

up entirely on men and start living with each other. If you poll them four months and three days later, you will discover that their views are different. It will be, "All men are stupid, vicious, worthless bags of slime and so is my new roommate." Believe it or not, there is a distinct subgroup of these women who prove how

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firmly grounded in reality they are by making an exception. They have seen a counter-example and they have allowed it into their world-view. They say, "All men are stupid, vicious, worthless bags of slime with two exceptions: Kirk and Spock."

In any case, once these women separate themselves from men they get cats. Figure that one out. Every nasty thing they say about men is true of cats (uh, except the one about leaving the toilet seat up). Nature made cats as part of an experiment to see how much intelligence you could put into an animal before it develops a conscience. The cat was an early effort that didn't have much of either, just enough intelligence to know how to scheme. A friend of mine had a cat who knew how to lift the lid off a pan on the stove and steal food. That could be why meals at their house had that certain indescribable something that the French call "hairballs." Not that this was the only way your food could get them. You could leave the table and come back to find your friends being a good host and scolding the cat and there in the middle of your mashed potatoes is that little paw print. I say my friends were being good friends to scold the cat because any scolding translates into cat language as "Good kitty, please claw the curtains or pee on the floor."

Actually, though, I should not be so hard on cats. My understanding is that they are on the way out as pets. More and more cat owners are discovering that they can get everything they get from a cat in greater abundance by adopting instead a Middle Eastern terrorist.

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Not only is the Universe stranger than we think,
it's stranger than we can think.

-- Werner Heisenberg

WHAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN, VOLUME 1: ALTERNATE EMPIRES

edited by Gregory Benford & Martin H. Greenberg

Bantam Spectra, 1989, ISBN 0-553-27845-2, \$4.50.

A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper

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This is the first of a projected series of alternate history short fiction. Most of the pieces seem to be new in this volume, though at least one ("We Could Do Worse") has previously appeared elsewhere. Benford in his introduction describes one of the constraints placed on authors for this volume: the alternate history must be the result of a failed event. Well, one man's success is another's failure; if the United States had won the Vietnam War, wouldn't that also be the failure of North Vietnam to defeat us? (Note: in discussing the stories, I will often be telling what the failed event was. For some of the stories this might be considered a spoiler, as the event is not disclosed until the end of the story. Reader, beware!)

Three stories deal with changes in the world's religious history. Poul Anderson's "In the House of Sorrows" postulates a world in which

the Assyrians captured Jerusalem and the Diasporah occurred before Christianity had a chance to even get started. "To the Promised Land" by Robert Silverberg is the story of a second attempt at a Hebrew exodus from Egypt, the first having ended in disaster at the Red Sea three thousand years ago. (So why does Silverberg have his first-person narrator talk about the holiday of Simchat Torah? And how did this error get past the editors?) Both Anderson and Silverberg draw civilizations that seem three-dimensional, that give the reader the feel of being somewhere where things are not quite the same. This (to me at least) is one of the major jobs of an alternate history story and whether I like or dislike one often depends as much on this "flavor" as on whether the world is a reasonable extrapolation of the changed event.

"Bible Stories for Adults, No. 31: The Covenant" by James Morrow is another in his series of "Bible Stories"; this one examines what might happened if Moses couldn't have gotten a set of replacement tablets for the ones he shattered over the Golden Calf. Rather than draw the alternate world, though, Morrow has a dialogue (admittedly interesting) between two computers, one of whom has reconstructed the tablets from the fragments, about how the Ten Commandments could be perverted. In other words, he spends his time describing o_u_r world. Interesting, as I said, but I find the implication that the world would be more moral without the Ten Commandments not very convincing, presented here more as an axiom than a conclusion from facts and reasoning.

Three deal with political changes. In "Counting Potsherds" by Harry Turtledove, the Persians defeated the Greeks and democracy never developed. Turtledove has done his research on the Near East (used also as the setting in his set of alternate history stories collected in

A_g_e_n_t_o_f_B_y_z_a_n_t_i_u_m, though the latter is based on a change farther down the line), and the world here is as well-developed as those of Anderson and (in a different way) Silverberg. Benford's own "We Could Do Worse" is based on changes to the Presidential elections in the 1950s and set in that time period; "All Assassins" by Barry Malzberg is a fairly bland twist on the early 1960s, with its ending not much of a surprise at all, though it seemed to be intended as one. Neither gives one much feeling for the world the author draws, but then both are much shorter than other stories in this volume, so maybe I'm expecting too much.

The remainder are a mixed bag. "Remaking History" by Kim Stanley Robinson is a sort of "what if the rescue of the Iranian hostages had worked," but not up to the level of most of the other pieces here. (It's not clear what the "failed event" Benford required is in this case; I guess it's that the Iranians failed to stop the rescue.) "Leapfrog" by James P. Hogan is not, strictly speaking an alternate history (so far as I can tell), but a tale of how our current history could have been manipulated into being, rather than an alternate history which would have arisen had events taken their "natural" course. In any case, it is mostly a polemic on how we mishandling the space program, and while I sympathize with the opinions held, I'm beginning to tire of stories which exist only to beat the reader over the head with them.

George Alec Effinger's "Everything but Honor" is a combination of time travel and alternate history. A black American physicist in an America in which the Civil War ran quite differently decides to use his newly-built time machine to "fix things up" and improve the lot of his race. The results are, I fear, predictable. "Game Night at the Fox and Goose" by Karen Joy Fowler gives us a description of an alternate world in which the war of the sexes has developed differently. We never get to see this world; instead of alternate history by demonstration we get alternate history by explication. Someone from an alternate world tells someone in o_u_r world what it's like (another approach is to have two people in the alternate world ruminate about why their world is the way it is ... "Oh, if only someone had shot Lincoln in 1865, he wouldn't have gotten brain fever in 1866 and signed that terrible Re-enslavement Act that led to the Second Civil War!"). Note that this is n_o_t the same as characters speculating about what would have generated our world (such as the Morrow story), because we know what our world is like. It's more like the old space opera stories where the hero explains everything he's building to his girlfriend. I much prefer alternate history by demonstration (a la Anderson, Silverberg, and Turtledove).

"Waiting for the Olympians" by Frederik Pohl is another "Rome never fell" story, with the addition of some arriving aliens. Pohl's main character is a "sci-rom" (scientific romance) writer, who can't seem to grasp the concept of alternate histories when someone suggests that he write one. Cute, and the ending is supposed to be one of those "the-reader-knows-something-the-characters-don't" sorts of things, but while it was a reasonable way to wile away some time, it was basically only an average story.

The final story has a history behind it. Larry Niven was asked to contribute an alternate history story; he agreed as long as he could include Robert Heinlein as a character. "The Return of William Proxmire" was finished and Heinlein read it shortly before he died. It too (like the Effinger) combines time travel with alternate history. While having Heinlein as a character makes it of interest to science fiction folks, it falls into the same traps as the Hogan and Effinger stories: the Hogan in that it is preaching to the choir, the Effinger in that readers know by now that if someone goes back to change the past to improve it, things will go wrong (at least from that person's point of view). Frank Capra knew this back in 1947 in I_t'_s_a_W_o_n_d_e_r_f_u_l_L_i_f_e. Come to that, Robert Burns knew it in 1785 ("The best laid schemes o' mice and men/Gang aft a-gley"), Ihara Saikaku about 1680 ("There is always something to upset the most careful of human calculations"), and Homer about 3000 years ago ("Zeus does not bring to accomplishment all the thoughts of men.").

So the score is three good to excellent (the Anderson, Silverberg, and Turtledove); five so-so (the Morrow, Effinger, Hogan, Pohl, and Fowler); and four below average (the Benford, Malzberg, Robinson, and Niven). I notice that the three I liked are precisely those set in an Eastern empire world, and maybe this shows some sort of bias on my part. Then again, they're also the three longest in the book. In any event (an apt phrase when talking about alternate histories, I think), while the book has its low points, its high points make it more than worthwhile (I wouldn't be at all surprised to see any of them on next year's Hugo ballot), and I recommend it as well as look forward to the others in its series.

A STUDY IN SORCERY by Michael Kurland
Ace, 1989, ISBN 0-441-79092-5, \$3.50.
A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper
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This book continues Michael Kurland's continuation of Randall Garrett's Lord Darcy series. Garrett wrote T_o_o_M_a_n_y_M_a_g_i_c_i_a_n_s, L_o_r_d_D_a_r_c_y_I_n_v_e_s_t_i_g_a_t_e_s, and M_u_r_d_e_r_a_n_d_M_a_g_i_c, all set in a Britain where Richard I was not killed in the Crusades, the Plantagenets still rule, and magic works (all technological advances are done through magic). After his death Michael Kurland continued the series with T_e_n_L_i_t_t_l_e_W_i_z_a_r_d_s and now A_S_t_u_d_y_i_n_S_o_r_c_e_r_y. Darcy had always been patterned somewhat on Sherlock Holmes; this latest title merely emphasizes it. There is less of the historical explication in this novel than previously, probably because Kurland assumes that by now the people who are reading these know the alternate history and don't need it recounted to them. The mystery is fairly mundane, there's the usual court intrigue, and perhaps the whole series is starting to run down. A_S_t_u_d_y_i_n_S_o_r_c_e_r_y is enjoyable enough for an evening's entertainment, but nothing new or original. If you haven't read the previous books in the series, don't start with this one; if you have, you'll know whether you'd enjoy this one anyway.

(One interesting thing to note is that the covers of the series have changed over the years. The first, at least in the edition I have, was strictly a modern--for the time--science fiction type cover, the second seemed to be a black magic cover, the third, a Gothic romance cover. This one is a humorous cover with Victorian-costumed characters. What next?)

FIRST BORN

A telefilm review by Mark R. Leeper

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Capsule review: BBC TV has done some very good science fiction stories in their 3-part, 3-hour format.

_ F _ i _ r _ s _ t _ B _ o _ r _ n is not one of them. The story spreads itself too thin by touching the philosophical issues and the social issues far too lightly, yet letting them get in the way of the story values. This story of a hybrid child is neither fish nor fowl. Rating: 0.

One of the facts of life that you have to get used to is that you just cannot have it all. Most major films, at least Hollywood films, open first in the United States and may wait a while before getting their releases in other countries. The United States has the second largest film industry in the world (second only to India's huge film industry) and films play in the United States first and take longer to get to places like Britain. But a lot of good drama, and in particular good science fiction drama, never makes it to the United States at all or does, but with a low profile, so few of us Yanks see it. In particular, there is some really good science fiction done for the BBC that few Americans ever get a chance to see and far fewer actually see.

The BBC seems to go for three-part, three-hour dramas with really high production values. Every once in a while one of their mini-series

gets shown in this country. Their adaptation of D_a_y_o_f_t_h_e
T_r_i_f_f_i_d_s was
one of the best book adaptations to another medium I have ever seen.
Their alternate history story A_n_E_n_g_l_i_s_h_m_a_n'_s_C_a_s_t_l_e is
probably the
most viewed and most requested tape in my collection. The most accurate
dramatic version of D_r_a_c_u_l_a (not science fiction, but in a related
field) was their C_o_u_n_t_D_r_a_c_u_l_a. But this sort of drama is picked up for
American television in a piecemeal fashion. Three-hour mini-series are
an awkward length and very hard to get scheduled here. When they are,
often these programs are poorly publicized. So in the long run, with
the exception of a few flamboyant series such as D_r._W_h_o and B_l_a_k_e'_s_7,
little of the BBC's science fiction gets much attention in this country.

However, having said all that, I have to say that last year's F_i_r_s_t
B_o_r_n, recently shown on the Arts & Entertainment Network, is only a
competently made science fiction horror story and is not representative
of the best of the BBC. F_i_r_s_t_B_o_r_n is an adaptation of T_h_e_G_o_r
S_a_g_a by
Maureen Duffy (not to be confused with the Gor novels of John Norman).
The story deals with the aftermath of a genetic experiment to cross-
breed a human with a gorilla. What do you get if you cross a gorilla
with a human? Improbably enough, you seem to get a human with only
minor physiological abnormalities and some minor ape instincts. Tarzan
is usually played more apelike than is Gordon who is half gorilla.
Somehow reminiscent of the O_m_e_n trilogy, the story is told in three

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segments showing Gordon as a baby, a boy, and a young man. There is so
little of the gorilla half in Gordon that the film is really more about
the social stigma of mixed parentage than it is about Gordon's hybrid
nature.

The story just compounds high improbability with high
improbability. Even given that such a hybrid could survive, why is it
as human as it appears to be? It starts life as a hairy baby, but soon
loses most of that hair and in spite of the baby looking and acting
almost entirely human, a fellow scientist who sees it every day believes
the story that it is half gorilla, half orangutan. There are no
orangutan characteristics at all and very few ape characteristics. In
fact, late in Gor's life--Gor is short for Gordon or Gorilla--his

gorilla side manifests itself in his wanting to be a priest. That is a touch that will please animal rights people somewhat more than the clergy, I suspect.

A story like this could be a thumping good adventure tale (well, maybe like a Tarzan story), or go deeply into the legal or moral or religious issues raised (as Vercors's novel Y_ o_ u_ S_ h_ a_ l_ l_ K_ n_ o_ w_ T_ h_ e_ m did), or delve into the mind of such a chimerical person, or examine the social issues involved. F_ i_ r_ s_ t_ B_ o_ r_ n tries to do all four and lightly, and comes up short on each.

I would have gone for the philosophical implications, but even the film S_ k_ u_ l_ l_ d_ u_ g_ g_ e_ r_ y (Vercors's philosophical novel turned into an adventure vehicle for Burt Reynolds!) went into the philosophy in more depth than did F_ i_ r_ s_ t_ B_ o_ r_ n. There is certainly the implication that there are deep theological issues--one priest seems to be very bothered by them--but the audience is never actually privy to his objections. The result is a well-made television film, but still very dissatisfying. I would give it a flat 0 on the -4 to +4 scale.

LICENSE TO KILL
A film review by Mark R. Leeper
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Capsule review: More action, less campy self-parody is the by-word of the latest Bond film. There is almost too little humor in this hard-edged adventure film involving Bond's vendetta against a Panamanian drug lord.
Rating: +2.

Operative 007 had been getting older and softer as the series progressed. The series had lost its hard edge. In the early days, Bond was a sort of all-purpose thug for the good guys fighting people who were basically grandiose hoods toppling missiles or holding cities for ransom. Later he lost the hard edge and became a sort of fop. His foes were people wanting to start nuclear wars and/or kill everyone in the world. And the stories became more campy and more silly, with more idiotic special equipment and more and more obvious product placements. Around the time they made M_o_o_n_r_a_k_e_r, the series hit bottom. After M_o_o_n_r_a_k_e_r, somebody must have seen that the series needed rethinking. Since then the plots have been better constructed, but there has been an uneasy blend of the tongue-in-cheek with some tighter storylines. The choice of Timothy Dalton, with a face like a Swiss Army knife and a sharp edge to match fueled speculation that the series was going back to hard adventure. L_i_c_e_n_s_e_t_o_K_i_l_l is the least fanciful Bond film ever made. James Bond is no longer the lucky but greying fop; he is young and vital and angry. But for a couple of stagey stunts toward the end of the film, this is a surprisingly serious action film.

There is a lot of story in this 133-minute film. Even the pre-credit action sequence advances the main story. It is rare that it ever does and this time it really is an integral part of the plot. Bond is helping old friend Felix Leiter (played by David Hedison, who becomes the first actor to play the role twice) catch Sanchez, a Central American drug lord. Things go extremely wrong and Bond finds he has a serious vendetta against Sanchez (played by Robert Davi, whose pockmarked face adds a touch of realism). Bond must track the drug lord to Panama (thinly disguised under the name Isthmus) where Sanchez ruthlessly holds his own empire through schemes involving drug-running, evangelists, and Contras.

The credit sequence is once again stunning in spite of the instantly forgettable credit song by Gladys Knight. Michael Kamen's score is not up to the classic John Barry efforts, but it gets the job done. Some aerial stunts are impressive though driving stunts tend to be a weak point in the film. The characters lack some of the interest value of those in F_r_o_m_R_u_s_s_i_a_w_i_t_h_L_o_v_e, the only other Bond film with any credibility. L_i_c_e_n_s_e_t_o_K_i_l_l is a sign that the Bond series is improving. I give it a +2 on the -4 to +4 scale.

THE RADIANT WARRIOR by Leo Frankowski
Del Ray, 1989, ISBN 0-345-32764-0, \$3.95.
A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper
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This is the third volume of "The Adventures of Conrad Stargard; volume four (the last volume--at least so they say) is due out in a couple of months. Once more, the premise: Conrad Schwartz, loyal citizen of Communist Poland, goes to sleep in the basement of an inn and wakes up in 1231 A.D. In the best "Connecticut Yankee" tradition, his knowledge revolutionizes the society he falls into. His main concern is defeating the Mongols, due to invade ten years after he arrives. There are also some time travelers in the future who are watching him via a viewscreen and who have provided him with a bionic intelligent horse.

T_h_e_R_a_d_i_a_n_t_W_a_r_r_i_o_r is like the second volume, T_h_e_H_i_g_h-T_e_c_h_K_n_i_g_h_t, only more so, in its emphasis on how to build nifty inventions.

Well-researched it may be, but stopping the plot to explain in great detail how to build a framis does not make the book flow. It almost seems as though Frankowski is marking time until the invasion. And the male chauvinism of the first two volumes is even worse in this one, with Frankowski even stooping to a scene in which a knight basically rapes the woman he wants, and that's how he wins her heart. (One suspects he did less research on women than on machines, borne out by the biographical note at the back of the book, which describes him as "a lifelong bachelor.")

Much of the book is spent with Conrad building up an army to fight the Mongols. Whether his ideas of how to build a modern army in 13th Century Poland would actually work I can't judge. In the book, they work fine, but then so did flogging for traffic violations in S_t_a_r_s_h_i_p T_r_o_o_p_e_r_s. Having stuck with the series this far, I'll read book four. But it's getting more difficult to recommend it to anyone else. (Of T_h_e H_i_g_h-T_e_c_h_K_n_i_g_h_t, I said it seemed to be aimed at adolescent boys, but given the attitude toward women in this one, I can't even recommend it for them.)

