

the Japanese are the most adaptable people in the world. Look how they took to rock and roll. We never adapted rock and roll to the Japanese. Marilyn Monroe is also popular in Japan and we never had to make a modified version of her. No, sirree! So why don't they adapt better to American products?

THE MT VOID

Page 2

All we get are the same tired excuses from the Japanese. The American auto companies want to sell our cars; the Japanese people won't buy. Why won't they buy? Well, for one thing, the steering column is on the wrong side. That's how we make them. To re-tool the plants to put the steering wheels on the right side would take eighteen months. These changes take time! We explained that to the Japanese in 1974 and we have told them about the eighteen-month figure ever since and they keep complaining about which side the column is on.

In January we sent the chairmen of the Big Three auto makers to Japan to explain it again. (I forget their names; let's just call them Larry, Curly, and Iacocca) to explain to the Japanese that we will do whatever is necessary to sell cars in Japan. If right-handed vehicles are what it takes to break into that market, we'll sell them mail trucks. We've made mail trucks with right-handed steering for years, but they don't seem to want to buy mail trucks either. At this point you begin to wonder if they are bargaining in good faith. Besides, Sweden used to drive on the wrong side of the road too and they corrected the law so they drive on the right side; Japan should be able to do the same thing.

It isn't like the United States hasn't bent over backwards to help the Japanese adapt to American goods either. I remember hearing one tractor company was having problems selling in Japan because the Japanese were smaller and their feet did not reach the pedals. The tractor company went that extra mile to develop blocks to strap to the bottoms of Japanese shoes so they could reach the pedals. We all know that if you go that extra mile for the customer you should make the sale. But did we? No! The customer still went with a Japanese tractor manufacturer. The Japanese have got to be made to realize that it is not just Japanese who want to sell to them any more. Now Americans want to sell to them. They have to stop living in the past. I mean, who won the war anyway?

2. Thanks to Nick Sauer, who has agreed to be our new Holmdel librarian (his location and contact information is listed above), and thanks to Rebecca Schoenfeld for taking care of it until now after our long-time librarian Tim Schroeder passed the torch. (Okay, maybe that's a bad image when talking about books.) [-ecl]

3. Reminder: there will be an Japanese animation fest at the Leeperhouse Sunday, February 9, at 1 PM.

Mark Leeper
MT 3D-441 908-957-5619
...mtgzy!leeper

The satisfied, the happy, do not live; they fall asleep
from habit, near neighbor to annihilation.

-- Miguel de Unamuno

ALTERNATE PRESIDENTS edited by Mike Resnick
Tor, 1992, ISBN 0-812-51192, \$4.99.
A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper
Copyright 1992 Evelyn C. Leeper

(This is a very long review. If you'd rather skip the commentary on each individual story, just read the first three paragraphs and then skip to the summary in the last two. The same is true if you want to avoid any possible spoilers.)

Now that alternate histories are experiencing a resurgence (or can you have a resurgence without a previous period of great interest?) and now that it's a Presidential election year, it's not surprising that we have A_l_t_e_r_n_a_t_e_P_r_e_s_i_d_e_n_t_s. What is moderately surprising is that it is not edited by Gregory Benford and Martin H. Greenberg (who edit the W_h_a_t_M_i_g_h_t_H_a_v_e_B_e_e_n series), but by Mike Resnick. Resnick also has A_l_t_e_r_n_a_t_e_K_e_n_n_e_d_y_s in production, leading one to believe in a division of focus here--Benford and Greenberg do the international anthologies and Resnick does the ones with a United States focus. This may be accidental, of course; only time

will tell.

In his introduction Resnick says these stories were all written for this anthology, and they all bear a 1992 copyright date. Yet I know that at least four (the Cadigan, the Gunn, the Moffett, and the Resnick) appeared in magazines in 1991. Maybe I just don't understand copyright.

For whatever reason, Resnick didn't or couldn't collect one story for each President (is there anything interesting to be done with James Polk or Franklin Pierce?), so we have twenty-eight stories arranged chronologically by election year. (Some occur many years after the change, so the stories are not in strictly chronological order.) There are two 18th Century, ten 19th Century, and sixteen 20th Century--not surprisingly, these are heavily skewed to the most recent elections. This is probably for the best, because (for whatever reason) the earlier stories are not as involving. Whether this is due to the reader (or the author) being less personally involved in the events, or whether the reader has less knowledge of the earlier events (and this is of course related to the first possibility), I don't know. But I do find alternate histories set in ancient Persia or Byzantium involving, so it could also be that the United States' early history is not inherently interesting. (And how well will this anthology sell in other countries, one wonders?)

"The Father of His Country" (1789) by Jody Lynn Nye, for example, looks at what might have happened if Benjamin Franklin had been chosen as the first President instead of George Washington.

Alternate Presidents January 18, 1992

Page 2

Told in the form of letters from John Adams to his wife, everything is seen from a distance rather than in direct narration and, though great change is implied, little is shown.

"The War of '07" (1800) by Jayge Carr puts Aaron Burr in the White House instead of Thomas Jefferson in 1800. Burr's more imperialistic tendencies effect some changes, though not always in the direction one might expect. But again, the use of short episodes keeps the reader from getting pulled into the story.

This changes with Thomas A. Easton's "Black Earth and Destiny" (1824). Though the change-point here is the 1824 election, the story takes place seventy-two years later, in a United States more technological (at least in the biological sciences), but otherwise little changed. Here at least we get to see a fully developed character in the person of George Washington Carver as he struggles between the desire for prestige and the desire to help his people. I have a minor nit: Easton may carry this too far--he implies that Carver's bachelorhood was due to his dedication to his work, but it was certainly partially a result of his homosexuality. Still, the description of Carver's background and how it affects his decision at last give the reader something to grab on to.

Easton puts Jackson in the Presidency four years early. By contrast Judith Moffett's "Chickasaw Slave" (1828) assumes he n_e_v_e_r gets in. Instead, Davy Crockett becomes President, and his land reforms have unforeseeable--and far-reaching--consequences. The story embodies the concept "tall oaks from little acorns grow," though I find the number of coincidences required dissatisfying. Here, though, the main story is told on a small scale--the big changes effected are almost all background, and so perhaps the coincidences are forgivable. (This story first appeared in the September 1991 I_s_a_a_c_A_s_i_m_o_v'_s_S_c_i_e_n_c_e_F_i_c_t_i_o_n_M_a_g_a_z_i_n_e.)

"How the South Preserved the Union" (1848) by Ralph Roberts is a look at the different path North-South relations might have taken had Millard Fillmore died at the same time as Zachary Taylor, leaving David R. Atchison as President. (Resnick's claim that Atchison, as President p_r_o_t_e_m of the Senate, was actually President for one day, when Zachary Taylor refused to take the oath on the Sabbath, is open to dispute. One could equally claim that James Polk remained President or that taking the oath is not required and Taylor w_a_s President.) Atchison, being less amenable to compromise, would have accelerated the North-South rift--but with surprising results. The story is unfortunately flawed by the first-person narrator's interspersing comments about a cheap dime novel he is reading which turns out to be an alternate history in his world that actually describes our world. After a while, his comments on the ridiculousness of it start to wear thin--Philip K. Dick may have been able to pull it off in T_h_e_M_a_n_i_n_t_h_e_H_i_g_h_C_a_s_t_l_e, but while Roberts is a competent author, he is no Philip K. Dick. A more

basic flaw, I think, was that the Civil War was fought over states' rights as much as over economic issues, and the events Roberts postulates ignore that, and so in the end fail to convince me. (Okay, so now I sound like the narrator talking about his cheap dime novel. Do as I say, not as I do.)

When I first saw that not every President would be covered, I tried to guess which were skipped. The first one who came to mind was Millard Fillmore so it was with some surprise that I discovered that not one, but t_w_o, stories centered on Fillmore: Roberts's story and Jack L. Chalker's "Now Falls the Cold, Cold Night" (1856). Roberts assumes Fillmore never became President; Chalker assumes not only that he did but also that he won election in his own right in 1856. Sweet irony, then, that they both postulate very similar results from very opposite premises. Chalker has the better characterization and avoids the states' rights problem that Roberts has, but leaves the reader up in the air at the end.

Abraham Lincoln won the Presidency in part because of his success in the debates with Stephen Douglas. What if these debates hadn't taken place? (Shades of 1960?) Bill Fawcett looks at this in "Lincoln's Charge" (1860) and concludes that some things never change: feelings, responsibilities, destiny. The story has three weak points, though--one major and two minor. The major one is that the debates did n_o_t take place during the Presidential campaign of 1860 as indicated in the story, but in 1858 during the Illinois senatorial campaign--an election which Lincoln lost. The debates brought him into national prominence, true, and he did run again against Douglas, but Fawcett clearly places the debates in the 1860 Presidential campaign and this is wrong. Beyond this, however, one minor problem is the story's heavy emphasis on troop movements, common in alternate history Civil War stories, but confusing to those of us who are not Civil War buffs (even if we have seen the entire PBS series). The other is the multiple points of view, manageable in a novel, but distracting in a 7,000-word story. These aside, though, "Lincoln's Charge" spends its time on the human price of history, which makes it worthwhile as a story, and in fact more so than as an intellectual exercise in historical speculation, given its error. (It's ironic, because the same story could have been written with the facts correct--by not debating in 1858, Lincoln wouldn't be well-known to the national electorate and, assuming one can find a rationale for his retaining the 1860 Republican nomination, he probably would have lost.)

"We Are Not Amused" (1872) by Laura Resnick takes as its extremely unlikely premise the election of Victoria Claflin Woodhull in 1872. Even if this had occurred, getting Congress to pass all the laws Laura Resnick postulates and approve all the Cabinet appointments mentioned is beyond the realm of possibility. I suppose this is being picky in a story meant humorously, but these, combined with the _v_e_r_y stereotypical portrayal of Queen Victoria and

the inclusion of a few too many anachronistic references intended as humor (the Commissioner of Indian Affairs is named Talks Too Much Woman, for example) kept me from enjoying this. I wasn't wild about Howard Waldrop's "Ike at the Mike" either, so maybe I just want more realistic alternate history, and need the "intellectual exercise" part as well. I'm afraid that my reaction to "We Are Not Amused" is that it is aptly named.

Just as Millard Fillmore figures in two stories, so does Samuel Tilden. In Tappan King's "Patriot's Dream" (1876) Tilden manages to avoid having the 1876 election stolen from him, but the story deals more with his dreams, nightmares, and feelings than with the results of such a change. In Michael P. Kube-McDowell's "I Shall Have a Flight to Glory" (1880) Tilden loses the 1876 election but gets his revenge in 1880. Some of the impact of the latter was telegraphed to me because of a recent musical work which I suspect is unfamiliar to most readers, but even so I found it one of the more thought-provoking pieces in the book. (Kube-McDowell is one of the few authors here who has written alternate history previously--in his case, the novel A _ l _ t _ e _ r _ n _ i _ t _ i _ e _ s .)

I guess it's politically correct to include a couple of stories in which women become President, but Janet Kagan's "Love Our Lockwood" (1888) suffers from the same fault as Laura Resnick's "We Are Not Amused"--it's just not very likely. To take a candidate who received a fraction of a percent of the vote (less than 150,000 out of 10,5000,000 cast) and say, "What if this candidate had won?" may be temporarily amusing but it is ultimately unsatisfying. This is not to say that Kagan point is not a good one, but a more likely scenario would have been preferable (at least to me).

"Plowshare" (1896) by Martha Soukup deals with women in politics in a much more realistic fashion. William Jennings Bryan's support of universal suffrage is well documented and figures strongly here, as does his "anti-imperialist" position. But this story, and others, also provides a counter-point to many alternate histories by saying that frequently external forces can overcome a local change, and international politics may not be swayed by the choice of this leader over that.

Mike Resnick has written several alternate history stories, all centered around Theodore Roosevelt and all mutually contradictory.

The ones I know of are "Bully!" (in the September 1991 issue of

I_s_a_a_c_A_s_i_m_o_v'_s_S_c_i_e_n_c_e_F_i_c_t_i_o_n
M_a_g_a_z_i_n_e and B_w_a_n_a&_B_u_l_l_y! (Tor SF Double #33)), "Over There" (in the April 1991 issue of I_s_a_a_c
A_s_i_m_o_v'_s_S_c_i_e_n_c_e_F_i_c_t_i_o_n
M_a_g_a_z_i_n_e and W_h_a_t_M_i_g_h_t_H_a_v_e_B_e_e_n
3:

A_l_t_e_r_n_a_t_e_W_a_r_s edited by Benford and Greenberg), and the one which appears here, "The Bull Moose at Bay" (also in the November 1991

issue of I_s_a_a_c_A_s_i_m_o_v'_s_S_c_i_e_n_c_e
F_i_c_t_i_o_n_M_a_g_a_z_i_n_e). This one assumes that Theodore Roosevelt was not injured during the 1912 campaign and went on to victory. And once again, universal suffrage is the

focus. Alas, Resnick--who has written many stories that make a point without having the characters make long speeches about it--has turned this into a series of declamations from Theodore Roosevelt on why universal suffrage is right. And his "surprise" ending was not a surprise to me. But that may be because...

...I know more about history than Resnick expects. In his introduction to "A Fireside Chat" (1920) by Jack Nimersheim, Resnick asks, "But how many of you know that [Franklin Delano] Roosevelt was the defeated vice presidential candidate in 1920?" That hand madly waving in the back of the room? That's me. But what if he had won, or rather James Cox had won (because Warren G. Harding died shortly before the election instead of after it) and then Cox was assassinated by an isolationist, having the dual result of making Roosevelt President and pushing the United States into the League of Nations and a stronger international role in the 1920s? For better or worse, Nimersheim leaves the ultimate results up in the air, though historical parallels (and the story's closing line) seem to indicate which direction Nimersheim thinks events will take. (Obligatory nitpick: In our world Roosevelt got polio in August 1921. So too did he in Nimersheim's, but I would claim that being President would have changed the course of his life enough that this would be unlikely--he would be going different places, meeting different people, and doing different things.)

Kristine Kathryn Rusch's "Fighting Bob" (1924) assumes the Progressive Party candidate in 1924, Robert La Follette, won (somehow--he did get a fair number of votes but still placed a distant third in the popular vote and got few electoral votes). In Rusch's world he still dies in 1925 (as in ours) but her story is n o t about President Burton K. Wheeler, but about how politicians in 1931 are trying to use La Follette's name and reputation to get their candidates elected--even if their philosophies are diametrically opposed. It's a cautionary tale on how politics does indeed make strange bedfellows, and a warning to us all that one must look behind the mask (in more ways than one!) to see the real candidate. Many of the stories here have a point to make; Rusch's may be the most immediately relevant. (Note: The Joe Stanislawski they are trying to elect as Senator from Wisconsin is n o t Joseph McCarthy--he was only 25 years old and not eligible to run for the Senate for another five years. I mention this because he's the first person I think of when I hear of a Senator named Joe from Wisconsin.)

"Truth, Justice, and the American Way" (1928) by Lawrence Watt-Evans made me think a lot. Though in the end I disagreed with his conclusions, I have to say he puts forth an interesting idea. Briefly, the premise is that Franklin Roosevelt did not defeat Herbert Hoover in 1932. Watt-Evans proposes that a Republican victory would have led to our involvement in the war in Asia in the 1930s. Japan's defeat would have served as a warning to Germany's

expansionist faction, resulting in the elimination of Hitler by more "moderate" elements. Without a war to keep the people in line, Stalin would also be removed. Sounds idyllic, right? Well, if you don't want the gist of the story revealed, skip to the next paragraph. Here goes. In this new world, the Holocaust never happens. But in 1953, the Nuremberg Laws are still in effect in Germany, and the whole world is as anti-Semitic as it ever was. Without the collective guilt brought on by the death camps, no one reconsiders their anti-Semitism or even feels guilty about it. The President has a candidate for a diplomatic post--but he's Jewish. The Japanese refuse to accept him as an ambassador. So where to send him? The President and the Secretary of State eliminate a lot

of countries based on the countries' purported anti-Semitism. But would England really be that anti-Semitic, even with Zionist rebellion in Palestine? After all, until the Holocaust the idea of a Jewish state in Palestine hadn't been a universal Jewish agenda. (Come to that, it isn't even now.) Other countries he lists are also questionable. But worse, he skips a whole collection of possibilities: the Netherlands, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, Greece, Thailand, China, Korea, But even with these complaints, I think this story is one that will stay with me for a long time. I have said in the past that everyone who writes a "what if World War II never happened?" assumes things would be better; I wanted to see it done with things being worse. Watt-Evans doesn't quite do that, but he does suggest that World War II and the Holocaust forced people to face their own bigotry and prejudice, and that without those events, bigotry would proceed unchecked. Watt-Evans is n o t saying that given a choice we should c h o o s e Holocaust and adjustment, but that given the Holocaust, maybe we've learned something from it. Have we? As I write this, the legislature of New Jersey is fighting over whether to guarantee gays and lesbians the right to work and live in peace and security. Will we use the lessons of the past or not? (Watt-Evans has also written several crosstime stories; this seems to be his first alternate history.) [Note: The bill did in fact pass and has been signed into law. Perhaps there is hope for the future after all.]

The first of Barry N. Malzberg's two stories in this volume is "Kingfish" (1936). What if Huey Long had survived the attempt to assassinate him in 1935 and had succeeded in displacing Franklin Roosevelt as the Democratic candidate in 1936. What would his down-home, common-sense philosophy have wrought? Malzberg's conclusions are believable, but don't leave the reader with a feeling of any real change. (Malzberg has written several previous alternate histories, including two about other "alternate

Presidents": "All Assassins" in W h a t M i g h t H a v e B e e n
1: A l t e r n a t e
E m p i r e s edited by Benford and Greenberg and "January 1975" in the January 1975 issue of A n a l o g.)

Barbara Delaplace's "No Other Choice" (1944) puts the decision of whether or not to bomb Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Thomas

E. Dewey's hands instead of Harry Truman's. But the real change is not the person deciding, but what is decided, and why, and what it leads to. For those who blame Truman for his decision, this story provides some additional food for thought.

"The More Things Change ..." (1948) by Glen E. Cox is a fluff piece whose entire point is revealed by the cover art. No great historical changes are wrought. Yes, they might be in the future, but an alternate history is supposed to give some answer to the question "What if A happened instead of B?" not just ask it. Explaining how A might have happened instead of B is interesting, but more is needed. How Napoleon might have won at Waterloo makes the background for an alternate history story; what happens after he wins is the story.

"The Impeachment of Adlai Stevenson" (1952) by David Gerrold suggests that even if Stevenson had won in 1952, the tenor of the country would have eventually brought about his downfall. Here at least there is some indication of on-going change, but I disagree with what Gerrold seems to say would happen, or at least what his characters believe. Then again, that may be Gerrold's intent--that we cannot truly predict the results of our actions. It's not that "the best laid schemes o' mice and men gang aft a-gley," but that even when they don't "gang aft a-gley" we don't get what we expect. (Gerrold has previously written one "changing the past" story.)

Barry N. Malzberg's second story here is "Heavy Metal" (1960). (I have no idea what the title means in this context.) This suffers to some extent from the same problem that Cox's story had: it tells the how of the change rather than the what then. But Malzberg's look at the machinations behind the election are more serious than Cox's and provide more insight into his characters. I'm not claiming, mind you, that Malzberg's characters are completely accurate representations of their historical parallels. After all, this is fiction. But they are deeper, more three-dimensional characters than those in "The More Things Change" And Malzberg has always cultivated a more interesting writing style than others, so stylistically "Heavy Metal" stands out as well.

What if Goldwater had won in 1964 and Richard Nixon became a talk show host? "Fellow Americans" (1964) by Eileen Gunn (which first appeared in the December 1991 issue of I_s_a_a_c_A_s_i_m_o_v'_s
S_c_i_e_n_c_e
F_i_c_t_i_o_n_M_a_g_a_z_i_n_e) goes off in this highly unlikely direction. I mean, if Nixon had any television charisma he would have won in 1960, right? There are some cute parts here, but I can't say that scenes of the Nixons and the Quayles in a hot tub are what I read alternate histories for.

Pat Cadigan follows an alternate path of history from the campaign of 1968 in "Dispatches from the Revolution" (1968) (which originally appeared in the July 1991 issue of I_s_a_a_c_A_s_i_m_o_v'_s
S_c_i_e_n_c_e

Fiction Magazine). Her technique in this, one of the last stories in the book, is reminiscent of the first. That was a series of letters; this is a series of excerpts from diaries, letters, and other documents. The style makes the reader work a little harder at piecing it all together, but the richness of the mosaic formed makes it worthwhile.

The topic may be Presidents, but no anthology of American alternate histories could avoid the Vietnam War. In "Suppose They Gave a Peace ..." (1972), Susan Shwartz suggests that nothing is as simple as people want to make it. As many of the stories suggest, so this one too says that there is an inertia to history that may be difficult to overcome.

1972 is the only Presidential election year which has two stories. The first dealt with Vietnam; the second, Brian Thomsen's "Paper Trail" (1972), deals with the other major event of the time: Watergate. What if the break-in and other events had been revealed before the election. Unfortunately, the resulting changes are hardly surprising (though admittedly it could have gone differently) and in this case, the use of memos and headlines to unfold the story results in a choppy, disjointed style and a somewhat unclear description of the resulting events. Both Cadigan and Nye used extended segments in clear prose, but Thomsen uses rapid-fire headlines and brief memos, which give flavor but at the expense of clarity.

Gerald Ford was not the President with the shortest term of office, but he was the President with the shortest term in living memory. Even so, Alexis A. Gilliland uses the idea of a victory by him in 1976 as the beginning of the story "Demarche to Iran" (1976). Gilliland's contention here--that Ford could have done better with bumbling than with diplomacy--is not even very original. Many humorous stories attribute success to luck, even the luck of incompetents, rather than brains. But in those at least you get the humor of the pratfalls. Now in our timeline Ford had his share of pratfalls, but in this story even that is missing. (I suppose this falls in the category of ironical humor, but it didn't do much for me.)

Moving right along (have faith--we're nearing the end), "Huddled Masses" (1984) by Laurence Person assumes that Walter Mondale won in 1984. This apparently leads to changes in Central America and Mexico, but Person never explains them or what decisions or policies led to them. (Person has previously written one crosstime story.)

And finally we have "Dukakis and the Aliens" (1988) by Robert Sheckley, a grand master of off-beat science fiction who delivers here a prime example to end this volume on a light-hearted note. (Sheckley has done one previous "changing the past" story.)

Alternate Presidents January 18, 1992

Page 9

Okay, there we have it. Twenty-eight stories covering almost all the Presidents as either primary or secondary characters. (Missing were Madison, Monroe, Van Buren, William Henry Harrison, Tyler, Polk, Pierce, Johnson, Arthur, McKinley, Wilson, and Coolidge.) What I find most surprising is the absence of the obvious turning points. No one wrote about Lincoln, McKinley, or Kennedy _ n_ o_ t being assassinated (any stories on the last may be being held for _ A_ l_ t_ e_ r_ n_ a_ t_ e_ K_ e_ n_ n_ e_ d_ y_ s), Franklin Roosevelt _ b_ e_ i_ n_ g assassinated by Zangara, William Henry Harrison not catching pneumonia at his inauguration (his three-hour speech in the cold rain didn't help--a warning to speech-makers) and dying a month later, and so on. Whether this was a conscious effort on everyone's part, or just coincidence I don't know, but it means the stories don't seem stale.

Of the stories, the best (in my opinion) are "Black Earth and Destiny," "Lincoln's Charge," "I Shall Have a Flight to Glory," "Love Our Lockwood," "Truth, Justice, and the American Way," "Dispatches from the Revolution," and "Dukakis and the Aliens." The others range from good to fair to so-so--there are no stinkers (which is more than can be said of Presidents or Presidential candidates). Obviously, this is a must-buy for alternate history fans, but worthwhile even for the reader just looking for good stories. Some knowledge of United States (and world) history is strongly recommended.

THE EXILE KISS by George Alec Effinger
Doubleday Foundation, 1991, ISBN 0-385-41424-2, \$11.
A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper
Copyright 1992 Evelyn C. Leeper

This, the third novel in Effinger Marid series, takes place in large part outside the Budayeen, that great Arab metropolis of the future. Mariid Audran and Friedlander Bey are kidnapped at the start of the novel and left to die in the desert. The first half of the book covers their struggles and adventures there; the second half is about their revenge on those who arranged for their kidnapping. The first part seems to draw rather heavily on the film

that _ L_ a_ w_ r_ e_ n_ c_ e_ o_ f_ A_ r_ a_ b_ i_ a at times, but works well and even events seem superfluous turn out to be important.

Effinger has done his research well, but may expect more knowledge of his readership than they have. For example, he follows Arab custom in referring to a mother as "Um Jirji" (where Jirji is her eldest son's name), but since she is also sometimes referred to by her own name, this may lead to confusion. And he keeps his calendar based on the Hegira, which requires some mental arithmetic at times. But all this also means that _ T_ h_ e_ E_ x_ i_ l_ e_ K_ i_ s_ s feels authentic. Effinger doesn't give the reader New York or London with a couple of minarets stuck on and a reference to Friday prayers. Instead he extrapolates from Cairo or Damascus, and achieves a much better result. (He also has his final manuscripts read over by Arab friends for errors--a highly commendable practice that other authors would do well to emulate.)

As with the first two books (_ W_ h_ e_ n_ G_ r_ a_ v_ i_ t_ y_ F_ a_ i_ l_ s and _ F_ i_ r_ e_ i_ n_ t_ h_ e_ _ S_ u_ n, both Hugo nominees), the story follows Marid's character development and how he is changed by events. Unfortunately, _ T_ h_ e_ _ E_ x_ i_ l_ e_ K_ i_ s_ s probably does not stand well on its own. Fortunately, I can recommend that you read all three books, and since Effinger writes clear prose with no padding, it will take less time to read all three than to read a single bloated novel from the best-seller list. In fact, it's probably worth re-reading them even if you have already read them--Effinger is a solid writer.

GRAND CANYON

A film review by Mark R. Leeper

Copyright 1991 Mark R. Leeper

Capsule review: _ G_ r_ a_ n_ d_ C_ a_ n_ y_ o_ n is an iridescent film. It looks entirely different from different angles. As with a Picasso, each person must find his/her own interpretation. Don't believe anyone else as to what the film is about. Rating: high +1 (-4 to +4).

You made a mistake. Because of your mistake you are about to die. Your loved ones will have to get along without you because they have seen you alive for the last time. You have just lost what would have been the rest of your life. Then a perfect stranger reaches out a hand and saves your life. It is just a tiny action, but it means you are back again in the world of the living. You are going to have that rest-of-your-life after all. Do you see the world any differently now? Darn right you do! Every good thing that happens to you--and every bad thing--is a gift of the stranger. Now the whole world looks surreal. You are much more aware of the happy and unhappy events that make up the life you almost lost. You suddenly have a sense of wonder about incidents you might never have thought about the day before. That is at least one way to look at Lawrence Kasdan's enigmatic _ G_ r_ a_ n_ d_ C_ a_ n_ y_ o_ n. My wife sat on my right and claimed to have seen a film making a philosophical point about what comes of good intentions. A friend who sat on my left (even slopping over into my seat) saw a film intended to make a strong but not overly familiar political point that our cities are deteriorating beyond the point of repair. These are remarkably different interpretations of a single film. Perhaps the greatest virtue of _ G_ r_ a_ n_ d_ C_ a_ n_ y_ o_ n is its strange ambiguity.

Mack (played by Kevin Kline) is on his way home from a basketball game in urban Los Angeles when his car breaks down in just the wrong neighborhood. He calls for a tow truck but has the feeling he may not see it come. Sure enough, five youths with obviously bad intentions are about to attack him when the tow truck driver, Simon (played by Danny Glover), arrives and diplomatically defuses the situation. Mack is so grateful to Simon he feels he wants to help improve Simon's life. Then an unrelated "miraculous" event happens to Mack's wife Claire (played by Mary McDonnell of _ D_ a_ n_ c_ e_ s_ w_ i_ t_ h_ W_ o_ l_ v_ e_ s and _ M_ a_ t_ e_ w_ a_ n). Soon events are intertwining the lives of these three people, Mack's secretary Dee (played by Mary-Louise Parker of _ L_ o_ n_ g_ t_ i_ m_ e_ C_ o_ m_ p_ a_ n_ i_ o_ n and _ F_ r_ i_ e_ d_ G_ r_ e_ e_ n_ T_ o_ m_ a_ t_ o_ e_ s), Dee's friend Jane (played by Alfre Woodard, who played Winnie Mandela to Glover's Nelson Mandela in--what else?-- _ M_ a_ n_ d_ e_ l_ a), and Mack's best friend Davis (played by Steve Martin).

Lawrence Kasdan co-produced, directed, and co-authored the screenplay with his wife. Together, the Kasdans create a story of rapture and disaster. It is a story of mysticism and self-reliance. It is about good luck and bad luck, yet it never becomes soap opera. It is always captivating, yet it is never clear where it is coming from. When the film ends, you sit watching the credits asking, "Well, what was that about?" I give it a high +1 on the -4 to +4 scale. (P.S. Checking the Variety review, I find out that they think it is a film about survival strategies in L.A.)

SHINING THROUGH

A film review by Mark R. Leeper

Copyright 1991 Mark R. Leeper

Capsule review: Melanie Griffith plays a half-Jewish woman who during World War II goes to Germany to spy on the Nazis and to save some of her family hiding in Berlin. This is an old-fashioned sort of spy film much like Hitchcock might have made in the 1940s. This film is good fun. Rating: low +2 (-4 to +4).

During World War II the sort of spy film that was made had generally normal sorts of people with normal sorts of goals. People like James Cagney would be normal, everyday Americans shocked by what they saw in Germany or Japan. The sort of thing we got was

ForeignCorrespondentorBloodontheSun. When the war was over,

Hitchcock added some gloss and star power with films like Notorious.

By the early 1960s, however, the personal sort of behind-the-lines

spy story, such as TheCounterfeitTraitororTornCurtain, was rare

and the spy film was giving way to the more spectacular sabotage

films such as TheGunsofNavarone. When James Bond came along,

there was much more gloss and in addition, the spy had become the

infallible super-spy. Even then the stakes could be as small as a decoder. But that was not true for long. Soon Bond had to fight bigger and bigger threats. The villains threatened Fort Knox, Miami, the space program. The stories got more and more tongue-in-cheek. In M_o_o_n_r_a_k_e_r the plot was to destroy the whole world. Then our agents started being people like John Rambo, who knows that you don't need brain power--you need fire power. T_h_e_H_u_n_t_f_o_r_R_e_d_O_c_t_o_b_e_r restored some of the need for brain power, but it was brain power together with fire power. Now there is S_h_i_n_i_n_g_T_h_r_o_u_g_h and it is a story that Hitchcock might have done in 1946. We have relatively normal people who make mistakes and get hurt and feel. Producer/director/writer David Seltzer seems to have forgotten everything we have learned about the spy film since 1950. Gee, I hope he makes a bundle.

We are told the entire story from a regrettable framing sequence (more on that later). Linda Voss (played by Melanie Griffith) is being interviewed by the BBC about her experiences in World War II. In flashback we see the young Linda as a romantic who loves movies, particularly about Germany. Her father is a German Jew who fled because of the oppression. But Voss still dreams of visiting Germany to bring the rest of her family out. With her quick mind and a general high efficiency she becomes a legal secretary and is assigned to lawyer Ed Leland (played by Michael Douglas). There seems to be more to Leland than meets the eye, however. He seems to disappear on mysterious missions for the

Shining Through

February 2, 1992

Page 2

government. Voss is intrigued by both the man and his job. In the first hour there is a romance between the two, but the film takes off in the second hour when Voss gets her opportunity to go to Germany to rescue her family and at the same time do some spying for the government.

The technical aspects of S_h_i_n_i_n_g_T_h_r_o_u_g_h are for the most part well-executed. The recreation of the streets of Berlin during the war feels particularly realistic. David Seltzer was both executive producer and director; as director, he could see what was needed to make a street look authentic and then as holder of the purse strings he could allot himself the budget to create the effect he wanted. The script is witty and suspenseful though occasionally it stretches

credulity a bit. There are some far-fetched coincidences (Hitchcock films often have the same problem). But the biggest flaw is a framing sequence which robs the story of much of its suspense. As the story is related by Voss years after the war, there is no doubt that Voss will survive all the events. The old age makeup, incidentally, is not nearly as good as it is in F_o_r_t_h_e_B_o_y_s. Perhaps that is the only area where that film is better than this. The framing sequence does give Seltzer a very clever excuse to have the German sequences shot in English. Michael Kamen provides a score including an interesting piano theme under the opening credits.

Besides Douglas and Griffith, S_h_i_n_i_n_g_T_h_r_o_u_g_h features Sir John Gielgud, generally considered to be one of the greatest living actors. This film does not sufficiently show off his talents, though it is hard to imagine any film that would. Liam Neeson, best known for the title role in D_a_r_k_m_a_n, plays a Nazi officer and Joely Richardson plays an attractive high-born German woman who befriends Voss. (Richardson is the daughter of director Tony Richardson and actress Vanessa Redgrave.) Overall a very enjoyable--I would rate it a low +2 on the -4 to +4 scale.

Very mild spoiler: Seltzer might have done well to study his history a little better. Peenemunde is not a town in central Germany as it appears on the map in the film. It is an island at the north-east tip of Germany at the mouth of the Peene River. I could be wrong about this, but I do not believe that there were factories at Peenemunde. The V-1 and A-4 (a.k.a. the V-2) were launched from Peenemunde but the A-4 (at least) was built at Nordhausen, which may well be the place Seltzer called "Peenemunde." Nordhausen was at least inland some distance and might have been in that position on the map Voss saw. One more comment about the framing sequence: it almost certainly was an after-thought to make the film more commercial and to give it a much happier but less realistic ending.