

catch *me* on this one. It must be a misdemeanor." You think you're gonna get laws against drunk driving? You're going to get wrist-slaps until drunk drivers start aiming for legislators. If a legislator thinks he might be caught drinking and driving, then that will be a misdemeanor. But if you really want to curb drunk driving, just have a patrol car sit in the parking lot of a bar at closing time. I bet that would still work even during the lockdown

So you get people trying to do something about the problem themselves. You get MADD. That's Mothers Against Drunk Drivers. Why did they have to pick that name? Sure, it gives you a cute acronym, but do you really think that some drunk driver is going to say to himself, "Now I've done it. I've got somebody's *mother* angry at me." Yeah, good luck. I don't care who founded it, if they want to be effective they should make it something like "Handgun Owners Against Drunk Drivers." [-mrl]

THE LIGHT BRIGADE by Kameron Hurley (copyright 2019, Saga Press, \$16.99, trade paperback, 356pp, ISBN 978-1-4814-4797-3) (book review by Joe Karpierz):

I struggled to begin writing this review of Kameron Hurley's *THE LIGHT BRIGADE* because, quite frankly, there are too many places that I *can* begin. On the surface, *THE LIGHT BRIGADE* is a military SF novel with one twist that is almost lost in the rest of Hurley's magnificent story telling, and that is the way it gets around the problem of slow interplanetary travel: travelers are broken down into particles of light and sent to their destination. Think Star Trek's transporters but for vast distances, in this case between the Earth and Mars. The more I thought about it, the more I realized that not only is this really the single SF idea in the book--and yes, there are the usual trappings of military SF here, but to be honest, we're probably not all that far away from the technologies that are used in this war--but the whole story turns on that single idea, in a way that is so mind-bendingly brilliant that I believe it's going to last with readers for years to come.

The plot idea starts out as something we've seen a hundred times before in science fiction. The young protagonist joins the fight against the enemies of Earth because those enemies destroyed that person's home. In this case, it's Sao Paolo, and the enemy is from Mars, with the twist that those Martians are humans. The event is called "the blink", and it ended the lives of over two million people. Our protagonist, Dietz, joins the army to exact revenge upon the Martians. Dietz and her various squads--and a point of reference here is that we don't find out until the near the end that Dietz is female (hold that thought)--are dropped on Mars via the previously mentioned new process, except that Dietz' experiences on those drops don't match up with what the rest of her squads experienced. It turns out that Dietz is a member of The Light Brigade, a group that experiences the war in a time-slipped, out-of-order fashion. The more drops she goes on, the more she pieces together the truth of the situation, and she realizes that the information the world has been fed about the war is a lie.

It should be pointed out that there are no longer nations the way we know them today. The world is run by supermassive corporations that run every aspect of a person's life, and they perform all the functions of a corporation as we know them today as well as those of a government. A person is either a citizen, a resident, or a ghoul, with ghouls being on the low rung of society. One can work their way up the chain, or get born into a certain class. One can also get sent down the chain. Some see the army as a way out, a way to make a mark for themselves, and it doesn't really matter what class a person belongs to. The point is, of course, that corporations will do what corporations do, only on a grander scale.

The writing style and story telling are magnificent. The reader experiences Dietz' confusion and sometimes humiliation as she comes back from a particular drop not having experienced the same things her squad mates experienced, nor knowing things her squad mates know, at the same time, without any explanation. The reader discovers what's going on the same time that Dietz does, and while it can be a bit disorienting--as when all of a sudden there is a virus that is killing people which results in a quarantine situation (and even though this book was published last year you have to ask yourself if Hurley knew something we didn't) and you as a reader shake your head, wondering "where did THAT come from?"-- and then you slowly realize this is another one of those things that we're learning about right along with Dietz.

We all know that war is hell, but when we as readers find out what's really going on in *THE LIGHT BRIGADE*, we realize just how disturbing things can really get, and how bad humanity can really be. It's military SF in the grand tradition of Heinlein's *STARSHIP TROOPERS* or Haldeman's *THE FOREVER WAR*. Back to an earlier point, sure, Dietz is female, but I think the point that Hurley is trying to make is that war touches everyone, and everyone can participate. Every one is affected by war, no matter who you are, and everyone can participate. It's irrelevant that Dietz is female. What's relevant is that Dietz is human, and can be and is affected by events around her; why shouldn't she be able to fight in this war?

THE LIGHT BRIGADE is well written, entertaining, and thought provoking. It is magnificent. [-jak]

Horror Films (letter of comment by John Sloan):

In response to [Mark's comments on the horror film](#) in the 05/01/20 issue of the MT VOID, John Sloan writes:

I remember as a kid--maybe I was ten years old, for sure it was over fifty years ago--watching *THE HAUNTING*, Robert

Wise's adaptation of the Shirley Jackson novel, on television. It freaked me out. It took days before I could get back to my normal sleeping pattern.

Decades later I was traveling on business towards the end of October. I returned alone to my hotel room, took off my sport coat, and turned on the television for background noise. The first image it displayed was the opening credits for that 1963 film. I immediately turned the TV off. And I slept with the bathroom light on that night. No joke.

Another few decades later, I read Shirley Jackson's "The Haunting of Hill House", partly out of curiosity, partly out of a desire to short circuit whatever pathways had been established in my brain so long ago. And I bought a copy of the DVD and watched it with my spousal unit and some friends. Now, I find I take a more studied, intellectual view of the film, instead of responding to it purely emotionally. But it still holds up. [-jsl]

Mark responds:

It sure does hold up, doesn't it? I am not frightened but it is an effective horror film. Can you believe it was directed by the great Robert Wise who in two years would direct THE SOUND OF MUSIC? [-mrl]]

Cattle (letter of comment by John Purcell):

In response to [Mark's comments on cattle](#) in the 05/15/20 issue of the MT VOID, John Purcell writes:

I'm sitting in the car outside the dentist's office where my wife is having a one-week post-op checkup after the oral surgery she endured last Tuesday afternoon, and I can't think of a better time to write a letter of comment. Social distancing at work and play in Texas.

As an avowed omnivore, I found your little parable about cattle riding this carnival ride called Life interesting, but feel it ignores an important caveat. Yes, cattle are bred for market, but not all of them are consumed. In fact, not all bovines are bred for meat. Dairy cows, for example, provide milk, which is nutritious, yet there are many people who are lactose-intolerant. My son is one of those. The random factor of life is at play here: some may live, some may die, some may be destined to another path. In this world things happen for various reasons, so we must learn to adapt in order to survive. The best way to deal with life is make choices that match our needs. In terms of beef, for example, as much as I enjoy a good burger or a steak, I have made the decision to eat less beef: nothing wrong with poultry, seafood, vegetables, and fruits in my book. These are all good. The key here is maintaining a balanced diet; on a broader scale, the key is to maintain a balanced life.

Honestly, I find some vegans quite radical. "Stop eating all meat products!," they screech. Personally, I do my best to avoid factory farm meat products. The more humanely raised animals tend to be more healthy for consumption anyway, so there is that to consider.

As for your starting point, cows/cattle/bulls are reasonable beasties, and I think they're beautiful, too. This reminds me of a bumper sticker I saw on a car in Iowa over 20 years ago: "I love animals. They're delicious." [-jp]

This Week's Reading (book comments by Evelyn C. Leeper):

This week I'll cover the finalists for the Retro Hugo Awards for Best Novelette and for Best Short Story.

The Best Novelette category was a clean sweep for "Astounding".

"The Big and the Little" ("The Merchant Traders"), Isaac Asimov: Whether this actually stands on its own is questionable, but the readers of the time would have read all the preceding stories. The real problem is that the climax of the courtroom scene relies on a stroke of luck. The parallels to the Roman Empire are fairly obvious: the Commdor as "First Citizen", but an absolute monarch ruling what is supposedly a republic. As an aside, the priest in this is named Jord Parma, and the priest in Carl Sagan's CONTACT is Palmer Joss. Coincidence?

"Arena", Fredric Brown: There have been other stories about war-by- champions, but this is, I believe, the first. (The best known is probably the "Arena" episode on the original "Star Trek", which credits Brown as the original story.) It does seem a bit drawn out at times, but still deserves credit as the origin of a theme.

"No Woman Born", C. L. Moore: I found this story of a human brain housed in a mechanical body quite good (although with what seemed to me an over-emphasis on beauty) right up to the end, when it took a sharp left turn into "super powers" territory. It made no sense to me and diminished the story.

"The Children's Hour", Lawrence O'Donnell (C. L. Moore & Henry Kuttner): This is about implanting a human brain in an artificial body, but the side effects see totally unlikely. On the other hand, there seems to be so much emphasis on how

Clarissa's beauty affects everyone who sees her that I have to wonder if Moore and Kuttner were trying to make a point about the emphasis placed on a woman's appearance over her mental abilities, even if those are superior.

"When the Bough Breaks", Lewis Padgett (C. L. Moore & Henry Kuttner): This seems very similar to their previous story, "Mimsy Were the Borogoves". Both have precocious children being educated by futuristic toys to have exceptional mental powers. This is a bit more downbeat, however, and one wonders if at some point [SPOILER] Moore and Kuttner started thinking about the childhood of someone like Hitler and whether getting rid of them early might not be a good idea. Because this has those philosophical aspects (at least as far as I can tell), it rates higher than many of the other stories.

"City", Clifford D. Simak: This is the first of the stories that eventually made up the fix-up novel CITY, and it suffers from a very "First World" perspective. Oh, sure, the people in it are folksy farmers and all, but the idea that cities will disappear because everyone can have a private plane and a ten-acre estate could not have made sense even in 1944. Certainly now, it makes even less sense. In 1940, the "urban area" of New York City had 13 million people, London had 12 million people, and Tokyo had 8 million people, and these were the largest cities in the world. Today there are *twenty* cities larger than any of them. Tokyo alone has over 37 million people. The majority of these cities are in China and India and I doubt everyone there will be getting a private plane soon. And for the population of Tokyo to get a ten-acre plot for each family, even assuming six people in a family would require 100,000 square miles. All of Japan is only 150,000 square miles. It's all a bit too nostalgic for the good old days of individual farmers and all for me.

Ranking: "When the Bough Breaks", "Arena", "The Big and the Little", no award, "The Children's Hour", "No Woman Born", "City"

And here are the finalists for Best Short Story:

"The Wedge" ("The Traders"), Isaac Asimov: This became the third section of the fix-up novel that was the first of the "Foundation" trilogy, FOUNDATION. It really is a minor episode that has not much plot and does little to advance the overall story. Indeed, when the Canadian Broadcasting Company did a six-hour radio drama of the trilogy, they omitted this episode entirely. Nor does it stand on its own.

"I, Rocket", Ray Bradbury: This is quite different in style than all the other stories. Though all appeared in the pulp magazines, "I, Rocket" is far more poetic in style, with its eponymous narrator describing what it feels like to be a rocket ship. This is not THE SHIP WHO SANG, which had a human rain operating a rocket ship, but a truly non-human being. As such, it stands out in this group.

"And the Gods Laughed", Fredric Brown: [SEMI-SPOILER] There may have been a time when the ending of this was not obvious, but this is not that time. Still, voters at the time probably would have thought this very clever.

"Desertion", Clifford D. Simak: This is the fourth story in CITY. (The third, "Census", did not make the ballot.) I will not be the first person to point out the similarity of Poul Anderson's 1957 novelette "Call Me Joe" to this story. Both involve putting people into bodies designed to survive on Jupiter: Simak's story modifies the actual body (a la THIS ISLAND EARTH) while Anderson's transplants the mind into a new body engineered for Jupiter. The description of Jupiter is poetic, even if totally outdated.

"Huddling Place", Clifford D. Simak: This is the second story in CITY, and is basically just an idea from "The Machine Stops" (which was later also used by Isaac Asimov in 1953 in THE CAVES OF STEEL). The premise is that as people have more ability to see everywhere and communicate with everyone from their homes, they will become less willing to actually *go* anywhere. They will all develop agoraphobia (apparently enabled in part by their robots, who support them in their decisions). In these days of "stay-at-home" and social distancing, this story has a certain poignancy and relevance. "City" may have a misplaced nostalgia for the old-fashioned farm life, but this has a nostalgia for the days when people could go outside their homes without having a panic attack. That's a nostalgia we can all get behind. :-)

"Far Centaurus", A. E. van Vogt: The basic idea behind this story is good (I won't spoil it here even though the story is seventy-five years old), but the execution leaves a lot to be desired. I know it was a different time and all that, but the only female character (other than someone's three ex-wives) is there only so that the main character can keep remembering her red lips and goodbye kiss. Add to this bizarre (and frankly unbelievable) science, with bizarre "scientific" terms (Adeledicnander? Really?!), and an excess of exclamation points, and you get a real mess.

Ranking: "I, Rocket", "Huddling Place", "Desertion", "And the Gods Laughed", no award, "The Wedge", "Far Centaurus"

[-ecl]

Quote of the Week:

A particle gets pulled over. Cop asks "Do you know how fast you were going?" Particle says "Yeah, but now I'm lost."

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