

running a single classic science fiction film from the 1950s. I have a large collection of these films on videotape and we will be showing one a week going through the 50s and perhaps on to the 60s. Films will be shown in chronological order by date of release. Each week we will publish in the notice the film to be shown that

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week and the following week. For those who are interested there will also be available at the fest voluminous published material about the films being shown.

So who wants to give up their Saturday night to see these creaky old films? Well, nobody I expect. In fact, I am only announcing that I will be watching the films that that people are invited to join me. Unlike our Thursday night films, I am making the assumption here that I can vary the films and the times without notice for any film that I have not already heard that someone wants to see it. Besides Evelyn will be a little upset if you come to the door and she is there in her special bunny pajamas with the rabbit faces and ears sewn onto the feet. Take it from me, it is really cute, but, well, it Boss's Private Stock. But in other words, if you are interested in seeing a film on the scheduled night, let me know in advance. Responding is essential. Let me repeat that, YOU HAVE TO RSVP IF YOU'RE ATTENDING. Also a few of these films may be recorded off of an antenna and some my have problems with picture quality.

So on that basis, I am starting out the series on Saturday, July 2, 8 PM with ROCKETSHIP XM directed by Kurt Neumann. The score is by Ferde Grofe, best known for composing the "Grand Canyon Suite."

Future showings planned are:

July 9: DESTINATION MOON

July 16: THE MAN FROM PLANET X

July 23: THE THING

July 30: WHEN WORLDS COLLIDE

August 6: THE DAY THE EARTH STOOD STILL

2. Summer reading suggestions included:

Mark Leeper (remember him?) sticks with the classics in suggesting Daniel Keyes's F_l_o_w_e_r_s_f_o_r_A_l_g_e_r_n_o_n and Frank Herbert's D_u_n_e (although other members added the caveat "but not any of the sequels!").

Rob Mitchell (who would probably recommend anything by Heinlein, but decided to stick to more recent books) suggested Vernor Vinge's M_a_r_o_o_n_e_d_i_n_R_e_a_l_t_i_m_e, Neil Gaiman and Terry Pratchett's G_o_o_d_O_m_e_n_s, and John Varley's S_t_e_e_l_B_e_a_c_h. (Well, the latter does have a Heinlein connection.)

S_t_e_e_l_B_e_a_c_h was also recommended by Andy Hewson.

John Jetzt suggested the "Giants" trilogy by James P. Hogan (I_n_h_e_r_i_t_t_h_e_S_t_a_r_s, T_h_e_G_e_n_t_l_e_G_i_a_n_t_s_o_f_G_a_n_y_m_e_d_e, and G_i_a_n_t's'_s_S_t_a_r). This was just re-issued in an omnibus edition from Del Rey.

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Seth Robertson recommends the "SpaceCops" and "Wizardry" series by Diane Duane, Dennis McKiernan's E_y_e_o_f_t_h_e_H_u_n_t_e_r and V_o_y_a_g_e_o_f_t_h_e_F_o_x_R_i_d_e_r, and Elizabeth Moon's "Deed of Paksenarrion" (available seperately as a trilogy starting with S_h_e_e_p_f_a_r_m_e_r's_D_a_u_g_h_t_e_r). (I guess a series will count as only one against the limit of three recommendations.)

Bob Hall recommends F_a_l_l_e_n_H_e_r_o_e_s ("Star Trek: Deep Space Nine" Number 6 or so) by Dafydd ab Hugh, and says, "While many of the ST: TNG and ST: DSN books are utter trash, this one is really good. It has several Niven-ish aspects (Niven's golden age, that is), with Cardassian locked boxes (sort of like Slaver stasis boxes) containing unfathomable devices with difficult-to-figure-out capabilities. It also does a good job with the characters, something most ST: TNG and ST: DSN books don't do, making them at least interesting. (And with such inherently unlikable non-starters as the Ferengi and Major Kira, this is no small triumph.) The book essentially explores the potential for heroism in each of the characters. One might argue that the answers found are too uniformly positive to be credible, but at least it's consistent with the Bajoran-freedom-fighter backdrop of the Deep Space Nine

storyline. The book also has several good practical features: it is a paperback and so widely available you might even find it discounted in grocery stores. On the negative side, the scientific extrapolation is not nearly as well done as it is in Niven's stories, and a few things are really bad in this vein. Also, some might think the violence is depicted a bit too graphically in some places, but for the most part I thought it appropriate." (He concludes by adding, "Okay, call me a low-life for still reading Star Trek books; I can take it. This one is definitely a cut above the others, though.")

And Avi Hauser reminds me that there are some other holidays coming up that I missed:

- July 1 Canada Day
- July 5 Venezuela Independence
- July 9 Argentina Independence
- July 14 Bastille Day France, and Republic Day Iran
- July 17 Constitution Day Republic of Korea
- July 20 Independence - Colombia
- July 21 National Day - Belgium
- July 22 Full Moon (for the were-wolves among us)

Avi writes, "All these dates are taken (of course) from the pocket diary for particle physicists who always knew what's worth knowing, and were not afraid to say I don't know--(so give me more funds till I do)."

3. The wackiest site we visited on our last trip was the Tartu University Museum, Tartu, Estonia. When you go in, they have you put on shoe covers. I am not sure they had a lot more to protect than a lot of other museums we had been in, but it was a nicely maintained building. Early on they say the museum's unique function was to serve as a "mediator between Russian science and international science." from this we learn that there are two different sciences: "Russian" and "international," and that they are going to be in conflict sufficiently that they need someone to

mediate disputes. We are met on a battlefield of that conflict.

I think that in the West we had always heard that Russian science was a bit weird. We'd heard of mental hospitals that were really political prisons because being politically discontented was treated as a mental aberration instead of a capitulation to the obvious. Among the things you see in the Tartu University Museum are weird machines that look like something out of D_r._X. There is a four-foot-high electronic whatchamacallit that does something electric to the air in a room for the sake of "prophylaxis." There are big electronic machines looking like 19th Century polygraphs that are for "psychological experimentation." There is a section that looks like a science lab from a good Frankenstein movie. On the floor is a battery of six huge Leyden jars (used as electric capacitors), each about two feet in diameter and two feet high.

You really want to get the creeps? Look in the medical section. There is a case of tools for bone operations in weird shapes, and the pieces look as if they were made in the last century. The instruments for eye operations, also in a carrying case, look almost as old and are things that come to needle points or razor edges. Next you see what looks like a huge syringe. The main body of galvanized steel--like a bucket--is about a foot long and four inches in diameter. It is labeled as an "enemator." Then there was a large device for inhalation medication that came to a mask.

There were cases displaying the august textbooks used. There was a short colorful booklet showing on the cover how atoms formed into crystals. We translated the title from the Russian: "We Learn Chemistry." It looked like something we'd read in third grade. There were large panels to pull out and read about the accomplishments at Tartu U. One had two columns of about twenty city names each. Between the two columns was the name Tartu and lines going to each of the forty cities. These were technical contacts. "We talk to people in forty different international cities about science," they were saying. In science this is hardly an impressive accomplishment. I probably have contacts in more international cities just to discuss films. A map on the wall shows places world-wide where they have placed science graduates. They have a blow-up of the United States. They often have cities in the wrong place. Amherst, Massachusetts, is shown as being in southeast Massachusetts. Again, such placements are not so

impressive in science.

Other accomplishments are written on the walls. One claims that the synthetic India rubber was invented here. Impressive if true, but I will be surprised if it turns out that synthetic rubber really was invented here. Other accomplishments seem more esoteric: the discovery of fossil ice in Alaska, for example.

From the school of theology they say they have graduated Protestant ministers trained in rooting out Catholic and pagan influences.

Their library has pictures of graduates and faculty, dueling suits, and other artifacts, including a beer stein made from a human skull. You definitely get the feeling you are in eastern Europe, but the century is a bit harder to judge!

4. THE LION KING (a film review by Mark R. Leeper):

Capsule review: With the exception of B_e_a_u_t_y_a_n_d_t_h_e_B_e_a_s_t this may be the best Disney animated feature since F_a_n_t_a_s_i_a. Rather than distorting an existing story, the filmmakers have created a myth brand new, but with elements going back to Jason and Pelias or Hamlet and Claudius. Some of the artwork is spectacular. Rating: low +2 (-4 to +4)

With the success of T_h_e_L_i_t_t_l_e_M_e_r_m_a_i_d Walt Disney Studios returned in a big way to making animated feature films. It looks like it was a good decision, since some of the best animated feature films they or anyone have ever made were made by Disney in this period. The formula has always been to take a well-known fairy tale or children's classic and retell it, usually distorting it nearly out of recognition. I have often wondered why they don't just write their own stories like they do for Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck. They have finally chosen to do a film that is their own story entirely--well mostly. Actually rather than taking a fairy tale and very freely adapting it they have chosen to retell an archetypical myth and move it to an African setting. The story is basically "The Return of the True King." Simba is really Jason or Arjuna or Hamlet or Aslan returning to defeat the usurper on his throne. It was a good idea for a film and it is told with a good deal of style.

The story begins with a prologue of all the animals in a kingdom coming to see their new-born prince, the young Simba. It is a powerful scene beautifully rendered with impressive art and music. The latter is rendered by Hans Zimmer's beautiful interpretations of African folk music, much like his work on T_h_e_P_o_w_e_r_o_f_O_n_e.

Young Simba (voiced by Jonathan Taylor Thomas) is the son of the great and powerful Mufasa, the reigning Lion King (James Earl Jones). One wonders how much a wildebeest an antelope really loves this reigning family, given that he might well become the family's next meal.

As a cub Simba is fascinated by everything in the world including his brooding uncle Scar (Jeremy Irons). Scar has been waiting for the day Mufasa would die and Scar would succeed him. With the birth of Simba that hope has been snatched away ... unless perchance something nasty should befall both Mufasa and Simba. Perhaps with an alliance with the smirking hyenas--currently exiled to the dark regions of the kingdom--something nasty can be arranged to happen.

In the classic Disney films like S l e e p i n g B e a u t y and S n o w W h i t e a n d t h e S e v e n D w a r f s the villains are usually far more interesting than the heroes. The margin is still there, but is starting to narrow a little. Belle in B e a u t y a n d t h e B e a s t was every bit as interesting

as the villain Gaston. This time around Mufasa and Simba are still just a bit handsome and empty. So it is hardly surprising that Scar is the most watchable character in the film. The smirking hyenas, however, hold their own for audience attention. Their clowning around making fun of Mufasa really is a lot of fun, villains or not. A carefree meerkat and warthog who figure into the later portions of the film make far more interesting sidekicks with far more personality than Disney himself would have created. Note how much more engaging they are than the mice in C i n d e r e l l a, for example.

For no apparent good reason, name actors are chosen to voice many of the character. Matthew Broderick is the young adult Simba, but does not seem to need to do a whole lot anyone else his age could have done. Jeremy Irons does give some real personality to Scar, though after hearing him attempt to sing on of the film's songs, my suggestion is that he should hold on to his day job. James Earl Jones does Mufasa and surprisingly we interpret his deep voice as

noble, even after hearing it so often as the less-than-noble Darth Vader. But again only Irons seems to give his character much that any moderate actor could not give him.

Some of the artwork with majestic African scenery is the best that has appeared in a Disney film. Disney, of course, always had great animation, but often his artwork often left something to be desired. It might be cute, but was rarely impressive. Here the art and animation work beautifully together. An early scene of birds flying over a waterfall brought gasps from adults in the audience. There are more nice experimental touches in the visuals, playing with focus or having characters appear out of dust. This is a film in which the visual interest goes well beyond the animation.

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Moments of direction are also very good. After the prologue the screen goes silent for the title of the film to appear and it is far more dramatic than any chord that could have been played. This also has one of the better scripts of Disney animated features. I think that The producers realize that much of the audience is parents bringing children, and there are many creative allusions and puns in the script that children will miss but adults will appreciate. There is even a liberal dash of Swahili, and those who can recognize it can appreciate that. And for the kids who like that sort of thing, there are moments of grossness. And there were children in the audience who seemed to liked being pleasantly grossed out by realistic details like animals eating insects and grubs.

One problem with the story is the whole theme of the hyenas. They are almost too likable for the film's own good. Certainly they are cynical, but considering their exile they have a right to be. Their motivation is that by any means necessary that they not go hungry. Somehow that does not sound like so villainous a motivation. The lions who have exiled them are certainly not missing any meals. On the face of it such a Grand Order, a circle of life that exiles one of its species, deserves to be toppled. Why are hyenas chosen as the villains? Probably because we find them unpleasing in appearance. In any case the film seems to take the (racist?) point of view that the hyenas are intrinsically evil

film for being half-accurate as a film version of the events around the famous gunfight at the O.K. Corral. Well, I see the error of my ways. At least I have to say that there is a whole lot more to an historical film than accuracy. W_y_a_t_t_E_a_r_p is even a little more accurate than even T_o_m_b_s_t_o_n_e on some points. But just recreating historical facts does not make for a good film. The two films are faithful to the historical detail about equally, but T_o_m_b_s_t_o_n_e is certainly the more worthwhile. The definitive film about Wyatt Earp, if it is even possible, still remains to be made.

Basically the title of W_y_a_t_t_E_a_r_p tells it all. This is a biography of Wyatt Earp from the time he was a teenager to his retirement. When the film opens Wyatt is in the Oriental Saloon waiting for the most famous gunfight of his life and probably of the American West. Then we flash back and now Wyatt is a teenager on his family farm in Missouri, anxious to go off and join his brothers fighting the South. Instead he finds himself giving in to the will of an autocratic father (Gene Hackman). Wyatt's real father, incidentally, was not a lawyer as the film would have it, but a farmer and a cooper. Over some protest, Wyatt's father announces one day that the family will move west. Wyatt goes and finds the West beautiful but also lawless and violent. He returns to Missouri to learn to be a lawyer and to raise a family. When his wife dies he returns west and tries his hand at being an alcoholic, a low-life, a horse thief, and a mugger in the hopes that he will soon be able to add "corpse" to his resume. This doesn't work out for him either.

Getting back on his feet, he decides to hunt the mighty buffalo (or "titonka" to you Costner fans). Wyatt befriends Ed and Bat Masterson who come along with him as mule skinnners. Later when Wyatt accidentally shows his prowess at subduing drunks he is asked to become a lawman, he brings the Masterson's along with him. And the rest is history--not that script writers Dan Gordon and Lawrence Kasdan did much of a job of researching it.

Costner plays Wyatt as Costner. He glides through the part doing little we have not seen from him before. That is really a pity,

since he desperately needs a role that will give him more to do.

He has been in some good films, but it is becoming clear he wants to play the hero roles of an Errol Flynn without the dramatic range of a John Wayne. But if it looks like this film didn't give him much opportunity to stretch himself, look what it did for Dennis Quaid. As Doc Holliday, Quaid submerges himself into a Georgia accent, a moustache, and a beard, and is nearly unrecognizable. (The real Holliday wore no beard, by the way.) There are a host of other familiar faces including Mark Harmon, Catherine O'Hara, Tom Sizemore, and Betty Buckley. Clearly not much expense was spared on the cast or even the sets, yet the film has not much sparkle or style. James Newton Howard's score is never engaging. With all the beautiful Arizona scenery available Kasdan rarely lets the camera take much advantage of it.

Under Kasdan's direction the film ends up being somewhat ponderous and oddly dull. Events take a long time to develop. While no film has ever so well caught the complexity of the events surrounding the corral gunfight, and that is the difficult part, the gunfight itself is staged very inaccurately. The actual scenario of the fight is easily available so that piece of the script could have written itself, but apparently it just was not researched or Kasdan did not care. I am not certain, but I seem to remember in this film five men facing down the Earps rather than the actual four. It seems as if somebody who knew something about the Earps wrote an outline for the film that said at this point put in the gunfight, and then someone who didn't know as much wrote the description of the fight. The film is accurate on a high level, but very inaccurate on low-level details. And it is about an hour longer than it should have been to sustain audience interest. For what they got right, I am tempted to rate it higher, but it also makes some big mistakes. I rate it a high 0 on the -4 to +4 scale.

Minor Spoilers:

I have heard some critics praising this film as finally being an accurate representation of Wyatt Earp. I suppose that they mean that because this seems to be awarts-and-all representation of Wyatt. Actually this film just shows more of his life than most previous films, but it also is full of inaccuracy. As I say above, it is almost as if the writers started with an accurate outline of Wyatt's life, then invented the details they needed to flesh it out without checking on the truth of the details. Not that accurate details are easy to come by. Wyatt is one of the most fabled characters of the West and there seem to be all sorts of stories about him. But many of the details that were thrown into this version, while lending a believable historic texture, only distort the facts.

I don't know how emotionally scarred Wyatt was after the death of his first wife, but he and some of his brothers were supposedly involved in a twenty-minute street fight with two of his wife's brothers not long after the death. This torching of the house in grief was made up of the whole cloth.

Ed Masterson tells Wyatt that Bat picked the name Bat because he couldn't stand his real name, Bartholomew. And Bat is unhappy about divulging this secret. Actually, he was born William Barclay Masterson, not a particularly stigmatizing name. The story certainly added a realistic texture to the script, but it didn't come out of anybody's research.

The film shows Earp as being a crack shot and an honest lawman. None of this is true. In fact he took bribes, pocketed fines, and at least on one occasion nearly shot himself with his own gun. Most of his legend was little more than legend.

Big Nose Katie Elder (Isabella Rossellini, who strongly resembles her mother, Ingrid Bergman), explaining her unexpected good looks, says people get nicknames for all sorts of reasons. She points out her nose is not actually big. That is a nice piece of texture. And it is good script writing. But the real Big Nose Katie Elder, based on her portrait, was an ugly woman with a large nose. In fact, most of the Earp/Holliday women are portrayed far more attractively than their real counterparts. That is standard in the syntax of cinema. Probably only Josie Marcus would still be attractive by today's standards. Of course standards of beauty change, but it would be nice to see a film in which the people and not just the scenery and buildings look right.

There is a problem with Wyatt's distaste for prostitution and his reforming Mattie and getting her out of the profession. Again, it is invented. Some sources think that he actually was half-owner of brother James Earp's whorehouse. In any case, Mattie was apparently not in that profession before Wyatt Earp knew her, as this film would have it, but did become a prostitute after Wyatt abandoned her.

Hype has been around throughout all of history, and perhaps the emotional need for hype has been with us even longer. Wyatt was a convenient person to make a hero in his own time and in ours. And in truth he was one of the most colorful figures of the old West.

But even the most admiring of his serious biographers conclude that Wyatt Earp was a long way from being a real hero or even an admirable character. If he fits any of the classic molds, it would be "scoundrel." And in showing more than usual of his negative side, though less than the truth, perhaps this film has its greatest virtue.

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