



making a soap opera set in World War II. One was surprised that another one had considered World War II a "sort of victory." Odd sort of discussion. Britain won the war. Then they started talking about how Britain had crumbled when the Germans invaded. I slammed a cassette into the machine. This was science fiction. It

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was, in fact, alternate history. I'll go one more step and say it was a really great alternate history. Our main character writes a bad soap opera for a BBC that answers to a German overlord. The last Jews in Britain are being rounded up for extermination. Urban guerillas and terrorists are revolting and bombing collaborators. The story is good and the acting is better. Kenneth More stars as Philip Ingram. We did eventually get a decent and complete copy and it became the most requested tape we owned.

On Thursday, August 22, at 7 PM, the Leeperhouse film fest will show:

AN ENGLISHMAN'S CASTLE (1978) dir. by Paul Ciappessoni

2. In my review of T\_h\_e\_M\_o\_u\_n\_d last week, I referred to "Sam Moskowitz's 'Microcosmic God'"; that should have been "Ted Sturgeon's 'Microcosmic God.'" (I first read it in an anthology entitled M\_i\_c\_r\_o\_c\_o\_s\_m\_i\_c\_G\_o\_d\_a\_n\_d\_O\_t\_h\_e\_r\_S\_t\_o\_r\_i\_e\_s edited by Sam Moskowitz, and the two have been inextricably entangled in my mind.) [-ecl]

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It is force, not opinion, that queens it over the world,  
but it is opinion that loses the force.

-- Blaise Pascal

EXPECTING SOMEONE TALLER by Tom Holt  
Ace, 1990 (1987c), ISBN 0-441-22332-X, \$3.95.  
A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper  
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I don't normally enjoy "humorous" fantasy. For one thing, it's usually not very humorous. But Tom Holt's E\_x\_p\_e\_c\_t\_i\_n\_g\_S\_o\_m\_e\_o\_n\_e\_T\_a\_l\_l\_e\_r is funny--funny enough that I frequently laughed out loud reading it (much to the distress of my spousal unit, who was trying to read something serious).

Holt takes as his background Richard Wagner's "Ring" cycle of operas. Malcolm Fisher, schlemiel supreme, runs over a badger one night. The badger is not really a badger, however--it is Ingolf, a Frost Giant who had seized the Ring and the Tarnhelm from Siegfried's funeral pyre. If you're not following this, that's okay. Malcolm didn't either, so the badger ... excuse me, Ingolf provides some explanation and Malcolm later does his own research as well. (At the end of Malcolm's research, Holt describes his state as follows: "Malcolm had never been greatly inclined to metaphysical or religious

speculations, but he had hoped that if there was a supreme being or divine agency, it would at least show the elements of logic and common sense in its conduct. Seemingly, not so. On the other hand, the revelation that the destiny of the world had been shaped by a bunch of verbose idiots went some way towards explaining the problems of human existence.")

Now that Malcolm has the Ring and can rule the world, of course, everyone else wants it back--gods, valkyries, Rhinemaidens. He also need some practice to get the knack of the Tarnhelm. And throughout all this Holt demonstrates a wry wit that other humor writers often fall short of. My only objection is the somewhat abrupt resolution, but then any long drawn-out serious stretch would spoil the comic timing. If you are a fan of Wagner's operas, you m\_u\_s\_t read this book, but even if you've never heard a note, E\_x\_p\_e\_c\_t\_i\_n\_g\_S\_o\_m\_e\_o\_n\_e\_T\_a\_l\_l\_e\_r is highly recommended.

(Extra note to opera fans: Anna Russell would have loved it.)

A MATTER OF TASTE by Fred Saberhagen  
Tor, 1990, ISBN 0-312-85046-8, \$16.95.  
A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper  
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This is the fifth of Saberhagen's "Dracula" series (also known as his "Old Friend of the Family" series). (The first four are T\_h\_e\_H\_o\_l\_m\_e\_s-D\_r\_a\_c\_u\_l\_a\_F\_i\_l\_e [1978], A\_n\_O\_l\_d\_F\_r\_i\_e\_n\_d\_o\_f\_t\_h\_e\_F\_a\_m\_i\_l\_y [1979],

T\_h\_o\_r\_n

[1980], and D\_o\_m\_i\_n\_i\_o\_n [1982].) The idea of a good vampire was certainly unusual when Saberhagen wrote the first one, but Saberhagen had already toyed with the concept once before. His D\_r\_a\_c\_u\_l\_a\_T\_a\_p\_e [1975] was a retelling of Bram Stoker's D\_r\_a\_c\_u\_l\_a--from Dracula's point of view. For whatever reason (poor distribution may have contributed), that work vanished after a couple of years. When Saberhagen revived the idea (so to speak), he started fresh, and in what was certainly a good move commercially included Sherlock Holmes as well. (Whether Saberhagen initially envisioned a new Holmes series rather than a vampire series is not clear.) This time the series persisted, at least until 1982, when it went into hiding and has only now resurfaced, almost a decade later, with A\_M\_a\_t\_t\_e\_r\_o\_f\_T\_a\_s\_t\_e.

Alas, the series, like the main character, may be getting a little long in the tooth. (Sorry, I couldn't resist that.) Once again, the central character is Dracula, under the name of Matthew Maule, still protecting the same family we first met in T\_h\_e\_H\_o\_l\_m\_e\_s-D\_r\_a\_c\_u\_l\_a\_F\_i\_l\_e. The story is really two interleaved stories--one of Dracula's origin and early life after death, and one of the present, where bad vampires are threatening Dracula's "nephew" and the latter's fiancée. The origin story was by far the more interesting of the two, though its historical setting seems influenced as much by Chelsea Quinn Yarbro's "Saint Germain" series and Les Daniels's "Sebastian" books as by the Dracula legend. (This is interesting, since I suspect that their success in the period between Saberhagen's fourth and fifth books may be due to a revival in interest in vampires caused by Saberhagen's series in the first place.) Even with this similarity in the historical story, however, I found the modern story more an interruption to what I considered the primary story than a story in its own right. Had Saberhagen published the historical story by itself as a novella (or even as a short novel), the story would have flowed much more smoothly and achieved a higher level and a wider appeal. As it is, I can recommend A\_M\_a\_t\_t\_e\_r\_o\_f\_T\_a\_s\_t\_e only for fans of the rest of the series. (I might further note that this is the first to appear in hardback. If this were a great book, it might be worth getting in hardback; as it is, you might as well wait for the paperback and have a matching set.)

NEWER YORK edited by Lawrence Watt-Evans  
ROC, 1991, ISBN 0-451-45045-0, \$4.50.  
A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper  
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This original anthology of twenty-four stories has as its theme the New York of the future (though one is more an alternate history/cross-time story). In his introduction, Watt-Evans talks about the appeal New York has always had for science fiction writers. This may be true, but I would be curious to see what the sales figures for this in and out of New York are compared to a randomly chosen anthology. Is this perhaps the product of a bunch of New Yorkers who think everyone is fascinated by New York?

With twenty-four stories one gets quite a range of styles, from humorous fantasy to dark horror to classic science fiction. In a single author collection or "Year's Best" anthology this is fine, but here the strong stories overpower the lighter works. After A. J. Austin's "Another Dime, Another Place" (a tale of a magical bag lady), a story about racing pink elephants, no matter how well written, is going to look pale and frivolous. And the examination of relationships in Martha Soukup's "Ties" makes a brief look into a yuppie toddler's mind seem superficial, even if in another setting it might have proved amusing.

There are the usual cyberpunkish futures, of course. There is the haunting ghost story "Long Growing Season" by Robert J. Howe. There are a couple of horror stories. (One suspects some people may say a\_n\_y New York story is a horror story.) And there is one distressingly obvious story: Warren Murphy and Molly Cochran's "A Nice Place to Visit." (In their defense, they are primarily mystery writers and may not be familiar with the Pohl and Harrison stories this parallels, or with John Carpenter's E\_s\_c\_a\_p\_e\_f\_r\_o\_m\_N\_e\_w\_Y\_o\_r\_k. But the editor should have noticed.)

On the whole this is a good anthology, and its size means there's probably something for every taste. (It helps to spread the stories out, so that a light story doesn't suffer by following immediately on the heels of a powerful one.) But then I'm a New Yorker and may not be impartial. If you are not familiar with New York you may react to this as I would to an anthology of sports science fiction. Assuming you have some interest in the subject, try this book.

## HOT SHOTS

A film review by Mark R. Leeper  
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Capsule review: Jim Abrahams, without the assistance of the Zucker brothers, manages to recapture the spirit of the classic Z.A.Z. comedies with about a gross of bad jokes, a gross of good jokes, a half dozen v\_e\_r\_y\_f\_u\_n\_n\_y gags, and maybe two or three dozen in-joke film allusions. What N\_a\_k\_e\_d\_G\_u\_n\_2-1/2 should have done to police action films, H\_o\_t\_S\_h\_o\_t\_s does to military flying films. Not one cliché remains intact when Abrahams is done. Rating: law +2 (-4 to +4).

Earlier this summer, and with much fanfare, we saw N\_a\_k\_e\_d\_G\_u\_n\_2-1/2 directed by Jerry Zucker of the famous team of David Zucker, Jim Abrahams, and Jerry Zucker, who made K\_e\_n\_t\_u\_c\_k\_y\_F\_r\_i\_e\_d\_M\_o\_v\_i\_e, A\_i\_r\_p\_l\_a\_n\_e!, T\_o\_p\_S\_e\_c\_r\_e\_t!, television's P\_o\_l\_i\_c\_e\_S\_q\_u\_a\_d!, and N\_a\_k\_e\_d\_G\_u\_n. And at that point I said that a film was just not as funny if it did not have all three funny men doing the writing. As far as I am concerned, N\_a\_k\_e\_d\_G\_u\_n\_2-1/2 just did not click. Now Jim Abrahams has his own attempt at an Airplane! style film with H\_o\_t\_S\_h\_o\_t\_s. And guess what? Abrahams operating without the other two really can capture the manic style of A\_i\_r\_p\_l\_a\_n\_e!. H\_o\_t\_S\_h\_o\_t\_s must average at least three jokes a minute and probably more. Maybe one in six is genuinely funny and at least half are enjoyably witty. The movie is 85 minutes long. You can do the math yourself and figure that H\_o\_t\_S\_h\_o\_t\_s is a v\_e\_r\_y\_f\_u\_n\_n\_y movie.

This time around Abrahams is trashing another breed of flying film, the military flying film. T\_o\_p\_G\_u\_n, F\_l\_i\_g\_h\_t\_o\_f\_t\_h\_e\_I\_n\_t\_r\_u\_d\_e\_r, A\_n\_O\_f\_f\_i\_c\_e\_r\_a\_n\_d\_a\_G\_e\_n\_t\_l\_e\_m\_a\_n, M\_e\_m\_p\_h\_i\_s\_B\_e\_l\_l\_e, and probably many others provide a mother lode of clichés for H\_o\_t\_S\_h\_o\_t\_s to mine. But those are just the beginning. There must be thirty film references for films outside the military flight genre. Charlie Sheen plays Topper Harley, a second generation hot-shot pilot who wants to recover the name his father soiled. Carey Elwes (formerly of T\_h\_e\_P\_r\_i\_n\_c\_e\_s\_s\_B\_r\_i\_d\_e) plays

Kent

Gregory, who has a vendetta to settle against Harley. Valeria Golino (formerly of  P e e- W e e' s B i g- T o p) plays Ramada Thompson, Navy psychiatrist and occasional night club singer, who provides the love interest, and who in a remarkable scene with Sheen really sizzles. Even telling the names of most of the other characters would be giving away some of the gags of the film, not that  H o t S h o t s could not spare them.

The film culminates in an air attack on a certain unnamed Middle East country. Considering that the flight sequences are basically a throwaway, they are surprisingly convincing. While occasional model work is obvious, at least some of the scenes really seem to show some impressive flying. Even where model work is used it is surprisingly good, no doubt by reaping effects technology as well as cliches from supposedly more serious flying films. If you like Z.A.Z. films but were disappointed by  N a k e d G u n 2- 1/ 2, this may be the film you were looking for. I rate  H o t S h o t s a low +2 on the -4 to +4 scale.

## IRON AND SILK

A film review by Mark R. Leeper  
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Capsule review: Mark Salzman stars in the film based on his autobiographical book about his two years teaching in China in the early 1980s. While the film places too strong an emphasis on his martial arts training, it is also a valuable film to help understand what is happening in modern-day China. Rating: low +3 (-4 to +4).

I have visited thirty-two countries other than my own, but none have had such an impact on me as China during my 1982 visit. This was just the tail end of Mao's China. In most of the places we saw everyone still dressed in the Mao suits and caps. Some of the cities I visited had been open to Westerners for only a year and you only had to be non-Chinese to be treated as a celebrity. The Chinese were not shy about their curiosity about Westerners either. In many cities in the north we would have crowds five and six deep around our bus, just to be able to look in the windows. Parents held up youngsters to see into the bus. People still talked very sadly about the horrible disaster that recently had struck their country. It was a man-made disaster called a "cultural

revolution." In 1982 this was one China. The China of five years later seemed another China altogether, with Western styles, new fancy hotels, Coca-Cola, and Reeboks. In their words, they were "letting a thousand flowers bloom." Two years later at Tienanmen Square there was yet another China. Truly a country that comprises one quarter of humanity changes little in any but the superficial face it shows to foreigners, but that face to visiting foreigners it makes a big difference and it is a very different China to them.

As something of a coincidence, the 1982 China I saw was also seen by Mark Salzman. He graduated from Yale that year and went to fulfill a dream he had had. He was a martial arts film enthusiast as a teenager and he went to live in China and to try to study martial arts if possible. The ostensible reason for his visit was to teach English at the Hunan Medical College in Changsha, but he also wanted to learn martial arts in the classical manner. After a two-year stay he returned to the United States and wrote a book about his experiences in China, I\_r\_o\_n\_a\_n\_d\_S\_i\_l\_k. With Shirley Sun, he co-authored a screenplay based on his book. He returned to China with Sun to film the screenplay. This time he went to Hangzhou, which stood in for Changsha in the film. Sun produced and directed; Salzman starred. The day after the film was completed, as V\_a\_r\_i\_e\_t\_y reports, the Chinese military moved on Tienanmen Square and crushed a student rebellion and a thousand flowers.

The film shuttles back and forth among several subplots which are not entirely independent. We see Mark's relationship to his class and his teaching. He is a teacher teaching teachers English and in turn being taught by them about Chinese culture and the Chinese people.

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Through one of the members of his class, Mark meets a great and famous martial arts instructor, Teacher Pan (played by Pan Qingfu, a.k.a. Teacher Pan--yes, both Mark and Pan play themselves). Pan is pleased by the interest of the American but at first wants no part of teaching a spoiled foreigner who is unwilling to "eat bitter." A third subplot has Mark attracted to a young woman with a taste for English literature. And a fourth subplot deals with Mark just learning about the ageless culture and the current government.

The stereotypic plot for such a story would have the foreigner and the local Chinese misunderstanding each other and conflicting at first, then learning to like each other. Ironically, that is just the reverse of what happens. In the early part of his visit, Mark's relationships

with the Chinese are characterized by friendly cultural curiosity on both sides. The one early ominous note is that the teachers in Mark's class who had earlier learned Russian were ordered not just to learn English, but to forget their Russian. Mark drops this detail gleefully without reflecting how firmly it indicates that the government can vengefully turn against a foreign nationality and how powerfully they can order the people to follow suit. Eventually Salzman comes to realize, or at least believe, that the government wants foreigners to believe that the country is open to new ideas, but at the same time it is determined to force the people to reject change. There is almost no mention of political differences until well into the film when suddenly Mark discovers that some of his closest friends are under heavy censure for showing too much interest in Western ways.

Most of what is wrong with I\_r\_o\_n\_a\_n\_d\_S\_i\_l\_k is in the iron part of the film: the martial arts. Salzman's martial arts accomplishments are impressive without being all that interesting. Entirely too much screen time is spent on showing uninteresting martial arts demonstrations and with characters, particularly Salzman himself, showing off for the camera. Also Salzman uses a cutesy touch--scenes from old martial arts movies intercut in the film to show what he is thinking. A similar touch is used on a cable situation comedy currently, but it undercuts the atmosphere of the otherwise serious film.

Salzman makes a surprising and disturbing mistake in the script when he tells his girlfriend that he wanted to learn Chinese so he would be able to speak to a quarter of the world. In fact, he speaks Mandarin and nowhere near all people who speak a dialect of Chinese speak Mandarin. Mandarin and Cantonese are as different as are English and German. Written Chinese is a different matter, I believe. There is basically only one written Chinese language and that all dialects share, but there are several spoken dialects that might as well be different languages.

I did find that the film reminded me much of my trip. I did not visit Changsha, but I did visit Hangzhou and the film very nicely captured the feel of that beautiful city. The highest compliment I can pay I\_r\_o\_n\_a\_n\_d\_S\_i\_l\_k is that not only did my visit help me to understand the film, the film helped me to understand better my visit. In spite of excessive martial arts sequences this is the best film I have seen this year. I give it a low +3 on the -4 to +4 scale.