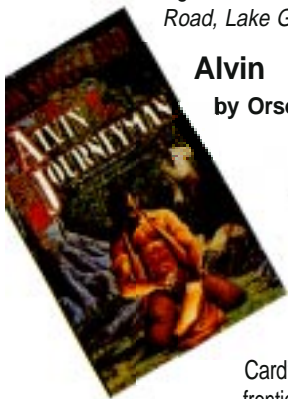


Bookwyrms™

Once again, we bibliophiles of the DRAGON® Magazine staff share our recommendations of the best books we've read (or re-read) recently. Would you like to recommend one to us? Write to "Bookwyrms," DRAGON Magazine, 201 Sheridan Springs Road, Lake Geneva, WI 53147.



Alvin Journeyman by Orson Scott Card

\$6.99

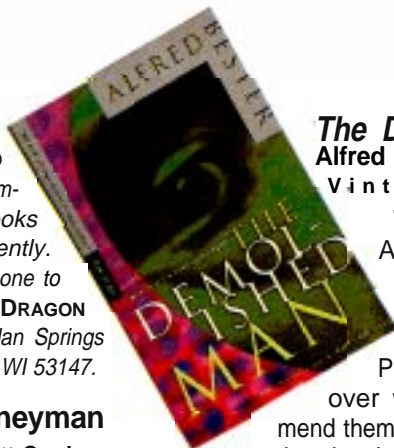
I have been a fan of *The Tales of Alvin Maker* since its debut volume, *Seventh Son*, was published back in the late eighties.

Card's alternate vision of a frontier America where hexes, knacks, and folklore are as real as science, industrialization, and democracy never ceases to entertain me with its quaint backwoods wisdom and parallel versions of figures from history like William Henry Harrison and Tecumseh.

The fourth and latest volume in the series (following *Prentice Alvin*) continues the tale of Alvin as he enters the journeyman stage of his career as a smith and shaman of sorts. His long-term goal of building a Crystal City and saving America from the clutches of the dreaded Unmaker faces another obstacle in the form of allegations that threaten both his good name and his freedom.

Card fuses the best of Mark Twain with Peter Beagle to tell his tale in the proper voice. The only fault is this otherwise enchanting tour-de-force of magical Americana is the long wait between volumes in the series. I hope the next one arrives soon.

B.T.



The Demolished Man Alfred Bester

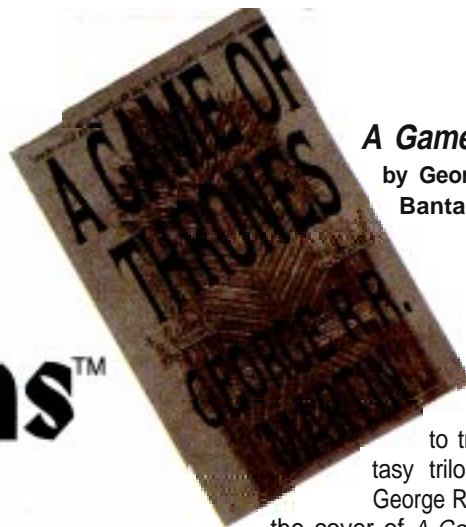
Vintage \$11.00

When we heard that Alfred Bester's two most famous novels were to be re-released this year, Pierce and I quarreled over who would recommend them. We came to a compromise, but immediately after, the quarrel resumed, this time over which book is the better. I pick *The Demolished Man*.

Ben Reich is one of the world's most powerful and wealthy men, even though he is not one of the gifted few who have developed telepathy. Reich is also a ruthless man, willing to kill a rival, knowing that the Espers of the police force can detect murderous intent even before a crime occurs. Nothing deters Reich, however, and soon he's locked in a deadly struggle with Lincoln Powell, Police Prefect and 1st-Class Esper.

The Demolished Man excels as science fiction because it takes a single SF premise and explores its effects on the setting and characters of an intense drama. Sure, you have your rocket ships and zapguns in the background, but the important thing is always the way that telepathy affects the conflict between two extraordinary men.

Also notable is Alfred Bester's inventive use of language. It is never so obtrusive as to detract from the story. It's smart, clever, and integral to the narrative. Maybe he shows off sometimes, but he never just shows off. *The Demolished Man* is superlative writing and great science fiction.



A Game of Thrones

by George R.R. Martin
Bantam Spectra \$21.95

I figure life is too short to drink bad beer or read poor fantasy novels. You can understand why I'm always reluctant to try the "next big fantasy trilogy."

George R.R. Martin's name on the cover of *A Game of Thrones* gave me hope. (Even he jokes that he has the right middle initials to succeed Tolkien.) Frankly, the first fifty pages worried me. I can't stand seeing common words like "Sir" or "master" transformed into "Ser" or "maester" simply to make them seem otherworldly — especially in a story with many obvious real-world analogs. Early coincidence and cliché, and characters who seemed too obviously good or evil nearly made me set the book aside.

Fortunately, *A Game of Thrones* soon employs the clichés of fantasy fiction to fresh effect rather than relying, upon them as a crutch. Martin makes vital figures of what seem at first to be stock characters, and even those who fall neatly into categories are genuinely beautiful heroes or truly despicable villains. His writing is good, but his storytelling is a killer. Martin can make you mourn, love, wonder, and hate.

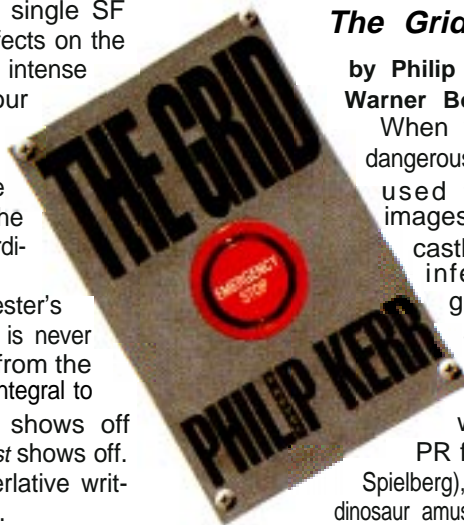
This is the one for fantasy novel snobs who wanted to enjoy the big trilogies but were spoiled on better writers. *A Game of Thrones* is only the first book of *A Song of Fire and Ice*, yet already it promises to exceed all of the epic fantasy series since . . . You're not going to make me say it, are you? D.G.

The Grid

by Philip Kerr
Warner Books \$21.95

When we think of dangerous places, we used to conjure images of haunted castles and trap-infested dungeons. Then along comes Michael Crichton

with a little PR from Steven Spielberg), and voilà, the dinosaur amusement park of



tomorrow takes the forefront. Well, Philip Kerr does him one better in his latest novel, *The Grid*. Unlike *Jurassic Park*, where you had to travel many miles to get there, this new dangerous place can exist right next door in major city in the U.S.

The Grid's antagonist is "smart building," that is, one that is fully automated and monitored by an ultra-sophisticated computer who manifests malevolent toward a group of trapped executives during its early days on line. What Kerr has so successfully wrought is a new riff on the bad computer monster theme that caters to all of our worst fears of technology, while also entertaining us with great new traps and perils that can lurk right down the hall in the nearest elevator, lavatory, or swimming pool.

The Grid is a modern dungeon crawl of great suspense that will both amuse you and thrill you. It is probably the best thriller of its kind since, well, *Jurassic Park*, and that is high praise indeed. B.T.

Now You See It . . .

by Richard Matheson

Tor

\$5.99

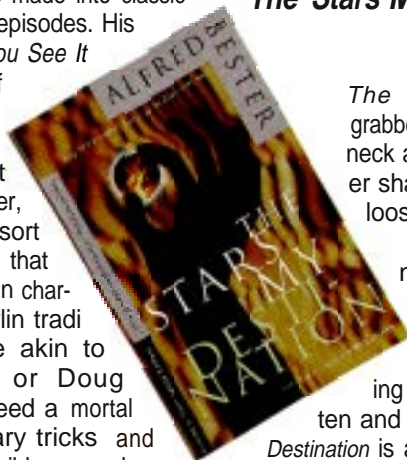
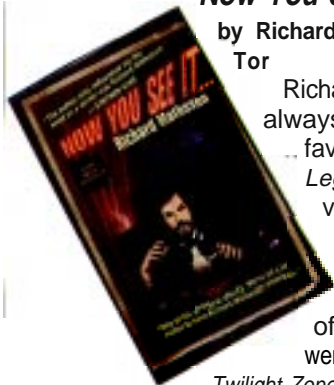
Richard Matheson has always been one of my favorite authors. *I Am Legend* is a classic vampire novel, *Hell House* is a classic haunted house novel, and many of his short stories were made into classic

Twilight Zone episodes. His

new novel, *Now You See It*

. . . has all the makings of becoming a classic magic novel.

The magic that Matheson uses, however, is not of the wizardly sort but rather more closely that of legerdemain. His main character is not in the Merlin tradition but rather more akin to David Copperfield or Doug Henning, for he is indeed a mortal performer of illusionary tricks and slight of hand, and possibly a murderer. What follows is not so much a whodunit but a whodunit-or-did-he mystery of deadly illusions and retribution games that rivals *Sleuth* and *And Then There Were None* in its inventiveness. B.T.



So You Want to Be a Wizard

Diane Duane

\$6.00

So You Want to Be a Wizard, first published in 1983, is an exciting adventure that's also a lot of fun.

The background is so rich and hints at so many things not explained that it begs for a sequel.

So You Want to Be a Wizard begins with a girl, Nita, running from bullies. She hides in the public library and finds a special book behind some others. This is a step-by-step, how-to manual on becoming a wizard. Nita takes the book home and begins to study. Soon she encounters Kit, another budding young wizard, and together conjure up a white hole named Fred by accident. Or was it an accident?

Fred is the bearer of a grave message. *The Book of Night with Moon*, the most important book in all of the universes, is missing. Through several misadventures, the threesome learn the whereabouts of the book, and together they seek to rescue it. They travel to an alternate Manhattan inhabited almost entirely by malevolent machines. Beset by perytons, evil taxi cabs and a forgetful dragon, Nita, Kit, and Fred are forced to improve their magic skills in order to survive.

So You Want to Be a Wizard leaves the reader satisfied with the adventure's conclusion but wanting to know more about the system of magic, the other wizards, and the alternate universes. This is a book to be enjoyed by readers of any age. P.W.

The Stars My Destination

\$11.00

The Stars My Destination grabbed me by the scruff of my neck and shook me like a terrier shakes a rat. I couldn't get loose, and I didn't want to.

When I first read this novel 25 years ago, I didn't completely understand it, but I knew it was good. Now, rereading it, I am in awe. Well-written and fast paced, *The Stars My Destination* is a splendid book.

A war has erupted between the inner colonies and the outer colonies. An Earth ship, the *Nomad* is destroyed. A lone survivor, Culley Foyle, lives in a ship's locker, venturing out when he

must to scavenge oxygen and food from the wreckage. He hopes for rescue. Finally, another ship arrives. Culley signals them. This other ship, the *Vorga*, ignores the signals and leaves. Now only the hope for vengeance keeps Gulley alive.

In a world where visualizing a place transports you there by jaunting (distances of 1,000 miles or less), Gulley Foyle, the focus, is a tiger-faced demon. He seeks revenge and savages anyone who stands in his way. Like a rogue tiger, sometimes he destroys people who are merely in the wrong place at the wrong time.

This novel grows in intensity like a tornado, whirling and twisting, relentless. You hate Gulley, but you can't stop reading. You need to know what will happen next. Eventually, Gulley begins to learn what it is to be human. Kicking and screaming, he learns. He's still the tiger, but what a tiger! Even those who hate him are held in his thrall.

Transformation, transmogrification, perhaps, that's part of what this is all about. Here is a novel of sin and redemption, but redemption on Gulley's terms. Finally, and most importantly, this is a book about faith.

Considered by some the greatest science fiction novel of all time, *The Stars My Destination* is wonderful, as in "full of wonder." Every reader has certain books that change their lives or change their perception of life. Two that come to mind, immediately, for me, are Roger Zelazny's *Lord of Light* and Cordwainer Smith's *Norstrilia*. Add this one to the list.

Sure, this 40-year-old book is a little dated, but to paraphrase Bum Phillips — If *The Stars My Destination* is not in a class of its own, whatever class it's in it don't take long to call roll. P.W.

War of the Worlds: Global Dispatches

edited by Kevin J. Anderson
Bantam

\$22.95

H.G. Wells's *War of the Worlds* has provided fertile inspiration for any number of other invasion earth scenarios (including most recently *Independence Day*) that have involved other planets, places, and times. Orson Welles's infamous Halloween radio broadcast further fueled the fame of this seminal work of science fiction by validating its verisimilitude in the eyes of the public. *The War of the Worlds* works because it's believable.

The thrust of this new anthology hinges on this conceit and asks the question: If this really happened, what did others have to say about it? The results are truly entertaining as Mike Resnick tells it from Teddy Roosevelt's point of view, George Alec Effinger from Edgar Rice Burroughs' via John Carter, Robert Silverberg from Henry James', etc. This is an anthology of wonderful riffs on Well's Martian War, and even if some of the stories fall short in terms of plot or originality, all of them are as vastly entertaining and innovative as listening to a collective of jazz musicians, each performing his own version of some classic tune.

Whether it's Mark Twain observing the war while at sea or Albert Einstein realizing that some things are relative, this is an anthology that entertains. B.T.

The Winter King

by **Bernard Cornwell**
St.Martin's Press

\$24.95

Bernard Cornwell, the author of the Sharpe series (dealing with the Napoleonic wars) and the Starbuck Chronicles (dealing with the Civil War), has this time turned his story telling skills to Britain in the fifth century for a naturalistic look at the reign of a warlord known to history as King Arthur.

Rich in historic detail and sociological research and interpolation, Cornwell focuses on the multitude of clashes that were coming to a head during the so-called Dark Ages (e.g., warlord vs. warlord, Roman vs. British, Christian vs. Druid, old vs. new, etc.) telling the tale from the retrospective point of view of an aging witness Derfel Cadarn, a recently converted Christian monk who had been a Saxon ward of Merlin and one of Arthur's warriors.

There is a sense of weariness of the present in relation to the excitement and passion of the past in the narrator's voice as he tells the story of Arthur as a warrior king and unrecognized bastard son of the former High King Uther Pendragon. Arthur's goal is to unite the disgruntled factions of his dead father's crumbling empire against the ravages of foreign powers. Cornwell purposely downplays magic in favor of religious mysticism and myth, with Derfel giving frequent asides to the reader in an attempt to put things in perspective (eg. the truth about Excalibur, Merlin, etc.).

The Winter King is perfect for fans of Arthurian lore, particularly those who are acquainted with the original source material by Geoffrey of Monmouth. Cornwell's latest is historic storytelling at its best.



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