

Lay's potato chips. I flip it over and what do I read?
"Ingredients: Potatoes [natch!], vegetable oil" (Hey, that sounds innocent enough--Mazola or something like that, right?) Wrong! It continues with "(contains one or more of the following: cottonseed oil, ...)." Well, gang, that's it That's their main oil or it

wouldn't be listed first. You eat a Lay's potato chip and you are eating cotton. You think Lay's is the only one? We have three different brands of chips in the house--I won't go into why it happened; it happened perfectly innocently. Each one lists as its main oil cottonseed oil.

So in the wild 1980s you really do eat cotton. Okay, so maybe they can make something edible from cotton, you say. Well, my understanding is that they can spray all sorts of stuff on growing cotton that they can't spray on food plants. How come? Well, nobody east cotton, see? well, nobody who doesn't eat crackers or chips. Hey, somebody's doing some first-class thinking out there.

And have you t_a_s_t_e_d a Lay's potato chip recently? They have the slogan, "Bet you can't eat just one!" I'd take that bet. The real question is, can you eat a whole one yourself. I remember when Lay's potato chips tasted good. And these were the people who complained that Pringles weren't r_e_a_l potato chips. I don't know what they Lay's like now, but it sure isn't potato chips. So how much longer do you think it will be before you start getting Peter Paul Cotton Balls?

2. This year's Nebula winners are:

Grand Master: Ray Bradbury

Novel: FALLING FREE, Lois McMaster Bujold

Novella: "The Last of the Winnebagos," Connie Willis
(IASFM, July 1988)

Novelette: "Schrodinger's Kitten," George Alec Effinger
(OMNI, Sept 1988)

Short Story: "Bible Stories for Adults, No. 17: The Deluge,"
James Morrow (FULL SPECTRUM)

3. From sci.space: "Dr. Brian T. Clifford (Pentagon) announced 10-5-82 that cases of citizen-extraterrestrial contact were illegal

under Title 14, Section 1211 of the Code of Federal Regulations (and adopted 7-16-69, a few days before the first moon landing). The Code specifies up to a year in jail and a 5000 dollar fine. The NASA authorities can examine you to determine if you have been 'ET exposed,' and can impose an indefinite quarantine which cannot be broken, even by court order."

So remember this next time you're approached by an alien from outer space! [-ecl]

4. The attached theatre reviews of M_e_t_r_o_p_o_l_i_s, A_W_a_l_k_i_n_t_h_e_W_o_o_d_s, and L_e_s_L_i_a_i_s_o_n_s_D_a_n_g_e_r_e_u_s_e_s are from our recent trip to London. [-ecl]

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The only way to learn is by changing your mind. --Orson Scott Card

FULL SPECTRUM edited by Lou Aronica and Shawna McCarthy
Bantam Spectra, 1988, ISBN 0-553-27482-1, \$4.95.
A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper
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Well, this is certainly the most talked about anthology of 1988, and of quite a while before that. It contains one Nebula winner and three Hugo nominees, so it will obviously be a best-seller (as anthologies go). Yet I was less than entirely satisfied with it.

First, the good points. There were several good-to-excellent stories, including Jack McDevitt's "The Fort Moxie Branch" (with the book's now-famous typo of labeling it "The Fourth Moxie Branch"), Thomas M. Disch's "Voices of the Kill," Walton Simons's "Ghost Ship" (yet another Titanic story, but a more evocative one than most), Lisa Goldstein's "My Year with the Aliens" (though it was somewhat predictable), and Pat Murphy's "Dead Men on TV."

There were the usual set of mid-range (average) stories. Jack Massa's "Prayerware" is of interest to computer types, but not

outstanding. Nancy Kress's "Philippa's Hands" and Charles Oberndorf's "Mannequins" reminded me of a "Twilight Zone" story (or maybe a "Tales from the Darkside"--at any rate, a television anthology type of story). (This seems to be true of a lot of stories these days.) Elissa Malcohn's "Moments of Clarity" was an interesting idea, but nowhere near the bombshell that the editors claimed. Most of the other stories I don't mention here are okay--nothing great, but worth a read.

Countering this are such disappointments as Andrew Weiner's "This Is the Year Zero." Whether intentionally or not, this is basically the story of the Pol Pot takeover in Kampuchea presented as science fiction. Rewriting a historical event as science fiction rarely results in good science fiction, no matter how tragic the event. Lewis Shiner's "Oz" is of no value that I can determine. (Fred Bals's "Once in a Lullaby" was equally bizarre, but at least had the virtue of charm.)

Gregory Benford's "Proselytes" strikes me as racist, and while I know it's a mistake to try to assign a character's beliefs or words to the author, it seems to me that Benford must take at least some of the blame for identifying all of Islam with its more violent proponents. This is particularly disturbing in that it promotes the currently popular view that Islam is a religion of violence and all its adherents want to convert the world by the sword. As the current joke goes, the Ayatollah has decided to deal with Salman Rushdie in a more Christian manner, and is just looking for where he can put the stake without starting a fire in an oil well. People who live in glass houses....

Norman Spinrad's "Journals of the Plague Years" has been analyzed by far better reviewers than myself already, so I can merely concur with

most of their criticisms. Bigelow, the main character, having found a cure/inoculation for the AIDS virus(es) which are sweeping the country (which he does in about a month working on his own, while whole teams of researchers working for years have found nothing), inoculates himself against the disease. This cure is designed to be transmitted in the same way as the disease. He then decides to protect his wife and son. But he concludes the only way to pass the protection to his wife is by raping her, and the reader is supposed to sympathize with how bad he feels about having to do this. To protect his son, he goes to even more baroque lengths--he hires a prostitute to have sex with him and then a

couple of days later, with his son. Now first of all, the cure is transmitted in the same way as the disease. But the primary method of transmission of AIDS now is through infected blood (mostly between intravenous drug users). Even assuming some sudden needle shortage that Spinrad fails to mention, Bigelow should be able to pass it through infected blood somehow. (It certainly seems to be transmissible enough that one session guarantees its passage.) Secondly, Spinrad seems determined to show us that a plague requires drastic means to contain it--Bigelow is willing to rape his wife (he doesn't tell her that he has the cure for reasons too flimsy to stand up) and this is "necessary." But Bigelow's (adult) son k_n_o_w_s his father has the cure, so one would imagine Spinrad would have Bigelow use the same method, minus the force. But no, that would be incest and homosexuality and even to save his son's life those are evil--rape is okay, but homosexuality between consenting adults is not, according to Spinrad. I find this moral structure odd, and Spinrad doesn't convince me of its necessity. And without its necessity, the force of the novella is lost. By making his "unpleasant choices" too easy to refute, he destroys the message he seems to intend--that sometimes unpleasant choices a_r_e necessary.

On the whole, I almost have to recommend the book--it contains many of the major stories of 1988. But it also contains some of the major disappointments.

IVORY by Mike Resnick
Tor, 1988, ISBN 0-312-93093-3, \$17.95.
A book review by Mark R. Leeper
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There is a 1942 movie called T_a_l_e_s_o_f_M_a_n_h_a_t_t_a_n that is a set of short stories--nearly unrelated--that follows a single dress shirt into and out of several people's lives. I think there was a made-for-television film that did the same thing with a handgun. Mike Resnick's 1988 novel I_v_o_r_y is a collection of what are, for the most part, unrelated short stories tracking the history of one of the great game trophies of all time, a pair of huge tusks taken from what has come to be known as "The Kilimanjaro Elephant." There are about ten short stories and one connecting story about a computer researcher hired to track down the tusks by finding historical references to them.

Resnick seems to have been consciously writing in the style of Asimov's "Foundation" trilogy. Asimov sectioned his trilogy into stories with titles such as "The Encyclopedists," "The General," and "The Mule." Resnick's stories have titles such as "The Gambler," "The Warlord," "The Thief," and "The Hunter." Further, like Asimov, Resnick tells his stories primarily through dialogue. Particularly in the earlier stories you experience the action through someone talking about it. Resnick gets off on the wrong foot by having the first story be an unimaginative game of poker--or some future equivalent of poker--with the tusks as stakes. This is very possibly the most unimaginative story one could think of of how the tusks might change hands. Have faith however, reader, the stories do get better--never good enough to really stand on their own, but the whole of I_v_o_r_y is better than the sum of its parts.

Resnick does have a disturbing habit of reusing names from the last fifty years of African history over a span of at least the next 6000 years. How many road names do we have today named for Egyptian pharaohs or buildings named for Babylonian kings? Also, there are many references and allusions to the last fifty years of African history but apparently none for the fifty years from 3000 to 3500 A.D. It's like the old S_t_a_r_T_r_e_k series constantly referring to the 20th Century and rarely to the 21st.

I_v_o_r_y is not a book you will long remember having read. It is at best diverting. It is one of those mid-range books that will be quickly forgotten and that do not lead to very positive or very negative reviews.

WATCHERS by Dean R. Koontz
Berkley, 1988, ISBN 0-425-10746-9, \$4.95.
A book review by Mark R. Leeper
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To make a long story short, Dean R. Koontz is one of the new breed of horror writers that specializes in making short stories long. He will take a story that a Richard Matheson might have told us in forty pages and turn it into a 500-page novel. He does this by expanding on the characters, without really improving the readers' knowledge of them. As in the television soap operas, a character will get sick and we will spend forty or so pages getting him well, meeting his doctor, and seeing how he behaves when he is sick; then the plot will course as if nothing had happened. Then there are the repetitions. W_a_t_c_h_e_r_s has a psychopathic killer who gets an energy charge when he kills that is described with an electrical zap. Now Koontz could have been blatant and told you that right off. He didn't, so I missed that point on the first killing and caught it on the second killing. I need not have been so clever. I could have waited and gotten it on the third or fifth or even the seventh gratuitous killing. I think Koontz was waiting until nobody could miss the pattern that there was always an electrical zap at the moment of killing.

Given that one complaint, I have to say I rather enjoyed W_a_t_c_h_e_r_s. The story deals with two escapees from a nasty military-industrial complex research company doing vile experiments in genetic engineering. One is a dog with human intelligence but all the virtues of a dog: loyalty, courage, strength. The other is called "The Outsider" for not very satisfying reasons. Also not very satisfying are the reasons the Outsider feels a need to kill in general and to kill the dog in particular. Einstein, as the dog is called, befriends human Travis Cornell and only slowly lets him know which of the two is smarter.

Einstein brings together Travis and a mousy woman named Nora who blooms in her relationship with Travis. Now how can anyone not like a story of a likable woman coming out of her shell and a loyal and friendly and super-smart dog? Koontz, who is becoming known as a best-selling writer, can tell a good story and interest the reader in his

characters. I don't think many people will feel cheated after having read W a t c h e r s, but how many will remember the story a week later is another matter.

GRAY VICTORY by Robert Skimin

St. Martin's Press, 1989 (1988c), ISBN 0-312-91375-3, \$4.95.

A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper

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This is half Civil War buff's novel masquerading as an alternate history novel, half actual alternate history. That is to say, about two hundred pages are devoted to the alternate history aspect and about two hundred pages to an in-depth analysis of the battle of Gettysburg, why it turned out the way it did, what might have made it different. Yes, in this alternate history it is n o t Gettysburg that is the turning point that lets the South win the Civil War, but a change in a later event in history: Davis did not send Hood to defend Atlanta, but left Johnston there instead. So Atlanta held out, Lincoln was defeated in 1864, and the rest was alternate history.

This is being marketed as historical fiction ("An Epic Saga, A Passionate Struggle--and a South That Never Fell..."), so naturally there's a fair amount of sex and related shenanigans. All this leaves less time for the most interesting part of the book--the plot to assassinate the Confederate leaders and bring about a slave uprising. Towards the end I found myself skimming (no pun on the author's name intended) the long descriptions of Gettysburg being given as evidence at the inquiry into possible incompetence or treason on the part of J. E. B. ("Jeb") Stuart, and concentrating on the uprising plot. This did keep me interested, with vivid characters and a well-maintained level of

tension. Unlike R_e_m_e_m_b_e_r_G_e_t_t_y_s_b_u_r_g!, which in my opinion had nothing to offer a person who was not a Civil War buff, this novel would be of interest to the average science fiction reader. (Well, probably more to American science fiction readers than those in other parts of the world.) It's just a pity that there is so much battle detail, especially since I suspect the Civil War buffs will find the uprising part of little interest. Still, if Skimin can sell to two different audiences and keep both reasonably satisfied, he's much better off financially if not artistically.

SEE YOU IN THE MORNING
A film review by Mark R. Leeper
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Capsule review: At last we are starting to see three-dimensional people with genuine problems returning to films. S_e_e_Y_o_u_i_n_t_h_e_M_o_r_n_i_n_g overcomes some narrative problems to tell a believable slice-of-life story. Rating: low +2.

Fifteen years ago there were a lot of films like S_e_e_Y_o_u_i_n_t_h_e_M_o_r_n_i_n_g. Three years ago it was much more of a rarity, at least from United States films. Now, knock wood, we are starting to see a few more

films from the American film industry that admit there are problems in life that cannot be solved by a karate kick, by a machine gun, or by winning the big race or a dance competition. I have to admit to being partial toward the former sort of film since none of my problems ever seem amenable to the latter sorts of solutions. _ S _ e _ e _ Y _ o _ u _ i _ n _ t _ h _ e

_ M _ o _ r _ n _ i _ n _ g

is about re-marriage--not actually one of my problems, thank God. It is about the strains that frustrate second marriages. The principal characters here are not real people--the widow of a famous concert pianist, the ex-husband of a famous covergirl--but they are real-ish.

The story is somewhat convoluted. It begins by showing two marriages with problems starting, then jumps forward three years to when Beth, the wife from one marriage, is marrying Larry, the husband from the other. Then for 45 minutes or so flashbacks fill the audience in on the interim, then the film continues linearly. This disorients the viewer, who is not always sure when a scene is taking place. Larry meets Beth at a party and discovers all they have in common. To start with, they each have a headache. About a third of the film is spent showing how Larry courts Beth, as often as not with cockeyed stunts. Then the film gets down to the serious question of whether a man can be grafted onto a family that has lost a father. We see this question from almost every aspect and angle, making one wonder if writer/director Alan Pakula has not actually been through it all. We see the jealousy of the previous spouses, we see how the children react to the step-father, we see the half-hidden urge to return to former spouses. While some of the stunts early on seem a little stagey, for most of the film the characters behave in very human ways. You see warm human moments, and cold spiteful ones.

Larry, a successful psychiatrist played by Jeff Bridges, does his earnest best to overcome rejection by his second family. Not everything works for him the way it does in the movies. He makes mistakes with the best of intentions sometimes. Alice Krige plays Beth. She may be a little glamorous as a photographer who gets offered trips to Russia and who always looks like Candice Bergen at her best. Around them are a collection of people well-drawn and each unique. This one is worth seeing. I give it a low +2 on the -4 to +4 scale.

METROPOLIS

A West End theatre review by Mark R. Leeper

There is an old adage that says well begun is half done. Well, clearly with M_e_t_r_o_p_o_l_i_s somebody began well and then went to lunch and never came back. The first ten minutes are almost worth the price of admission. The last ten minutes, on the other hand, more than offset the first and it's the last ten minutes that people will remember as much as they'd like to forget them.

M_e_t_r_o_p_o_l_i_s is supposedly based on the 1926 Fritz Lang film and admittedly there a_r_e a few undeniable similarities in the plot, but not enough. On the face of it, adapting the Fritz Lang classic to the stage seems doomed from the start. M_e_t_r_o_p_o_l_i_s worked by the scale of its production: its huge sets, its cast of thousands, and its spectacle. Its story and its human drama were weak and the plot really makes no sense. In short, its weaknesses were precisely the things you might do well on a stage, but its strengths are precisely what would be lost by transition. One can do all sorts of amazing things on the stage, but adapting M_e_t_r_o_p_o_l_i_s does not seem as if it is one of them, and even less so after seeing this attempt.

Lang's film, inspired by seeing the New York City skyline and presumably by reading H. G. Wells's future history works, tells a story of a world stratified into an effete ruling class living above ground and a working class living below ground in slavery-like conditions. The play goes a step further, claiming that with Earth's resources depleted, the city has returned to human labor. Interesting, though since almost all the labor we see done could be done far cheaper by silicon chips, the slavery takes on the aspect of charitable make-work.

The city is ruled over by John Freeman (Frederson in the film), who hatches several plots more cruel than logical to maintain his control. One of the joys of the film is his relationship with the mad alchemist/scientist Rotwang, a fine screen villain. The play replaced Rotwang with a mousy scientist here called Warren. If the name "Warren" seems less intriguing than the name "Rotwang," that is just how the characters seem. This play is not big enough for two villains, so sadly the film's most interesting character is lost. The play is built around Freeman's villainy and a tyranny that knows no bounds. At one point he seems even to be able to choose who the best-liked poop-stars will be. I can imagine what would happen if New York mayor Ed Koch tried to start dictating who would be the popular recording artists in New York City. Freeman is played by Brian Blessed making the best of a badly written role. When the script calls on him to sing a solo while blowing up his own city, even his best is not sufficient.

Freeman's son--here called Steven--is supposed to look sympathetic and appealing, so he has been dressed unimaginatively to look like Rod Stewart in a jacket with rolled sleeves. Judy Kuhn plays Maria and the robot Futura. A better actress could have been the focal point of the whole play, but she is just not quirky enough somehow as the robot and not particularly inspiring as the leader of the worker activists.

Visually the story has been scaled down and elements of cheap science fiction scripts have been added to fill the vacuum. The most successful piece of scaling is the huge machine set that opens the play. One machine 20 feet high with two levels of walkways virtually fills the stage. It is rumored that they needed to excavate under theatre to add extra support under the stage. The film's huge elevators have been replaced by elevator tubes, which are used as often as the script would allow. To simulate the electronic effects of the film, especially the creation of the robot, laser lightshow effects are used. These are mostly prosaic loops of light and figure-eights. However, since the scene is filled with dry-ice mist, it is rather obvious that they are being projected and where the laser is. The film's water effects are replaced by unoriginal fireworks a la _ V _ o _ y _ a _ g _ e _ t _ o _ t _ h _ e _ B _ o _ t _ t _ o _ m _ o _ f _ t _ h _ e _ S _ e _ a .

And speaking of the tired and overly familiar, the introduction of high-tech stormtroops seemed gratuitous.

The music for this extravaganza was provided by Joseph Brooks, whose greatest credit to this point is the song "You Light Up My Life." For _ M _ e _ t _ r _ o _ p _ o _ l _ i _ s he wrote a very similar song, "You are the Light," which is clearly intended to be another smash hit. One way you can tell is at the end of the play everyone in the cast, live characters and dead one, joins together in a chorus of "You Are the Light." It's just that kind of play.

One of the ushers quoted a critic as saying that in the play "the only thing that works are the lifts." I cannot improve on that assessment. And when you cannot improve on something, it is best not to pretend you can.

A WALK IN THE WOODS
A West End theatre review by Mark R. Leeper
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The setting is the strategic arms limitation talks in Geneva. The discussion is in its usual state of being bogged down by minute details and the Soviet negotiator has suggested to the American negotiator that the two of them take a walk together in the woods. This is the first of four short walks dramatized in Lee Blessing's play A W a l k i n t h e W o o d s.

The American negotiator is a new man, John Honeyman, a human oaken stick, stiff, formal, wooden, even stuffy, but dedicated to finding a way out of the nuclear dilemma the two superpowers find themselves facing. In marked contrast to his business-first professionalism is the style of Andrey Botvinnick. The Russian seems simple and likable, a bit ironic, but is maddeningly evasive on the subject he is negotiating. He wants to know the man the Americans have sent, not the proposal. He prefers to discuss country-western music or Mickey Mouse to nuclear arms.

Structured much like the play S a m e T i m e N e x t Y e a r, A W a l k i n t h e W o o d s visits characters in pretty much the same setting in each of its episodes and gives us a view into how they (or at least the American) change over time. The four walks we see take place at roughly three-month intervals, so we see the woods go from summer to fall to winter to spring, and we see how the American changes under the strain of trying to negotiate for one of the two superpowers who do not want to be bargained out of their arms race.

In the West End production at the Comedy Theatre, John Honeyman is played by Edward Herrmann and Andrey Botvinnick is played by Sir Alec Guinness. I know that Guinness is twenty years too old for the part (by the age of _ m _ o _ s _ t negotiators and by the age stated in the published play), and I don't give a darn. He is a great actor now and is an indelible part of the history of film and theatre. And I have actually seen him live on stage. So there! But enough bragging.

The play is about two things: It is about the Cold War attitudes of the two superpowers and it is about the two men and how each copes with the stress of a job both know is vital but also doomed to failure. The audience goes into the play naturally enough hoping the negotiators will succeed and disliking Botvinnick for his obstructionism, but Botvinnick is a remarkable character, extremely well-written and Guinness is better. The Russian's natural wit as expressed by Guinness immediately wins the audience to his side. He realizes that both sides are vitally interested in "the quest for the appearance of the quest for peace" rather than in peace, and it is his adaption to that fundamental hypocrisy that is the real core of the play.

LES LIAISONS DANGEREUSES
A West End theatre review by Mark R. Leeper
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Some plays get better treatment than others when adapted into films. _ A _ m _ a _ d _ e _ u _ s was far better as a play than as a film. At least the performance I saw was superior to the film. This was decidedly not the case for the Royal Shakespeare Company's production of _ L _ e _ s _ L _ i _ a _ i _ s _ o _ n _ s _ D _ a _ n _ g _ e _ r _ e _ u _ s _ e _ s. Louis Hilyer's Vicomte de Valmont with a perpetual three-day growth of beard was hardly believable as the super-seductive cad. Penelope Beaumont seemed young for the part of La Marquise de Merteuil, though her performance was every bit as good as that of Glenn Close in the film, and Amanda Royle might even have bettered Michelle Pfeiffer's lackluster performance as Le Presidente de Touvel. But overall the performances could not match those of the film, nor recreate the

spectacle. The play seemed simply a redundant experience after seeing the film.