



quarantined and then ordered killed. So far the owners of the dog have spent about \$30,000 in the dog's defense and Bergen County has spent about \$60,000 to oppose them. A Kenyan businessman has started a clemency campaign in Africa, the government of Japan have offered asylum to Taro, noting that his Akita breed makes him

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ethnically a Japanese-American.

But at stake is the question of the actual purpose of the canine penal system. Is it to remove a menace from society? If so, would not exile to Japan serve just well? Is it to exact some sort of societal revenge? Is it to reform the inmate? The fact is that incarceration is not enough. Often if you send dogs to penal institutions, do they not learn bad habits from other vicious dogs and return to society all the meaner?

Governor James Florio has not been willing to intercede on Taro's behalf with an election this year. It is speculated he has taken a hard line, not wanting to turn the dog into another Willie Horton. However the issue will not go away. Only now after the election is it coming out that Taro has also killed another dog at one point in the dog's spotted past, but that dog's owner may have not been willing to testify against Taro in the proceedings--possibly having been paid to remain silent during the gubernatorial campaign.

For Taro's part, he insists that the time spent on death row has given him an opportunity to contemplate his past and to reform himself. He claims to be Bred-again and having looked within himself he claims to have now found Dog.

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2. WORLDWAR: IN THE BALANCE by Harry Turtledove (Del Rey, ISBN 0-345-38241-2, January 1994, 488pp, US\$21) (a book review by Evelyn C. Leeper):

First, a warning: this is the first book of a four-book series. ( According to what I've heard, the other three are W\_o\_r\_l\_d\_w\_a\_r: T\_i\_l\_t\_i\_n\_g t\_h\_e B\_a\_l\_a\_n\_c\_e [already in Del Rey's hands], W\_o\_r\_l\_d\_w\_a\_r: U\_p\_s\_e\_t\_t\_i\_n\_g t\_h\_e

Balance [just finished], and Worldwar: Finding the Balance [still to be written].) Nowhere on the cover (or inside) does Del Rey warn you of this, and unlike some first novels which can be read as stand-alone stories, this ends on a very open-ended note, with little if anything resolved. Shame on Del Rey for not warning the reading! (Oh, and the cover art by Bob Eggleton has been flip-flopped. One assumes this is for some arcane marketing reason, but the result is that all the swastikas are backwards.)

It is May 1942. War is raging around the world. Major Heinrich Jager is fighting for the Third Reich on the Eastern Front. George Bagnall is a flight engineer for the RAF. Ludmila Gorbunova is a pilot, but for the Soviet Air Force. Moishe Russie is a Jew in the Warsaw Ghetto. Liu Han is a Chinese peasant woman. Jens Larssen is an American physicist on the Manhattan Project. Sam Yeager is a minor league outfielder and science fiction fan from Nebraska. Atvar is the fleetlord of the invading spaceships of the Race.

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Say what?

Oh, didn't I mention it? It seems that in this alternate universe, lizardlike aliens from outer space invade Earth in 1942. Needless to say, this changes the progress of World War II considerably. Alliances shift in interesting ways as humans attempt to repel the invaders. This often involves uneasy truces and alliances, as countries unite with their erstwhile (human) enemies to fight the invaders while trying to avoid conceding any advantage to these (human) enemies that might backfire if and when the Race is defeated.

One thing that Turtledove has managed to do is take plot devices and writing techniques that often fail, and make them work. For example, the book starts with a bit of a cliché: the Race surveyed Earth eight hundred years ago and is amazed at the amount of progress made since then, since they show change or progress only over periods of millennia rather than years (for example, between steam engines and powered flight, or between dynamite and atomic bombs). But there is further explanation and elaboration of this as the story progresses and as the history, biology, and psychology of the Race is revealed. the result is that there are reasons

given for this "slowness" on the part of the Race. That's the flip-side of an alternate history, I suppose. An alternate history asks, "What would have happened if Y had happened instead of X?" Here Turtledove asked, "What would have had to have been different for X to happen instead of Y?" It's the difference between induction and retrodution (as described by Charles Peirce). Detectives use retrodution (also known as abduction) to figure out what could have led to a certain result; Sherlock Holmes was famous for it. It is seen in science fiction, but more common is the inductive aspect: build a world, then decide what would populate it. (There's also some rather obvious foreshadowing when the Race complain of the cold in Poland--in the middle of the summer.)

The characters on the whole are well fleshed out, though with as many major characters as W\_o\_r\_l\_d\_w\_a\_r: I\_n\_t\_h\_e\_B\_a\_l\_a\_n\_c\_e has, it's not too surprising that a couple of them are still thinly sketched (undoubtedly some of these will be further developed in the remaining volumes). The multiple points of view do give a very good "global" feel to this book that many alien invasion stories lacked--how often is everything told through American eyes, with only passing reference to the rest of the world? Here the parts of the world not portrayed are those which are not on a war footing when the Race arrived, and so have less ability to resist the Race. (The end papers contain a list of all the major characters--and some minor ones--with indications as to which are real and which are fictional creations. I would have hoped the latter clarification wasn't necessary, but after someone asked Connie Willis whether the General Grant character in her L\_i\_n\_c\_o\_l\_n'\_s\_D\_r\_e\_a\_m\_s was real or fictional, one never knows. And admittedly some of

Turtledove's "real" characters are less famous than others. At any rate, I hope Del Rey continues this for the rest of the series--in a story published over a period of years, some memory joggers are helpful.)

Turtledove knows how to write a plot and characters that keep the reader interested and turning the pages. Whether he can sustain this for two thousand pages remains to be seen, but this book is at least a good start.

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3. STRONG SPIRITS by Elisa DeCarlo (Ace, ISBN 0-380-77405-4, January 1994, 151pp, US\$4.50) (a book review by Evelyn C. Leeper):

This is apparently the prequel to DeCarlo's earlier book, T\_h\_e\_D\_e\_v\_i\_l\_Y\_o\_u\_S\_a\_y, since that deals with the adventures of two characters who meet in this book. I heard DeCarlo read some of T\_h\_e\_D\_e\_v\_i\_l\_Y\_o\_u\_S\_a\_y on "Hour of the Wolf" on WBAI radio and that was part of what made me pick up this book: the P. G. Wodehouse influence is not immediately obvious from the cover. (The cover is reminiscent of that of Nina Kiriki Hoffman's T\_h\_r\_e\_a\_d\_T\_h\_a\_t\_B\_i\_n\_d\_s, but here the whimsical effect is accurate to the book.)

This is the story of Aubrey Arbuthnot, good-for-nothing playboy, whom his father's death has left somewhat impoverished, and his adventures with ghosts, spiritualists, hell hounds, and music hall singers. Playing Jeeves to Aubrey's Wooster is Hornchurch, a gentleman's gentleman and clearly the more intelligent of the pair. Though the story attempts a serious tone and a bit of horror for its climax, even that gives way to the general frivolity of the book. All in all, this is a pleasant little book in a delightfully refined style.

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4. THE INTERNET DIRECTORY by Eric Braun (Fawcett Columbine, ISBN 0-449-90898-4, 1993, 704pp, US\$25) (a book review by Evelyn C. Leeper):

It seems as if every day brings a new book about the Internet. Some are about what the Internet is and how to use it, aimed at the novice user. T\_h\_e\_I\_n\_t\_e\_r\_n\_e\_t\_D\_i\_r\_e\_c\_t\_o\_r\_y, in spite of brief instructions on the syntax for such commands as g\_o\_p\_h\_e\_r and f\_t\_p, is not in that category. It is, as its name implies, a directory of data available on the Internet. So far I have used it to find some public library catalogues to access (trying to find the name of the author of an old book), to locate various archives for Project Gutenberg and the Online Book Initiative (looking for an online

text of Bram Stoker's D\_r\_a\_c\_u\_l\_a to do searches for certain phrases), and to look for Sherlock Holmes and Jewish mailing lists. In the latter test, the book was less helpful; I know if one Sherlock Holmes list and at least four Jewish lists, but none was included. While it's true no directory like this can be complete, these omissions make me wonder at its overall hit ratio.

Another criticism would be in its description of Usenet groups. Braun (or whoever wrote them) frequently opted for a "witty" description which would be meaningful only to those who already knew what the subject matter of the group was. For example, alt.history.what-if is described as "what would the net have been like without this group"? It's actually about alternate histories and parallel worlds. And rec.arts.sf.misc is n\_o\_t "no-so-on-topic discussion from rec.arts.sf.written"--it is discussion about science fiction that doesn't fit into any of the other rec.arts.sf subcategories. These description failures are particularly noticeable in the "alt" groups. (And by the by, there's a major typo in defining the "misc" hierarchy--it's not "Groups on all sorts of miscelations topics"!)

Is this book worth \$25? That depends on how often you look things up in general and on how long the information in it remains current. It certainly seems a worthwhile addition to a library where many people may use bits and pieces of it. And for writers who use their local reference librarian's services a lot, this may save some trips to the library. For the casual user, however, it's probably overkill.

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##### 5. SHORT CUTS (a film review by Mark R. Leeper):

Capsule review: Several unrelated stories by Raymond Carver are braided together into one overly-long telling. Carver's Pacific Northwest tales are moved to Los Angeles. Unfortunately none of the individual stories is particularly interesting and the whole is little more than the sum of those parts. Rating low +1 (-4 to +4).

By all accounts the stories of Raymond Carver are strong on describing the texture of life in the Pacific Northwest, but plotwise have been described as "minimalist." In S\_h\_o\_r\_t\_C\_u\_t\_s, Robert Altman relocates those stories to give a feeling for the texture of life in Los Angeles. In fact, they probably could have been moved to Massachusetts, Texas, or Wisconsin without doing much harm. The narrative approach is a lot like that of 1980's S\_e\_r\_i\_a\_l, though the end result is neither so cohesive nor so humorous.

There is no single unifying element to the stories tied together in S\_h\_o\_r\_t\_C\_u\_t\_s, though many of the plotlines do involve men who act selfishly and in unfeeling ways. A philandering traffic cop secretly rids himself of the family's obnoxious but loved dog. Some friends on a fishing trip put off reporting the discovery of a body in order to get in more fishing. An alcoholic keeps pestering his long-suffering wife who seems unaccountably to love him in spite of his personality. Another man executes a painstaking revenge against his former wife. Revenge is also on the mind of another man who terrorizes a woman over what seems like a trivial offense. This film is over three hours long to tell all these stories simultaneously, yet none of the stories is particularly enthralling in itself. What becomes more interesting is the manner in which these minor stories are tied together with each story touching nearly all the others. However, that also strains the credibility a bit since all these people have dramatic stories which start within hours of each other and end the same way. The main story line is of Ann and Howard Finnigan (played by Andie McDowell and Bruce Davison) facing a crisis when their son is hit by a car. Ralph and Marian Wyman (Matthew Modine and Julianne Moore) have unfinished business about an incident in Marian's past. Jerry Kaiser (Chris Penn) can't quite come to terms with his wife's (Jennifer Jason Leigh) phone sex business. And the list of plots could go on and on.

Robert Altman directs and co-authored the screenplay with Frank Barhydt. The style is reminiscent of N\_a\_s\_h\_v\_i\_l\_l\_e with its set of intertwined stories, but without nearly so much a sense of why tell this particular set of stories. Perhaps one advantage to this manner of story-telling is to allow the viewer to see the diversity of lifestyles that can be found in one small community. The stories include liberal amounts of female nudity, often with no more necessity than to dress up (or undress) a scene. There are several scenes of light comedy, warm humanity, or cold tragedy. One sequence will seem very timely but at the same time the flaws of the sequence will be more obvious than when the film was made.

S\_h\_o\_r\_t\_C\_u\_t\_s is yet another film this year that did not quite come up to most critic's estimation. My rating is low +1 on the -4 to +4 scale.

The Raymond Carver stories adapted in S h o r t C u t s as reported in V a r i e t y are "Jerry and Molly and Sam," "Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?," "Collectors," "Neighbors," "A Small Good Thing," "So Much Water So Close to Home," "They're Not Your Husband," "Vitamins," "Tell the Women We're Going," and the poem "Lemonade."

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6. SIX DEGREES OF SEPARATION (a film review by Mark R. Leeper):

Capsule review: This adaptation of the Broadway play is diverting but eventually doesn't tell very much story and left this viewer with the vague feeling that he missed some of the point. An enigmatic young black man turns upside-down the lives of some glib high society New Yorkers. When you find out what is really going on, you also find it very unlikely. Rating low +1 (-4 to +4)

BACKGROUND: Humanity is like a group of people walking around in a fog. Nobody is very far from anyone else, but you can see only the people nearest to you. And they can see only the people immediately around them. So everybody sees just a small part of the crowd. People drift closer in the fog and you see them for a while, then they move further away and cannot be traced. That, I think, is a big piece of what this film is about, though I admit a certain fog between me and S i x D e g r e e s o f S e p a r a t i o n. That is not a lot for a film to be about, but an odd and convoluted mode of storytelling makes this film entertaining and at the same time enigmatic. Whatever else the film is about is really in the eye of the beholder.

Our story is told in large part through flashbacks as several groups of friends, families, and acquaintances tell each other about a mysterious young black man Paul (played by Will Smith) who



has insinuated himself into their lives and then has gone back out of it. Primarily we see the stories through the eyes of Ouisa and Flan Kittredge (Stockard Channing and Donald Sutherland). They are wealthy pseudo-intellectual members of the upper crust. Flan makes his money through dubious trading in fine art. On a night that they are having an important dinner with a friend who might finance their next big deal, Paul shows up on their doorstep claiming to be the a friend of the Kittredge children and the son of Sidney Portier. The refined Paul makes an immediate hit and helps Flan to swing his deal. They invite Paul to stay the night only to have him hire a male hustler and bring him to the house. They throw Paul out. Almost immediately they start hearing that others of their friends have had run-ins with the same person. Soon they decide that they have to learn more about this young man who seems to know so much more about them than they know about him.

The people in this film are much like adult versions of the young people in M\_e\_t\_r\_o\_p\_o\_l\_i\_t\_a\_n. They have superficial conversations on profound subjects. While what they are saying seems erudite, it is only banality phrased well. What Paul says to keep up his end of the conversation occasionally does border on profundity, which makes him all the more enigmatic to the people he visits. Conversation and how things are expressed is very important to this film since so much of it is carried on by social conversations,

often recounting other conversations. This slows down the plot development, but eventually this 111-minute film tells a nearly complete story that could have been told in twenty or thirty minutes. In the final analysis film is a light fantasy. The story is contrived and very unlikely to occur in the way it was told. I think that credibility is not the point here. Even the title is never clearly explained; it seems to refer to some idea that there are at most six intermediate people between anybody and anybody else in the world. Considering how isolated some tribes are to this day in the Amazon and other parts of the world, it seems very unlikely. Also it is not clear what counts as a direct adjacency.

This is a film with a terrific cast and a lack of characters. Will Smith is actually fairly charismatic as Paul, but the characters played by Channing, Sutherland, Ian McKellan, Mary Beth Hurt, Bruce

Davison, Richard Masur, and Anthony Michael Hall are all quickly forgettable as indeed John Guare's screenplay based on his Broadway play would have them be. Perhaps like "Cats," this is just a play that cannot be done on the screen."

The film is a departure for director Fred Schepisi, but will not be one of his more memorable accomplishments. I give it a low +1 on the -4 to +4 scale.

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The majority of people believe in incredible things which are absolutely false. The majority of people daily act in a manner prejudicial to their general well-being.

-- Ashley Montagu