

SPECULATIVE FICTION REVIEW by Stephanie Young

TITLE *The Demolished Man*
AUTHOR Alfred Bester
PUBLISHER Pocket
COPYRIGHT 1951
PRINTING 1978

This is one of the classic Bester novels from the 1950's. I admit I have never read anything by him before this but at the science fiction conventions I go to, his name is always brought up when discussing great classic authors of the genre. I now know why.

This is a story of a rich and powerful business man set in a future world that has a large number of 'espers'. Espers can read minds but with only a few exceptions cannot transmit thought so that non espers cannot receive their thoughts. They can, however, usually sense when they have been 'peeped'.

Ben Reich is obsessed with power and control but his main competitor, Craye D'Courtney, has him backed up against a wall. Reich feels his only way out is to merge with D'Courtney and when he is turned down, plots to murder him.

Murder or any other violent crime is almost unheard of because of the espers. The punishment is Demolition which is so horrible it is a viable deterrent. Reich however has a plan to defeat the espers and get away with the perfect crime. And he does even though D'Courtney's daughter walks in on Reich doing the deed.

The investigation into the murder is handled by Lincoln Powell, a level one esper (the highest) and the middle of the story is consumed with his efforts to gather enough evidence to convince the master computer that Reich is guilty.

The ending has a solid twist and we also find out exactly what Demolition is.

Bester writes with a clarity and deftness that is not seen much today. Not one word is wasted and his plot is razor sharp. The characters are fully developed without wasting a paragraph. I loved this story and at 230 paperback pages it reads quickly and is hard to put down. We could use more writing like this today instead of the bloated novels we see so much of.

Rating 