

economic necessity a writer ought to send out material merely because it's salable. I think he hurts himself; he hurts the field; he hurts the publication in which the material appears. Mere salability is the ethics of a K-Mart. I think writing is an art, and without trying to be too pretentious, I think it ought to

THE MT VOID

Page 2

have a better set of ethics than an army/navy store."

2. Once before the Leeperhouse film festival was dedicated to a filmmaker. That time it was Roger Corman. We showed a documentary about Corman and two films associated with him. Opportunity allows us to do a similar tribute to William Wyler. On Thursday, August 18, at 7 PM we will show a documentary on William Wyler and one of his best-known films.

William Wyler

"Directed by William Wyler" (AMERICAN MASTERS)

BEN HUR (1958) dir. by William Wyler

"Directed by William Wyler" is a comprehensive career biography covering Wyler's films from silent Westerns through F_u_n_n_y_G_i_r_l. Wyler turned out one good film after another, each very different from the others, no two being very much alike. Actors talk about why he was a difficult director to work for and how he achieved his results.

BEN HUR was a spectacle from the days when a spectacle wasn't just a photographic technique. I know, you've already seen BEN HUR...when you were a kid. Well, look again. We are talking about a film that features whole armies on screen, thousands of extras, sea battles, horse races (including the famous chariot race), a lush musical score, beautiful color, and a story that spans more than a generation. And it's got a real story with passion and revenge and love. And, yeah, there is some religion too, but no film is perfect.

William Wyler's films include: T_h_e_T_h_r_e_e (1936), D_o_d_s_w_o_r_t_h (1936), D_e_a_d_E_n_d (1937), J_e_z_e_b_e_l (1938), W_u_t_h_e_r_i_n_g_H_e_i_g_h_t_s (1939), T_h_e_W_e_s_t_e_r_n_e_r (1940), T_h_e_L_i_t_t_l_e_F_o_x_e_s (1941), M_r_s._M_i_n_i_v_e_r (1942), D_e_t_e_c_t_i_v_e_S_t_o_r_y (1951), T_h_e_D_e_s_p_e_r_a_t_e_H_o_u_r_s (1952), F_r_i_e_n_d_l_y

P_e_r_s_u_a_s_i_o_n (1956), T_h_e_B_i_g_C_o_u_n_t_r_y (1958), B_e_n_H_u_r (1958), C_h_i_l_d_r_e_n'_s_H_o_u_r (1962), T_h_e_C_o_l_l_e_c_t_o_r (1965), and F_u_n_n_y_G_i_r_l (1968).

3. Science update: The latest technique for dieting is to have a mantra, preferably rhyming, that you recite when you want food to take your mind off of it. Of course, there are still a few problems with this. Mark, for example, chose "Famous Amos." [-ecl]

Mark Leeper
MT 3E-433 957-5619
...mtgzz!leeper

THE BLOB

A film review by Mark R. Leeper
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Capsule review: Faithful to the original up to a point, then vastly different, the remake of the 1958 version of T_h_e_B_l_o_b has everything modern science fiction audiences want and have gotten entirely too often. It is a flashy but empty film. It has a lot more going for it than the original but it is unlikely to be remembered as fondly in 2018 as the original is in 1988. Rating: 0.

When the original B_l_o_b came out in 1958, it was a film that was in some respects ahead of its time. Not that it was a virtue, but it was one of the first science fiction films that put teenagers not only at the forefront as the main characters but also made them the clearest thinkers of the film--a device to cater to a recognized teenaged audience even then. Also the film was made by an independent production company but released by a major--in this case Paramount--a practice more common today than in the 1950s. One thing that was not 1980-ish about

T_h_e_B_l_o_b was the special effects. At that time most often special effects were expected only to help tell the story, not to be visually believable necessarily, much in the way that little is really visually believable in a marionette show. So, like many of the science fiction films made when science fiction films were hitting their stride but special effects had not yet hit theirs, T_h_e_B_l_o_b is getting a nominal remake in the special-effects-conscious 1980s.

I say a "nominal" remake, because there are some major twists to the story not in the original film. Perhaps Jack Harris--who produced the original and co-produced the remake--felt that the original story was a little slow and simplistic for modern audiences. However, the major "innovation" is one that has been done many enough times that a straighter remake would have made for a more original film overall. Many of the incidents of the original film occur in the remake but in different ways. Shawnee Smith plays Meg Penny, who has seen what the amorphous alien can do, but nobody believes her. The police look at the mostly-consumed body of one of the victims and assume absurdly enough that it is local rebel Brian Flag (played by Kevin Dillon) who killed (and ate?) the unfortunate after a disagreement between the two. I assume some sort of congratulations should go to screenwriters Chuck Russell (who also directed) and Frank Darabont for figuring ways to take the plot of a 30-year-old film and fill it with 1) motor vehicle chases, 2) sex, 3) another retread of the condom-buying scene from S_u_m_m_e_r_o_f'_4_2, 4) heavy armaments, 5) an anti-government social statement, 6) whiz-bang special effects, and 7) rock music.

And whiz-bang special effects they are. The original shapeless glop from outer space did little but roll. The new incarnation also

Blob

August 6, 1988

Page 2

shakes and rattles. It does all kinds of disgusting gooey things that seem to have been inspired by the effects of John Carpenter's T_h_i_n_g. Also, the filmmakers of the new B_l_o_b know how to create some atmospheric photographic effects. So which is the better film? Well, if they are seen back-to-back (which effectively I did), I would say that the original pales next to the remake. That only proves that the remake would have been a memorable film in the 1950s--if it had not been banned for what then would have seemed like too much sex and totally absurd levels of violence. But the original will remain the classic because it stood out from the pack. The remake is just one more of the same kind

of film. Rate it a 0 on the -4 to +4 scale.

WILD CARDS IV: ACES ABROAD edited by George R. R. Martin
Bantam, 1988, ISBN 0-553-27628-X, \$4.50.
A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper
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The premise of the "Wild Cards" series is that after World War II aliens dropped a virus that caused all sorts of mutations. (Space aliens, that is, not German aliens or Japanese aliens.) 90% of the mutations are fatal, but the other 10%--they are the "wild cards." There are two types of "wild cards": There are the "aces," those with valuable powers such as teleportation or great strength. And there "jokers," those whose mutations are disfiguring, such as reptilian skin or feline face. The jokers are outcasts, treated as sub-human by most people, restricted to Jokertown, dumped on by the police--if this sounds familiar, it is. "Strings" (a story in W_i_l_d_C_a_r_d_s_I by Stephen Leigh) is the story of the Jokers' Rights Movement, for example, but it is also many other stories not the least of which would be the Stonewall riot.

So when the authors say:

"And are we so very much better in the enlightened USA, where fundamentalists ... preach that jokers are being punished for their sins? ... No, I'm afraid that they are all preaching the same creed--that our bodies in some sense reflect our souls, that some divine being has taken a direct hand and twisted us into these shapes to signify his pleasure ... or displeasure Most of all, each of them is saying that jokers are different. My own creed is distressingly simple--I believe that jokers and aces and nats are all just men and women and ought to be treated as such. During my dark nights of the soul I wonder if I am the only one left who believes this." (page 126)

we shouldn't be surprised if this sounds relevant to the world today.

Of late, there have been many books dealing with the idea of "otherness" in people around us. W_a_t_c_h_m_e_n is very similar in theme to the "Wild Cards" books, dealing with supermen among us. But other books such as O_r_p_h_a_n_o_f_C_r_e_a_t_i_o_n (which asks if A_u_s_t_r_a_l_o_p_i_t_h_e_c_u_s_b_o_i_s_e_i is a person or an animal), and films such as S_h_o_r_t_C_i_r_c_u_i_t (which deals with whether a machine can be a person) are part of this trend, if trend it is. And one of this year's Hugo-nominated novels, S_e_v_e_n_t_h_S_o_n is set in an alternate universe a couple of hundred years ago in which some people have powers such as telekinesis or telepathy, and because of these powers, they are often treated as outsiders, or the children of Satan. What is distressing is that while fiction seems eager to embrace A_u_s_t_r_a_l_o_p_i_t_h_e_c_u_s_b_o_i_s_e_i and machines as "people," worthy of being treated as such, the real world seems all too willing to lock out even certified H_o_m_o_s_a_p_i_e_n_s from humanity.

As far as the book itself goes, Martin and his co-authors are continuing to modify the method they use to construct it. The first

book was a collection of stories by different authors. The second was a novel written in consecutive sections by different authors. The third was a novel in which each author wrote a different character. This book, the fourth in the series, is the journal of a trip around the world to see how jokers and aces are treated in various countries. Each section is set in a different country and written by a different author. The connecting sections and excerpts from Xavier Desmond's diary have no credited author and may have been written by Martin or some other single author, or jointly by all authors (I tend to believe the diary excerpts have a single author, but that's just a feeling I have).

In terms of quality, I would say that this book ranks up with the first one, and is an improvement over the second and third volumes. I question how much longer this series should run, but that may be my basic prejudice against interminable shared-world series. There is much of value in this series, but I think that even now much of it has been done more than once already and further repetitions will not strengthen it. But it hasn't worn thin in this volume and I recommend it. (Reading the earlier volumes will help understand this one, but is not entirely necessary.)

"We have much in common, jokers and AIDS victims. ... We pariahs need to stick together. Perhaps I can still erect a few necessary bridges before my own Black Queen lies face up on the table." (pages 152-153) Every group, at some time in history, somewhere on this globe, has been the pariahs, the outsiders. It would be a big step forward toward real humanity if we would remember this.

ORPHAN OF CREATION by Roger MacBride Allen
Baen, 1988, ISBN 0-671-65356-3, \$3.50.
A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper
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Barbara Marchando is a paleontologist who reads in her great-great-grandfather's diary of "Beasts" brought in to work the fields alongside the slaves. She determines to dig up the bones of these beasts, curious as to whether they were gorillas or some other type of ape. She discovers, instead, that they were _ A_ u_ s_ t_ r_ a_ l_ o_ p_ i_ t_ h_ e_ c_ u_ s_ b_ o_ i_ s_ e_ i brought from Africa in 1851, and furthermore, there are still _ A_ u_ s_ t_ r_ a_ l_ o_ p_ i_ t_ h_ e_ c_ u_ s_ b_ o_ i_ s_ e_ i alive in Africa today. Are they animals? Are they people? Are they something in between? What will this do to the theory of evolution or to creationism? How will it be resolved?

All these are interesting questions and were when Vercors wrote his novel _ Y_ o_ u_ S_ h_ a_ l_ l_ K_ n_ o_ w_ T_ h_ e_ m in the 1950s, asking the same questions. Though _ O_ r_ p_ h_ a_ n_ o_ f_ C_ r_ e_ a_ t_ i_ o_ n does show us the inner workings of paleontology, it adds nothing to the basic premise that Vercors might have missed. Even the film loosely based on _ Y_ o_ u_ S_ h_ a_ l_ l_ K_ n_ o_ w_ T_ h_ e_ m, _ S_ k_ u_ l_ l_ d_ u_ g_ g_ e_ r_ y, covered the territory as well. Add to these the fact the

H. Beam Piper's LittleFuzzy was a more science fictional reworking of the same theme, and you begin to wonder why Allen (or is it MacBride Allen) even bothered. Oh, he throws in some editorializing on slavery and "creation science" (he's against them), but in paleontological terms, he's not digging any new ground. His characters, with the possible exception of Marchando, exist as caricatures brought in solely to solve some plot problem, and even Marchando somehow does not ring true. The book seems to be presented as a book of ideas. Is science fiction so well-mined a field that no new ideas exist?

(Oh, and a minor complaint not directed at the author, but at the publisher: the cover photograph is beautiful; why scrunch it down into only one corner of the cover?)

LINCOLN'S DREAMS by Connie Willis
Bantam Spectra, 1988, ISBN 0-553-27025-7, \$3.95.
A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper
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Jeff Johnston is a researcher for an author of Civil War novels. He meets Annie, who is having dreams--not her dreams, but Robert E. Lee's dreams. (Lincoln's dreams figure in the novel also, but not as strongly. I guess Lincoln'sDreams makes a better title than

_ L_ e_ e'_ s_ D_ r_ e_ a_ m_ s.) Reading this novel, you learn a lot about the Civil War and not much about dreams (except that everyone has a theory as to what they are and no one knows for sure). I felt as if I _ s_ h_ o_ u_ l_ d enjoy this book, and I suppose I did, but I can't say it's a good book. In some strange fashion, it seems as if it was written as a film rather than a book, complete with gauzy visions of Lee's Arlington and disjointed images of battles.

I'm no expert on the Civil War, so I will just say that that aspect of the book appears well-researched. But some of the other parts are unsatisfying. Annie's doctor friend never comes alive as more than a plot device. Jeff's employer is two-dimensional and serves mostly to introduce the main characters and then disappear from the scene, though continuing to give Jeff information via phone messages to keep the plot moving. After a while, the long historical explanations began to grate--they reminded me too much of the old "scientist explaining to his girlfriend how his new anti-gravity machine works" technique. In short, for me this book was a misfire.

LOVING LITTLE EGYPT by Thomas McMahon
Penguin, 1988 (1987c) ISBN 0-14-009331-1, \$6.95.
A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper
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This is a work of fiction. Just because in it Nikola Tesla invents a machine that could shake a building to rubble doesn't mean that he really did. Unfortunately, it also means that just because in it Edison gets his comeuppance, it doesn't mean that he did so in real life.

Neither of these people is the main character of L_o_v_i_n_g_L_i_t_t_l_e_E_g_y_p_t: Little Egypt is. No, not the dancer, but an almost blind telephone hacker of the early 1920s. He has discovered how to work through all the switches and operators to make the telephone system do whatever he wants. And now he finds out that the telephone company is going to change their switching system to something even easier to break into. Not everyone is as honest as he is; not everyone is as careful not to destroy anything. (In this respect, he seems almost patterned after Bill Landreth, who in his book O_u_t_o_f_t_h_e_I_n_n_e_r_C_i_r_c_l_e decries the destructive tendencies of many hackers, while claiming that he and the rest of the inner circle were interested only in the challenge and were careful never to damage anything.) But Little Egypt can't get the telephone company to listen to him. So he decides to get help: from Alexander Graham Bell, from Nikola Tesla, from anyone he can find.

For those of us who are interested in telephone and computer security, this book will be particularly interesting, though I'm not sure I believe even half of the methods Little Egypt supposedly uses (a copper bullwhip lashed around the lines to eavesdrop on conversations? really?). The main strength of L_o_v_i_n_g_L_i_t_t_l_e_E_g_y_p_t, however, is the development of the characters. McMahon draws his characters far more thoroughly than most other science fiction authors (and, yes, it is science fiction, by any reasonable definition). He doesn't do it by slighting the technical aspects (though, as I say, they are extremely fanciful), but by not being afraid to make his characters quirky. Perhaps many science fiction authors, wary of being accused of drawing characters with "funny hats," have shied away from any sort of characterization at all. My only objection to McMahon's characters is that the character of the blind (or near-blind) telephone hacker is becoming something of a cliché these days.

For people in the telecommunications industry, for people in the computer industry, and for people just looking for a fun book which takes a sideways look at the early history of electricity and telephony, L_o_v_i_n_g_L_i_t_t_l_e_E_g_y_p_t is highly recommended.

SAURIAN by William Schoell
Leisure, 1988, (ISBN), (price).
A book review by Mark R. Leeper
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Every once in a while you find a real jaw-dropper of a novel, a novel that is compelling reading just because you cannot believe that anyone would commit such a stupid idea to paper. Well, the most amazing novel I have read for a good long time is S a u r i a n by William Schoell. It's sort of a horror novel about a dinosaur stomping and eating people today. "Fun stuff," I told myself, "Godzilla for adults, right?" Well, it might have been. But realize that the author did not make it just any dinosaur; he invented his own breed, a Gargantasaurus. Not absurd enough? Okay, how's this: it is supposed to be the largest animal that ever lived and it walks like an iguana. No true dinosaur that ever lived walked like an iguana, but this one does. It smashes people, then licks them off its paws. Not weird enough? It's not just a dinosaur, it's a were-dinosaur. The thing changes back and forth from an animal hundreds of feet high to a human. Ready for more? It has this shape-changing ability because it is really from outer space and it gets its mass to grow from energy like sunlight. Can you take a little more? We are told all this only because one woman knows all about the Gargantasaurus and she knows it because she has a race memory of the creatures. She is descended from alien were-dinosaurs and her race memory tell her about their powers. This is the silliest novel I have read since T h e F a m i n e by John Creasey. In that book a worldwide famine was caused by a scourge of rabbits, but they turned out to be millions of little men in little rabbit suits. Honest! That may have been sillier, but I doubt it. You can decide.

We get to see inside the mind of a were-dinosaur. We share precious family memories like that all-important first transformation to a dinosaur. Daddy--in human form--took son out swimming and arranged for son to nearly drown. To save himself, son must become a dinosaur. You know, you never forget that first time you turn into a prehistoric animal with a head "the size of 20 bull elephants."

Then there all all the wonderful new options dinosaurhood brings.
Like in making love, you can do it the traditional way or transform and
literally eat your partner.

Yes, at last there is a new horror writer who rivals Guy N. Smith,
author of _ T_ h_ e_ S_ u_ c_ k_ i_ n_ g_ P_ i_ t and the man-eating crab novels.