISBN 0-09-964440-1, L4.50.
A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper
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This long-awaited collection of Howard Waldrop's work is, alas, almost impossible to find in the United States. Since the original publications of most of them were also hard to find (Waldrop explains in one of his introductions why he has the reputation of selling to the lowest bidder), this is a double whammy. So far as I can tell, this is an omnibus volume which includes H_o_w_a_r_d_W_h_o? (Doubleday, 1986) and A_l_l_A_b_o_u_t_S_t_r_a_n_g_e_M_o_n_s_t_e_r_s_o_f_t_h_e_R_e_c_e_n_t_P_a_s_t (Ursus Imprints, 1987).

Lots

of luck finding those either. However, large specialty stores will probably have a limited supply of S_t_r_a_n_g_e_T_h_i_n_g_s_i_n_C_l_o_s_e_U_p, or try your favorite mail order house. Is it worth all that effort? Yes.

H_o_w_a_r_d_W_h_o? comprises the first twelve stories in S_t_r_a_n_g_e_T_h_i_n_g_s_i_n_C_l_o_s_e_U_p. The first is "The Ugly Chickens." If you know only one Howard Waldrop story, chances are this is it. You will get two things

from reading this story: an encyclopedic (well, almost) knowledge of the dodo, and an inkling of what makes Waldrop's stories so unique.

"Der Untergang des Abendlandesmenschen" has Bronco Billy and William S. Hart helping Hermann Goering fight a vampire in a typical Waldrop "alternate history" where unlikely people get together and do unlikely things. The "split point" of these universes--the event that causes them to differ from ours--seems to be some time when the ancient Israelites threw some peyote mushrooms in with their burnt offering and God got more than just a "sweet savour." Certainly no rational explanation will suffice.

"Ike at the Mike" is another alternate history: Dwight David Eisenhower is a rock star and Elvis Aaron Presley a successful politician. A whole bunch of other famous people turned out differently too. But I'm not a big rock music fan and so found this less involving than some of Waldrop's other works, even though this did win a Hugo.

If you like old horror movies (and my old I mean 1940s, not E_v_i_l D_e_a_d I or even C_a_r_r_i_e), you will appreciate "Dr. Hudson's Secret Gorilla," an old story told from a new point of view. (If the names Rondo Hatton and George Zucco ring no bells, however, you may react as I did to "Ike at the Mike.")

Once, scientists believed in phlogiston. A hundred years later it was just another crackpot idea. But what if it wasn't? Well, "The World as We Know't" gives us one look at what might have happened. As with many of Waldrop's stories, it's not a pleasant look--one problem with describing a Waldrop story is that its bizarreness makes it sound like a fun romp when frequently it's quite the opposite.

"Green Brother" is a story of mysticism set among the Lakota Indians. In his introduction Waldrop talks about his penchant for telling stories of "cultural and biological losers and underdogs." One possible reason he doesn't mention is that he doing so he can give them another chance, if not to emerge totally victorious, at least to rise higher, or last longer, or have that "one brief shining moment." And if not that, to try to understand why not.

George R. R. Martin describes "Mary Margaret Road-Grader" as a

"tour de force about post-holocaust tractor pulls." Well, it's certainly the best story in that genre I've ever read. Okay, sorry, old joke. And it was, after all, nominated for a Nebula.

The next story is a total change of pace. (Well, to a great extent they all are.) "Save a Place in the Lifeboat for Me" was inspired by the question, "Where were you the Day the Music Died?" Can Laurel and Hardy, Abbott and Costello, and the Marx Brothers save ... well, that would be telling (though not much). I found this rock-music-inspired story more interesting than "Ike at the Mike," possibly because it was full of old movie comedy teams and comedians. It reminded me a bit of parts of John Kessel and James Patrick Kelly's F_r_e_e_d_o_m_B_e_a_c_h.

I can't say that I think the motivation in "Horror, We Got" makes sense to me--but it makes as much sense as the history that leads up to it and causes it, and the damn story does stick with you. Maybe it bothers me because people may use these characterizations to justify "more of the same," even though (I hasten to add) this is not Waldrop's intent. What does all this mean? Well, Waldrop sets up a world in which time travel is discovered in Israel and the newly constituted Elders of Zion decide rather than changing history, they will "implement" it. They will do or arrange to have done everything the Jews were accused of doing throughout the ages. They will control the world and its history. To me this seems a somewhat pointless revenge but then every time someone in a time travel novel tries to change history they only make things worse, so who can say that this isn't the best solution? Or maybe Waldrop is just saying we are trapped by history.

I find sumo wrestling no more interesting than any other sport and even Waldrop's infusion of Japanese culture and philosophy was unable to get me interested in "Man-Mountain Gentian." But in one way it's like every other Waldrop story: it's unlike any other Waldrop story. (Take that, Bertrand Russell!)

"God's Hooks!" has Isaak Walton fishing for something out of "The Revelation of Saint John the Divine." John Kessel, on hearing it read, said that Waldrop could sell it either to F_i_e_l_d & S_t_r_e_a_m or to C_a_t_h_o_l_i_c_D_i_g_e_s_t. Or maybe it was that he could sell it to o_n_l_y those two. So naturally it was nominated for a Nebula.

"Heirs of the Perisphere" shows more of Waldrop's fascination with popular culture (an oxymoron?). This reminded me of Arthur C. Clarke's "Expedition," but of course Waldrop goes in an entirely different direction than Clarke did.

The remaining seven stories formed A l l A b o u t S t r a n g e M o n s t e r s o f t h e R e c e n t P a s t. Where "Dr. Hudson's Secret Gorilla" is an ode to the horror films of the 1940s, the title story of this section is an unabashed copy of the monster films of the 1950s--all of them.

"Helpless, Helpless" is an updating of the plague to our modern, mechanized, computerized society. I think Waldrop overlooks (or glosses) a lot of what would happen in a mechanical plague, and find his ending somewhat overly rosy. (It is interesting to note that, while I usually compose my reviews directly onto the computer, this one is being written long-hand, albeit with a mechanical pencil. Of course, before you see it, it will be typed in, run through the spelling and punctuation checker, and automatically formatted. In fifty years, will Christie's be auctioning off Stephen King's original floppy disks for T h e D a r k H a l f?) In any case, this story seems a trifle on the Luddite side--and Waldrop admits to not owning a word processor, or even an electric typewriter.

Even Waldrop acknowledges "Fair Game" may represent some ultimate minimalist approach to literary criticism, or at least that's how I read his introductory comments. Certainly no one can go further in this direction than he does with Hemingway in this story. (Free idea to any anthologist: T h e S c i e n c e - F i c t i o n a l H e m i n g w a y. Lead off with Joe Haldeman's "Hemingway Hoax," follow with "Fair Game," and then--well, I can't do all the work for you!)

It has been said that art imitates life. It has also been said that life imitates art. One of these--perhaps both--would seem to be the case in "What makes Hieronymous Run?" If you haven't studied or at least been exposed to the works of Hieronymous Bosch or Peter Brueghel the Elder, this story probably won't make much sense. If you have, this will open a whole new way of looking at them. (Another idea for an anthology: classic works of art and literature inspired by them. W. H. Auden's "Muse'e de Beaux Arts" is certainly one obvious choice. Another science-fictional example, though by no means great literature, is Hal Clement's O c e a n o n T o p, inspired by a cover painting for A n a l o g which happened to be sitting upside-down on the floor when he came into their office one day. Most inspiration seems to go in the other direction, so this would be an interesting twist.) There is an undercurrent in this story that ties into one in "Horror, We Got": the idea that maybe our view of history is totally out of whack with "reality" (whatever that is).

"The Lions Are Asleep This Night" is a more conventional alternate history, this one set in Africa. It predates Robert Silverberg's "Lion Time in Timbuktu" but I doubt there is any connection. Maybe it's just

Resnick is making quite a name for himself with his Kirinyaga series set in a future recreation of pre-colonial Kenya and his novel I_v_o_r_y. As usual, though, Waldrop's entry in this African renaissance is different, more subtle--so subtle, in fact, that Ellen Datlow insisted that he had to rewrite it to explain more to an audience who didn't know history. Even so, I think it still assumes a lot on the part of the reader.

"Flying Saucer Rock and Roll" is yet another story that I failed to appreciate due to my ignorance of rock and roll music and history. But since I am probably exceptional in the extent of my ignorance, you may enjoy it more. Certainly Waldrop's need to substitute phonemes for real rock lyrics (which would have cost a fortune in royalties) didn't help matters.

The final story, "He-We-Await," is described by Waldrop in his introduction to it as "original to this collection." In this case, that mean original to A_l_l_A_b_o_u_t_S_t_r_a_n_g_e_M_o_n_s_t_e_r_s_o_f_t_h_e_R_e_c_e_n_t_P_a_s_t, not S_t_r_a_n_g_e_T_h_i_n_g_s_i_n_C_l_o_s_e_U_p. Another story set in Africa (it is, you know), this shows some influence from the horror films of the 1930s--the Mummy series in particular. Or maybe it's just the similarity of theme, and I'm applying Waldrop's penchant for pop culture to my reading of it. At any rate, this story ends the book on a suitably apocalyptic note.

Also included are an introductory essay by George R. R. Martin, some closing words by Lewis Shiner, and introductions to each of the stories by Waldrop himself. Not included, unfortunately, are "Night of the Cooters" (a story nominated for a Hugo several years ago that I s_t_i_l have been unable to find), nor "Custer's Last Jump," nor "The Passing of the Western." I suppose these were written after 1987, the copyright date of the more recent of the two component parts of this collection, but I still miss them. I am annoyed the subtitling of this volume as "The Nearly Complete Howard Waldrop" when it is missing not just his more recent work (which is expected), but also older works, such as "Billy Big Eyes," "Black as the Pit, from Pole to Pole," "My Sweet Lady Jo," "Sic Transit ...? A Shaggy Hairless Dog Story," "Sun Up, "Unsleping Beauty and the Beast," and "A Voice and a Bitter Weeping." I bought this expecting finally to find all (or almost all) of Waldrop's stories; it turned out not to be so.

The cover is wonderfully Waldropian (Waldropesque?) in that nothing is what it first seems to be. If only they had credited the artists I could tell you who s/he was.

There are a few odd things I noted in the books. Capitalization varies among the copyright page, the table of contents, the introduction headers, the story headers, and the page headers. Trivial, perhaps, but disconcerting nonetheless. It's almost as if the British have different rules for capitalization in titles, but even there it's inconsistent, and in any case they didn't Briticize the spelling.

As you might have suspected from the sheer length of this review, I recommend this book. This article is as long as it is because you can't group Waldrop's stories into categories and discuss them in bunches. Each one is an individual and insists on being treated as one. It won't be easy for most of you to find this--make the effort.

HOW TO GO TO THE MOVIES by Quentin Crisp
St. Martin's Press, 1990, ISBN 0-312-033364-8, \$15.95.
A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper
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This book is a collection of film reviews and articles that Mr. Crisp has written for C h r i s t o p h e r S t r e e t Magazine. (Since he uses the honorifics Mr. and Miss throughout the book, I feel it's only fair that I should do likewise.) He begins with a series of articles on stardom, stars, and the new Hollywood, and then proceeds to the main body of the book, film reviews. But even here he often comments as much on Hollywood (or France, or Britain, or wherever the film in question originated) as on the film itself.

Mr. Crisp brings an air of gentility to reviewing that seems to have all but disappeared. He uses each article (column) as a means of using the English language with a delicacy and refinement that is sadly missing from most reviews. Certainly your average newspaper reviewer (who admittedly may have a shorter deadline for the daily paper than Mr. Crisp has for a weekly magazine) seems to write so that "he who runs may read" while Mr. Crisp assumes that you will stop, sit down, pour yourself a cup of tea, and savor his column.

This is not to say Mr. Crisp cannot be serious, as in speaking of

_ T_ h_ e_ P_ o_ p_ e_ o_ f_ G_ r_ e_ e_ n_ w_ i_ c_ h_ V_ i_ l_ l_ a_ g_ e:
"We have come a long way from the moral

certitudes of the reign of Mr. Cooper and Mr. Wayne, the midday cowboy.

In their halcyon day, anybody who was still standing after the sound of gunfire had wasted its bitterness on the desert air was virtuous to the fringe of idiocy. When these paragons died, they were succeeded by the tarnished heroes, such as Mr. Douglas and Mr. Sinatra, whose sins were forgiven because they summoned up sufficient goodness to overcome one last challenge. ... Now we seem to have reached the lowest ring of

Hades. In films such as _ T_ h_ e_ P_ o_ p_ e_ o_ f_ G_ r_ e_ e_ n_ w_ i_ c_ h
_ V_ i_ l_ l_ a_ g_ e and _ A_ g_ a_ i_ n_ s_ t_ A_ l_ l

_ O_ d_ d_ s, the people who survive the battle are in no way better than those

who lost it--lecherers and murderers all. Are we to interpret these parables as demanding more of our pity? Are directors reminding us that we ourselves would have sunk equally low in similar stressful circumstances, or are we being told that even the effort towards integrity is no longer worthwhile. If this is the message, beware. You may find yourselves among men even more eager to receive this cynical news than you are and even more adept at acting upon its possibilities."

But he can also be satirical: "I think that somewhere there is a dim cellar in which, once a year, all the film critics of America meet. Like Aztec priests convened for the selection of a sacrificial virgin, they huddle together to decide which of the current movies they will totally destroy. Their task is easier than that of the holy men because, though a good movie may be rare, it is not as hard to find as a good woman."

Certainly part of the worth of this book is the new perspective you will get on some of the films Mr. Crisp discusses. Consider his opening comments on _ 1_ 9_ 8_ 4: "_ 1_ 9_ 8_ 4 was written as a political satire and read as a science-fiction fantasy. When it was first published in 1949, few people who shuddered at Mr. Orwell's prophesies thought that any of them would veer be fulfilled--except members of the gay community.... To them, the whole horrifying situation described in the book was already happening nightly in British cities. In January of this year, Mr. Steel and I saw a secret screening of _ 1_ 9_ 8_ 4 and for me a certain irony pervaded the occasion. Nine years previously, I had watched Mr. Hurt acting with great intensity the story of my life, walking in terror along dark pavements, finally having his home invaded without warnings by the

police, and being threatened with eight years imprisonment. Now I beheld the same actor suddenly caught naked by Miss Hamilton in a rented room and being dragged away to prison by the grim servants of Big Brother. Things don't change much do they?"

I realize this "review" is more a selection of quotes than a review, but somehow that seems a better way to encourage you to buy the book than my saying, "Oh, what a wonderful book this is!"