

1. In Lincroft on Wednesday, February 1, they are discussin Charles Sheffield's B_e_t_w_e_e_n_t_h_e_S_t_r_o_k_e_s_o_f_N_i_g_h_t and parallel universes. In a parallel universe to ours, someone may have sent me a description of the book, but in t_h_i_s universe I have gotten

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nothing. I do know that Sheffield gave a very interesting talk at Rider College about various ways of powering starships, but that probably has nothing to do with the book. [-ecl]

2. Back in 1965 the people who were making the James Bond films wanted to start up another series of spy stories, one with a slightly more realistic bent. They started adapting the novels of another popular spy novelist Len Deighton. They had to invent a name for the spy, however, since the books are told in the first person without ever naming the main character. And thus the Harry Palmer series, starring Michael Caine, was born. They did two good spy films and for the third, THE BILLION DOLLAR BRAIN (1967) they gave the directing job to Ken Russell who turned it into a not-very-good art film that died at the box-office and killed the series along with it. Our next Leeperhouse film fest, 7 PM, February 2, will show the two series entries that really were good. The Palmer films fall just about halfway between the realism of John LeCarre and the action of James Bond.

Harry Palmer, Back-to-Back
THE IPCRESS FILE (1965) dir. by Sidney J. Furie
FUNERAL IN BERLIN (1966) dir. by Guy Hamilton

In IPCRESS FILE, ex-convict Palmer is involuntarily transferred to a new boss to investigate the disappearance of several important scientists. Palmer isn't pleased, but as usual nobody has asked him. The plot twists come a little thick to tell much more than that. (Also the plot is complex enough that I am not really sure I remember what happens next!)

I will tell you that in FUNERAL IN BERLIN that Harry has been sent to Berlin to arrange for the escape and defection of a high-ranking Russian security officer, played by Oscar Homolka with almost as much laconic humor as Caine puts into Palmer. It seems a recent

rash of escapes to West Berlin has made things a little hot for Homolka and it is time he arranges one such escape for himself.

Harry Palmer is a sort of thinking-man's James Bond. I have never forgiven Ken Russell for killing the series.

Mark Leeper
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My atheism, like that of Spinoza, is true piety toward the universe and denies only gods fashioned by man in their own image, to be servants of their human interests; and that even in this denial I am no rude iconoclast, but full of secret sympathy with the impulses of idolators.

-- George Santayana

Book reviews by by Arthur Kaletzky
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THE BYWORLDER by Poul Anderson
1971, Signet, \$2.95, ISBN 0451152999

This is a disappointing short novel, which took me a long time to read. It is probably a good buy in a departure lounge, particularly on snowy days. The plot concerns a libertarian hippie drifter who is unbelievably bright and has connections which rival the Mafia and the Secret Service, a researcher who happens to be female, inhibited but with an intense sexuality (guess what happens?) and an alien who must be the worst candidate for an extraterrestrial first contact imaginable. These might have been good material for a humorous short story. Maybe that is what Anderson originally intended, but there is very little humour unless the reader laughs at the novel's construction, characters, padding, etc. There is lots of machismo and violence but I would have preferred a few laughs and new ideas.

THERE WILL BE TIME by Poul Anderson
1973, Signet, \$2.95, ISBN 0451154126

A boy in the Midwest shortly after World War II gradually discovers that he can travel through time, more or less at will. The boy gradually gets used to his abnormality and then finds others in a with similar abilities - the story of his contacting the other time travellers is probably the best part of the book. The hero is then introduced to a time travellers organization (c.f. T_h_e_E_n_d_o_f_E_t_e_r_n_i_t_y and Dr. Who's time lords) which, of course, tries to control history. Predictably, the organization becomes corrupted by its power, the hero rebels, is made to suffer, takes his vengeance and saves history. This is a pleasant little book, and the idea that time travel may be enabled by a recessive gene rather than requiring a time machine is a good one. Overall, this book is not nearly as good as Anderson's famous writing - do not expect the quality of T_a_u_Z_e_r_o, T_h_e_R_e_b_e_l_W_o_r_l_d_s or A_f_t_e_r_D_o_o_m_s_d_a_y. It does have Anderson's annoying grammar, which might be reasonable in the past or the future, but sounds ridiculous in scenes set in the 1960's.

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NEANDERTHALS ed. by Robert Silverberg et. al.
1987, Signet, \$3.95, ISBN 045114762

Many readers would argue that the short story is the basic and most important form of SF writing. Ideas can be presented succinctly, the existence of a body of genre conventions enables the text to be briefer, and more densely packed with the truly new and interesting, than the mainstream story and the story seems to be much more readily convertible to other media than the novel. Depth of character (characterisation), a

perennial problem for SF writers, is usually much less important. The real problem of the SF short story is how to deliver it to the reader.

The traditional way, of course, is the pulp SF magazine. The biggest shortcoming of these is that the reader only gets a choice of what is on the newsstand (or in the mail) this month, or what is already in her (or her friends') possession. There are also collections (by a single author) and anthologies, which are usually "Best of 19xx".

This book is a kind of anthology new to me - all the stories deal with the same subject. This seems to be an excellent idea, the book was a pleasure to read and I hope it is the forerunner of many similar efforts. The title is actually too restrictive, as there are as many Cro-Magnons in the anthology as Neanderthals, but this is quibbling. The devoted SF fan will probably already be familiar with most of them, such as Asimov's "Ugly Little Boy" and Farmer's "Alley Man." If you are, the book is still an excellent gift to those who are not so fortunate. In any case, there is a very good story by Charles Sheffield, which was new to me, a Poul Anderson piece which was quite good, and a good sarcastic story by Avram Davidson. A foreword by Asimov and an elegant, non-fiction afterword by Silverberg rounds out the volume, which contains 11 stories.

The packaging of this book leads me to believe there will more of these single-subject anthologies (should they be called fiction monographs?) and I, for one, would applaud the idea.

SHERLOCK HOLMES ON THE ROOF OF THE WORLD by Thomas Kent Miller

Rosemill, 1987, ISBN 0-944872-50-6, \$4.95.

A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper

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S_h_e_r_l_o_c_k_H_o_l_m_e_s_o_n_t_h_e_R_o_o_f_o_f_t_h_e_W_o_r_l_d is a minor addition to Sherlockiana. Miller sets up a scenario where Holmes meets Horace Holly, the protagonist of H. Rider Haggard's S_h_e--or rather, Holly meets Holmes, since it is told from the point of view of Leo Vincey, Holly's companion. Holmes is never called by that name; he is Sigerson, the Norwegian explorer, placing this story during the period between the episode at Reichenbach Falls and the "Adventure of the Empty House." The mystery Holmes solves is not particularly interesting, though the motive postulated shows some imagination. The story--too short to be called a novel--spends too much time in the background of the Haggard characters, particularly for those readers unfamiliar with the Ayesha stories. For Holmes completists only.

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KING & JOKER by Peter Dickinson

Pantheon, 1976, ISBN 0-394-71600-0, \$2.95.

A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper

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K_i_n_g_&_J_o_k_e_r is an alternate history mystery. The alternate history aspect is slight: what might have happened if King Edward VII's son Albert Victor hadn't died young and had gone on to become king of England instead of George V? Well, according to Dickinson, not much different than what did happen--the same wars and conflicts, the same technology, the same economy. So why suppose it? Without giving too much away, let me say that Dickinson needed to set up some relationships in _h_i_s royal family that don't exist in the current royal family.

While Dickinson is considered a good author, I found the characters in K_i_n_g_&_J_o_k_e_r unconvincing, the plot twists extremely unconvincing, and the whole book a disappointment.

I'M GONNA GIT YOU, SUCKA
A film review by Mark R. Leeper
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[The following review uses frank language to describe the film I'_m_G_o_n_n_a_G_i_t_Y_o_u,_S_u_c_k_a. If you feel you may be offended, you may wish not to read the review.]

Shiiiiit! Hey, brother, you jiv'n me? I mean I was spectin' this to be one bad-ass film. I mean the way some of the brothers were talkin' this shit was supposed to be like...what was that other thing? Like A_i_r_p_l_a_n_e! Yeah! Like, man, no way! I mean these muthah-fuckers who made this thing don't got what it takes to cut it. I mean like no-fuckin-how.

Well, shit. Like, it wasn't all bad. Some of it was cool. I mean the story had wha-cha-call possibilities. I mean this dude gets out of the Army to find his brother gold-chained to death. That could happen. Shit, something like that happened to this dude I know. But then this story started messin' around with this big muther-fuckin crime lord called Mr. Big. Now you know and I know no muther-fucker is gonna go anywhere with a name like Mr. Big. Shit. They gonna be more brothers laughin' at him than at fuckin Eddie Murphy.

So, like this dude has one badass mother. I mean like when this bitch gets mad she goes all the way! Anyway, turns out she used to be like the main squeeze of this guy who was like Shaft, only his name was Slade. And like when Slade hears what's been goin' down he starts actin' like the bald guy in that M_a_g_n_i_f_i_c_e_n_t_S_o_m_e_t_h_i_n_g movie. Like, shit, he starts gettin' a bunch of mean brothers together to go in and wipe out this Mr. Big. Well, shit, he gets guys like Isaac Hayes and Jim Brown. And, like there's a bunch of funky shit goin down, like makin' fun of other movies. And that's cool. But there just ain't enough of the funny shit and there ain't enough of the fightin' shit. No way, brother. Now you want to see some good shit, fuck I'_m_G_o_n_n_a_G_i_t_Y_o_u_S_u_c_k_a and go see D_a_n_g_e_r_o_u_s_L_i_a_i_s_o_n_s. Shit.

[Grammar checked by Ed Knowles who is one cool brother.]

TORCH SONG TRILOGY
A film review by Mark R. Leeper
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Capsule review: Disappointing window into the gay sex life shows a lot of the same elements as a straight sex life. A film with interesting and even poignant moments but overall neither interesting nor poignant.
Rating: low +1.

Let me be clear at the outset where I am coming from on T_o_r_c_h_S_o_n_g
T_r_i_l_o_g_y. I don't condemn the "I-Love-you, you-left-me, I-hate-you, I-miss-you, you-want-to-come-back, I-don't-want-you-back" sort of film, but it doesn't do much for me either. Perhaps it is because there has not been a lot of sexual turmoil in my life, but any such machinations more complex than those in C_a_s_a_b_l_a_n_c_e will almost never strike any kind of responsive chord in me. I will generally find these films pretty fatuous and dull. Even Woody Allen failed to pull me into M_a_n_h_a_t_t_a_n and T_o_r_c_h_S_o_n_g_T_r_i_l_o_g_y's Harvey Fierstein is no Woody Allen.

Originally this story was three hour-long one-act plays by Fierstein: "The International Stud," "Fugue in a Nursery," and "Widows and Children First." In 1982 the three semi-autobiographical plays were performed back-to-back as a single play, T_o_r_c_h_S_o_n_g_T_r_i_l_o_g_y. Fierstein himself starred, which must have made him awfully difficult to direct.

How do you tell someone acting out scenes from his own life that he isn't doing it right? In any case, the story covers about ten years in the life of a gay man who is a female impersonator and later a playwright. It is mostly about how he comes to terms with the men in his life and his mother. Once again Fierstein is played by Fierstein, the lovers are played by Brian Kerwin and Matthew Broderick, and the mother is played by Anne Bancroft.

While the play was considered an insightful and honest view into gay sex life, much of what we see in the film could apply to any sort of relationship that society frowns on: inter-racial, inter-class, ever inter-faith. We are constantly aware that the characters are gay but we do not really see much of how losing a lover of the same sex is different from losing one of the opposite sex that your parents didn't like. There is the added complication that you could conceivably lose one lover to another--which I suppose could not happen in a set of purely straight relationships--but most of the situations set up are gay people in standard situations. Whenever you put four people in a house of whom three pairs have been lovers you expect problems, for example.

There are definite problems with some of the writing. One has the feeling that Fierstein is washing his family's dirty linen in public. It is as if we are paying to be an audience for Fierstein giving his mother what-for. And some of his speeches are just a little too well-

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formed to be off-the-cuff. It is as if he is turning his "what-I-should-have-said" into "I-said." Also, the passage of time seems to be inadequately handled. The characters talk about how they age, but they do not appear to. Given that this is not really a type of film I think I can fairly judge, I would rate

+1 on the -4 to +4 scale.

