

that word the same kind of an abomination, but no. I went ahead pig-headedly and called Spuds a "spokesman." Now a reader, one Carrie Bryan, points out that I wasn't accurate either. I should have gone for "spokesdog," which is at least neutral. The proper term for Spuds is "spokeswoman." Now that I think about I did see

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Spuds being carried into a basketball game and Spuds's agent (who probably makes a heck of a lot more money out of the ad campaign than the star) was carrying Spuds in a way that not only looked uncomfortable but left the belly exposed. Um. How can I say this? Uh. Well, I hate to say anything that could be considered "off color" but Spuds had no... uh... Well, anyway, let us say that in public it was very clear that the proper term is "spokesbitch." Well, maybe that would not be clear to the public, but all the facts that led up to that term would be. Well, I guess just about everyone I know that has been named "Spuds" has been female. Since this set includes just one member, I guess that Spuds is de facto a female name. I guess that means that Spuds and Lassie really could breed together but it would have to be Spuds that would as they say "become great with puppy."

2. Of course, once in a while I make a mistake also. I managed to flub Erik Schreiber's address with my formatting macros. It should have read:

Club for phanttastic Literatur
Erik Schreiber
Hafenstr. 18
D-3500 Kassel
West Germany

What I had elicited the following comments:

I would presume that Erik is not sufficiently celebrated to have a harbour named after him--although, on second thought, that might be possible in Kassel, which is rather far from the sea. The problem may lie in the German (and Polish, etc) habit of inverting street names and house numbers. This would not be so bad if they inverted the entire address putting the addressee at the end (like the Russians), but they don't. Anyway, 18 is a legal house number, and D-3500 a legal West German postcode. [-Arthur Kaletsky]

And John Jetzt points out, "... the club name seems to be a blend of English and German." But that, at least, was how I got it. Honest! [-ecl]

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

THE TOMMYKNOCKERS by Stephen King
Putnam, 1987, 0-399-13314-3, \$19.95.
A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper
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T_h_e_T_o_m_m_y_k_n_o_c_k_e_r_s is full of good ideas--it's just a pity that they aren't fresher, or weren't buried by the volume of prose.

When Bobbi Anderson accidentally uncovers a flying saucer that has been buried for millennia in the woods behind her home, strange things start to happen. These things are because of the "tommyknockers," as she (and others) call the inhabitants of the saucer. Aren't the inhabitants dead by this point? Well, yes, but like the Krell of F_o_r_b_i_d_d_e_n_P_l_a_n_e_t they seem to live on through their devices. F_o_r_b_i_d_d_e_n_P_l_a_n_e_t isn't the only source King draws on. If it sounds to you like the plot is very similar to Q_u_a_t_e_r_m_a_s_s_a_n_d_t_h_e_P_i_t, you're not alone. And there are bits and pieces from C_a_r_r_i_e, T_h_e_F_u_r_y, and several of King's earlier works. In general, I don't object to authors tying their works together, but in this novel King mentions has from he Dead Zone, the movie T_h_e_S_h_i_n_i_n_g, and himself as a Bangor, Maine horror author all

sharing the same level of reality. I don't know about you, but I find this very jarring.

Even though the ideas aren't brand-new, the book could still be good. But it's s_o long. King does write lively prose, I'll grant him that, but readers who have read widely in science fiction--or even seen a lot of science fiction movies--will probably decide that it isn't worth reading almost 600 pages of unoriginal work, no matter how lively the prose. In addition, King loves to foreshadow ("The next time they met, she would have changed."), a technique that can be used once or twice to good effect, but pales rapidly after that. King uses it about a dozen times in T_h_e_T_o_m_m_y_k_n_o_c_k_e_r_s--and at least once, he lies: what he says is just not true, though it is obvious that that is because of a slip on his part rather than intentionally misleading the reader.

Why are the inhabitants of the ship called the "tommyknockers"? Well, King claims in his Forward that there are well-known nursery rhymes about the "tommyknockers," who apparently are monsters who skulk around and come knocking on your door in the middle of the night. I've never heard of them, and I spent my childhood (at least from the age of 4 to the age of 9, the years when monsters outside the door are most real) in Bangor myself. Of course, I didn't realize at the time I was researching Maine legends for Stephen King reviews and I might have just not noted it down at the time.

If you're a fast reader, you might find this book worth the time. If you're a Stephen King fan, you'll read it anyway. I used to be a King fan, but haven't read any of his latest books--T_h_e_T_a_l_i_s_m_a_n, I_t, M_i_s_e_r_y--because, again, they're just too long. I realize this sounds

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inconsistent coming from someone who has recently reviewed a 900,000-word Gothic vampire novel. The only explanation I can give is that King's books all start to sound alike after a while. The menace may be different, but the cast of characters is very similar from book to book--not superficially, perhaps, but the underlying types--and it just doesn't seem worth it. I can't n_o_t recommend T_h_e_T_o_m_m_y_k_n_o_c_k_e_r_s, but I can warn you that the goal may not be worth the effort.

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BIGGLES: THE MOVIE by Larry Milne
Coronet, 1986, 0-340-38588-X, \$3.95.
A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper
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I can almost promise you that B_i_g_g_l_e_s: T_h_e M_o_v_i_e will be released soon. I bought this novelization almost a year ago in Canada but held off reading it because if I know there's a movie, I like to see it before reading the book. But I have finally broken down and read it, so the movie will undoubtedly show up next week in a theater or video store near you.

If it does, catch it. It's not great, by any means, but seems like an enjoyable action-adventure film. Jim Ferguson, a New York ad-man from 1985 keeps falling backwards in time to 1917, World War I, and Captain James Bigglesworth. Why? He's needed to help head off the Germans' perfecting a secret weapon that could utterly defeat their enemies and change the world.

The World War I air setting had me imagining this film as similar to something like H_i_g_h R_o_a_d_t_o_C_h_i_n_a. Apparently Bigglesworth is the hero of a series of British novels (97 of them, to be exact!). The book contains pictures from the film and a description of the making of the film, so it is probably "in the can" somewhere, and may even have been released in Britain. One can only hope that the producers will decide to take a chance on releasing it here as well.

THE YEAR BEFORE YESTERDAY by Brian W. Aldiss
Watts, 1987, ISBN 0-531-15040-2, \$16.95.
A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper
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This is a book set in an alternate universe about characters in that universe who write (and read) books about yet o_t_h_e_r alternate universes. Confusing? Definitely. But extremely clever. You see, the books that the characters deal with are T_h_e_I_m_p_o_s_s_i_b_l_e_S_m_i_l_e and E_q_u_a_t_o_r. The former, in the universe of T_h_e_Y_e_a_r_B_e_f_o_r_e_Y_e_s_t_e_r_d_a_y, was written by a character named Jael Cracken; in the universe we inhabit, it was published in a different form in S_c_i_e_n_c_e_F_a_n_t_a_s_y in 1965 under the pseudonym Jael Cracken. The latter, in the universe of T_h_e_Y_e_a_r_B_e_f_o_r_e_Y_e_s_t_e_r_d_a_y, was also written by Jael Cracken; in our universe it was published in N_e_w_W_o_r_l_d_s in 1958 and later (as part of an Ace Double) as V_a_n_g_u_a_r_d_f_r_o_m_A_l_p_h_a. By now you've probably guessed that these works were in fact written (in our universe, anyway) by Brian Aldiss, who in this "novel" has come up with a truly original way to re-cycle his earlier works.

The world in which the framing story takes place is the by-now familiar one in which the Nazis have won World War II. Well, not entirely familiar, since every author does this differently. The world in which T_h_e_I_m_p_o_s_s_i_b_l_e_S_m_i_l_e takes place is also a Reich-triumphant one, though a different one. And so on, through labyrinthian nestings of stories in alternate worlds, until you're not really sure which level you're on.

Though I love alternate histories, this disappointed me. I don't think it was so much the worlds themselves, though I must admit that the Reich-triumphant world may have been as overdone in alternate history stories as Arthur has been in high fantasy. I'm not saying there can't be another good Arthurian novel, or even another good Reich-triumphant alternate world novel, but it's a lot more difficult than it used to be. But I think what really disappointed me was that I was hoping for a n_e_w novel, and what I got was a framing sequence and two recycled 25-year-old novelettes.

Why the character portrayed on the cover by Ray Lago has an alligator on his jumpsuit is anybody's guess.

BUDSPY by David Dvorkin
Watts, 1987, 0-531-15053-4, \$17.95.
A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper
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Alternate history novels seem to come in clumps and, sure enough, hard on the heels of Aldiss's T_h_e_Y_e_a_r_B_e_f_o_r_e_Y_e_s_t_e_r_d_a_y comes David Dvorkin's B_u_d_s_p_y. I want to make clear that I don't for a minute think that Dvorkin stole the idea from Aldiss--it takes much longer to write a book and get it published than that would allow. But I think every once in a while there's a publishing trend, and publishers start buying more alternate histories. And the premise of this alternate history? You guessed it--it's another "Germany won World War II" story. The cover of Aldiss's book shows a Union Jack with a swastika super-imposed; the cover of this book shows a computer image of the Capitol building with a swastika rising in the background. I wonder if someday someone will sponsor an alternate history art show. Now t_h_a_t would be original!

Well, back to Dvorkin's book. Most authors who follow the Reich-triumphant school of alternate histories emphasize the atrocities and outrages of the Nazis. Some, in fact, seem aimed at the thrill-seekers who enjoy reading about that sort of thing, much as the film C_a_l_i_g_u_l_a was not designed so much as a brilliantly researched historical epic as a soap opera that emphasized the erotic and decadent over everything else. Dvorkin, to his credit, takes a different approach. Hitler was killed by a Russian attack while inspecting the Eastern Front. After his death, those who took control reversed some of his policies, including releasing all those in the death camps and establishing a Jewish state as a refuge for them. I find this unconvincing, especially the additional detail that Adolf Eichmann led this project. But passing that over, Dvorkin manages to convince the reader that this pulling back from the extremes has resulted in Germany's eventual victory and stability.

Ah, but things are never as they seem. Chic Western has been sent to the embassy in Berlin by the United States as a "budspy," an undercover agent sent to spy upon his fellow Americans. He finds Germany both oppressive--it is after all a fascist state--and

flourishing. With its victory has come a certain level of economic success and national pride. But he gradually finds that the public face of the Third Reich covers many of the same horrors that were thought to have been abandoned. The novel splits roughly into two parts: the first is spent giving the background of this world; the second examines how Western reacts to this and to his role as budspy in general.

The main characters were interesting and well-developed, though the subsidiary characters seemed to be sketchily drawn. The background was far more interesting than the characters, though, and by the end I found the characters had been swallowed up by it--as indeed they were in the novel itself, but that's something you'll have to discover for yourself. On the whole, a decent novel with an interesting approach.

THE LAGRANGISTS by Mack Reynolds, ed. by Dean Ing
Baen, 1983, 0-812-55125-7, \$2.95.
A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper
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I'm sure this was intended as a paean to the space movement, but it could set that movement back fifty years.

On page 93, the author refers to the "girl flight engineer, a Black." On page 145, in describing who will inhabit the space colony being built, one of the characters says, "And all of the animals will be of the best stock available, perfect breeds, including the human beings, naturally." Elsewhere, the organizer of this project says that all inhabitants will be "intelligent, adjusted, well educated, trained, healthy" (though apparently not well-educated enough to know that "well-educated" should be hyphenated) as well as rich and have an IQ of at least 130. A reader new to the space movement reading this book would get the impression that all the rich, white, upper-class people with IQ's over 130 will go forward into the glorious life that awaits them in space and everyone else will be left in misery on Earth. And if it's true that space habitats can't afford to support those of lower intelligence or skills, what will happen to the unfortunate child born in a space habitat who doesn't have an IQ of 130? This all sounds familiar--too familiar. Someone proposed a society similar to this about a half-century ago. It didn't work out too well then either.

In addition, the main character has supposedly studied up on Island One (as the habitat is called) in the hopes of getting a job there, but

he is constantly asking things like, "Well, how will you get your supplies here?" at which point the other characters can launch into three-page Gernsbackian speeches on how to build and run a space station. The other characters are two-dimensional, except for the ones that are one-dimensional. The "father" of Island One is George Casey, a very thinly disguised Gerard O'Neill, who is painted as somewhere between Gandhi and Jesus Christ in his saintliness. His assistant is a "liberated woman" (the author's words, not mine) who shows her liberation by propositioning men by saying things like, "I'll bet I know what you like. Good heavens, you're absolutely rampant" and pressuring the main character to have sex with her by insinuating that if he doesn't she'll assume he's gay and he wouldn't want that, would he? The villains are four mafiosi and some KGB agents. They are of course all ruthless and heartless, except for when it is convenient to have them suddenly change sides after hearing Casey speak for two minutes on how Island One will bring about world peace and happiness.

It is to barf.

It's not clear who is to blame for all this. I presume from the crediting of Dean Ing as editor that this book was based on an unfinished manuscript by Mack Reynolds, and completed by Ing after Reynolds. By the principle of "he touched it last," therefore, one must lay the blame at Ing's doorstep.

This book has a sequel, C_h_a_o_s_i_n_L_a_g_r_a_n_g_i_a. I wouldn't expect it to be any better.

MOONSTRUCK

A film review by Mark R. Leeper
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Capsule review: A rich and endearing comedy about love and life in New York City's Italian community. Cher gives her best performance ever. Vincent Gardenia is a positive joy to watch. M_o_o_n_s_t_r_u_c_k just barely edges out B_r_o_a_d_c_a_s_t_N_e_w_s as the best comedy of 1987. Anyone can enjoy this film but it is a pleasure to see a film with subtlety, making it clear it is aimed at adults. Rating: +2.

The children of the post-war baby boom are edging their way up around forty and it has been a while since filmmakers have targeted the forty-and-up crowd. Then the final months of 1987 saw two good comedies that did not taste of bubble gum. One was B_r_o_a_d_c_a_s_t_N_e_w_s and the other, only now getting a wide release, is M_o_o_n_s_t_r_u_c_k. Norman Jewison, who is still on a career-long roll, directed this delightful and endearing comedy about many kinds of love.

M_o_o_n_s_t_r_u_c_k is set in a never-never land where the moon stays completely full three days in a row and everyone is Italian-American and good at heart. Loretta (played by Cher) is engaged to Johnny (played by Danny Aiello). But Johnny wants to hold off on the marriage for a month until his ailing mother in Sicily dies. He is going to Sicily to be by his mother but leaves a request that Loretta invite his brother Ronny (played by Nicholas Cage). If you can't figure out what kind of problems that can cause, you ought to hang it up. But the plot is not as important as the beautiful yet economical characterizations. Jewison has a talent like Louis Malle for creating a feeling that the viewer knows a character after just moments of screen time. In one scene a woman is telling Loretta about the fickleness of men. The woman tells her husband she sees a wolf in him. He responds that he can still see the girl he married in her. He has spoken one sentence on the screen and already he has won over the audience.

Jewison can charm magical performances from his actors. He did it in F_i_d_d_l_e_r_o_n_t_h_e_R_o_o_f and he does it here. I personally have never been fond of Cher as an actress but if this were the only film I had ever seen her in, I would anxiously be awaiting her next performance. Vincent Gardenia, on the other hand, is a good actor and he too turns in one of his best performances. And one more touch adding to the effect: Like T_h_e_K_i_l_l_i_n_g_F_i_e_l_d_s, A_R_o_o_m w_i_t_h_a_V_i_e_w, F_a_t_a_l_A_t_t_r_a_c_t_i_o_n, and several other recent films, M_o_o_n_s_t_r_u_c_k makes good use of the transcendently beautiful opera music of Giacomo Puccini. In this case, the film is filled with the music of L_a_B_o_h_e_m_e.

What can I say? This is a very good warm comedy for just about any audience. Rate it a high +2 on the -4 to +4 scale.