

Lincroft-Holmdel Science Fiction Club  
Club Notice - 2/12/86 -- Vol. 4, No. 30

MEETINGS UPCOMING:

Unless otherwise stated, all meetings are on Wednesdays at noon.

LZ meetings are in LZ 3A-206; HO meetings are in HO 2N-523.

\_D\_A\_T\_E

\_T\_O\_P\_I\_C

02/19 LZ: WORLDS by Joe Haldeman (Politics)

02/26 HO: DUNE by Frank Herbert

03/19 HO: "Chronicles of Narnia" by C. S. Lewis

04/09 HO: AT THE MOUNTAINS OF MADNESS by H. P. Lovecraft

HO Chair is John Jetzt, HO 4F-528A (834-1563). LZ Chair is Rob Mitchell, LZ 1B-306 (576-6106). MT Chair is Mark Leeper, MT 3G-434 (957-5619). HO Librarian is Tim Schroeder, HO 2G-427A (949-5866). LZ Librarian is Lance Larsen, LZ 3C-219 (576-2668). Jill-of-all-trades is Evelyn Leeper, MT 1F-329 (957-2070).

1. We all know our great national art film director, Woody Allen. But did you know this great artist also made a string of comedies early in his career? Now you have a chance to see two of these little-known comedies by our this serious art film director. The Leeper house film festival will be showing, at 7:00 Thursday, February 20, two comedies by this prestigious and prodigious talent.

Woody Allen Fantasy

FLASH GORDON CONQUERS THE UNIVERSE (Chapter 1: The Purple Death)

EVERYTHING YOU ALWAYS WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT SEX (1972)

LOVE AND DEATH (1976)

FLASH GORDON, of course, has nothing to do with Woody Allen, but it is the first of 12 exciting chapters of campy adventure and classical music, particularly Liszt's "Les Preludes". Buster Crabbe stars. If this feature is popular we will go through all 12 pulse-pounding chapters.

EVERYTHING is, of course, a sensitive and highly educational film intended to improve your knowledge on this thorny subject. Nevertheless an alert viewer will notice (unintended?) comic touches at various points.

LOVE AND DEATH is my personal choice for the best of Allen (admittedly a minority opinion). It is a broad sendup of Russian literature, philosophy, and cinema. Good stuff.

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2. It's 2084 A.D. A number of orbital habitats, including a hollowed-out asteroid, circle the Earth, providing power and raw materials, in exchange for technology and scarce minerals. Marianne O'Hara, from New New York (the hollow asteroid), comes to Earth for a post-doc study of world cultures and politics. She soon becomes involved with a radical group that doesn't like the American political structure, revolving as it does around the business Lobbies. Along the way, she spends some time against her will in the Anarchist country of Nevada, which left the United States after the Second Revolution...

WORLDS, by Joe Haldeman, is the main feature of the Lincroft chapter's discussion of "Politics in SF." If you've ever been angry at a politician, you'll want to join us -- reading the book isn't required. Other books that have political elements are THE MOON IS A HARSH MISTRESS by Robert Heinlein, THE WARLOCK IN SPITE OF HIMSELF by Christopher Stasheff, and THE FOUNDATION TRILOGY by some Good Doctor whose name escapes me. [-r.l.mitchell]

As an extra bonus, anyone who attends this meeting on Wednesday the 19th can help us choose our next batch of books for discussion. Come make your voice heard! One vote \*can\* make a difference! {Oh, shut up with the rhetoric, already...} [-r.l.mitchell]

3. Back when I was working for Burroughs in Detroit my supervisor once commented to me that he had seen part of a pretty good war film on Canadian TV the previous day (Sunday). It had been about prisoners of war trying to escape from Germany. He had only seen part and he wanted to know if I could tell him something about the film. The first thing I told him was that it was on every week. "The same film?" No, it isn't a theatrical film at all. It was a British TV series called COLDITZ. If it seemed good enough to be a theatrical film it was because British TV is often very good. Some series are good enough that most episodes measure well against

films made in the same genre.

I saw the first episode of British series called SANDBAGGERS, about British intelligence. Channel 21 in New York has picked it up and is showing it. I expected to watch one episode, but to decide it was not that good. The first hour has to rank as one of the best spy films I have seen. "First Principles" concerned a request from Norwegian intelligence to have British intelligence rescue a Norwegian spy plane that crashed just inside the Russian border. British intelligence refuses so the Norwegians do some economic arm-twisting. That is the first 10 minutes of the story, I won't tell more, but it gives you the feel that we are not talking about a James Bond sort of spy story. If anything it is closer to LeCarre or Deighton. In fact, I would say I like it moves a little better than LeCarre does, but without sacrificing the feel of authenticity. If you like spy films, watch for SANDBAGGERS on Thursday nights, Channel 21.

Mark Leeper  
MT 3G-434 957-5619  
...mtgzz!leeper

CLAN OF THE CAVE BEAR  
A film review by Mark R. Leeper

Capsule review: Modern feminist issues create havoc in a society of 35,000 years ago. Darryl Hannah as a career cavewoman fights prehistoric prejudice. Somehow, though, the film transcends all that and is really engrossing at times.

A durable genre of fantasy is the prehistoric man melodrama. Cavemen like Alley Oop and B.C. hang around in our Sunday funny papers. Chic magazines like the N\_e\_w\_Y\_o\_r\_k\_e\_r have cartoons showing how primitive man first came up with the idea for taxes. Saturday mornings children listen for caveman calls like "Yabba-dabba-doo!" In films, the stories go back at least as far as Willis O'Brien's D\_i\_n\_o\_s\_a\_u\_r\_a\_n\_d\_t\_h\_e\_M\_i\_s\_s\_i\_n\_g\_L\_i\_n\_k, made for Edison in 1917. More recently, there were films like O\_n\_e\_M\_i\_l\_l\_i\_o\_n\_B.C. and a string of prehistoric films from Hammer. Most recently we have seen the surprisingly funny C\_a\_v\_e\_m\_a\_n with Ringo Starr, which could have ended the genre, but we also saw Q\_u\_e\_s\_t\_f\_o\_r\_F\_i\_r\_e, which claimed to be trying for realism. Now based on the first book of Jean Auel's series about prehistoric man (and woman) comes C\_l\_a\_n\_o\_f\_t\_h\_e\_C\_a\_v\_e\_B\_e\_a\_r.

Somehow the film gave me every reason to hate it, yet I didn't. It

is about an unmarried woman doctor with a child who has to decide if she wants to settle down with a man or continue with her career. Set it in modern Manhattan, and you would not want to see this soap opera, but set in 33,000 B.C. this sorry plot had some novelty. Ayla is a Cro-Magnon child grudgingly adopted by a clan of Neanderthals. The clan's attitude about the place of women is medieval--which is progressive by Neanderthal standards, I suppose. This is the story of how Ayla grows up and wanders into the careers of hunter and medicine woman. Ayla is played by Darryl Hannah. As a Cro-Magnon she is tall, thin, and blond. This means that she is not squat enough nor does she have a thick enough forehead or nose to attract a Neanderthal man so she turns instead to healing and secretly becomes the first female marksperson.

The story is simple (but then it is hard to envision what a complex story about Neanderthals would be like). If it seems anachronistic to put a feminist in this period, let me assure you it is far more so to have a dinosaur. Some of the details did bother me. The film gets off to a shaky start (quite literally) when there is an earthquake that destroys the clan's home. It seems to be a cliché of prehistoric films that the Earth was just forming when the action takes place so they have volcanos or earthquakes as often as we have hailstorms. The question I ask is: how did an earthquake leave them homeless? It is not like they have skyscrapers to knock over. They live in huts or caves. Both are pretty earthquake-proof. Any cave that you find in earthquake country has to be quake-proof. If it isn't, it wouldn't still be a cave.

Auel's books do have pretty paintings on the cover and the photography does a good job of creating the same feel.

The story is definitely the weakest part of this film, but for a soap opera, it is still a watchable film. Give it a +1 on the -4 to +4 scale.

## DOWN AND OUT IN BEVERLY HILLS

A film review by Mark R. Leeper

Capsule review: This light comedy from Disney's Touchstone Productions lampoons the California lifestyle, but lacks the satisfying bite of S\_e\_r\_i\_a\_l. Speaking of biting, Mike the dog is the hit of the film but surely hungers for a meatier role. Pleasant, but no aisle-

roller.

Hollywood seems to be losing some of its self-confidence and looking for succesful genres elsewhere in the world to imitate. They are taken from all over the spectrum from martial arts films to Kurosawa's historical epics. One periodic source is the French farce.

T\_h\_e\_M\_a\_n\_w\_i\_t\_h\_O\_n\_e\_R\_e\_d\_S\_h\_o\_e, T\_h\_e\_W\_o\_m\_a\_n\_i\_n\_R\_e\_d, and B\_u\_d\_d\_y\_B\_u\_d\_d\_y are

examples that come to mind. The most recent addition to their ranks is the Touchstone film D\_o\_w\_n\_a\_n\_d\_O\_u\_t\_i\_n\_B\_e\_v\_e\_r\_l\_y\_H\_i\_l\_l\_s, the Americanization of the classic French film B\_o\_u\_d\_o\_S\_a\_v\_e\_d\_f\_r\_o\_m\_D\_r\_o\_w\_n\_i\_n\_g.

Nick Nolte plays, Jerry, a bum so far down on his luck that his own dog deserts him for a bag of French fries. Meanwhile Dave (Richard Dreyfus) plays a man who has made millions selling coat hangers. His family had everything material they could possibly want so, of course, everyone is just vaguely discontented and looking for something else. Fate brings Jerry to Dave's swimming pool to commit suicide. Dave, seeing Jerry jump into his pool, rescues him and adopts him into the family only to discover that bringing strangers into one's home can be a mistake. It can also be very educational.

D\_o\_w\_n\_a\_n\_d\_O\_u\_t\_i\_n\_B\_e\_v\_e\_r\_l\_y\_H\_i\_l\_l\_s has a light, whimsical touch in its lampooning of the California lifestyle, but little of the lampooning feels like it comes from someone who has been there. Instead, it seems like a stranger guessing what sort of eccentricities might go on in California. D\_o\_w\_n\_a\_n\_d\_O\_u\_t had neither the humor nor the biting satire of S\_e\_r\_i\_a\_l.

Some attention has been paid to the antics of Matisse, the family dog, played by Mike, a black and white dog with eyes of two different colors. High praise and (reputedly) many job offers have been heaped on Mike after his comic acting performance. Mike is funny, and appears well-trained, but he seems to be a method actor and he uses the Cheeta method. That is, when given a chance of behaving like an animal or a human, act human.

It is hard to be enthusiastic about D\_o\_w\_n\_a\_n\_d\_O\_u\_t\_i\_n\_B\_e\_v\_e\_r\_l\_y\_H\_i\_l\_l\_s. It has occasional bursts of hilarity, but generally is toned down to whimsey. The film is somehow missing something, but what it does have makes it worth seeing. Give it a +1 on the -4 to +4 scale.

\_N\_O\_T\_E\_S\_F\_R\_O\_M\_T\_H\_E\_N\_E\_T

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Subject: "Cobra Strike" by Timothy Zahn

Path: mhuxt!mhuxr!ulysses!bellcore!decvax!decwrl!amdcad!lll-crg!caip!daemon

Date: Sat, 1-Feb-86 17:45:02 EST

Cobra Strike takes place about thirty years after "Cobra". Our hero Jonny Moreau from "Cobra" is still part of the plot but no shares the spotlight with his sons. The cover mentions that the Troft, the aliens, want to hire some cobras as mercenaries. And the plot is in response to this. It is a good story. Enjoyed every page. The plot moves along very well. Zahn has done a good job of writing a sequel. If you like "Cobra" I think you'll enjoy "Cobra Strike"

Henry III

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Subject: THE MAGICK OF CAMELOT by Arthur H. Landis (mild spoiler)

Path: whuxl!whuxlm!akgua!gatech!seismo!hao!noao!terak!mot!anasazi!duane

Date: Fri, 31-Jan-86 13:55:48 EST

The jacket reads:

"The planet the watchers from the stars called Camelot was unique among all worlds. For there, amid the trappings of medieval chivalry magic actually worked! It had stumped the secret observers from the Terran worlds for years--until Kyrie Fern brought back the startling answer.

But Kyrie's work was not done, for on the heels of this triumph in leading the knights and ladies and dragonlords to victory, the gate between the universes opened. And the vangard of a super-science beyond humanity set up its conquering banner on Camelot.

Knighthood may have always been in flower there but the time had come for warlock spells and high-tech strategies to combine forces...or lose first a world and then the galaxy."

A fair summary, though it partly refers to goings on in two previous books, A WORLD CALLED CAMELOT and CAMELOT IN ORBIT (and a later book is also out, HOME TO AVALON).

Kyrie Fern is an "Adjuster" for the Terran worlds, trained to blend into the planet's society and manipulate things from within. He is now in a position of leadership on Camelot, and he himself often feels more kinship with the people there than with Terrans.

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Camelot is a world of magic and chivalry, but it is being attacked by people using very high technology. Both the technology and the magic are decently explained in the book.

The story is an enjoyable adventure, though it doesn't develop much tension since Kyrie always seems to be in control of things. The characters are somewhat stereotyped; for the inhabitants of Camelot, that's appropriate, since the characters are patterned after our popular notions of Camelot. On the other hand, it's somewhat grating to occasionally hear main characters making chauvinistic remarks.

I give this book 3.0 stars (pretty good). I like the way it treats magic and technology; it's a good read, but it doesn't leave a lasting impression.

Duane Morse ...!noao!terak|anasazi!duane

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Subject: What The Book Of The New Sun Means To Me (In 25 Words Or More)

Path: mtuxo!drutx!druri!dht

Date: Wed, 5-Feb-86 18:23:03 EST

Well, I thought I'd stay out of it for awhile, but I can't resist any longer...

Gene Wolfe is demonstrably one of the finest (if not the finest) writers of fiction in the world today. He has a mastery of his genre that few others in many other fields ever even hope to acquire. Like Joyce, he can turn his conventions, our conventions, on their heads, and achieve a beautiful resonance that goes beyond mere head-turning. Every sentence he writes in *The Book Of The New Sun* drips with meaning, throbs with resonance of ideas and images gone before, or to come. Like Eco, he can make a novel of ideas and mood and atmosphere and history become a novel of actions and deeds and words and movement with a stroke of the pen or the turn of a page, without seeming disjointed, without (in many cases) the reader even being aware. Like Lem, he can take a set, mundane situation and make the reader see how much the perception of reality affects reality itself, to illuminate the distinction between what it

real and what is perceived, to illuminate that there is sometimes a difference between them, that there sometimes is not.

The Book Of The New Sun is arguably science fiction's crowning achievement to date, in its scope, its innate understanding and subsequent casting-off of forms and accepted precepts. Certainly, it is difficult at times, and while science fiction readers have grown accustomed to their own special vocabulary and accepted the making-up of words to describe things for which there are no words ("Grok", "Slan", etc.), Wolfe, in a very simple and subtle manner, turns even this convention on its head with his use of archaic words, and Latin usage, words that have rung in other people's ears and have come out of other

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people's mouths (like "destrier" - a medieval term for a knight's horse). Science fiction readers don't generally like long, mellifluous sentences of this nature; we want Hemingway-esque, Heinlein-esque sentence structure. Gritty, to-the-point, advancing the story with every clause. We don't like Melville or Marquez, with their two-page sentences that are like mazes of apposition, predication, and subject-verb agreements a mile long. Wolfe, in turn, writes sentences that are paragraphs and paragraphs that are sentences, turning the long into the short and the short into the long. He brings back to modern literature the sheer joy of reading for reading's sake, something that the "good read" and the "great story" generally don't offer. Each page reveals something new, some surprise, some totally different way of looking at reality.

In the larger scale, beyond his minor triumphs of structure of clause, phrase, sentence and paragraph, Wolfe presents a world that evokes so many different things to so many different people that this one quality alone makes the book deserving of great praise. To some, Urth is medieval. To others, it is Egyptian, Byzantine, Roman, Foundation (Asimov), Future History (Heinlein). Urth reminds me of Jack Vance's deeply symbolic societies where form is more than function, of Smith's Instrumentality where what is best for Man is to remain ignorant and keep knowledge, true knowledge, in the hands and hearts of a select few, of Louis XIV's Versailles, of Eliza-bethan England, of Renaissance Italy, of Macbeth. And more, although the primary accomplishment is that Urth is none of these things, that it is a construct of Wolfe's, as real and vivid (see, Charlie?) as 20th Century America. Urth is so strange,

so wonderful, so alien, and yet the fundamental nature of human beings, the fundamental flaws of man, are still the same, and still worked out on a tapestry of incredible imagery and breathtaking scope.

Most definitely, *The Book Of The New Sun* is difficult to read, in places. We often tend to forget in this age of television and speed-reading courses that there can sometimes be merit in slowing the reader down, in forcing the act of reading to be noticed, in allowing a reader to take time to savor the individual moments and concepts of a single page. We read at a chapter's pace, and Wolfe forces us to read at a sentence's pace. This is uncomfortable, just as riding in a horse-and-buggy from Lancaster County to Philadelphia is uncomfortable - we can get there so much faster by car, or plane. But as many of us would admit, there is beauty and something extra in going by the landscape at ten miles an hour that we could never hope to experience at sixty. The same is true for books. *The Book Of The New Sun* is difficult to read because there is so much more in it that people are used to - page for page, Wolfe attacks more, cajoles more, surprises more, and accomplishes more than any modern writer.

What is *The Book Of The New Sun* about? I don't really know. I do know that it fascinated me more than any novel I have read, that it left me with a feeling of dislocation in this world that I have never experienced from a book, that feeling of having lived another life with

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which I have nothing in common, of having been someplace that I could never imagine being. We can all imagine spaceships now, and sandworms, and the infinity of space - it's part of science fiction history. But Wolfe has given us the infinity of the mind, the infinity of dreams layered over dreams, covered with time and dust, resting on a precarious foundation of shifting perception. There is a puzzle, there is a puzzle of puzzles, there is a morality play and a homonculus who is ruled by the giant he thinks he possesses (yet another twist among the thousands), there is an order of nuns who guard a jewel that is worthless and yet beyond price, there are cannibals and revolutionaries and palace intrigues, there is a good bit of film noir double-dealing and sleight-of-hand, reminiscent of "Body Heat" and "Double Jeopardy", there is loneliness and self-realization and swords and wizardry, demons of the desert and of the mind, time travel that is used for different purposes than anyone could ever imagine, backwardness and incredible

sophistication of the intellect and the society, war and hatred and duels, myths from our present that are changed around to present the symbology of different times, often with the opposite moral than we would draw from them, there is death and rebirth, imperfection and strangeness, there is hope, there is confusion, there is decay and degradation. There are at least ten great novels in here, in different parts, and a multitude of great, truly great short stories cast off like litter by the side of the road. There is more in *The Book Of The New Sun* than any one person can understand, appreciate, or see in one reading, or in ten. Wolfe has managed to build so many layers on top of layers, like his necropolis, that it is an incredible literary archeological attempt to unearth them all. And like cutting through a pearl or an onion, no one layer is more important than the other, though some may be more central.

In the immortal words of Marty DiBergi "But hey - enough a my yakkin... Let's boogie!"

Davis Tucker

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Subject: Nerilka's Story

Path: mtuxo!houxm!whuxl!whuxlm!akgua!gatech!ut-sally!topaz!caip!daemon

Date: Wed, 5-Feb-86 23:53:39 EST

From Publishers Weekly, Jan 31, 1986 page 366

Nerilka's Story: A Pern Adventure Anne McCaffrey, illustrated by Edwin Herder Ballentine/Del Rey 12.95 March 21

The latest of McCaffrey's romantic Pern novels expands on the tale of a minor character in *Moreta: Dragonlady of Pern*. Young Merilka is considered unattractive and overly serious in her own hold, where her preemptory father installs his mistress immediately after his wife's death. Angry and frustrated, Nerilka uses her medical training and her

access to the supplies her father is hoarding to help combat the plague sweeping Pern, which has already claimed her mother and sisters. Inevitably, her work with the Healers leads her to Ruatha Hold, whose

rugged widower chief, Lord Alessan, sees her worth and marries her. In form, this is basically a Victorian gothic in which a governess tames and marries the gruff master of the house. As such, McCaffrey's legions of fans should enjoy it, but it is a weak entry in the Pern saga.

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Subject: Reply to Rick Heli about Gene Wolfe

Path: mtuxo!drutx!druri!dht

Date: Mon, 10-Feb-86 14:59:49 EST

I have read The Shadow of the Torturer, (first volume of The Book of the New Sun), but in almost a year have yet to continue with the rest of the book. In general, I found the writing murky and the tale rather disconnected. I found that I learned very little of the political system, social classes, economic systems or even recent history. This failure of Wolfe's to adequately inform varies directly with my failure to be interested in his tale.

Perfectly understandable - what got me interested in the rest of the novel was his writing style, primarily. Your criticisms are all true, to a small extent, and it most definitely *is* a difficult book to follow, written in a deliberately dense and ponderous style that (as I have said before) forces the reader to slow down from the usual 1980's breakneck pace. I disagree that the writing is "murky" - this implies an involuntary lack of clarity that I do not think is in the work - certainly Wolfe obscures the truth and asks that the reader spend time puzzling things out for himself, sometimes crucially important things. But he does not do this idly, as William F. Buckley does when he speaks. Wolfe, above all, is communicating the act of dreaming (or at least that's my humble interpretation - stop laughing, Charlie...). Dreams are impenetrable, sometimes, even after we wake up and can realize what was going on in them - sometimes there is nothing that we recognize, nothing that we can understand. This would explain the disconnection of the work, which is also a large component of dreams - although I must add that the subsequent volumes explain the previous ones, while they themselves beg more explanation. The disconnectedness does mitigate, though, to a sort of not-so-free association. This could just be the result of reading all of them, that the reader grows used to the style and doesn't ask questions in the hope that they will be answered later.

As to your complaint that Wolfe did not inform well enough, you are asking of him the things that you would ask of a hack writer. Didn't you *feel* that you were in another world? Didn't you *feel* that you didn't know what was going on, just like Severian? Didn't you *feel* an incredible decay? The Book Of The New Sun wants you to ask questions and search for answers - it is not a pat sociology, or a future history.

It is not dry and it is not going to give in to dryness of the sort that is so often necessary in novels which build worlds. At the heart, Urth is not the central point of reading this book - Severian is. What you will learn of Urth is what you can learn through Severian's eyes and wits, and if sometimes it leaves you hungry, well that's usually the way it is in real life, and in dreams. Wolfe does not need to give you the social rank of every character, to explain why his world works the way it does - to do so would be to cheat you of the rare experience of seeing such a complex, strange, and different place through someone else's eyes, a crowning achievement for any writer. Severian is not so wise or so observant either, and the murk that you complain about may just be the murk that comes as the beginning of self-awareness. This is not to say that as you progress through the novel things become "clearer", that Severian in some way "comes to his senses" - quite the contrary. But he does grow up, and he does see what is wrong and right with Urth, and he does learn the things we all learn as we grow older and a little wiser. It is *\*this\** that is important, not how many legions the Autarch has, or how many people are on Vodalus' side, what their economic interrelations are, who pays the bills, etc. Leave that kind of thing to Herbert and Heinlein (who do it quite well), and leave the dreams and the self-realization to Wolfe.

This seems to me to be particularly true in a story like this where so many of the characters seem to be insane and therefore take actions that appear illogical: Master Palaemon gives an extremely valuable sword to a man who never seemed to interest him and who ought to be sentenced to death. Agia and Agilus are insanely greedy, consider the bizarre excuses Agilus gives in the prison cell when he argues to be spared. The boatman is in a crazed state and Dorcas suffers from amnesia. The rationality of Dr. Talos, Baldanders and the stuttering man seem questionable to me as well.

I think you are projecting 20th Century notions of rationality and sanity onto characters who are very much not products of the 20th Century. This is a common fault, and most writers of science fiction do not really change their characters' personalities and faults and foibles to reflect the times that they live in - too many are merely 20th Century dudes in some other place and time, using starships like cars and teleportation like phones. Buck Rogers is an archetype for science fiction characters, almost the norm. Certainly *\*some\** of the characters are insane; but they are not the ones that you think are. Wolfe pulls some interesting twists later on. Dorcas suffers from amnesia for a very good reason, which I won't spoil for those who are interested - her story is a very, very strange and fascinating one. But remember that Urth at this time is a world in turmoil, a world of duels and high

emotions and melodramatic flourishes, and certainly not cool rationality. Read Hugo, Dickens, and Dostoevsky - their times were similar, and their characters were sometimes histrionic, ranting lunatics in the light of later, calmer times. Master Palaemon was not acting illogically nor was he acting without good motivation - if you reread the text leading up to this point, you will see that the Master is portrayed sort

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of like the gruff schoolmaster with the heart of gold underneath, and that while he wants to uphold the law that would condemn Severian, he spends considerable time trying to find a loophole to save his life. In this context, the Master is acting out of kindness, as a father-figure to a wayward son, not irrationally. Remember his speech about the loving relationship between torturer and "client"? He is not a man without emotion, for all that believing in such a relationship may seem insane to \*us\* - certainly such beliefs have been held before, and explained in novels (I am especially reminded of works about the French Revolution).

Agia, you have correctly indicated, \*is\* insane, at least on the subject of money and Severian. Insane people often make great characters, especially ones who are sane except on a few points - many of Shakespeare's most memorable characters (Lear, Richard III, MacBeth, Hamlet, Iago) were somewhat insane, by modern definition. They are just difficult to follow, and they do not do things by accepted literary manners. They explode conventions in some works, they confront, they confuse, and they stay vivid. As for Dr. Talos and Baldanders, well... their portion of the story is fantastic. They are not insane, or at least not insane in any way you would recognize as insane. I can't say anymore.

...having awakened. This probably accounts for the dreamlike nature of the work, which many people seem to admire highly. I am less than enthusiastic about it; on the other hand, only reading the first book is probably tantamount to turning off Beethoven's 5th symphony in the middle of the second movement in terms of being fair to the author's complete message... But on the first hand, the author has the responsibility to make the first story accessible enough that the others will be read... In time, I may re-read the first book and give it another chance...

Well, I am one of those who admire this dreamlike quality, and I grant

you it isn't everyone's cup of tea. I am not so sure that if you didn't feel captivated by "The Shadow Of The Torturer" that it would be worth your time to read the other three volumes - in other words, Wolfe isn't telling you any lies - this is the way the rest of the novel will continue, with the same feel and the same complications that you find, so don't think that he made the first work more inaccessible than the others. By this yardstick, they're all somewhat inaccessible ("\*SOMEwhat\*?!!" I hear Charlie scream).

As to the author's responsibility - booshwah. Authors don't have any responsibility. That's why they're authors and not insurance salesmen or high school teachers. If you look at the history of authors in the western world, you will see that it is a history of irresponsibility, a history of little white lies and some damn big ones, of alcoholism and drug abuse, of suicide, murder, and compulsive gambling, a history of backbiting and sniping at their fellow authors with a vitriol suited for lighting houses on fire. Generally speaking, as soon as an author starts thinking about "responsibility" toward his audience, he's already ceased

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writing anything very good, or at least ceased writing the kinds of things that got him his audience in the first place (hacks are excluded here, as they are thinking about responsibility from the start). The only thing an author is responsible for is to type neatly, get his pages in order, to avoid misspelling and bad grammar, and to return calls from his agent. And a lot of them don't even do that.

One thing that intrigues me is the theory that Severian has lived this life before and that all the events depicted have been experienced by Severian not once, but twice. Anyone have any thoughts or theories on this? What made someone think of this rather unique thought in the first place? What evidence is there for it?

There is a profound sense of déjà vu running through the book. Severian himself, repeatedly, refers to this feeling of having been through this before - not all of the book, but some portions that strike him with that feeling. He indicates in his narrative that the act of writing this down is jogging his memory even as he writes, so that he is bound to feel that he is repeating himself (which is essentially what a first-person narrative is). Also, remember that Severian has a photographic,

or a holographic memory - he forgets nothing. With such a gift or a curse, it is impossible to avoid the resonance of previous acts and emotions and sensations with those of the present. A past that we may know nothing about, incidentally. As to the significance of this, there could be many things - it allows Wolfe to flesh out each scene in aching detail that a normal narrative might skip over, as his main character remembers everything. But I think it goes beyond this, as many first-person narrative novels often act as if the narrator remembers everything (When's the last time a narrator said "I'm not too sure about this..." or "I don't really remember..."?). Wolfe wants to get us inside the head of a man who remembers everything, but who isn't exactly the smartest guy running around Urth with a badass sword. It's a fascinating juxtaposition - we always assume that those with perfect memories are intelligent, just because they can remember everything. Severian is like a bird, flooded by so much sensory input that his ability to think is sometimes clouded by his ability to remember, to sense. He's almost a walking tape recorder, without the appearance of volition. And don't you often feel that way in dreams? That everything reeks of your past, that you have done all this before, and better, but that now you have no control, you are just acting out your part in your little play? Generally in dreams what people remember is how they feel, how they sense - such as they common dream of running around naked in a public place, looking for your clothes. Perhaps that is the purpose of Severian's sense of deja vu - and it complements the the reader's own sense of deja vu, such as in a previously mentioned vignette where Severian tries to describe a picture of Armstrong walking on the moon, or a story told later that is a strange reworking of the Theseus myth.

Given your questions, and your underlying interest in the sanity and motives of the characters, whose names you still remember after a year,

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perhaps your memory and your curiosity are trying to tell you something. Another read of "The Shadow Of The Torturer" might help you decide about The Book Of The New Sun once and for all. If you have any questions, ask Jim Gardner - he knows it better than I.

Davis Tucker

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Subject: Upcoming SF/Fantasy Films (very long)

Path: bellcore!decvax!ittatc!dcdwest!sdcsvox!sdcrcf!ucla-cs!reiher

Date: Wed, 5-Feb-86 21:42:34 EST

Here is a list of the science fiction and fantasy films which are scheduled for release in 1986. The list is culled from a list of all films to be released. The list was in the Calendar section of the Sunday LA Times of January 12th. It was compiled by Pat H. Broeske.

The blurbs attached are from that article. In a few cases, I have added my own comments, in brackets. The films are listed in order of release (generally speaking), and alphabetically within the time periods. Not all of those listed are certain to be released. Other films of this type not on the list may also be released (especially cheap ones from small studios). I have omitted films which seem to be more horror oriented than fantasy/sf. Releasing studio is listed in parenthesis after the blurb.

January and February (Most of these have already opened.)

"The Adventures of Mark Twain" Fantasy-adventure written/directed by Will Vinton in his Claymation process. [This seems to be a love-it or hate-it film. I loved it. Mark Leeper hated it.](Atlantic)

"Critters" - Campy thriller about the invasion of a small Oklahoma town by alien carnivores with razor-sharp teeth and porcupine quills and a pair of alien bounty hunters (from their galaxy) on their trail. Billy Green Bush, Dee Wallace, M. Emmet Walsh. (New Line Cinema)

"The Dirt Bike Kid" - Not unlike Jack of "Jack and the Beanstalk", a boy (Peter Billingsley) disobeys his mom's instructions when he's sent to the store and buys a magical dirt bike. Adventures follow. (Concorde/Cinema Group)

"The Eliminators" - Half human android (named Mandroid), a beautiful scientist, a mercenary, and a ninja exact revenge on a mad scientist. (Empire)

"Hands of Steel" - Futuristic action-adventure tale about an android (with hands that can penetrate steel) hired to kill the world's last environmentalist. (Things have gotten pretty murkey on the planet.) [I wonder if Harlan Ellison can successfully sue these guys, too.] (Almi

Pictures)

"Terrorvision" - Horror/comedy about an intergalactic garbage monster that enters a nutty family's home via their satellite dish and through their television. With Mary Woronov, Gerrit Graham, Bert Remsen, Diane Franklin. (Empire)

"Troll" - When the Potter family moves into the apartment building at Mockingbird Lane, they're unaware that Torok the Troll is making himself comfy in the laundry room. (Empire)

Spring

"Aurora Encounter" - Three school children befriend the alien pilot of a UFO in 1897 Aurora, Texas. They try to convince townspeople of the alien's existence while saving him from a government agent. Jack Elam, Peter Brown, Spanky ("Our Gang") McFarland, singer Dottie West. [Not again!] (New World) [With a studio like this, we can at least hope that the alien winds up dismembering Spanky on screen.]

"Bio-Hazard" - Fred Olin Ray directs the tale of an alien from another dimension who's a scout for a planned invasion. With Aldo Ray. (21st Century)

"The Boy Who Could Fly" - An autistic youngster named Eric sits on a second story ledge, hums like an airplane, and believes he can fly. And, guess what? With Lucy Deakins, Fred Savage, Bonnie Bedelia, Fred Gwynne, Colleen Dewhurst, Louis Fletcher. Directed by Nick Castle. (Fox)

"Ghost Warrior" - A Samurai warrior, trapped frozen in ice over centuries, is defrosted in contemporary Los Angeles. Starring Hiroshi Fujioka, the "Don Johnson of Japan" (says the distributor). (Empire)

"The Highlander" - Antagonists who don't age or die struggle for power in a saga that takes them from a remote 16th-century Scotland to a battle in present-day Manhattan. Sean Connery, Christopher Lambert, Roxanne Hart, Clancy Brown. (Fox)

"Pleasure Planet" - Outer space meets rock 'n roll under the direction of Albert Puhn. (Empire)

"Star Crystal" - A routine expedition to Mars in the year 2035 turns up a curious rock that an astronaut pockets. He'll wish he hadn't: The rock encases a tiny creature that grows in size and intellect and murderous thought. (New World) [Nearly the perfect description of a modern New World picture, lacking only the detail that the creature likes to rip the cloths off its female victims before dispatching them. I'll bet it does, though.]

"Zone Troopers" - Extraterrestrial soldier assists the allies battle the Nazis in this WWII-science fiction tale. [A still from this film makes it look really cheap and hokey.] (Empire)

#### Summer

"Aliens" - Sigorney Weaver returns as chief warrant officer Ripley, sole survivor of the starship Nostromo's encounter with the extraterrestrial of 1979's box-office smash. This time, as written/directed by James Cameron, she returns to the site of the original terror and encounters more than one of the nasty title creatures. Michael Biehn, Paul Reiser, Lance Henrickse. (Fox)

"Big Trouble in Little China" - Director John Carpenter and Kurt Russell reteam for a mystical action-adventure-comedy-kung-fu-monster-ghost-story, about the imaginary world beneath Chinatown that's inhabited by ghosts. Kim Catrall, James Hong, Victor Wong, Kate Burton (daughter of Richard). Scripted by W. D. Richter [of "Buckaroo Banzai".] (Fox)

"Cherry 2000" - When his robot playmate has an internal meltdown, lonely guy David Andrews goes in search of the parts needed for repair. His journey into the lawless zone, circa 2017, forces him to team with a real woman, Melanie Griffith, which means he soon discovers there's more to love than hot wiring. (Orion)

"The Fly" - David Cronenberg co-wrote/directed this remake of the 1958 Vincent Price horror classic about a scientist whose atoms are scrambled with those of a housefly during an experiment with matter transmission. Jeff Goldblum, Geena Davis, John Getz. (Fox)

"Flight of the Navigator" - A 12-year-old boy goes the Rip Van Winkle route - leaving home on an errand and returning eight years later, only to learn he hasn't aged a day. Directed by Randal Kleiser. (Buena Vista) [I.E., either Disney or its mature-film company, Touchstone.]

"Harry and the Hendersons" - Steven Spielberg is exec-producer of this comedy about a typical American family whose lives are turned around when they run into an unusual creature. [Deja vu ... ] Written/directed by William Dear. (Universal)

"Howard the Duck" - George Lucas is the exec director [say what?] of this live action comedy based on the Marvel Comics ducky. With Lea Thompson, Jeffrey Jones, Tim Robbins. Directed by Willard Huyck. (Universal)

"Hyper Sapiens" - The citizenry of Wyoming has a close encounter with two runaway extraterrestrial teens and their creature in this comedy-adventure directed by Peter Hunt. With Sidney Penny and Keenan Wynn. (Distributor Pending)

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"Invaders From Mars" - Tobe Hooper directed remake of the 1953 sci-fi favorite about an 11-year-old boy (Hunter Carson) who awakens one night to watch an alien spacecraft land in the hills behind his home. Over the next three days, the boy tries to convince the authority figures around him that something strange is going on... With Karen Black, Laraine Newman, Timothy Bottoms, Louise Fletcher. (Cannon)

"Labyrinth" - Directed by Muppet master Jim Henson and exec produced by George Lucas, this is an adventure-fantasy about a young girl's journey through a multi-walled maze to rescue her baby brother who has been kidnapped by David Bowie, ominous ruler of the labyrinth. With only three human characters, the film will feature a menagerie of new creatures. [The coming attractions look great. Does the synopsis remind anyone else of Maurice Sendak's "Outside Over There"?] (Tri-Star)

"Legend" - Ridley Scott directed this fantasy-adventure about hermit Tom Cruise who must do battle with the evil Lord of Darkness (Tim Curry) to rescue Princess Mia Sara and free the universe from its curse of perpetual winter. With fairies, goblins, unicorns, and some mortals. [Scheduled to be released last year, "Legend" has gone through substantial changes, including ripping out a supposedly excellent orchestral score to throw in a rock score, drastic shortening, etc., all in the name of appealing to teenagers. The original version is supposed to be playing in Europe. I hope it eventually makes it over here.] (Universal)

"Maximum Overdrive" - The Earth passes through the tail of a comet,

turning all machinery against man. Stephen King scripted/directed. Stars Emilio Estevez. (De Laurentiis Entertainment Group) [A business title many would consider a contradiction in terms.]

"Poltergeist II: The Other Side" - After being terrorized in California, the Freeling family moves to Phoenix - only to discover their nightmares haven't ended. Craig T. Nelson, JoBeth Williams, William Heather O'Rourke, Oliver Robbins. (MGM/UA)

"Short Circuit" - John Badham-directed high-tech adventure comedy about a military weapons robot, named No. 5, who short-circuits (in a thunderstorm) and becomes "alive" - and turns peacenik. He's also chased by the government and the scientist (Steve Guttenberg) who created him. And he's befriended by Ally Sheedy. [John Badham ("Wargames") again brings his, shall we say, interesting views of computer science to the screen. Which doesn't bother me as much as the feeling that I will be able to predict almost every single plot twist in this film.] (Tri Star)

"Spacecamp" - A summer at camp turns into an unexpected space shuttle voyage for a group of teenaged astronaut trainees. Kate Capshaw, Tate Donovan, Leaf Phoenix, Kelly Preston, Larry B. Scott, Tom Skerrit, Lea Thompson. [It will be interesting to see what happens to this film in the light of the recent tragedy. Will the studio fear charges of poor

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taste, or will it crassly use the tragedy to promote its movie, or will it go ahead just as if nothing had happened?] (Fox)

"Starship Redwing" - Science fiction tale (set in the year 2084) about conflicts on a mining planet. (Concorde/Cinema Group)

"Underworld" - The gothic meets the futuristic when mutant members of an underworld realm - who live beneath the streets of a metropolis - incur the wrath of a criminal underworld. Denholm Elliott and Miranda Richardson. [Elliott is a fine actor last seen in TV's "Bleak House". How typical of the acting profession, to move from Dickens to what sounds like cheap exploitation.] (Empire)

Fall

"American Tail" - Steven Spielberg's Amblin Entertainment will team with animator Don Bluth for this animated tale of an immigrant mouse. (Warner Bros)

"Robots Rule" - Futuristic Western about a robot ranch hand whose relationship with a female human gets him in trouble with the authorities, leading to a showdown between man and machinery. Scripted/directed by Rospo Pallenberg. (New World)

"Spellcaster" - Filmed in an authentic Roman castle, this one's about a group of people who've been summoned for a treasure hunt that results in magical legends - courtesy of a Merlin-like wizard. (Empire)

"Test Tube Teens From the Year 2000" - Futuristic comedy with a 1950s slant - in which a couple of dudes from the 80s are put into hibernation and reawaken in the year 2000 when teens have reverted to '50s-ish mannerisms (like "Oh gee") and '50s-ish morals - which means the guys have their work cut out for them when they find themselves on a "female farm" where the gals pine about finding Mr. Right. Oh golly! [Sounds like a cheap ripoff of an excellent Polish film, "Sex Mission". Also sounds incredibly sexist and offensive.] (Empire)

#### Christmas

"Batteries Not Included" - The plot to this one is being kept under wraps, but it's said to involve flying saucers - a familiar stamping ground for exec producer Steven Spielberg. Matthew Robbins directs. (Universal)

"King Kong Lives!" - The beast, whom we presumed dead after toppling from the World Trade Center (silly us), apparently is alive and well. John Guillerman, who directed the 1976 remake, again directs. Cast not yet announced. [One of the few cases I've heard of where they make a sequel to a flop.] (DeLaurentiis Ent.)

"Spiderman" - Bitten by a radioactive spider, a man attains newfound strength and the ability to sense criminal evil, becoming Spiderman - defender of law and order. Joseph Zito directs, based on Stan Lee's

Marvel Comics character. (Cannon)

"Star Trek IV" - The Enterprise takes off again. Leonard Nimoy stars and directs who else but William Shatner, DeForest Kelley, James Doohan, Walter Koenig, George Takei, Nichelle Nichols. (Paramount)

No Announced Release Date

"Booby Trap" - Futuristic tale set in (what's left of) Southern California, circa 1998, about an 18-year-old who, accompanied by his girl and a robot named Winston, takes revenge on a gang that attacked him. (Distributor pending)

"Little Shop of Horrors" - Based on the Off-Broadway musical (which was based on Roger Corman's 1960 cult flick) about a botanical genius and his bloodthirsty Venus flytrap. Frank Oz directs Rick Moranis, Steve Martin, Ellen Greene, John Candy. [And Bill Murray in a cameo.] (Warner Bros)

"Trackers: 2180" - Michael Pare and Richard Farnsworth team for a prison break on a futuristic colonized desert planet. (Vestron)

And some which might or might not get made:

"Blue Plaid Sneakers" - fantasy-comedy-romance. (Atlantic)

"Creature" - Youngsters find and protect a mysterious young forest creature found in a magical woods. (New World)

"Heros for Hire" - superhero adventure. (Atlantic)

"Making Mr. Right" - Susan Seidelman directs an ironic look at modern romance - in which the perfect man turns out to be an android. (Orion)

"Robocop" - All about the future of law enforcement - as the body of a cop who lies near death is used to create a mechanical robot with a human memory. (Orion)

And a few final comments. Notice how many sf/fantasy films are being released by companies like Empire and New World. Most of these will stink. Of the majors, only Fox seems to have very many sf/fantasy films coming out. (Universal has several Spielberg produced films coming out.) Even among the major studios, the emphasis is in predictability, with a flood of robot/android movies sporting interchangeable plots. Also several sequels and one or two presold films based on other mediums. Only a very few original sounding films are coming out in the sf/fantasy field. It may be that this will be a big sf/fantasy year quantitatively, but qualitatively, it sounds poor.

Peter Reiher

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Subject: Discussion on TWAIN  
Path: leeper  
Date: Mon, 10-Feb-86 10:58:53 EST

Steve Knight wrote me a well-thought-out response to my review of ADVENTURES OF MARK TWAIN. I would like the Net to see what he had to say and also to see my responses to his comments. I have left his entire text intact, but have interposed my own comments.

Well, Mark, I have to take strong exception to your review of "The Adventures of Mark Twain." If nothing else, your review has forced me to get off my butt and post one of my own, which I've been writing in my head for a week and a half now. So much for my timing.

Great! A little controversy should liven things up a little. But why wait until you disagree with someone? If you like a film, you should write a review. That is what net.movies is all about. (Not that I am trying to lecture; I'm not. But the more points of view the better it will be.)

Okay, I'm confused. You claim that the film is only "children's fare," yet not three paragraphs later you talk about how much of the humor is too subtle for children. It seems to me that it'd be difficult for it to be both.

Not really. Let me give you an extreme example. Suppose Mr. Rogers started giving little allusions to Spinoza and Kant, but the rest of his program was pretty much the same. The program would still be children's fare with humor too subtle for children. TWAIN wasn't that bad, but it shows how you can mismatch styles.

And, if you'll forgive the possible unintended snide overtones in such a question, were you asleep through the Mysterious Stranger sequence? You'd have a difficult time indeed convincing me that a message that nihilistic is something which children will understand, or even appreciate, more than adults.

I think that is part of my point. I don't think the children would appreciate it at all. I don't think the adults would enjoy some of the more cutesy aspects like the heart-headed Becky and the worm-engines in the back of the ship. I suppose the film does have something for

everyone, but too little and at too many points it is giving you something that either adults or children will not appreciate.

This, in particular, is why I'm impressed with "The Adventures of Mark Twain" as a film, animation aside. I feel it gives a very decent treatment of a difficult subject, namely the dichotomy

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between Twain the genial humorist of his early years, and Twain the cynical misanthrope of his later years. I think you underestimate the difficulty of handling such a subject in a manner which children will at least comprehend (and still be entertained by) yet which will not bore adults to tears.

If I felt it had given me any real insights into Clemens as a man, I would have enjoyed the film a lot more. It more simply made the statement that there were the two sides and I think that it may give children the impression that his writings are always either cute and simple or dour. Actually there is a whole range. And what was missing almost entirely was Twain's great humor. I didn't laugh even once at the film. Maybe I was too familiar with the Adam and Eve story, which I thought was really funny the first time I read it. And I really did not like the way they turned Eve into Twain's image of his lost love.

I'm also a bit bewildered that you fault it for only introducing children to Twain's "less important" works, yet later imply that it has set its sights too high. ("...future full-length claymation films will probably set their sights a little lower.") Now, I am no Twain scholar and am not overly familiar with all his shorter works, so if you mean that there are better short works that they could have selected, I will have to yield to your greater familiarity with Twain. If, however, you meant that the film did not introduce its viewers to longer works such as "The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn," works which are worthy of feature-length films in themselves, I ask you, how were they to adequately fit a novel into the structure they had chosen?

Ah, but the sky-craft with its index-evator was supposed to represent the whole of the works of Twain. The implication is that they would at least give you scenes from many of the major works. There are many incidents from Huckleberry Finn that stand on their own as stories.

Picking substories from major works that gave the feel of the major works is more what was called for if this was going to be a good introduction and sampler of Twain's better works. But that is nearly impossible in Claymation. Different media force their own speed of storytelling. Let me take a minute to explain what I mean by that. Up until PBS/BBC did their COUNT DRACULA, the story of DRACULA has never been done very faithfully on film. The reason is that the novel is a long story with a lot happening in it. It takes three hours of film to do justice to the story. Ah, but Orson Welles did a very good job of telling the story in one hour on the Mercury Theater radio show. Why could he do in radio in one hour what it takes three to do in film? Because he has passages like, "Before anyone could stop it the black dog jumped up on the deck, was over the side of the boat and running down the beach and out of sight." [Well, that is the gist of a passage, anyway.] It takes about five seconds to say it. It would take at least 25 seconds to show it on film because you are slowed down by the visual images. The ear and mind are actually much faster than the eye which becomes dizzy if presented images too fast. Some Claymation actually

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takes advantage of this by intentionally presenting images faster than the eye can catch them so the mind always lags a second behind what is happening. CLOSED MONDAYS and another piece I just saw recently on cable in which an impressionist gives his impression of all of WWII do this quite effectively.

My point is that just as film is a slower medium than radio, Claymation is a slower medium than most of the rest of film. The images take a moment more to comprehend than seeing real people would. They have to slow down and to let you admire their artwork. That combined the fact that ADVENTURES OF MARK TWAIN was short for a theatrical film -- most animated features are -- meant that Vinton left himself with not enough screen time to do justice to the idea of an introduction to Twain's works in Claymation. It was like trying to summarize the history of the US in two paragraphs. His medium forced him to give only superficial coverage.

Introducing viewers to Twain's style through some of the more accessible short stories and through the characters of Huck, Becky, and Tom seems to me, although not an outright exposition of the longer works, an adequate push for any viewers who like the film to

go explore Twain in more depth.

I think giving a better feel for Twain's wild humor would do more. I think Hal Holbrook's MARK TWAIN TONIGHT gets more people to read Twain than this film ever would. It is verrry funny in places. And it is just Twain's writings that make it so. They are what are so funny. But you need a Holbrook to deliver the lines, not a cute clay doll.

All this is not to say, however, that I think the film is flawless. Although I enjoyed "The Diary of Adam and Eve" far more than you did, I still thought it a bit slow in places; it certainly could have used some tightening up.

I think the fault was more in the medium than you give it credit for being.

(In fact, I wonder if the film as a whole got its start because they made a short of "Diary of A & E" and decided to put a frame around it. The animation in the "Diary" seemed much more primitive to me, but this is purely conjecture on my part.)

It seems quite possible, but you'd have to ask Vinton.

This, in fact, is one of the reasons that I initially thought the film was completely inappropriate for children when I first saw it--too much talk, not enough action to hold a younger attention span. After repeat viewings, I did convince myself that there is enough action to hold younger viewers's interest.

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The kids in the audience I was in saw the film only once and had the same first impression. One seemed to ask his mother every three minutes "Is it over?"

This brings up the question of audience. Again, I do not get a clear sense of your position. After dismissing it as "children's fare" and mentioning that the audience was filled with parents with small children, you state that "this film is not going to find its proper audience."

I do seem to be implying that it has a proper audience. I am not sure I really believe that. The people who would appreciate the Mysterious Stranger sequence would be put off by the more cute sequences. A proper audience would be able to follow the shift gears from childish to profound. Now notice that ALICE IN WONDERLAND never shifts gears like that. The story is always on two levels. It can be seen straight through as a children's story or it can be seen straight through as a collection of profound ideas (see Martin Gardner's ANNOTATED ALICE). TWAIN operates rarely at more than one level at a time, but that level shifts all over the place. I think kids were baffled by the concept of the two Twains. They are never baffled by ALICE IN WONDERLAND.

If it is attracting the sort of crowd which you feel it is suited for, how is that not finding a proper audience? I, however, would agree with your latter statement, but I can not fault the film itself for not finding its proper audience. I instead place the blame on Clubhouse Pictures for not realizing what they have in "The Adventures of Mark Twain" and for marketing it as though it were in the league with the other drek in their series of five "family" films ("Hey There, It's Yogi Bear" and "The Gobots Movie," to name two).

I think they might have done better to rip out the framing sequence and just done short stories and incidents from longer works. But even when they had a work that would have been done well as a short story, "Celebrated Jumping Frog..." They let the medium change the story. They wanted to make the final scene more visual so they had the frog cough up pickaxes, irons, etc. instead of buckshot. You show me a frog that can swallow a pickaxe! That was Vinton trying to improve on Twain and fit the story to the medium.

Okay, let's talk about the Claymation itself. (Oh, just for your information, Claymation is a registered trademark of Vinton Productions, and is not a generic term for animation using clay.)

"Kleenex" is a registered trademark of Scott tissue. "Claymation" is becoming a generic term, just like registered trademarks "linoleum" and "aspirin" went from being trademarks to generic terms.

Again, I'm confused. You start by saying that it presents "images almost equal to cartooning," yet two sentences later fault the

medium for being "too cartoonish."

It is between "three-dimensional image" and "cartoon animation," but it is closer to cartoon animation. It is perceived as being an interesting way to do cartoons, not as being just a step removed from having real actors.

Which is it? If by mentioning "cartooning," you mean to compare it to cel animation, I have to strongly disagree, at least as far as the portrayal of human figures goes. (I am not speaking here of the overall character design, which is necessarily not perfectly anatomical. In particular, the heads and hands are too big for the bodies, but this is purely a concession to the ease of animation.) I think of moments such as the difference between Becky's smile when Tom's asking her to swear not to tell as opposed to when he gives her the valentine; the subtleties portrayed in her face make all the difference between a roll-the-eyes smirk and an awed, wondering half-smile. I challenge you to name *any* example of animation since Fantasia which is as successful at portraying subtle emotion in human figures.

Interesting. But it doesn't convince me that Claymation isn't much more like cartooning than it is like having actors. You say that you cannot have similar nuances in cartooning, then you imply that it was done in FANTASIA. In fact, I think that it was done in other Disney cartoons since FANTASIA. It just takes a good artist, something that is not all that common. But notice similar facial expressions on a human actor would be considered overacting and hammy.

This is not say that I think the film does not have its moments where the animation is not up to scratch. I'm thinking here of moments such as the early crowd scene, with the paper boy and religious fanatic who look like something out of Gumby, or the scene with Huck, Becky and Tom bedded down in the hold, where the characters looked unexpectedly rough. But on the whole, I will still contend that the *animation* of the main characters is as stunningly realistic as you will find.

As you will find in a limited medium like Claymation. Holbrook does Twain much better.

In short, though, I feel that you did a grievous disservice to a very good film. Again, I'll maintain that it has its flaws--but by glossing over the good points and concentrating on the latter without establishing a consistent viewpoint, well, I can only shake my head and hope that other people will be intrigued enough to see this film without the misconception that anything that is animated is, by definition, a "children's film."

I think that is a pretty common misconception. I agree it is a misconception, however.

You mentioned the possibility of future feature-length films in Claymation. Unless "The Adventures of Mark Twain," helped by reviews which more successfully describe its triumphs and failures, can successfully combat the prejudices of the marketplace, there will be no future feature-length films in Claymation. And that, to me, would be a great tragedy.

I see my responsibility as a reviewer to honestly give my impression of the film, not to foster the Claymation medium. I would not want to see Claymation die altogether, but I have to admit that I am unconvinced it is a medium that sustains a full-length film. People were unconvinced that cartoon animation would sustain a full-length film and when Disney made the first full-length cartoons he had to make them films that really stood out and proved themselves to be in the best medium for telling their particular story. That was the genius of Disney. Vinton is good at what he does, but he could not perform a similar feat with ADVENTURES OF MARK TWAIN and it may well be that it is an impossible task with the limits of Claymation.

One last point: the film was not intentionally timed to correspond with the return of Halley's Comet, as you claimed. Vinton Productions started work on the film over three years ago, and as I understand it, their initial production schedule was not timed for it to come out now. (Vinton claims they were completely oblivious to the comet's return in making the film, but I must admit I find that to be a little difficult to believe.)

I should have said "seemingly timed."

Look for my review on the net sometime in the next few days. I hope you'll feel free to discuss with me anything I've said above, or will say in my review.

I look forward to reading it.

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Subject: Brazil: Great SF Movie?

Path: mtuxo!houxm!mhuxt!mhuxr!ulysses!bellcore!decvax!mcnc!rti-sel!wfi

Date: Sun, 9-Feb-86 13:20:48 EST

In the most recent issue of Fantasy and Science Fiction (March?), Harlan Ellison proclaims Terry Gilliam's film "Brazil" to be a great SF movie and in fact one of the greatest films of all time. Well, we all know that ol' Harlan has a tendency toward hyperbole in his essays. In his column he claims that Brazil is unlike any other movie you're likely to see. What's the lowdown?

I just saw "Brazil" last night and thought I'd share my thoughts with you. I'll probably go see it again. Note that the following comments are presented as opinion only. "Brazil" is, in fact, sui generis. It's a

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little bit of "1984," a little bit of "Time Bandits," a little bit of the 1939 World's Fair, and a whole lot of fun. In this film, Gilliam presents a vision of the world as it might have been if the futurists of the 1930s and 1940s had been right on the mark. Faceless people in a society of monumental buildings where on the surface everything is supposed to be just peachy but in reality everything's going to hell in a handbasket. A society of suspicion and terror presented in the best (worst?) spirit of black humor that Mr. Gilliam is capable of. Now that I think about it, I'm not sure "Brazil" IS a whole lot of fun. It can be very amusing in the Swiftian sense, but it is also a profoundly disturbing movie.

It brings to mind (for me) "The Third Policeman" by Flann O'Brien, for some reason (the policemen in the MOI's "basement" are straight out of O'Brien, I think), and "Memoirs Found In A Bathtub," by Stanislaw Lem. But the associations and resonances don't stop there: this is a complex piece of work. I found myself thinking about it last night long after the final credits.

"Brazil" is not without its problems, and it's not a film for everyone. The motivation of the characters' actions don't always gel for me, and if you absolutely HATE everything Monty Python and Mr. Gilliam have done you should steer clear of this film. You should also steer clear of it if you have a problem with ultrablack humor. Harlan Ellison sez the American distributor wants to add a happy ending; this apparently hasn't happened. Eleven minutes have been trimmed in the American version according to Harlan.

-- Cheers, Bill Ingogly

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NOMINATE MARK R. LEEPER FOR HUGO FOR BEST FAN WRITER