



the hundred best novels of science fiction and the hundred best novels of fantasy, is now attempting such a guide with T\_h\_e\_U\_l\_t\_i\_m\_a\_t\_e\_G\_u\_i\_d\_e\_t\_o\_S\_c\_i\_e\_n\_c\_e\_F\_i\_c\_t\_i\_o\_n.

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For each of over 3000 science fiction books, he has given a few sentences of review and a rating of one to four stars. The result tells you something about the books he is reviewing and also quite a bit about Pringle himself. I certainly disagree with much of his taste. But once you have a feel for what he will rate high or low, the book becomes a useful guide to science fiction books. It is particularly useful to help you decide if that book you've had in a box since high school is worth digging out and reading. [-mrl]

Reminder: The room is MT 1P-364.

2. Okay, two issues ago time I had the date wrong; last issue I had the volume number wrong. It should have been 11, not 10. I\_t\_h\_i\_n\_k I have it right this time around; between moving to a new machine and changing volume numbers, it's been a bit confused.... [-ecl]

3. From those people voting on the Hugos, good news: For perhaps the first time ever, all the stories nominated for the short story Hugo award are now available free, in one place, during the voting period.

Brad Templeton has gotten permission to provide the Hugo-nominated short stories via anonymous FTP or e-mail. The files are available via anonymous ftp from "sf.clarinet.com" in the directory "sf". If you don't have access to anonymous FTP you can still get the stories via E-mail. Send mail to ftpmail@decwrl.dec.com or att!decwrl!ftpmail. The subject is ignored other than as an identifier for you in the mail you'll get back from the ftpmail server. The text should be as follows:

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connect
chdir pub/sf
dir
ascii
get READ.ME
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get cretaceous  
get dogs\_life  
get perfectmorn  
get pressann  
get walkinthesun  
get wintersolst  
get buffalo  
get howto.read  
get esf.ballot  
quit

IMPORTANT NOTE FROM BRAD: These stories are all copyrighted, professional stories. The writers should be thanked for taking this sort of new venture, allowing you to have the stories for free. They are granting you permission to download these stories for your personal use. However, you may not copy them further, forward them to others, put them in archives or republish them in

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any way. Please respect the rights of these superb SF Pros.

This is free, though if you want to send a donation to the authors to reward them for this move, Brad will pass on 100% of donations (less collection costs) to them. The easiest way is to send a check to ClariNet Communications (make checks payable to this), Box 1479, Cupertino, CA 95015-1479. Brad suggests \$3 (which he claims is the price of a small paperback--where is he buying his books is what I want to know!), which will be divided amongst the authors.  
[-ecl]

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

As far as the laws of mathematics refer to reality,  
they are not certain; and as far as they are certain,  
they do not refer to reality.

-- Albert Einstein

THE MODULAR MAN by Roger MacBride Allen  
Bantam Spectra, 1992, ISBN 0-553-29559-4, \$4.99.  
A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper  
Copyright 1992 Evelyn C. Leeper

David Bailey has downloaded himself into his home maintenance unit (a.k.a., vacuum cleaner, a.k.a., "Herbert"--it's a pun, get it?) and now Herbert is being charged with first-degree murder,

because the complete download of a personality destroys the original. The district attorney hopes Herbert's owner (Suzanne Jantille, who is also David's widow and a lawyer) will take the obvious path and ask for dismissal on the grounds that Herbert can't be charged because he isn't human. This would set a precedent for preventing the rich from achieving immortality by replacing all the parts that wear out--in effect, turning themselves into cyborgs. But Suzanne takes another tack.

Allen raises a lot of interesting issues here, but eventually short-circuits them (you'll pardon the pun) by providing an ending that does not follow at all from what comes before, but from the whim of one character (which means, basically, the whim of the author).

And the supposedly innovative solution to resolve the problem of the "immortal rich" is one that has appeared before, and in a very well-known work. (I'm desperately trying to avoid spoilers here.)

In addition, I'm no lawyer, but it seems obvious to me that if Herbert can stand trial as David Bailey, then David Bailey isn't dead, and so no one can be tried for his murder. If the prosecution is claimed Herbert is David Bailey, but a \*different\* David Bailey, then it's clear that the original David Bailey did all the set-up for the transfer ("murder") and so the new one is not responsible. (If I rig up a suicide device so that I'm killed when someone rings my doorbell, is the unsuspecting mailman guilty of murder?) Allen tries a bit of hand-waving to get around this, with some obscure point of law not introduced until near the end of the story (future law, not any law we have), but it's not very convincing.

This is probably the last of the "Next Wave" series, and even this is an abbreviated entry: instead of an introduction by Isaac Asimov and an essay by a "working scientist," it has three short articles by Asimov strung together in place of the essay and no introduction.

The Modular Man started out with some great ideas, but didn't carry them through. I wish I could recommend this book, but ultimately I found it disappointing and annoying.

BEAST by Peter Benchley  
Fawcett Crest, 1992 (1991c), ISBN 0-449-22089-3, \$5.95  
A book review by Mark R. Leeper  
Copyright 1992 Mark R. Leeper

In writing this review I have tried not to reveal to what kind of beast the title refers. But if Peter Benchley tried to keep it a surprise, he is lousy at keeping a secret. I heard an interview in which he gave some teasers about what the creature was. Some of his teasers would have told me by themselves and certainly there was no doubt in my mind from the whole set what he was talking about. The cover of the book shows a tentacle of a characteristic shape. So if you want to keep it a secret, buy coverless. Also skip the dedication page.

Okay, so why did I read B\_e\_a\_s\_t? No, I didn't expect an edifying experience. To be honest, I like monster movies. I loved them when I was young and I never grew out of it. The idea of an attack of a giant cephalopod conjures up memories of I\_t\_C\_a\_m\_e\_f\_r\_o\_m\_B\_e\_n\_e\_a\_t\_h\_t\_h\_e\_S\_e\_a and 2\_0,\_0\_0\_0\_L\_e\_a\_g\_u\_e\_s\_U\_n\_d\_e\_r\_t\_h\_e\_S\_e\_a.

B\_e\_a\_s\_t is a beach novel. It is clearly intended to be read on a beach when the reader has come out to dry off and rest and maybe get some sun. Then with the ocean lying in front of him or her, the reader can have Benchley tell him or her scary stories about what is in the water. Essentially this is the same story Benchley told in J\_a\_w\_s. Here he is telling it again, but with another nautical nasty. Despite the back cover comments about Benchley's great literary family, nobody would mistake B\_e\_a\_s\_t for being much more than Benchley borrowing from Benchley. And doing a lukewarm job of it at that.

There is not really a whole lot of plot to tell. It takes place in and around Bermuda. A number of people start disappearing from the sea. We are given spooky stories of tentacles grabbing people from boats. It leaves behind clues that some nasty sea creature is getting them. William "Whip" Darling is a former fisherman who now hunts interesting specimens for an aquarium. His hobby is protecting the seas from fishermen who would exploit it. He is a younger and more pleasant Quint from J\_a\_w\_s. He is eventually called upon to go out and help hunt the beast. There is little that happens in the book that the reader has not read or seen in a movie somewhere. The ending is pure cliché--one used in many films. The cause of the problem--what brings the beast--is also cliché: man tampering where he does not belong.

Probably the best thing about B\_e\_a\_s\_t is the detail about a rather intriguing sea creature. Benchley gives us the interesting facts and tells his entire story in clean, clear prose. That is no common talent these days. He writes to convey, not to impress or to

amuse. He tries to make reading his novel as easy and passive as watching an action film, and at that he actually succeeds. You have to admire the crisp clarity of his story-telling.

Benchley indulges himself, making at least two references to J\_a\_w\_s and the effect the film had on swimmers who learned to fear the water. Perhaps it is vanity, or an inside joke.

Still B\_e\_a\_s\_t gives you just about what you expect, a feather-like monster movie in portable form. It could be worse.

A LEAGUE OF THEIR OWN  
A film review by Mark R. Leeper  
Copyright 1992 Mark R. Leeper

Capsule review: Move over, Rosie the Riveter: this film celebrates Betty the Baseball Player. Penny Marshall tells the story of the women's baseball league founded during World War II. The script is a little cliched and predictable, but Marshall, as usual, tells an engrossing story.  
Rating: +1 (-4 to +4).

At one point in A\_L\_e\_a\_g\_u\_e\_o\_f\_T\_h\_e\_i\_r\_O\_w\_n, Dottie Hinson (played by Geena Davis) observes that playing baseball is hard. Veteran ballplayer Jimmy Dugan (played by Tom Hanks) tells her sagely, "If it wasn't hard, everyone would do it. The hard makes it great." I think that must play better to baseball fans than it does to me. Having as I do virtually zero interest in the game itself, I would not play no matter how easy it was for me. Nor do I believe that the game is great or that its hardness makes it great. The presence of baseball will not make a film very good in itself. For a baseball film actually to be good it has to rely not on good baseball content or the belief that playing baseball is somehow a noble profession. That is why I like T\_h\_e\_N\_a\_t\_u\_r\_a\_l and F\_i\_e\_l\_d\_o\_f\_D\_r\_e\_a\_m\_s, but T\_h\_e\_P\_r\_i\_d\_e\_o\_f\_t\_h\_e\_Y\_a\_n\_k\_e\_e\_s leaves me cold. I think that A\_L\_e\_a\_g\_u\_e\_o\_f\_T\_h\_e\_i\_r\_O\_w\_n really requires of the viewer a belief that



there was something noble in women playing baseball and keeping the sport alive while most of the men players were fighting in World War II. For me that is a difficult leap of faith to make and you can weight this review accordingly.

A\_L\_e\_a\_g\_u\_e\_o\_f\_T\_h\_e\_i\_r\_O\_w\_n is, I suspect, almost pure fiction vaguely inspired by real events as was director Penny Marshall's previous film, A\_w\_a\_k\_e\_n\_i\_n\_g\_s. Undoubtedly some of the background detail is accurate, but most of the drama is probably made up of the whole cloth. The story tells how Hinson and her sister Kit Keller (played by Lori Petty) are recruited by a hilariously rude and obnoxious scout (played by Jon Lovitz). Sixty-four women are chosen to field the four teams of the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League. Kit is more anxious to play than is her older sister, but Dottie is a natural. Not that anyone seems to care. Their alcoholic team manager, Dugan, introduces himself to his team by shuffling drunkenly to the locker room urinal, using it, and shuffling back out. During the games, he shows his commitment to the team by sleeping, scratching his crotch, or practicing what appears to be a regimen of losing ten pounds a week by spitting. Hanks takes to this role as if his view of baseball players mirrors my own. League President Ira Lowenstein (played by David Strathairn) at first is anxious only to be certain that the skirts

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on the uniforms are short enough to attract audience interest. The news media seems even less interested, editorializing against the "masculinization of women" and then making amused and patronizing newsreels about the women's league.

The script is by Lowell Ganz and Babaloo Mandel and is something of a comedown for the team, who wrote P\_a\_r\_e\_n\_t\_h\_o\_o\_d and C\_i\_t\_y\_S\_l\_i\_c\_k\_e\_r\_s. Much in the plot is incredibly predictable and overly cliched. A word that is overused to describe a film of this sort is "manipulative." Actually, a film should be manipulative, and Ganz and Mandel have done it well in the past. Here it is often done well, but other times done too obviously. The last ten minutes of the film are maudlin and drag. They could and should have been cut to two minutes. The script comes perilously close to making fun of the awkward, plain, and shy Marla (played by Megan Cavanaugh).

While some of the male characters redeem themselves later in the film, they almost universally are insensitive jerks when we first meet them.

That brings me to the issue of hypocrisy in this superficially feminist film. The order of billing is Hanks, Davis, Madonna (as a stereotypical loose woman), and Petty. Based on contribution, the order should have been Davis, Petty, Hanks, and Madonna. Top billing for Hanks is absurd; he just did not do more than Davis or Petty. The locker room scenes are G-ratable in the first half of the film, then suddenly turn "peek-a-boo" in the second half of the film.

The score by Hans Zimmer deserves some credit, occasionally having some of the mythic feel of Randy Newman's score for T h e N a t u r a l. However, it mixes in rock, which seems out of place in a film mostly about the 1940s. I would like to call some attention to David Strathairn as Lowenstein. He plays quiet and usually likable characters of integrity. He played a policeman sympathetic to the strikers in M a t e w a n and a commander very worried for the safety of his men in M e m p h i s B e l l e. He reminds me a lot of a latter-day Henry Fonda. I have never seen him in a bad film, which indicates either that he is intelligent enough to select only better scripts or that his acting has qualities that appeal only to better filmmakers.

One final nice touch: the script calls for us to see most of the main characters as they look almost fifty years later. Normally this would be done with a makeup effect. These makeup effects are rarely done believably and the results are almost always at least suspect. Marshall went to the effort of finding look-alike actors of approximately correct ages, then had the younger actors dub the voices. The effect is reasonably convincing.

Considerable money and effort was lavished on this production, but problems in the script diminish the effort to a +1 on the -4 to +4 scale.