



Nerves

Lester del Rey

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At the great atomic plant in Kimberly, a congressional committee makes a surprise inspection raising the level of the men's tension even higher than it has been. By midday there have already been minor accidents but in the giant nuclear converters which are at the heart of the project work goes on at desperate speed.

Until converter Number four fails disastrously. Jorgenson, the supervisor of the technical team and his crew had been running through a new and unstable isotope when the walls of the reactor gave way. The process of fusion is suddenly out of control...and half a continent may be destroyed in a "peace-time" disaster which will not only sacrifice millions of lives but will destroy the possibility of controlled nuclear power forever.

Jorgenson, the crew chief has survived the accident and is the only man who knows how to stop the runaway reactor. But Jorgenson is trapped inside that reactor, unable to communicate. He must be found and saved quickly in a desperate race...or risk the globe itself.

Nerves Details

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From Reader Review Nerves for online ebook

Chris says

Interesting Golden Age science fiction tale of a meltdown at a nuclear reactor. Much of the science didn't turn out like del Rey envisioned---the reactors are for making "super-heavy isotopes" for medicinal uses, with power as a secondary output, and the main way to remove "radioactives" from injured workers is curare treatment.

But it's interesting to see what he got right---such as a Chernobyl-style cleanup attempt, and several aspects of how the nuclear plant operates---as del Rey first wrote this three years before Hiroshima, and then revised it the year the first civilian nuclear power plant entered operation (1956). He did a lot with the information he had on hand---that is to say, not much---and this book has a fascinating time capsule feel to it, and is prophetic to some degree.

That said, it's not quite the thriller the back cover makes it out to be; the characters are often flat and lifeless, and there's too many named-and-numbered redshirts who show up only once or twice; and the narrative sags at the end under progressive amounts of technobabble and the erosion of focus. It's a passable novel that might interest hardcore science fiction readers and Golden Age junkies, but it has some big flaws. It was okay: a good read that started off great, but did not end as a standout.

Full review found [here](#).

Jon says

Nerves had good characterization, but the medical and atomic sciences didn't stand the test of time well. Liked it (3.5 stars).

Dylan Grant says

Meh, more like Lesser del Rey ...

Stephen Poltz says

I bought this book from a used paperback vendor at Orycon 2014 for a buck. I thought I'd try another novel by del Rey after my less than satisfying experience with "Pstalemate" last year. "Nerves" is about an atomic products manufacturing plant disaster, originally written as a novella in 1942, before Hiroshima and Nagasaki. It was expanded into a short novel in '56, and then republished around the time of the Three Mile Island accident. I thought it would be a fun romp of disaster porn, a la the book "The Prometheus Crisis" or the film "The China Syndrome". Instead, it makes me consider the idea that del Rey was a better publisher and promoter of science fiction than a writer of it.

For my full review, visit my blog...
<http://itstartedwiththehugos.blogspot...>

Kenneth says

A story of a nuclear plant near meltdown. First written in 1942 for magazine publication, so it was prophetic to some extent. Expanded for book publication in 1956, and revised again in 1976.

Doctor Science says

In many ways the world-building is an incoherent, hand-wavy mess. But the tension and the theme still work: I don't know if this is the first description of an accident at a nuclear power plant, but knowing how these things have happened in real life doesn't detract from the tension.

Jonathan S. Harbour says

Hard to finish, too dated, with contrived anxiety and that classic "U.S. Army" dialogue and response to every situation from this time period.

Emperador Spock says

A good emergency thriller from the time of atomic cars and human operator-controlled videophone lines. The book manages to hold your attention quite well, despite the somewhat silly ideas about transuranic elements that are at the core of the story.

It's also great to see that the author did not take the path of evil, and did not shrink the medicine in the novel to magic lazorrs and glue guns. Treatments look mostly believable and well thought out.

The only serious annoyance is the whole 'Jenkins turning out to be a big huge genius all of a sudden' business. It feels a bit forced, and a lot like wishful thinking, which is too much for an otherwise down-to-earth story like this.

Susan says

The science and some of the characters are rather dated, but I love the action in this one. I read it every few years.

Gina Andrews says

Dr. Ferrel is the company doctor for the atomics plant. Hatred and mistrust about the use of atomics is growing among those in town and nationwide, so as the plant tries to appease those in power a small accident happens. When they try to make a super-heavy isotope to help farmers combat boll weevils and get in the area's good graces; well, if anything can go wrong... Will they be able to fix it or will half of the US be blown up?

Benn Allen says

Lester Del Rey's 1956 novel, "Nerves", a science fiction novel set minutes into the future, was originally a novella which appeared in the September, 1942 issue of "Astounding Science Fiction". The story is a precursor to the movie, "The China Syndrome" and such Real Life events as Three Mile Island and Chernobyl. Essentially, it is a disaster novel or to say it more clearly, a novel about a disaster. In this case, a kind of meltdown at a nuclear power plant involving man-made isotopes. The novel isn't especially complex. (Well, some of the science might be a little complex.) Its tale is about as complex a narrative as, to invoke yet another cinema comparison, 1972's "The Poseidon Adventure". Disaster strikes and the heroes work to solve it. There are no "bad guys". The accident isn't caused by Big Bidness cutting corners or shoddy practices. It's an accident, period and the scientists and engineers work to correct it.

Some of Del Rey's science is wonky, especially when he talks about "curing" human radiation exposure. (I could be wrong, but I don't think the procedures described in "Nerves" would actually be practical.) I also found Del Rey's use of the terms "atomics" and "radioactive" for "atomic" and/or "nuclear" and "radiation" a bit off-putting, but beyond those things, this was actually a pretty good read. Nothing fancy. But it does hold the attention pretty well.

Nicholas Bobbitt says

Read as part of a collection of Science Fiction Hall of Famers. It's decent but I'm not particularly a huge fan.

Phil Giunta says

Old Doc Ferrell can't even spend a day off with his wife and son. The National Atomics nuclear facility in Kimberly, Missouri is scheduled to undergo a government inspection and the plant manager, Allan Palmer, needs his chief physician present to handle the suits.

Worse, inspections make the men nervous and nervous men make mistakes.

There was already a bill under review in Congress to move the entire facility to a remote location, away from the dense civilian population that is currently enjoying the inexpensive power generated as a by-product of the plant's operations. Palmer wants nothing more than to prove the safety of nuclear power. As such, he wants his best people present.

Giving up his day off, Ferrell enters the plant to find minor injuries already in progress, adroitly handled by the nursing staff. However, during the inspection, an accident occurs that leaves one man badly burned.

To make matters worse, a routine testing of one of the converter chambers by chief scientist Mal Jorgenson uncovers the presence of highly volatile and deadly “Isotope R”, otherwise known as Mahler’s Isotope. Jorgenson sounds the alarm, but not before becoming trapped inside the converter chamber, his armored Tomlin suit his only protection against the fatal radiation.

Palmer orders a rescue mission to retrieve Jorgenson, the only man in the plant who knows the best method to stop Mahler’s Isotope from destroying not only everything in a fifty-mile radius, but perhaps the entire eastern United States!

After a massive and dangerous effort by several of the plant’s crew (aka “atomjacks”), Jorgenson is pulled from the wreckage of the converter chamber and brought to the Infirmary where a heart massage is the only way to keep him from certain death, but when his heart fails to respond, Doc Ferrell and his team must turn to an unorthodox—and untested—solution.

Stories from the golden and transitional ages of speculative and science fiction have always been my absolute favorites. Asimov, Bradbury, Clarke, Ellison, Heinlein, Niven, the list goes on. Over the past two years or more, I’ve made a deliberate effort to expand my knowledge by including such writers as Philip José Farmer, Joe Haldeman, and Lester Del Rey, founder of Del Rey Publishing.

While I enjoyed The Best of Lester Del Rey anthology, I think it’s fair to say that NERVES is not one of his best works. Fortunately, it’s a short novel at only 153 pages. Sentence structure was occasionally awkward, character development non-existent, and I’m not entirely confident that Del Rey had a full grasp of the true nature of radiation exposure and its effects on the human body, although I will give him credit for an engaging description of the rescue and cleanup work after the accidents. I was a bit perplexed that there was only one expert on Mahler's Isotope in the entire facility. I suppose having another would have invalidated the entire plot.

Overall, I’d recommend skipping this one, but I will absolutely read more from Lester Del Rey.

Cheryl says

Even though I couldn't sleep and I didn't have any other book handy, I got out of bed about 1/3 through this and pored through my shelves looking for something worth my time. This was boring, but not soporific, ime.

John says

In 1942 Lester del Rey, a second-string Golden Age science fiction stalwart, published a story titled “Nerves”. In 1956 he published an expanded version as a novel with the same title. It is to the 1956 version I refer here. Nerves is the story of an accident at a nuclear plant, the political machinations which helped cause it, and the struggle to control the disaster and save the injured. Almost all the science in Nerves is what is sometimes called “rubber science”: to be less polite, it’s made up and inaccurate, although often based on speculation and hopeful expectation of mid-twentieth century popular science. The writing is unremarkably

workmanlike. One might expect that this little book of science fiction, with its poor fiction and worse science would be best forgotten, but . . .

I can't help but feel a fascination with the thing, principally because of del Rey's confidence in the power of technology to solve our problems and remake the world for modern humanity. This idea of the improbability of Nature has become largely foreign to modern public discourse (although we in the West silently continue to take part in just such an idea as we painlessly adopt every new bit of technology). I happily acknowledge (guiltily confess?) my strong nostalgia for the nuclear-powered, sky-scrapered, monorailed future metropolis that never was to be. So, del Rey's future in which nuclear plants' prime function is to produce inconceivably useful and beneficial trans-uranic elements in the (non-existent) Islands of Stability while generating vast amounts of power as a cheap byproduct — this world stirs my naive childhood technocratic dreams of a future life made better through chemistry and physics. And I can't help feeling sympathetic to del Rey's depiction of the Ludite mobs opposed to the nuclear industry as a bunch of ignorant fools wanting to destroy all the benefits of the magnificent modern world in order to return to the brutish pre-Atomic age.

Of course, we know better now, don't we?

Of particular interest in this Post-Chernobyl, post-Fukushima age, is del Rey's description of the heroic efforts to shut down the out of control reactor. . . .

Full review here: <http://behindthehedge.wordpress.com/2...>
