

of Leeds. That is unless you can get some people who are willing to meet in the Southern part of Leeds. If you can let me know and I will change my mandate to not the Northern part of Leeds. Well, unless you think you can get people to meet both places. Ah, let me amend that. You can meet anywhere in Leeds, but absolutely not

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in North Yorkshire. Unless you think you might.

I don't know. I think I may not have the hang of this Power thing just yet.

2. PASSION PLAY by Sean Stewart (Ace, ISBN 0-441-65241-7, 1993, US\$4.50) (a book review by Evelyn C. Leeper):

I find science fictional looks at religion intriguing, and in that category I would include future theocracies. P a s s i o n P l a y is about a near-future America that is a theocracy, having been taken over by the Redemptionists. The "reds" (as they are somewhat confusingly called) have taken over the entertainment media as well, and everything is now instructive or uplifting. The Reds seem to have some idea of art--though movies and such financed by religious groups now don't seem to show much evidence of this--and it is during the production of a version of F a u s t that the murder which forms the core of the book's plot occurs. The story is told in the first person by an independent investigator (who has some semi-psychic powers which are never explained).

Reading the book, I felt like a stone skipping over the surface of a lake. There's too much "stuff" in this short book to have any of it examined in depth. The Redemptionist government, the religious structure (what happened to all the non-Christians in the new United States?), new uses of the media (along with a distrust in technology approaching the neo-Luddite level--how do these contradictory ideas get resolved?), puritanism (along with drugs and sex)--all these are touched on, but never examined or even made consistent. And wrapping all this around a murder mystery confuses the issue. There's too much the reader is trying to figure out

about the background to give him or her a fair chance at figuring out the crime. (Yes, I know a murder mystery is not necessarily a puzzle. Still, it does seem as though the science fiction nature of this merely mystifies the reader further.)

_ P _ a _ s _ s _ i _ o _ n _ P _ l _ a _ y suffers from a super-abundance of aspects. I rarely find myself complaining that a book is too short, but Stewart needed either to lengthen the book or cut back on the various changes introduced. (It's also possible that an "expository lump" explaining some of what was going on might have made the rest less confusing.) _ P _ a _ s _ s _ i _ o _ n _ P _ l _ a _ y is an intriguing novel, but ultimately disappointing. (In fairness, I show note that many people have liked it more than I, and it did win the Aurora Award for Best Canadian Science Fiction Novel in English. But my reaction was that it showed a lot of promise, but didn't deliver on it.)

3. The 1993 Skran "Batch Review" (book reviews by Dale L. Skran):

Periodically, I write a "batch review" of books I have read, but didn't like enough to write a full-length review. In some cases, I just want to warn people that the book should be avoided. Since I moved in the fall of 1992, I have had my hands full with "house chores" and work, and thus have fallen _ r _ e _ a _ l _ l _ y behind on the little reviews. However, at long last I am attempting to catch up.

_ D _ a _ r _ k _ S _ k _ y _ L _ e _ g _ i _ o _ n by William Barton:

Barton is one of the authors of IRIS, a book I previously reviewed and liked a good bit. Dark Sky Legion has as its premise a galactic empire ruled by Earth using light-speed-limited ships. This empire (the MetaStable Order) is controlled by Televoxes (Far Voices) for the Order. The Order has an extremely advanced technology (which the far-flung planets generally lack), including a limited range "Star Trek" type transporter, which is actually a copying machine. The Televox is stored as a pattern during the long, slow interstellar voyages, and then created anew at each

planet he/she inspects. The Televox's job is to assess how far the planet has drifted from the MetaStable Order, and to take corrective action, up to and including obliterating the planet. Note that this system assures the Order that the Televox changes very little from the person that originally left Earth many thousands of years ago. If the Televox is killed on a planet, another one is created from the pattern and continues the mission.

_ D _ a _ r _ k _ S _ k _ y _ L _ e _ g _ i _ o _ n follows Maaron Denthurion as he judges Olam and its inhabitants. The result is an original, thought provoking tale that does not duplicate previous science fiction efforts on "Galactic Empires." A brief look at the appendix is helpful in understanding the special terminology of the MetaStable Order.

Recommended to fans of space opera, galactic empires, and thought-provoking SF.

_ T _ h _ e _ R _ e _ m _ a _ r _ k _ a _ b _ l _ e _ s by Robert Reed

Reed wrote _ D _ o _ w _ n _ t _ h _ e _ B _ r _ i _ g _ h _ t _ W _ a _ y, which I enjoyed greatly, and have

previously reviewed in these pages. I liked it so much that I started reading his other books, including _ T _ h _ e _ R _ e _ m _ a _ r _ k _ a _ b _ l _ e _ s.

_ T _ h _ e

_ R _ e _ m _ a _ r _ k _ a _ b _ l _ e _ s is a "little story" in the sense it is not about the clash of empires or the fate of the universe. It concerns a man with a secret (Ranier Lu) who joins in a dangerous expedition on the only planet ever found that contains non-human intelligent life. There is a bit of a plot, but mainly the story concerns the relationship of the travelers to each other, and to the aliens (the

Remarkables).

I did read the whole story, and although it isn't quite my cup of tea, I came away with more respect for Mr. Reed's writing talents.

Recommended to fans of SF character stories, encounters with aliens, and out-of-doors adventures.

_ B_ l_ a_ c_ k_ M_ i_ l_ k by Robert Reed

_ B_ l_ a_ c_ k_ M_ i_ l_ k jumbles together too many elements to make a good story. Much of the tale concerns a Dr. Florida and the genetically engineered children he has created. This part of the story is pretty interesting, but Reed tacks on a world shattering threat or two, and a plot more suited to Marvel Comics at the end. In truth, I didn't get past page 161. However, Reed's talent is visible even in this earlier work, and I hope to see better stuff from him in the future

_ B_ l_ a_ c_ k_ M_ i_ l_ k was written before _ D_ o_ w_ n _ t_ h_ e
_ B_ r_ i_ g_ h_ t_ W_ a_ y and _ T_ h_ e
_ R_ e_ m_ a_ r_ k_ a_ b_ l_ e_ s, and it shows, oddly enough, not in the writing (which is very good), but in the poorly cobbled-together plot.

Recommended to fans of mutant children, genetic engineering, and Reed completists.

_ R_ a_ f_ t by Stephen Baxter

This novel got tremendous hype from people like Clarke and Niven, and indeed, it resembles their styles to a large extent. It concerns what happens when a spaceship from our universe ends up in a universe where the force of gravity is a billion times stronger than in our universe. The "one speculation" granted Baxter is that everyone doesn't die right away, and indeed they set up a struggling colony.

Five centuries later "Rees" begins to wonder about the odd limits of his rather brutal life, and begins explore and generally get into trouble in the best SF fashion. What follows is traditional exploration SF that reminds the reader of a Heinlein young adult novel with just a touch of sex, or of the adult Heinlein generation ship story. I like this better than a lot of recent Niven/Forward books--Baxter seem less tired and more interesting then Niven/Forward's recent works. For a first novel, Baxter writes with excellent control, and once you get used to the single grand and unlikely premise, the story rips right along.

Recommended to fans of Hard SF, "sense of wonder" SF, Heinlein, Clarke, Niven, and Sheffield. Warning: There is some sex and a few

gross scenes with a primitive tribe.

_ T _ i _ m _ e _ l _ i _ k _ e _ I _ n _ f _ i _ n _ i _ t _ y by Stephen Baxter

I jumped into Baxter's second novel with great eagerness, and was rewarded (at least initially) with a complex time-travel plot. Humans from the future seek to return to the past to prevent the alien Qax from enslaving the Earth. The story ends with a rock-'em-sock-'em super-science battle that would do Larry Niven or Doc Smith proud. Unfortunately, an extremely promising novel ends abruptly and in an unsatisfactory and confusing fashion, leading the reader to suspect an artificial page limit, or, worse, sequelitus. Perhaps, I am just too dense to appreciate the ending, but read it yourself and make your own decision. However, even with this complaint, there are many worse books than _ T _ i _ m _ e _ l _ i _ k _ e _ I _ n _ f _ i _ n _ i _ t _ y (see the review to come!).

Recommended to fans of Hard SF, "sense of wonder!!" SF, Clarke, Niven, Sheffield, Forward, time travel stories, and the end of IT ALL.

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To know, to think, to dream. That is everything.
-- Victor Hugo

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