

continue with the story."

This war everyone seems to be watching on CNN. High-ranking military people are giving unsolicited testimonials for CNN coverage. Well, I suppose they are unsolicited. I'd hate to think

THE MT VOID

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the people commanding our side are supplementing their income with product placement. It has occurred to me that if Saddam Hussein really wanted to make his will felt he could have his agents in the United States take out CNN. Of course, that would be a mistake because much of his intelligence information comes from CNN. I wonder how that makes Ted Turner feel.

I have tried to imagine Saddam Hussein watching CNN. It's kind of tough imagining some of the great nasties of the world watching the same stuff I do. I have it from a high-placed, reliable source (actually a Trivial Pursuit card) that Adolf Hitler's favorite film was K_i_n_g_K_o_n_g. Somehow it is tough to imagine old Adolf getting a real charge seeing Kong duke it out with a tyrannosaurus. I guess it's something Adolf and I had in common. But it is tough to think of Hussein watching CNN. When he sees a bomber drop a charge into his military headquarters, do his eyes light up and does he say to himself, "Hey! I recognize that building! I've been there!"

Does Hussein watch the same CNN commercials we do? Do they work on him? When he hears that his new palace has been flattened, does he order, "Get me an aspirin. No, make it a Tylenol gel-cap. I trust Tylenol." Does the self-styled leader of the Arab world feel bad because his telephone isn't shaped like a football? Does he wonder what the big deal is about the S_p_o_r_t_s_I_l_l_u_s_t_r_a_t_e_d swimsuit issue? (Actually, I've seen it and I still don't know.) Does he make plans that if he has to flee the country he'll loot the treasury and invest heavily in Elvis plates from the Bradford Exchange? I bet right about now he could go for some dollar-a-week life insurance with no medical checkup required.

2. Collected from Usenet (warning--spoilers ahead):

My name is Batman. You killed my father. Prepare to die.

My name is Darth Vader. I_a_m your father. Prepare to

die.

My name is Freddie Krueger. I killed your father.

Prepare to die.

My name is Freddie Krueger. Your father killed me.

Prepare to die.

My name is Hamlet. You killed my father and slept with my mother. Prepare to die.

My name is Locutus. You are irrelevant; my father is irrelevant. Prepare to die.

My name is Norman Bates. I killed my mother. Prepare to die after I put on this dress and wig.

My name is Oedipus. I killed my father and slept with my mother. Prepare to be grossed out as I rip my eyes out.

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

A Batch of Midi-Reviews
Copyright 1991
By Dale L. Skran Jr.
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S_u_r_r_e_n_d_e_r_N_o_n_e_-_t_h_e_L_e_g_a_c_y_o_f_G_i_r_d
by Elizabeth Moon

Elizabeth Moon is best known for the "Deed of Paksenarrion" trilogy, a sword-and-sorcery epic concerning a sheepfarmer's daughter who becomes first a mercenary and then a paladin. The series features more realistic combat than most and is certainly readable. S_u_r_r_e_n_d_e_r_N_o_n_e is a prequel to the trilogy that tells the tail of how "Gird," a god-like figure in the trilogy, came into his reputation.

Once again there is extensive focus on realistic combat and especially on training for combat and the logistics of combat. Magic actually plays a very minor role in story. Overall, readable and even enjoyable, but not a great work.

D_e_a_t_h'_s_H_e_a_d_R_e_b_e_l_l_i_o_n: _W_a_r_W_o_r_l_d_V_o_l_u_m_e_I_I
created by Jerry Pournelle
edited by John F. Carr and Roland Green

This "mosaic" story continues the threads of the John Christian Falkenberg universe into a new period. The "Saurons" have come -- genetically engineered to be perfect soldiers -- they attempt to conquer and fail in all-destroying battle. Though the Empire of Man destroys the Sauron homeworld, one ship survives and finds its way to Haven, an isolated colony world where they seek to establish themselves anew. The catch is that Haven is a lot like Harrison's Pyrrus -- not a place you really want to live -- and the humans who already live there plan on having something to say about the future of the Saurons.

With authors like Larry Niven and Harry Turtledove it is hard to go to far wrong. Unfortunately, the Saurons are portrayed as being too much like a combination of Nazis and Spartans to be believable. There are many unanswered questions in this universe - why is genetic engineering o_n_l_y used to produce super-soldiers? Why is technology so little advanced beyond our own in 2637? The best story is "Brenda" (by Niven). It concerns a Sauron woman who crashes on an Earth colony (not Haven) and ultimately passes herself off as human.

Overall, this series is interesting reading, but no more fundamentally believable than Buck Rogers.

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I_n_t_h_e_C_o_u_n_t_r_y_o_f_t_h_e_B_l_i_n_d
by Michael Flynn

This is the first book I've read by Flynn, and I admit to being sucked in by the intriguing jacket blurb, which reads "What if there really were a secret conspiracy running things behind the scenes ... and they were incompetent?" The story begins with a young reporter finding a warehouse full of old but workable Babbage mechanical computers sometime in the late 1990s. It takes a bit, but eventually she realizes that not only is the history we have been taught an

incredible shell obscuring a terrible reality, but that there is *more than one* group seeking to manipulate history for their own ends. Unfortunately, the technology they are using is less than perfect. However, in the land of the blind the one-eyed man is King ... unless someone kills the King.

Although certainly readable, Flynn is not a brilliant stylist, and the book reads like many a best-selling thriller, albeit with a more interesting premise. This volume contains many entertaining historical speculations, although the characterization is a bit on the weak side. I look forward from hearing more from Flynn in the future.

MIND CHILDREN
THE FUTURE OF ROBOT AND HUMAN INTELLIGENCE
by Hans Moravec
Harvard University Press, 1988
A review by Dale L. Skran Jr.
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[First published in PYROTECHNICS, the newsletter of General Technics, and reprinted here by permission of the author.]

Hans Moravec is a well-known robot researcher at Carnegie-Mellon University. In M_i_n_d_C_h_i_l_d_r_e_n he has produced his first work of speculative science. Although interesting, it is unlikely to win the Pulitzer ala Hofstadter's G_o_d_e_l, E_s_c_h_e_r, B_a_c_h, or Sagan's B_r_o_c_a'_s_B_r_a_i_n.

Initially, Moravec describes some of the history of robotics and his personal part of it. He then works through a calculation of the computing power of the human brain, develops a metric for the comparison of computer hardware with organic brains, and extrapolates computer evolution forward to the point at which first a so-called "super-computer" and second a personal computer will have human equivalence in raw power (about 2010 and 2030, more or less). Although moderately convincing, this analysis is not complete, and could easily be off by an order of magnitude. However, due to the rapid growth of computing power, this would not delay human equivalence in computers very much.

Moravec then explores the history of AI briefly, and lays out his support for "bottom-up" or robot-based AI as opposed to "top-down" mainframe AI. Moravec splits the difference, and predicts that the two will meet half-way in the fairly near future, resulting in a robot cottage industry as thousands of entrepreneurs strive to produce specialized robots, much as thousands of programmers today labor to product software tools and games. Moravec envisions, for example, a plumbing robot, a stair-building robot, a window washing robot, etc.

Moving beyond the immediate future, Moravec makes an argument for personality downloading and "pattern-identity" as opposed to "body-identity." The downloading argument is fairly plausible, especially in its weaker form, which allows for the gradual enhancement of human capacity via bio-cybernetic add-ons. Eventually, the organic part of our brains might be such a small part of the whole as to make downloading straightforward. Moravec dismisses genetic engineering as merely the production of robots using inferior materials.

This opinion neatly sums up one side of Bruce Sterlings fictional (S_c_h_i_s_m_a_t_r_i_x, C_r_y_s_t_a_l_E_x_p_r_e_s_s) Shaper/Mec stories. In Sterling's fictional future, humanity is divided into two camps: the Shapers, who use genetic technology to improve themselves, and the Mecs, who abhor genetic engineering and rely instead on mechanical and electronic enhancements to the human body. Although I enjoyed Sterling's stories greatly, I always found this dichotomy a bit silly, and was surprised to

find Moravec arguing so ardently for the Mec position. One hopes that the conflict between these two views will not result in the centuries long war envisioned by Sterling, since both approaches can be used at the same time. Given our history of past conflicts over relatively abstract issues (Protestantism vs. Catholicism, Capitalism vs. Communism) this may be too optimistic.

To carry the speculation further, even intelligent robots may be body-identified. The real long-term conflict may be between those who prefer bodies (organic a_n_d inorganic), and "cybernetic ghosts" who find them inconvenient.

Moravec also mentions a side effect of downloading - backup copies, and considers a few of the implications. This theme is explored in much greater depth by the SF writer John Varley in many books and stories, but notably "Overdrawn at the Memory Bank."

Moravec also discusses the re-creation of the dead via simulation, but unconvincingly. First, except for a very few famous people, we just don't have enough information to create a good-quality simulation of, say, my great-grandfather. A few pictures and a box of letters won't do it. Second, although a person much like the original might result, unless they were directly downloaded, there would be significant gaps between simulation and the original. Note that I am not contending that the simulation would not be human, just that it would not be the original person. Although this might be an interesting experiment a la Silverberg's "Enter A Soldier, Later, Enter Another," it is not an immortality that would appeal to most.

In one of the more imaginative and original sections, Moravec discusses that possible creation of self-perpetuating information "wildlife" on every level of abstraction (from machine code to high-level software structures), and buttresses his case with some hair-raising ARPA-net stories. He details a cybernetic existence analogous to our biological existence, in which we are surrounded by a sea of parasites and dormant viruses that occasionally give us serious trouble. The recent Signaling System 7 crash that affected long-distance phone service nationwide suggests that Moravec's vision is not far-fetched.

Finally, Moravec considers the possible infinite extension of

consciousness either by altering time or by moving beyond our universe. Here he is clearly out of his depth, and is borrowing from better minds than his.

All in all, M_i_n_d_C_h_i_l_d_r_e_n is a worth-while book for those interested in the romance of technology as well as the forward-looking technical professional. Moravec's robot cottage industry may be the basis for the latter half of many of our careers.

THE CRYSTAL SINGER by Anne McCaffrey
A book review by Frank R. Leisti
Copyright 1991 Frank R. Leisti

This wily woman writer has collected together various shorts published in magazines and has created a new series to rival that of the Pern series. Well, not quite yet, but she has made an excellent base upon which to bring forth wondrous stories and adventures from.

While not on the order of evolution as the "Dragonriders of Pern" series, this first book on the crystal cuckoo or silicate spiders has a dramatic impact on this reader. Imagine a world of such grayness and of such terrible storms, whose winds can exceed Mach speeds, three moons and a huge amount of water bringing changes destruction in various cycles. From this world, crystals in the ranges have been formed into amazing things of beauty, structure and form.

The Heptite Guild governs the entire planet Ballybran, where everyone in the Guild is a member paying 30% of their salary as a form of tax and protection. We learn about a young talented singer, Killashandra Ree, who in a fit of frustration embarks on an odyssey where she can take a lead part out of the entire universe of Federated Planets.

Upon meeting a Crystal cutter, or the more flattering term, Crystal Singer, she discovers more about his profession and decides that she

will become one. We follow her journey through the indoctrination and examination and basic tutoring when she is on the planet. The down side of this job application is that if you do not become a Crystal Singer, you can never leave the planet.

We discover more about Killashandra as she undergoes her training and medical transition and finally goes to cut crystal. While she believes that she is in charge, we find her manipulated by the Guild in search of the fantastic Black Crystal--segments of which allow instantaneous communication.

A wonderful idea and book. I have re-read this book many times, and each time, its impact is such that I often dream of the planet Ballybran and have further adventures in its realm. How reassuring to know that a second book is published about Killashandra.

I would rate this novel at +3 for its effect on me and the wonderful planet from whence these crystals have been formed.

IN BETWEEN DRAGONS by Michael Kandel
Bantam Spectra, 1991, ISBN 0-553-28814-8, \$3.95.
A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper
Copyright 1991 Evelyn C. Leeper

I n B e t w e e n D r a g o n s is Michael Kandel's second novel, his first being S t r a n g e I n v a s i o n. (Before setting off on his own auctorial career, he was best known as the translator of Stanislaw Lem's works into English.) I n B e t w e e n D r a g o n s to some extent is similar to S t r a n g e I n v a s i o n in that both deal with heroes attempting to save the universe, or at least the world, from some terrible menace. Both also deal with the question of "what is reality?" But where the main character of

S_t_r_a_n_g_e_I_n_v_a_s_i_o_n is a schizophrenic, the main character of I_n
B_e_t_w_e_e_n
D_r_a_g_o_n_s, Sherman Potts, is a teenage boy who travels to the worlds in
the books he reads in Mr. McGulvey's library. The choice of Sherman as
the hero's first name is perhaps unfortunate, given the publicity about
T_h_e_B_o_n_f_i_r_e_o_f_t_h_e_V_a_n_i_t_i_e_s which talks
about i_t_s "hero," Sherman McCoy,
leading to possible confusion in the public's mind. But in many ways
Sherman Potts is more a "Master of the Universe" than Sherman McCoy, so
who knows? For all I know, it could be intentional. Anyway, Sherman
travels to worlds full of dragons, psychic enemies, and disappearing
food. All this isn't enough for him, though, and his attempt to travel
to the world of the "Lust Kittens" makes the whole structure start to
unravel.

Having never been an adolescent boy, I can't say how accurately
Kandel has portrayed one, though one does have the inkling that Kandel
may have been one himself. While I thought this was not up to S_t_r_a_n_g_e
I_n_v_a_s_i_o_n, other readers may disagree, but in any case it is certainly an
interesting perspective on adolescence.

FLIGHT OF THE INTRUDER
A film review by Mark R. Leeper
Copyright 1991 Mark R. Leeper

Capsule review: Pretty pictures, stupid story. The air-war of a previous conflict is occasionally entertaining to watch but the plot is cliched as are most of the characters. This film's only chance is to follow the current wave of interest in military equipment.
Rating: low 0.

Had I not actually seen a copy of the book F_l_i_g_h_t_o_f_t_h_e
I_n_t_r_u_d_e_r
by Stephen Coonts, I would have had a hard time telling if this was a very weak story given classy military equipment photography and quality special effects treatment or if this was just a collection of classy military equipment photography and quality special effects tied together by a very weak excuse for a story. During World War II a lot of B war movies carried stories just as good to the bottom half of double bills. We are talking H_e_l_l_c_a_t_s_o_f_t_h_e N_a_v_y-level plotting here. In 1972 Vietnam we have an aircraft carrier ruled over by a cigar-chewing, mean-as-a-junkyard-dog-but-heart-of-gold sort of commander. Danny Glover plays the Black commander with the unlikely name Frank Camparelli. One of his bright young pilots, Jake Grafton (played by the uninteresting Brad Johnson) agonizes over the loss of his bombardier. The companion is lost in a raid that accomplishes nothing besides adding visual interest to the opening credits. Grafton wants to go on a super-special raid of his own devising. But this raid is directly contrary to orders. His top-gun replacement bombardier Virgil Cole (played by Willem Dafoe) says absolutely not. Does Jake get to make his super-special raid on North Vietnam? And if he does, what is the Navy's reaction?

The weak story is, however, punctuated by pretty pictures of planes, helicopters, and aircraft carriers to keep the audience watching. If this film stands any chance with audiences it is in the fortuitous timing of this film coincident with a sudden upsurge of interest in technical weaponry. Indeed many people may find events in the Middle East resonating with attitudes in this film. On the other hand, maybe some people would prefer to stay home and watch technical weaponry on television.

F_l_i_g_h_t_o_f_t_h_e I_n_t_r_u_d_e_r is directed by John Milius, who is specializing in gutsy films like A_p_o_c_a_l_y_p_s_e N_o_w (which he wrote), C_o_n_a_n t_h_e B_a_r_b_a_r_i_a_n, and R_e_d D_a_w_n. The score is by Basil Poledouris, the gifted composer of the scores for the "Conan" films, who seems repeatedly associated with films with right-wing themes. Poledouris scored R_e_d D_a_w_n, A_m_e_r_i_k_a, and T_h_e H_u_n_t

_ f _ o _ r _ R _ e _ d _ O _ c _ t _ o _ b _ e _ r .

_ F _ l _ i _ g _ h _ t _ o _ f _ t _ h _ e _ I _ n _ t _ r _ u _ d _ e _ r is linked in advertising with
_ T _ h _ e _ H _ u _ n _ t _ f _ o _ r
_ R _ e _ d _ O _ c _ t _ o _ b _ e _ r, but it falls well short of that film's interest value and
quality. My rating is a low 0 on the -4 to +4 scale.

WHITE FANG

A film review by Mark R. Leeper

Copyright 1991 Mark R. Leeper

Capsule review: Nice photography, nice score, nice
dog, good script mostly new even to those who have read
the book. Rating: low +2 (-4 to +4).

Walt Disney Studios continues to make films that old Walt would
have been proud of. They are better films than Disney himself was
making toward the end of his life. While it is not necessarily true of
the Touchstone line, when a film comes out under the Disney title, it is
worth seeing. Films such as _ N _ e _ v _ e _ r _ C _ r _ y _ W _ o _ l _ f _ , _ T _ h _ e
_ J _ o _ u _ r _ n _ e _ y _ o _ f _ N _ a _ t _ t _ y _ G _ a _ n _ n ,
_ and _ W _ h _ i _ t _ e _ F _ a _ n _ g have more in common than just the curious link that they
all try to vindicate wolves: they have good scripts with well-crafted
dialogue. Disney's staff may be among the most accomplished nature
photographers in the world. And they appear to be the only studio that
seems to make sure all their prints are on high-quality, blemish-free
film. While it probably will not stand with some of their better
efforts of the past, _ W _ h _ i _ t _ e _ F _ a _ n _ g is fully up to Disney's photographic and
writing standards.

_ W _ h _ i _ t _ e _ F _ a _ n _ g has a decent story which takes some of its ideas from
the novel by Jack London. Perhaps the film's biggest failing is that it
really is very different from the novel. While the novel linearly
follows the story of the dog, the screenplay follows two often crossing
lines, the story of the dog and the story of a young prospector who has
come to the Klondike to inherit his father's gold mine. Ethan Hawke
plays Jack Conroy, who slowly learns to survive in the wild with the
reluctant tutelage of Alex Larson (played by Klaus Maria Brandauer).
Disney apparently is not ready yet to have animals as his main
characters the way Annaud did in his film, _ T _ h _ e _ B _ e _ a _ r . Speaking of that
film, incidentally, Bart the Bear, who played the big, strong, silent

hero of T h e B e a r, gets to try his paw at playing a villain in W h i t e F a n g. He has a high old time chewing up the scenery in a small but important part and, like Brandauer, seems a little too big for his role as written. Conroy arrives in the Klondike and climbs the "Golden Stairway" in an impressive and spectacular scene. At the top he teams up with friends of his father, Larson and a delightful old prospector played by Seymour Cassel. Then, in a sequence that does not quite make geometric sense, they cross country but repeatedly run into first a she-wolf and later her cub. The hazards of surviving in the spectacular desolation are well represented in the film.

The nature photography is flawless, with huge vistas of craggy blue ice. Against this backdrop you see the wolves playing and dancing. Unfortunately, not all the photography is as original as it usually is in a Disney film. Whole sequences seem borrowed from T h e B e a r and one nice underwater shot was inspired by T h e B l a c k S t a l l i o n. The score by

Basil Poledouris, who also scored the current film F l i g h t o f t h e I n t r u d e r, is very good and in some ways reminiscent of his best score, C o n a n t h e B a r b a r i a n.

My rating for W h i t e F a n g is a low +2 on the -4 to +4 scale.

SADDAM HUSSEIN AND THE CRISIS IN THE GULF by Judith Miller and Laurie Mylroie
Random House, 1990, ISBN 0-8129-1921-1, \$5.95.
A book review by Mark R. Leeper
Copyright 1991 Mark R. Leeper

It is generally the case that when there is a news event of national or international implications that dominates public interest, enterprising publishers will try to provide timely, books to give readers background on the situation. Such a book is Miller and Mylroie's S a d d a m H u s s e i n a n d t h e C r i s i s i n t h e G u l f. The window of time when such a book will be optimally useful is, of course, short. This book bears a 1990 copyright but includes text reprinted from a "Middle East Watch" report dated November 10, 1990. I can only conclude that the book was up to date in late November or early December. I bought the book January 13, 1991, and finished it January 20, 1991, distracted by not totally irrelevant events in the news

To some extent the haste with which the book was prepared is

evident. The organization is not always as clear and logical as it might be. Some information appears more than once, though that may not necessarily be a bad thing. Judith Miller is from the NewYorkTimes and is a former Cairo Bureau Chief, a former Washington Deputy Bureau Chief, and currently a special correspondent on the Gulf Crisis. She wrote the shell of the book about the take-over of Kuwait, Iraqi-American relations, chemical weapons, and Kuwaiti-Iraqi relations. Laurie Mylroie of Harvard's Center for Middle Eastern Studies wrote a six-chapter insert giving Hussein's background and Iraqi history, and then a history of Hussein's rule of Iraq. Another chapter was written by Jerome Levinson on petroleum policy. Sadly missing is an index, which would have made referencing the book much easier.

Most interesting and readable are the sections by Mylroie whose histories of both Hussein and Iraq, first separate, then merging, are both grisly and authoritative. Neither of the authors equivocates on the violent nature of the man or the police state that he has brought about in Iraq. I can say that I have read a fair amount about the Holocaust perpetrated by the Nazis in Europe and find some of what Hussein's regime has done in Iraq comparably disturbing, though done on a much smaller scale. Some insight is added by Mylroie's biography of the political-assassin-and-torturer-turned-national-leader who visualizes himself as a real-life Don Vito Corleone. Miller sees Hussein, at least in part, as a man venting his rage on the powers he defended in the Iran-Iraq War, but who failed to come to his and his country's defense and financial aid in the years following that war.

The conclusions section, authored by Miller, disappointingly prosaically concludes we are fighting this war to protect our oil interests. She harangues the West for its addiction to vast quantities of oil. I agree that this is a concern to the Western powers, but I do

Saddam Hussein

January 20, 1991

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not see that as the most pressing reason this war is being fought. My opinion, admittedly a minority one, is that the Western powers, through financial greed and desire for political leverage, have sold or given the Iraqi regime the means to build superweapons. Then, too late, they realized that placed Iraq on a collision with Israel, who already had superweapons. Allowing the conflict to take place would have been too dangerous for the world. In many ways this war is an extension of the 1981 Israeli raid on Iraq's Osirak Reactor, an action publicly condemned

and privately applauded by the Western powers. Now Israel could no longer defuse the situation and the Western powers could only at the cost of war. It is a frightening war, but less frightening than its alternatives. Miller and Mylroie talk of the nuclear/chemical/biological capabilities the Hussein regime was accumulating as part of the overall portrait of the brutality of Hussein, but they do not adequately consider defusing that was machine as a real reason for the war. I do think that the authors and I agree that this war is _ n _ o _ t being fought because of our moral outrage that one country should take over another, an outrage we would have to have developed since China took over Tibet.

_ S _ a _ d _ d _ a _ m _ H _ u _ s _ s _ e _ i _ n _ a _ n _ d _ t _ h _ e _ C _ r _ i _ s _ i _ s
_ i _ n _ t _ h _ e _ G _ u _ l _ f is most valuable for its presenting a wealth of background information at the right time. While the authors say their goal is to help understand the kind of man Hussein is, in fact they only harden the reader's resolve that this may not be a man one wants to understand. And the book's hasty construction shows a few too many seams. Nevertheless, no better source of timely war background information is known to me. In that vein, this book is recommended.