

list survey recently posted to Usenet. [-ecl]

2. Well, friends and neighbors, we'll start out the new year with another "Survivors" fest. Since each story is self-contained in the wonderful way BBC series run, you really can jump into _T_h_e

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_S_u_r_v_i_v_o_r_s at any point and find it is pretty compelling stuff. The story is of Britain trying to pull itself back together after an epidemic has killed all but about 10,000 people. Last fest we got our first look at how the urban areas are rebuilding and coping with disease, but of course the little societies set up there had their own problems with a few power-hungry people. I have no idea where our group of survivors is going in the next three episodes and don't want to know until January 7 at 7 PM at the Leeperhouse. Call for directions if you are interested in this solid science fiction series. You'll find no ray guns and no space ships, but you will find good writing and an exciting story.

3. We are back with the money-saving tips you all subscribe for. Well, gang, this is your promised reminder that you can save money on new calendars for the upcoming year by putting up May's calendar from last year and then waiting until the last week of January to buy your replacement calendar. It is always true that January starts on the same day as the previous May did and both have thirty-one days. So if you haven't written all sorts of useless stuff like your Aunt Jenny's phone number all over your last May's calendar, you can use it again. Right now it is a seller's market on 1993 calendars, but by the end of January, 1993 calendars will be back down to a reasonable price.

Another way you can save money this season is to insist on buying items for the marked price. That may not sound like it will save you a whole packet, but you have to realize the television generation is starting to run the world and you are seeing more and more items marked at prices like ".85" cents. There is now a substantial part of the population who think that "\$.85", "85 cents", and ".85 cents" all mean the same amount of money. I have seen things marked as ".85 cents" at my grocery and at the local branch of McDonalds. And if something is marked at a price, you can legally insist on getting the item at that price. It is just

one of the side benefits of living in one of the few countries of the world where the locals do not know their own currency. Apparently MTV is not pushing its viewers to know that ".85" is not the same thing as "85". Not this season anyway.

Along the same lines it also occurred to me this Christmas season that nobody in this country actually knows what a reindeer looks like. Every Christmas you see a multitude of representations of Santa and his reindeer. And they always look like North American deer. Gang, the North American deer is not built as a bear of burden. A r_e_a_l reindeer is a much more compact and stocky animal, not nearly so cute. It is smaller but looks a lot like a moose. It really is used to pull sleighs, as the name indicates. But somewhere way back somebody started putting North American-style deer in front of Santa's sleigh. And everybody has been showing them that way ever since, without looking up or questioning what a reindeer looks like. Is it any wonder Galileo had so much trouble

against entrenched ignorance?

So if you are going to decorate with reindeer, save your money. Unless you can get them for .85 cents.

4. The Garden State Horror Writers will be having a business meeting, discussions, etc., at the Monmouth County Library in Manalapan on Saturday, January 9, 1993, from 9 AM to 4:30 PM. They are apparently expanding to include all writers, not just horror writers, and the public is invited. This is **not** a science fiction or horror convention, however, but aimed more at current and aspiring writers. [-ecl]

5. Another update on discussion book availability: S_t_e_e_l_B_e_a_c_h by John Varley is available at the Old Bridge and Monmouth County (Headquarters) libraries. W_e_s_t_o_f_E_d_e_n by Harry Harrison is available at the Monmouth County (Headquarters, Extension, Eastern, and Holmdel branches) and Old Bridge libraries. A_r_i_s_t_o_i by Walter Jon Williams is available at the Old Bridge library. T_h_o_m_a_s_t_h_e_R_h_y_m_e_r by Ellen Kushner is available at the Monmouth County (Headquarters, Eastern, and Extension branches) library. W_o_r_l_d_a_t_t_h_e_E_n_d_o_f_T_i_m_e by Frederik Pohl is available at the Monmouth

County (Headquarters, Extension, and Eastern branches) and Old Bridge libraries. T_h_e_U_s_e_o_f_W_e_a_p_o_n_s by Iain Banks is available at the Monmouth County)Extension branch) library. I keep forgetting to look up the Sheffield. (Don't forget, the Drexler, Hogan, Harrison, Kushner, Banks, and Sheffield are also available in paperback.) [-ecl]

Mark Leeper
MT 3D-441 908-957-5619
...mtgzfs3!leeper

Heaven, as conventionally conceived, is a place so inane, so dull, so useless, so miserable, that nobody has ever ventured to describe a whole day in heaven, though plenty of people have described a day at the seaside.

-- George Bernard Shaw

THE GRIPPING HAND by Larry Niven and Jerry Pournelle
Pocket Books, 1993, ISBN 0-671-79593-2, \$22.
A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper
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This is billed as the "long awaited sequel to T_h_e_M_o_t_e_i_n_G_o_d'_s_E_y_e." Some things aren't worth the wait.

This book has, so far as I can tell, nothing to recommend it

_e_x_c_e_p_t that it is the sequel to a popular novel. The plot is contrived, the solution pat, and the characters flat. This is also the most sexist (and heterosexist) book I have read in a long time. A thousand years in the future all the secretaries and receptionists are women (who wear skirts--we know this because the clothing and appearance of every woman is described for the reader, while the men could be globs wrapped in circus tents for all we are told about them). The Navy does seem to have one woman officer, but everyone uses the phrase "Navy men" to refer to any Navy unit. (They also refer to someone as a "career woman," a phrase that one doesn't hear even now, and seems unlikely to return.) The woman officer, by the way, is shunted aside when the action begins, while the eighteen-year-old heiress is allowed to tag along on what is at least a quasi-military expedition. She does this by batting her eyes and stamping her feet, and then has a long discussion with the only other female character of note about whether she should have sex with her boyfriend, providing Niven and Pournelle an opportunity to insert Heinleinesque speeches about sex and morality. All the women in the book are someone's "love interest" and everyone is of course heterosexual, and everyone assumes everyone else is as well. People will still use condoms (although there are also pills--but I guess all those implants are just a passing fad). Everyone drinks coffee and many smoke tobacco. You'd think in a thousand years something new would be discovered--neither of those were enormously popular a thousand years ago. In fact, think about how different society was a thousand years ago, and how different it would be in another thousand. Niven and Pournelle seem to think it would be like the 1950s with spaceships. Except for the politics, which are from the 1980s--the Arab Liberation Organization (ALO) and bomb-throwings on New Ireland. Arabs still hate Jews (apparently), and as much as I am a pessimist about the Middle East, even this seems unlikely without Israel to fight over in 3080 or whenever. Several authors and philosophers are quoted, but none are from after 1992. (Try not quoting anything written in the last thousand years for a while and you'll see how unlikely this is.) There's also the "Crazy Eddie" references, which to West Coasters may be okay, but here in the New York area, all they conjure up are images of the stereo dealer named that who was a staple on television for years. I don't know if this is intentional, but it's annoying as hell.

In case you haven't figured it out, I do _n_o_t recommend this book. In "Niven's Laws" he says, "It is a sin to waste the reader's time." This book constitutes a major sin.

HOFFA

A film review by Mark R. Leeper
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Capsule review: Danny DeVito's film is not so much a biography of Jimmy Hoffa as a spectacularly illustrated dossier. DeVito, with the aid of a David Mamet screenplay, tells us that behind the forceful, ambitious public image of Hoffa was a man who was ambitious and forceful. Rating: 0 (-4 to +4).

Something is missing in Danny DeVito's H_o_f_f_a. It is not the budget and it is not that the budget seems wasted. There is a lot of money on the screen in H_o_f_f_a. The film has an expensive star with a terrific make-up job (when I first saw the trailer and saw the face on the screen, I thought "Hoffa" first and it took a beat to two to recognize it was Jack Nicholson I was looking at). The film also has spectacular action scenes of an acre of strikers in a melee with an acre of strike breakers. But what is missing and what is missed is a human behind the public face of Hoffa. What this film says about Hoffa, the man, is that he cusses and drinks coffee. Just about everything else about him in this film you could find in a good encyclopedia. That is, everything that is true in the film. In an afterword to this review I will give a few facts that do not square with this fictionalized version of the professional life of Jimmy Hoffa. There are probably other major deviations from the truth in this film.

As the film opens, Hoffa (played by Nicholson) is at a roadside diner with his longtime friend Bobby Ciaro (played by Danny DeVito outdoing the major role Spike Lee gave himself in M_a_l_c_o_l_m_X). Together they are waiting for the arrival of a third party. As they wait Ciaro remembers their long career together. They meet when Hoffa is a young man preaching the evangel of the union. Ciaro soon learns that his new acquaintance is happily willing to break the law and to hurt whomever he has to for the sake of organizing labor. While DeVito's character never finds love and looks for one-night stands, DeVito the director here finds his own true love--the overhead shot. Through much of the rest of the film DeVito carries on his torrid love affair with overhead shots. DeVito and overhead shots seem inseparable until in the last third he has a quick affair with artistic scene transitions.

DeVito's infatuation with overhead shots and artistic scene transitions notwithstanding, he does show some nice visual sense. One gets the impression that Hoffa (like the other enigmatic anti-hero of this film season, Dracula) rarely ventures forth in the daytime and then only when it is heavily overcast. This gives us a dismal recreation of Detroit. Hoffa comes off as a creature of the

night more than willing to deal with the underworld if it suits the purposes of the union. Since we see almost none of Hoffa's personal life and little positive in his professional life, we are understandably ambivalent as to the fate of the union leader. Hoffa seems likable only when he is verbally tying knots in Robert Kennedy (played by Kevin Anderson). Kennedy, as you might guess, comes off less than favorably in this film.

DeVito's H o f f a is sometimes well-photographed and sometimes not. But its biggest failure is in getting us to care what happens to Jimmy Hoffa. My rating is a 0 on the -4 to +4 scale.

Afterword (with minor spoiler): Jimmy Hoffa disappeared on Wednesday, July 30, 1975. He expected a meeting at the somewhat fancy restaurant, the Manchus Red Fox. It is thought he was meeting a local crime figure. He arrived at the restaurant at about 2 PM. After a half hour, he called his wife to tell her that the others had failed to appear. At 2:45 PM or so he was seen in the parking lot getting into a car with some other men. This is clearly not events as shown in the film. Also, one might wonder why in the film Bobby Ciaro chooses this day to remember his whole past with Hoffa.

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