

harder to understand why every ant in my neighborhood has it in for me personally. They all seem to figure that my house is the place to be. Perhaps I am lucky. My neighbors get termites; I get carpenter ants.

THE MT VOID

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Now you may think that you have had ants too in your time, but let me assure you that you are a piker unless you live, as I do, in a drained swamp. Ants are just one of the many species trying to reclaim the housing development as it slowly sinks into the ground. In Lakeridge even the spiders--not known as one of your more social animals--tend to band together in armies and try to make my life miserable. Lakeridge is the only place I have ever lived that has dangerous attack butterflies.

But my house is under siege, these being the cold months of the year and my house being the ant equivalent of Fort Lauderdale. (Have you ever seen an ant in a revealing bikini? Not a pretty sight!) We have swamp ants, thought by most of the world to be antediluvian. They are roughly the size of packs of Benson and Hedges.

Now this in my mind creates a moral dilemma. I try not to kill any animal for sport, convenience, or any other reason but survival. I think unnecessary killing is wrong. This is a deeply held belief arising out of my empathy for all living creatures. It has nothing to do with the fact I'm a wimp.

I make every attempt to avoid killing in my house. I will not kill a spider in my house. And you know, the spiders seem to sense that I am trying to help them. Animals usually do not understand kindness from the same species that makes films such as B_a_m_b_i but also invented the NRA, but I truly believe that the spiders sense that I am a sympathetic soul, since they invite their friends and neighbors from all over the country to invade my house and put up disgusting webs.

Anyway, I try to explain to my friends about the moral dilemma of having to kill the ants. Uh ... that's the human friends I try to explain it to. Spiders have no conception of what a moral dilemma

is. Neither do most of my friends. "No moral dilemma there," they say. "The ants will eat your house if you don't stop them." Of course, that is just why there is a moral dilemma. The spiders are welcome. The ants would be too if they would be reasonable house guests and not trash the place. None of my human friends trash the place. They let their kids do it for them.

So I have asked an exterminator to come and look at the problem. An ant must have heard me calling. All of a sudden I cannot find one of the darn little cusses to show the guy. He may come and find nothing. I left out pieces of Hershey Bar on the floor to tempt them out. Nothing. I really would like to give the exterminator a live ant, this being the holiday season and all. I just know that after he leaves it is going to be business as usual for the ants.

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2. Here is more on WIZARD OF SPEED AND TIME:

- > WIZARD OF SPEED AND TIME will also be shown (in 35mm rather than NTSC)
- > Jan. 31 and Feb. 1 at the Cinema Village in NYC [12th Street east of
- > Broadway] - could you post this information also?
- >
- > --Mike Rubin <sfbat!mike>
- >

Mark Leeper
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...mtgzx!leeper

To be nobody but yourself in a world which is doing
its best night and day to make you like everybody else
means to fight the hardest battle any human being can
fight and never stop fighting.

--e. e. cummings

JASON COSMO by Dan McGirt
Signet, 1989, ISBN 0-451-16289-9, \$3.95.
A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper
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Jason_Cosmo is a tongue-in-cheek fantasy. It won't set the literary world on fire, or win any Hugos, but it makes an enjoyable read.

Jason Cosmo is a woodcutter in Hicksnittle who somehow gets tapped to be the hero who will save everyone from the Demon Lords and assorted other nasties. He gets to rescue princesses, fight monsters, and do all that other hero-type stuff. Of course the plot isn't original--hero plots rarely are. But for a novel that starts out in the Festering Wart Tavern, you can forgive a familiarity of plot.

McGirt has a talent for coming up with humorous names, but he also has an ear for clever dialogue. For example:

"If Rae City falls and the man Jason Cosmo is captured by the minions of the dreaded Society or the pawns of the Demon Lords--whichever these marauders may be--then beauty and truth, honor and justice, hope and peace, may be forever lost to the peoples of all kingdoms."

"In other words," said Mercury. "This is very important."

Later, Jason asks Mercury why Mercury has come with him; is it because he is Jason's friend? Mercury replies, "That's true, but you loan a friend garden tools. You don't escort him through the Incredibly Dark Forest." (As usual, one might wish for a better copy editor--one who would have caught the punctuation error in the first example and the grammatical error in the second--but heck, what do you expect for \$3.95 these days?)

There is a lot of what passes for humorous fantasy these days, but much of it falls into the Xanth trap--what's funny the first time around is marginal by book three and positively stupefying by book seven. This book is original and fun. I hope we see more from McGirt, possibly even more humorous novels (though he could probably do a straight fantasy if he wished). I just hope we don't end up with J_a_s_o_n_C_o_s_m_o_V_I_I: J_a_s_o_n_t_a_k_e_s_M_a_n_h_a_t_t_a_n.

YABSR - Yet Another Batch of Skran Reviews
Book reviews by Dale L. Skran Jr.
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P_r_o_c_y_o_n'_s_P_r_o_m_i_s_e
by Michael McCollum

This book has an interesting premise--interstellar travel is extremely difficult, so difficult that somewhen, an ancient race gave up trying except for one effort--seeding the galaxy with Von Neumann probes seeking other races that h_a_v_e found the secret. A couple of centuries in our future, one of these probes enters the Solar System. It offers a deal--a wealth of technology in return for true FTL. Hot-minded Earthlings blow up the main-brain of the probe, forcing the remaining part of the ship to make a deal with more calm folks to continue its efforts. Apparently, it has just detected apparent FTL in the vicinity of Procyon, and needs help to get there. Help is given, and in due course the probe and an Earth ship leave for Procyon. Centuries pass, and a second interseller probe arrives. Then the fun really starts.

If this is a bit over-complex, so is the novel. While constantly on the verge of being really insightful, in the end McCollum writes an unbelievable space opera. Not really recommended.

B_u_y_i_n_g_T_i_m_e
by Joe Haldeman

This well-crafted book has the premise that the Stileman foundation holds the secret of immortality--but will only sell it ten years at a time--and the price is 1,000,000 pounds, or your net worth, whichever is greater! Up until its let-down conclusion, Haldeman writes a crackling good hard-SF adventure yarn, full of believable characters, convincing thought on how immortals might behave, and a mystery within a mystery that keeps the pages turning. Recommended.

D_e_m_o_n_s_a_t_R_a_i_n_b_o_w_B_r_i_d_g_e
by Jack Chalker

If you like what Chalker writes--semi-realistic space opera--this will satisfy you. Be warned, this promises to be the first book of a long series. The entire volume--375 pages--is devoted to INTRODUCING THE CHARACTERS! Of the real plot, only about 20 pages exist. Only for the Chalker fan.

T_h_e_L_a_s_t_L_e_g_e_n_d_s_o_f_E_a_r_t_h

by A. A. Attanasio

This novel sits on the cusp between hard SF that has vast scope, such as R_i_n_g_w_o_r_l_d, and frank fantasy such as T_h_e_D_y_i_n_g_E_a_r_t_h. There is the veneer of a vast battle between the Rimstalker and the Zotl, a battle so vast that the resurrection of humanity from its forgotten grave to take part in the war is just a small part of the millennium spanning action. Overall, Attanasio tells a good tale, with powerful, characters, interesting ideas, and immense courage. What this story is not, finally, is probable. The science frequently verges off into magic, leaving the reader wondering about the author's intent. Worth reading.

T_h_e_M_u_m_m_y,_o_r_R_a_m_s_e_s_t_h_e_D_a_m_n_e_d

by Anne Rice

I think Anne needed some bucks quick, and decided to crank out this imitation of her excellent vampire series (I_n_t_e_r_v_i_e_w_w_i_t_h_t_h_e_V_a_m_p_i_r_e, T_h_e_V_a_m_p_i_r_e_L_e_s_t_a_t, and T_h_e_Q_u_e_e_n_o_f_t_h_e_D_a_m_n_e_d) using a mummy instead

of a vampire as the immortal character. Although better than pulp fiction, this novel is simply n_o_t up to the high standard Anne Rice has set with her vampire stories. The scenes without Ramses on stage are dreadfully dull, and the end promises sequel after sequel without the vast scope and detail of the vampire series. N_o_t recommended.

T_e_a_W_i_t_h_t_h_e_B_l_a_c_k_D_r_a_g_o_n

by R. A. MacAvoy

Every once in a while I read something fans everywhere have been raving about for years, and after reading it I wonder why. I felt that way after reading Gene Wolfe's S_h_a_d_o_w_o_f_t_h_e_T_o_r_t_u_r_e_r and I felt that way after reading B_l_a_c_k_D_r_a_g_o_n. Politely put, there is very little substance to this slow-paced, delicately written tale of an ancient Chinese dragon who has taken on the guise of a man, and who has come to America to seek enlightenment. This theme is rich with the possibility of contrasting the viewpoint of an immortal dragon with that of

contemporary humans, but little is done with this.

I get the impression R. A. MacAvoy is a middle-aged woman who has led a dull life, and this is her idea of an exciting experience--a middle-aged woman finds love while meeting a Chinese dragon and solving a mystery. I could barely keep turning the pages, and never would have gotten past the first five if this wasn't so highly recommended. I intend to steer clear of MacAvoy in the future. It's just not my cup of tea!

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P_r_e_n_t_i_c_e_A_l_v_i_n
by Orson Scott Card

This is the third book in the tales of Alvin the Maker, Card's excellent series blending American history with backwood's magic (The first two are S_e_v_e_n_t_h_S_o_n and R_e_d_P_r_o_p_h_e_t.) So far, Card is still going strong, but a bit of the overpowering enchantment of the first novel has worn off as Alvin gets older. Among other things, Alvin meets the torch who has been watching over him all his life, fights Mike Fink, forges a golden anvil, and survives a harrowing battle with the "unmaker" who has stalked him from birth. Overall, an excellent book by a Hugo-winning author (E_n_d_e_r's_G_a_m_e and S_p_e_a_k_e_r_f_o_r_t_h_e_D_e_a_d) who is still growing artistically.

D_a_w_n's_U_n_c_e_r_t_a_i_n_L_i_g_h_t
by Neal Barrett, Jr.

The conclusion of the hard-bitten adventures of Howie Ryder as he seeks his sister, long ago taken to Silver Island. A down and dirty after-the-bomb story. Pretty good, but read the first book in the series first. Also, plenty of blood, guts, and sheer meanness for the fans of films like T_h_e_G_o_o_d,_t_h_e_B_a_d,_a_n_d_t_h_e_U_g_l_y.

D_i_v_i_d_e_d_A_l_l_e_g_i_a_n_c_e(B_o_o_k_I_I_o_f
t_h_e_D_e_e_d_o_f_P_a_k_s_e_n_a_r_r_i_o_n)
O_a_t_h_o_f_G_o_l_d(B_o_o_k_I_I_I_o_f_t_h_e
D_e_e_d_o_f_P_a_k_s_e_n_a_r_r_i_o_n)
by Elizabeth Moon

Ms. Moon has apparently led a more exciting life than Ms. MacAvoy-more anon. There are two main claims being made for this series. One, according to the jacket, Judith Tarr (whoever this may be?) states that "This is the first work of high heroic fantasy I've seen that has taken the work of Tolkien, assimilated it totally and deeply and absolutely, and produced something altogether new and yet incontestably based on the master" This is certainly true--although I am not a big fan of Tolkien, he did produce stories with an enchanting background. However, Ms. Moon has simply borrowed the characters (orcs, dwarves, elves, thieves, paladins, etc.), although more from D&D games than Tolkien, and strung them together in a series of action sequences that at their worst resemble D&D games. There is no coherent sociology or logic that underlies her society or her magic. Stuff just seems to happen as needed by the plot. Women are treated equally with men in a feudal society with not the slightest explanation. Lesbian love is accepted along with heterosexual love, again with no explanation. This "no means of support" style of writing should be contrasted to Niven's T_h_e_M_a_g_i_c_G_o_e_s_A_w_a_y.

This is not to imply that Ms. Moon is a poor writer (I did read both books, after all), but that she has not applied sufficient thought to the background of her stories. The other claim (also of the jacket)

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is that "Her (Ms. Moon's) background in military training and discipline imbue D_i_v_i_d_e_d_A_l_l_e_g_i_a_n_c_e and its companion volumes with a gritty realism that is all too rare in current fantasy." Apparently Ms. Moon was at one point a 1st Lieutenant in the U.S. Marine Corps. This part of the promise is delivered on--the action is gritty, and much of the book is a series of lectures on the reality of military life.

I'm not sure whether to recommend this series or not, but readers should be warned that it is gritty and realistic, including at one point extended descriptions of medieval tortures.

THE BOOK OF A MILLION YEARS by Poul Anderson

A book review by Dale L. Skran Jr.

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I got this for Christmas, and read it immediately.

It has been quite a while since I really enjoyed anything by Anderson (_ T_ h_ e_ A_ v_ a_ t_ a_ r). It seemed to me that he had given up on writing realistic SF, and retreated to "Scandinavians in Space" opera. "By Ya, fur dem turpedos, Ya bluker. Ah dur blur skie ist bwueterful." Poul has at last found a way to write historical fiction _ a_ n_ d hard SF in the same novel. The premise is that a very, very small number of humans are, by chance, naturally immortal. Most die, but a small number survive. This is their story. It starts in Norway in 310 B.C. and ends somewhere in the infinite depths of space, focusing on the lives (and some deaths) of little more than a half dozen immortals. At first separated from humanity by their immortality, they survive until they are the only true humans left who still aspire to human dream of exploration and love. The Fermi paradox is answered darkly - humanity has lost interest in outer space once the machine/human interface allows the exploration of inner space. Only the original immortals still follow the dream of interstellar voyaging, and as kind gesture, the god-like machine/human intelligences of Earth build them a single matter/anti-matter vessel and send them forth, the only such human ship to ever travel the dark ways between the stars. As to what they find, well, that makes sense too.

Most of the novel is historical. I especially liked the interview between one of the immortals and Cardinal Richelieu. Overall, this is perhaps the most realistic novel about historical immortals I have read. Anderson has done his homework, and written a solid novel.

Unfortunately, although I liked it a fair amount, I wasn't quite as

taken by it as I was by my off-beat Hugo picks, _ M_ a_ r_ o_ o_ n_ e_ d_ i_ n_ R_ e_ a_ l

_ T_ i_ m_ e,

_ C_ o_ u_ r_ t_ s_ h_ i_ p_ R_ i_ t_ e, _ S_ c_ h_ i_ s_ m_ a_ t_ r_ i_ x, or

_ N_ e_ v_ e_ r_ n_ e_ s_ s. This probably means it'll

win the Hugo! Recommended.

THE WRITER'S HOME COMPANION by James Charlton & Lisabeth Mark
Penguin, 1989 (1987c), ISBN 0-14-011012-7, \$4.95.
A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper
Copyright 1990 Evelyn C. Leeper

This wonderful little volume (128 pages, 4 inches wide and 6.5 inches high) is full of literary anecdotes and facts. For example, in regard to the publishing industry, we learn: "It was Richard Simon of Simon and Schuster who instituted the policy of allowing bookstores to return unsold copies of books for full credit. ... Two years after the return policy went into effect, Simon scrawled 'Bookstore returns too high' across the margin of that year's financial statement. The return figure was 3 percent. Today ... returns average 25 percent at trade houses and up to 50 percent and higher at the mass market paperback houses. ... CRUEL SHOES, by the comedian Steve Martin, has a 93 percent return rate...."

We also read about authors and their own views on writing: "Mickey Spillane ... warned his fans not to look too closely for symbolic depth in his novels. 'Mike Hammer drinks beer, not cognac, because I can't spell cognac.'"

This book is in the same series as R_o_t_t_e_n R_e_v_i_e_w_s and R_o_t_t_e_n R_e_v_i_e_w_s I and, like those two volumes, would make an excellent gift for a literary friend--even if that friend is yourself.

The "Kirinyaga" Stories by Mike Resnick
Comments by Kimiye Tipton
Copyright 1990 Kimiye Tipton

[Spoilers for Mike Resnick's "Kirinyaga" series follow--please don't spoil these stories for yourself if you have any intention of reading them.]

I have to comment on [Evelyn Leeper's] thought-provoking review of the Kirinyaga stories. I agree that the stories leave much to the reader's interpretation. I had the chance to hear Resnick read "For I Have Touched the Sky" at our Orlando con in May, and I mentioned to him that he had done a fascinating job of describing Koriba's reasoning. Mike replied, "He's a fanatic, and all fanatics are dangerous." From this I'm guessing that Koriba does not = Resnick.

The choice in "For I Have Touched the Sky" was very clear--the existence of a young girl or the way of life intended for Koriba's tribe. The two could not exist together. Koriba does what he believes is fair, which is to offer the girl a chance to remain in the tribe under his terms. She relieves him of more than one burden with her death--it solves the current problem and removes her dangerous super-intelligence from the gene pool. Although Koriba regrets what happens on a personal basis, there is essentially no choice for him to make,

since he already knows that the life of any single person is worth far less than maintenance of tribal life.

Koriba is the ultimate reactionary in the truest political sense of the word. He has dedicated his life and formidable intelligence to the closed social and ecological system of Kirinyaga, in the certain knowledge that this is the only way for his people to live. The parallel for "Bwana" is Adam and Eve in Eden, with the Maasai hunter appearing as the Snake, offering dangerous knowledge for too high a price. Koriba's mistake is that he drives out the devil, rather admitting that the mere existence of other worlds and advanced technology will always bring the Snake back to his artificial Eden. His intention is to keep his tribe going long enough to raise a generation that will know about technology only as legend. His problem is finding successors that can hold the key to contacting Maintenance for further generations, but who will not succumb to the comforts of advanced technology.

The question is whether Resnick intends for us to sympathise with Koriba. Yes, he does, but only so we as readers can further understand the fanatic mind. Koriba himself is admirable as a leader, but he is unacceptable because of his creed. He sacrifices the individual to the system, and would sacrifice his people to an idea(l). He has completely removed choice from his world. He has set himself up as god, and so far in the Kirinyaga stories, has maintained the position.

But Resnick has obviously set Koriba up for a mighty battle. The outcome-- whether he succeeds in leaving his people ignorant and stunted, or if even a few of them escape to the possibilities of growth and progress, will not be near so interesting as how the mundumugu goes about trying to keep his Eden intact. If we understand Koriba well enough, it may be easier for us to recognize the next Gary Jones or Adolph Hitler when he or she charismatically appears on our horizon.

After hearing Resnick read "For I Have Touched the Sky," I told him I thought it was the best thing he had ever written. After reading "Bwana," I am beginning to think that this series may be the best being currently written in the sf field.

