

Christians vs. Pagans

THE WAR LORD (1965) dir. by Franklin Shaffner

THE WICKER MAN (1973) dir. by Robin Hardy

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In the 11th Century, Duke William of Ghent sent his most trusted Norman knight to hold the fens of Normandy against raiders from the sea and to root out the Druidic customs that are creeping back into the land. In THE WAR LORD Chrysagon (Charlton Heston) makes the mistake of bringing his jealous brother Draco (Dean Stockwell). Draco begins to subtly subvert Chrysagon's rule and soon there is more trouble than the war lord finds he can handle. Richard Boone also co-stars. There are few enough films that are set in the Middle Ages and this is actually a fairly accurate portrayal. It is based on a play by Leslie Stevens, but in a genuine coup, the filmmakers got short story writer John Collier to co-author the screenplay. Collier's writing is terrific in his stories and he brings the same cold wit to his screenplay. I have liked this film for a long time, and friends who knew more about history than I ever will tell me that they respect the film quite a bit. The battle scenes are particularly realistic and well-directed and there certainly is a gutsey feel of some of the sagas of the period. And it certainly doesn't hurt to have a score by Jerome Moross. I have wanted to show this film for years, but all I had was a grungy copy off of television in my pre-cable days. Thank goodness it finally came out on cassette this year.

THE WICKER MAN is a highly respected mystery with dark touches. Edward Woodward plays a Scottish police inspector who comes to an island off Scotland to investigate the reported disappearance of a girl. He finds the islanders less than cooperative. Also to his horror he discovers that under the rule of the lord of the island (Christopher Lee) Summerisle has slipped back into the pagan customs of ten centuries before. Can it be that the girl he has come to find is actually intended to be a fertility sacrifice for the crops? Inspector Howie, a devout Christian, finds himself waging a battle that he thought had been won centuries before. The intelligent screenplay is by Anthony Schaffer, author of S_l_e_u_t_h. Also starring are Britt Ekland and Ingrid Pitt. This film has

become a cult classic.

2. Good Reads (or Not So Good!) (book reviews by Dale L. Skran Jr.):

This "batch review" covers what I like to call "good reads"--novels that are not "great" and not Hugo quality, but are still enjoyable in the same way as an Agatha Christie novel. As you can see from the titles, most of them fall under the heading of military SF or "dark fantasy." I also cover novels that I expected to be "good reads" but fell short, along with some other "turkeys" that have pretensions of grandeur.

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B_l_o_o_d_V_e_n_g_e_a_n_c_e: A_W_a_r_W_o_r_l_d_N_o_v_e_l created by Jerry Pournelle, with S. M. Stirling, Judith Tarr, Susan Schwartz, and Harry Turtledove (Baen Books, 1994): Welcome again to one of the longer running shared worlds in military SF. A tremendous level of balkanization has been achieved when we discover that a sub-genre of "shared-worlds" military SF exists. The good news is that the presence of other writers (especially women), allows the story to get past the embarrassing prejudice Pournelle is famous for--read J_a_n_i_s_s_a_r_i_e_s for some examples. Pournelle is constitutionally incapable of having a strong or truly independent female character, but with Schwartz and Tarr writing the script in Pournelle's bloody backdrop we get Sigrid, the female Sauron Cyborg as one of the main characters.

I have been a more or less faithful follower of the war world series since its inception. Also, I have a confession to make--I am rooting for the Saurons. Okay, so they did nuke the whole planet back to the stone age so they could have a monopoly on advanced technology, and so they charge outrageous payments for birthing rights in the high-pressure Shangri-la valley, the only place on Haven where children can be born healthy on this low-pressure planet. Still, they are hated as much for being gene-

engineered as for being tyrannical, and they are an interesting bunch of villains.

The early volumes follow events as the Saurons from the Dol Guldur establish themselves following their narrow escape from the Empire of Man. The Saurons are gene-engineered supermen, bred to be the ideal soldiers. However, their hubris led them to an apocalyptic battle with the Empire of Man, a war that left few survivors on either side.

Used for centuries as a dumping ground by the Co-Dominium (the US and the USSR teamed up in the 90s), Haven is a mean place, full of odd-balls and trouble-makers, including Jews, Arabs, old Communists, etc. The Saurons think they have it all under control, but the "cattle" fight back, and over the centuries, acquire a few of the Sauron genes for themselves.

In B_l_o_o_d_F_e_u_d_s, the background is set for a massive planet-wide revolt against the arrogant Saurons. Unfortunately, I lost interest in the confusing story line as it meandered from one culture to another, each with an odd argot. In B_l_o_o_d_V_e_n_g_e_a_n_c_e the story line is clearer, and has more Sauron characters. B_l_o_o_d_V_e_n_g_e_a_n_c_e is interesting both as a military fiction, with a refreshing focus on both the strategic and the tactical view instead of David Drake's insufferably dull focus on small-unit tactics, and as a tale of genetic warfare, as both the HaBandari and the Saurons try to gain some advantage over each other in the next generation.

It is possible to complain about the background of this story, which inherits the inconsistent technology of the CoDominium/Falkenberg universe Pournelle created with faster than light travel and interstellar warfare, but where other technologies (biotech, AI) have had very little effect on human society or government. On the other hand, maybe human gene engineering will take five hundred years to reach the level practiced by the Saurons. My real complaint is that the maps in this series are terrible. I really really wish they would include maps that mention a_l_l the places where fighting takes place, and not just

Shangri-La Valley, where in fact very little fighting takes place at all. Overall, (ignoring the silly cover showing a fiendish Sauron and a bouncy HaBandari Babe), B_l_o_o_d_V_e_n_g_e_a_n_c_e is a good read, and will keep me coming back as long as Pournelle stays away.

Recommended to fans of Pournelle, H. Beam Piper, Dickson, Anderson, military SF, Rudyard Kipling, and those interested in tales of genetic engineering.

M_o_r_e_T_h_a_n_F_i_r_e by Philip Jose Farmer (Tor, 1993, SF Book Club Edition): In M_o_r_e_T_h_a_n_F_i_r_e Farmer returns us once again to pure paranoid action fiction of the type he does best as Kickahi, born the human Paul Janus Finnigan, hunts and is hunted by his arch enemy, the Lord and maker of Terra (our Earth) and the World of Tiers, Red Orc, across a complex series of artificial universes and traps, in the company of his beloved Anana the Bright, another immortal Lord. Unlike the previous book in the series, T_h_e_L_a_v_a_l_i_t_e_W_o_r_l_d, where it appeared Farmer's imagination had begun to flag, M_o_r_e_T_h_a_n_F_i_r_e keeps the ball rolling and the action moving. Deep thought is not what is called for, as our hero escapes one bizarre trap after another set for them by the ancient and cruel Lords. In the end (apparently) Red Orc meets his match, although there are just enough loose ends to sustain a final novel in the series if Farmer wants to write one. The dust jacket claims this is the conclusion of the "epic series" that began with T_h_e_M_a_k_e_r_o_f_U_n_i_v_e_r_s_e_s, but I wouldn't bet on it!

Recommended to fans of Van Vogt, Farmer, Edgar Rice Burroughs, and the World of Tiers Series.

P.S.: The other volumes are: T_h_e_G_a_t_e_s_o_f_C_r_e_a_t_i_o_n, A_P_r_i_v_a_t_e_C_o_s_m_o_s, B_e_h_i_n_d_t_h_e_W_a_l_l_s_o_f_T_e_r_r_a, and T_h_e_L_a_v_a_l_i_t_e_W_o_r_l_d.

W_a_r_h_a_m_m_e_r_4_0_0_0: I_n_q_u_i_s_i_t_o_r by Ian Watson (GW Books, 1991): This is one of those books that seems to have come from the middle of an interesting series, although the jacket claims this is "Book 1 in the Inquisition War Series." Written by Ian Watson, this book reminds me so much of Iain Banks's dark space operas (C_o_n_s_i_d_e_r_P_h_l_e_b_a_s, U_s_e_o_f_W_e_a_p_o_n_s, and A_g_a_i_n_s_t_a_D_a_r_k_B_a_c_k_g_r_o_u_n_d) that I

frequently confuse the authors. In W_a_r_h_a_m_m_e_r we leap into a dimly lit paranoid future as the renegade Inquisitor Jaq Draco of the Ordo Malleus (Secret Order of the Daemon Hunters) in the year 40,000 struggles to protect the emperor against assorted daemons and traitors.

Watson is deft and imaginative although a bit bloody-minded for some. I_n_q_u_i_s_i_t_o_r keeps you turning the pages, even if you find yourself wanting to skip the numerous disturbing illustrations that remind me of those used for the original version of Jack Vance's T_h_e_D_r_a_g_o_n_M_a_s_t_e_r_s. Much like M_o_r_e_T_h_a_n_F_i_r_e, I_n_q_u_i_s_i_t_o_r is pure paranoia fiction, where nothing can be trusted, although far more literate. Watson's brilliant fantasy feels like SF--or is it SF that feels like fantasy? I_n_q_u_i_s_i_t_o_r is packaged like cheap role-playing game fiction, but is of much higher quality.

Recommended to fans of dark fantasy, dark space opera, Iain Banks, and D_u_n_e (which it slightly resembles). Readers are warned that Watson's tale contains scenes of violence and bodily transformation that may offend some. This is the first Ian Watson book I've read, and I'm willing to come back for more in the future.

L_e_g_i_o_n_o_f_t_h_e_D_a_m_n_e_d by William C. Dietz (Ace, 1993): Every once in a while I take a chance on a new author, and one day Dietz got elected. Here he spins a tale of a future foreign legion made up of condemned criminals who are given the choice of death or life as a cyborg in the Legion. This readable tale has the broad scope of battle so often lacking in David Drake's tired stories of platoon level action. Although not really original or memorable, L_e_g_i_o_n_o_f_t_h_e_D_a_m_n_e_d keeps the pages turning. I'd be happy to read another book by Dietz.

Recommended to fans of Pournelle, Dickson, H. Beam Piper, W_e_A_l_l_D_i_e_d_a_t_B_r_e_a_k_a_w_a_y_S_t_a_t_i_o_n, Rudyard Kipling, the French Foreign Legion, Drake, Elizabeth Moon, W_a_r_W_o_r_l_d, T_h_e_r_e_W_i_l_l_B_e_W_a_r, and military SF in general. Got the message? Peaceniks verboten!

R_o_g_u_e_W_a_r_r_i_o_r by Richard Marcinko with John Weisman (Pocket Star, 1992): R_o_g_u_e_W_a_r_r_i_o_r is just as much a page-turner war story as anything in the "War World" series. Unfortunately, the world is Earth, and the war is Vietnam. Marcinko, currently in jail on various fraud charges, tells the tail of his military exploits from his early days crawling through the Mekong Delta killing Cong to his leadership of SEAL Team Six and finally to the legendary Red Cell, a group dedicated to testing the security of U.S. facilities by breaking into them.

Surely self-serving, R_o_g_u_e_W_a_r_r_i_o_r is certainly entertaining and educational. My major insight after reading this book was that the

U.S. relies far too much on "team bonding" to produce soldiers. The SEALs partying, drinking, and eating lobsters together before going out to play tag with the Cong may produce good results in the short term, but it ultimately ties military success too closely to "being a man" and "winning the game." This allows the "players" to obscure the fact that war is not a game, and that winning it does not make you a man. The Cong relied on ideology and nationalist spirit for the most part, and they seemed to perform well enough. Most of the U.S. military's current difficulties with gays and women stem from the "manly team bonding" approach to building an army. This might be a good time to stop treating war as a game that boys play to prove they are men, and start treating it as something adults do when they must, something that is carried to whatever conclusion is necessary for survival.

Recommended to SEAL fans and fans of military SF.

_ B _ l _ o _ o _ d _ B _ r _ o _ t _ h _ e _ r _ s by Brian Lumley (Tor, 1992): If you've been following the story of Harry Keogh as told in the five volume "Necroscope" series, you'll like this. Otherwise, it may be a bit difficult for the uninitiated to follow. _ B _ l _ o _ o _ d _ B _ r _ o _ t _ h _ e _ r _ s takes place after Harry's "Death" and expands our understanding of the world of the Wamphyri. The brothers are his sons, and one, of course, becomes a vampire, while the other struggles to re-discover for himself the awesome powers of the Necroscope bequeathed to him by his father. _ B _ l _ o _ o _ d _ B _ r _ o _ t _ h _ e _ r _ s will keep me coming back for the next book in the series, but mileage may vary.

Recommended to fans of Edgar Rice Burroughs, vampire stories, Lumley, and the Necroscope Series. Contains some scenes of splatter-punk style horror.

_ L _ i _ a _ r _ ' _ s _ O _ a _ t _ h by Elizabeth Moon (Baen Books, 1992): Elizabeth Moon returns us to the early days of her Gird universe, long before Paksenarrion became a Paladin. In this early tale, Luap, the Mage-born bastard son of the King seeks to find a safe haven from the normals. Unfortunately he awakens an ancient horror, and is

less than successful at creating the safe haven. A readable tale, and of special interest to those who have read the other tales in the life of Paks (_ S_ h_ e_ e_ p_ f_ a_ r_ m_ e_ r'_ s_ D_ a_ u_ g_ h_ t_ e_ r, _ D_ i_ v_ i_ d_ e_ d_ A_ l_ l_ e_ g_ i_ a_ n_ c_ e, _ O_ a_ t_ h _ o_ f_ G_ o_ l_ d) and the other early Gird story (_ S_ u_ r_ r_ e_ n_ d_ e_ r _ N_ o_ n_ e: _ T_ h_ e_ L_ e_ g_ a_ c_ y _ o_ f_ G_ i_ r_ d), but not especially interesting or compelling.

Recommended mainly to those who really liked the Paks/Gird stories.

_ A_ t_ h_ y_ r_ a by Steven Brust (Ace, 1993): The tale of Vlad Taltos continues, but I'm wishing Brust would call it quits soon. By the device of introducing a new, naive character and letting Vlad

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function as a mainly off-stage mover and shaker, a readable tale is produced. However, the energy and interest of the Taltos Tales is not present.

Not really recommended, but I did read it.

_ T_ h_ e_ P_ h_ o_ e_ n_ i_ x_ G_ u_ a_ r_ d_ s by Steven Brust (Tor, 1991):

In this over-long tale, Brust produces a prequel to the Vlad Taltos series in the style of Dumas. I read it, but at 491 pages the reader spends a lot of time trudging through the tale. I really hope Brust gets a better new idea, and _ s_ o_ o_ n!

Not really recommended, but fans of Brust and Dumas might find it somewhat interesting.

_ T_ h_ e_ N_ i_ n_ e_ t_ y_ T_ r_ i_ l_ l_ i_ o_ n_ F_ a_ u_ s_ t_ s by Jack Chalker (Ace, 1991): Chalker

continues his extended tale of daemon-like aliens and competing alien cultures in this third volume, following _ T_ h_ e_ D_ a_ e_ m_ o_ n_ s_ a_ t _ R_ a_ i_ n_ b_ o_ w_ B_ r_ i_ d_ g_ e and _ T_ h_ e_ R_ u_ n_ t_ o _ C_ h_ a_ o_ s_ K_ e_ e_ p. Definitely interesting, it keeps the pages turning as rival bands of explorers seek to

survive. However, it is difficult to justify reading this series-
-airport fodder!

Recommended to Chalker fans, fans of alien cultures, and people
stranded in airports.

_ S_ t_ r_ a_ n_ g_ e_ r_ S_ u_ n_ s by George Zebrowski: Zebrowski, a Clarkian sense-of-
wonder author best known for _ M_ a_ c_ r_ o_ l_ i_ f_ e, a tale of the future
evolution of humanity from space colonists to universal mind,
brings us _ S_ t_ r_ a_ n_ g_ e_ r_ S_ u_ n_ s, a galaxy-spanning story of scientists
exploring a web interstellar tunnels that lead from planet to
planet, or is it from universe to universe? An interesting and
well-written tale of the old-fashioned kind, but not of the same
scope and interest as _ M_ a_ c_ r_ o_ l_ i_ f_ e.

Recommended to fans of Clarke, Asimov, Sheffield, Zebrowski, hard
SF, and sense of wonder tales.

_ S_ t_ a_ t_ i_ o_ n_ s_ o_ f_ t_ h_ e_ T_ i_ d_ e by Michael Swanwick (Avon, 1991):
I was

greatly disappointed in this previous Hugo and Nebula nominee. I
have enjoyed some of Swanwick's previous work, but I found this mix
of magic and nanotech at once confusing, overcomplex,
unimaginative, pointless, and unoriginal. Swanwick can write, and
brief sections of this book are haunting, but overall the reader is
lost, and a coherent, interesting story is not forthcoming. I
clearly am on a different wavelength from many (who nominated this,

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anyway?), but I knew that already.

Not recommended to anyone--there is so much better SF out there
that I am astounded that this got nominated for anything.

_ B_ o_ n_ e_ D_ a_ n_ c_ e by Emma Bull (Ace, 1991): This came highly recommended,
but basically I read it as a nuclear-war fiction completist.

Although a lot (and I mean a _ l_ o_ t) more readable than _ S_ t_ a_ t_ i_ o_ n_ s_ o_ f_ t_ h_ e_ T_ i_ d_ e, _ B_ o_ n_ e_ D_ a_ n_ c_ e was not to my liking. Bull can write, but
the

ideas (fantasy and SF) in B_o_n_e_D_a_n_c_e were old in the 50s, and she adds very little new. B_o_n_e_D_a_n_c_e seems to be an example of how style alone cannot create a good novel--there must be new ideas.

Also, the magical excursions slow down the novel, and distract attention from the somewhat interesting (but not original--see

Heinlein's T_h_e_P_u_p_p_e_t_M_a_s_t_e_r_s for a much more interesting

treatment) SF ideas. I am feeling a bit guilty that I have been overly harsh in this capsule review. Emma Bull clearly has writing talent, but doesn't seem to be interested in writing what I want to read.

Not recommended except to post-nuclear war completists and fans of Emma Bull.

T_h_e_M_i_n_d_P_o_o_l by Charles Sheffield (Baen, 1993): This is an updated version of T_h_e_N_i_m_r_o_d_H_u_n_t with a different ending. I have never read T_h_e_N_i_m_r_o_d_H_u_n_t, but I felt I should mention this so you can avoid it if you h_a_v_e read T_h_e_N_i_m_r_o_d_H_u_n_t, although

Sheffield

claims this is revised and has a different ending.

I started this, stopped for a long time, and then finished. This is lesser (maybe least) Sheffield. It lacks the clarity and thrust

of S_i_g_h_t_o_f_P_r_o_t_e_u_s or T_h_e_M_c_A_n_d_r_e_w_C_h_r_o_n_i_c_l_es. Sheffield, at his

best, is not a very good writer, and T_h_e_M_i_n_d_P_o_o_l is not his best.

T_h_e_M_i_n_d_P_o_o_l is over-long and overly complex, ponderous in the telling, and full of 50s style SF scenes and ideas, including a disturbing hint of Jack Chalker's "too-many-aliens" style.

Not recommended to anyone but Sheffield completists.

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3. THE CANARY TRAINER by Nicholas Meyer (Norton, ISBN 0-393-03608-1, 1993, 224pp, US\$19.95) (a book review by Evelyn C. Leeper):

This is the third of Nicholas Meyer's Sherlock Holmes pastiches.

The first two were T_h_e_S_e_v_e_n-P_e_r_C_e_n_t S_o_l_u_t_i_o_n and T_h_e_W_e_s_t_E_n_d

H_o_r_r_o_r, and they are the most widely known of all the pastiches.

But though Meyer is very popular, he is not the best of the current Holmes biographers.

For one thing, he has chosen an already existing plot, that of Gaston Leroux's P _ h _ a _ n _ t _ o _ m _ o _ f _ t _ h _ e _ O _ p _ e _ r _ a. Telling you this is not

really a spoiler, since Monsieur Leroux shows up on page 48. The title is a bit deceptive, however, since the title leads the browser to believe that the story is based on the reference to "Wilson, the notorious canary-trainer" at the beginning of "The Adventure of Black Peter." And then he insists on including Irene Adler (introduced on page 60). I must admit here to having a strong negative reaction to the inclusion of Irene Adler in a Sherlock Holmes pastiche--everyone and their cousin seems to feel obliged to do it. (Maybe the publisher--Norton--insisted on her inclusion.)

Meyer has great fun in the footnotes commenting on various mistakes and inconsistencies in the original stories by Doyle. But he leaves his own trail of errors. Most obvious of all is the misspelling of Puccini's name in the footnote on page 145. Is the art of proof-reading dead? The other major blooper is a dual one, and strictly Meyer's fault. On page 113, he claims that Bizet invented the word "toreador" because he need an extra syllable over

"matador." First of all, the O _ x _ f _ o _ r _ d _ E _ n _ g _ l _ i _ s _ h
 D _ i _ c _ t _ i _ o _ n _ a _ r _ y lists

instances of "toreador" as early as 1613, so Bizet could hardly have invented it. And secondly, Bizet wrote the m _ u _ s _ i _ c for C _ a _ r _ m _ e _ n-the words were by Henri Meilhac and Ludovic Halevy. (And while we're nitpicking, it should have had its "premiere" described on page 61, not its "premier.")

Holmes seemed fairly unnecessary in this story. Though he is the narrator, he does very little to affect the events that occur. This isn't too surprising, since he doesn't appear at all in Leroux's version--nor is there any explanation here of why he doesn't. Doyle would have at least made a passing note that Holmes's part in the events was hushed up for security reasons or some such. True, it took place during The Great Hiatus, but by the time Leroux published, this was moot. And the ending is truly a deus ex machina.

Leroux did an excellent job with this story in 1911. Adding Sherlock Holmes to it improves neither the story nor Holmes.

4. HEAVEN AND EARTH (a film review by Mark R. Leeper):

Capsule review: A true chronicle of forty years in the life of a Vietnamese woman whose country and whose life are torn apart by the war. For once Oliver Stone recognizes that it wasn't just the Americans committing atrocities in the war. And subtly, he also seems to argue with the main

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character of the film. I like this the best of Stone's Vietnam films. Rating: +2 (-4 to +4)

Film critics seem to be asking themselves what went wrong with the third film in Oliver Stone's Vietnam trilogy. After two films they loved he has failed in his third. Frankly, I do not understand their reaction. For my money the other two films have much greater flaws than H_e_a_v_e_n_a_n_d_E_a_r_t h. Perhaps because this film is told from the point of view of a Vietnamese, I think it gives a much better view of what the war was all about. For once in a film that this was not a war in which just Americans were to blame, there is plenty of blame to go around to all involved. It is a powerful view of the dilemmas faced by the Vietnamese people. This true story has the sweep of forty years of turbulent history filled with tragedy and horror.

When Le Ly (Hiep Thi Le) remembers her home when she was a little girl she remembers it as the most beautiful village in the world. And it certainly appears to be. We see an almost idyllic life of hard work and spiritual joy. Then the French come to Vietnam to fight a war, but it still seems to affect the village little until some Vietcong come to recruit soldiers. Their simple appeal for national unity wins the sympathy of village for Vietcong. Against her father's wishes, Le Ly's mother sends her two sons to fight with the Vietcong. That sets into motion a course of events that will shape the next forty years of Le Ly's life. The South Vietnamese army suspect Le Ly's family of sympathies with the North and arrest and torture Le Ly in some extremely harrowing scenes. Le Ly's mother bribes the South Vietnamese officials to release Le Ly only to see her arrested by the Vietcong for suspected complicity with the South. The Vietcong, she finds, are little if any better than the South Vietnamese government. A short stint as a servant in a rich household leaves her pregnant and penniless,

and she must turn to the streets of Da Nang to earn her living. Eventually she will fall in love with an American soldier who will marry her and take her to California where her life's tragedies will continue. Perhaps there is where the critics are disliking the film since the American household melodrama falls into cliché, but even there it is the tragedy of the war that pursues her.

H_e_a_v_e_n_a_n_d_E_a_r_t h is based on Le Ly Hayslip's two autobiographies W_h_e_n_H_e_a_v_e_n_a_n_d_E_a_r_t_C_h_a_n_g_e_d P_l_a_c_e_s and C_h_i_l_d_o_f_W_a_r,W_o_m_a_n_o_f P_e_a_c_e. It is ironic that in this story of how a Vietnamese woman is exploited and abused, Hiep Thi Le, who plays Le Ly and who must be on-screen for more than 90% of the film gets only fourth billing. Top billing goes to Tommy Lee Jones who certainly does a fine job as Le Ly's disturbed husband, but it really is Hiep Thi Le's film. Second and third billing go to Joan Chen and Haing S. Ngor as Le Ly's parents.

The photography of the Vietnamese countryside is just spectacular making Le Ly's claim of the most beautiful village believable. Creative, if gimmicky, camerawork is also used to show Le Ly's first reactions to her new American home with its pandemonium from the family dogs and its huge refrigerator stocked from a grocery aisle that looks like a fjord. The score by the Japanese composer Kitaro is a little overpowering at times, but the music by itself is actually quite good.

There are definitely unexpected touches in the script. Late in the film Le Ly herself gives in to a Buddhist belief in not challenging fate but just going with it, yet clearly the film shows her agony at being buffeted by fate without fighting it. Each time she does take a step to fight her apparent fate she gains a new set of problems but each time they seem less painful than the situation she is escaping. When she returns to the village at the end of the film, she is deciding it may have been better to submit to fate, but it is clear that she has improved her state a great deal in some ways over what it would have been had she stayed in the village. It is almost as if Stone--who wrote the screenplay as

well as directed--is subtly arguing with the real Le Ly. It is clear also that Stone does not care so much for the Buddhist priests that Le Ly goes to for advice casting at least one as a charlatan.

Overall I found this story moving and at times wrenching. In spite of some negative reactions by some of the critics I think that Oliver Stone has made his best film about Vietnam. I give it a +2 on the -4 to +4 scale.

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Who lives in fear will never be a free man.
-- Horace

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