

getting that from science any more. I loved science museums. I turned the astronomical exhibits into fantasies of traveling to the stars and having adventures. The physics exhibits took me inside the atom. Even chemistry had its own panache: supermaterials to explore the insides of volcanos and to explore oceans. Oh, and

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rocket fuels!

And of course mathematics is the most mind-expanding of all. Imagining orders of infinity and huge intersecting planes that dwarf our galaxy intersecting in hyper-dimensions. The creation of beautiful curves by manipulating a few arguments in a polynomial. In infinite machine to be explored and find bizarre inter-connections.

Those were the good days of science. When we needed a generation people who knew science to compete with the Soviets and by gosh we knew how to get kids interested in science. We need it no less these days. But these days we do a really rotten job of teaching kids science. I have been back to the Museum of Science and Industry recently. And I have been to the Liberty Science Center. And I found out what science is all about. It is about being lectured to. It is about sitting and being told that you are doing things wrong and you have to wise up. Or that Mommy and Daddy have to wise up. You have to conserve, you have to stop killing wildlife, protect those wetlands, you are polluting the world, stop wiping out other cultures! Important messages, all, all, all. And they have a place. Unfortunately the place they have taken is science museums. And they have made the exploration of science about as exciting for the young as being sent to the principal's office. With the exception of parts of museums we saw in Arizona and New Mexico, I am seeing very little of museums that is capturing my imagination. The science museums I am seeing these days get high marks for political correctness but there is no spark of imagination. Or if there is, it is very dim. Today's science museums would never have gotten the adolescent me interested in science.

Actually, it isn't only science museums that brought this editorial on. I am watching PBS's retrospective on the history of the _N_o_v_a

science program. It is hosted by that internationally-known scientist and role model for young students, Bill Cosby. Some of what you are seeing really is interesting sights of genuine science. You see fiber-optic pictures of the embryos that look like shu mai dim sum. You see the un-icing of some prehistoric explorer prehistoric explorer. And a lot is things like how they filmed the special effects for I_n_d_i_a_n_a_J_o_n_e_s_a_n_d_t_h_e_T_e_m_p_l_e_o_f_D_o_o_m. That isn't really science. And every half-hour or so, even that is stopped dead so that they can go to a fifteen-minute pledge break. You should be sending your money to your local PBS station. I am sure you should. But why make this program so irritating to watch? You get so that when you see Bill Cosby show up on the screen, you know it is to bring the bad news of another interruption.

Well, enjoy the standard of living you have now. The next generation is not going to have a lot of people who got interested

in science from museums, or from reading, or from science programs on television, or even from schools. You may have some practical scientists, people developing things like food-wrap, and most will be recent immigrants, but there will not be a whole lot of people bitten by the curiosity to learn more about the universe. Sense-of-wonder will be relegated to wonder at the antics of rock stars.

2. JUMPER by Steven Gould (Tor, ISBN 0-812-52237-0, 1993 (1992c), 344pp, US\$4.99) (a book review by Evelyn C. Leeper):

When I told a friend I was reading this, his response was, "It's not alternate history; it's not literary. Why are you reading it?" Well, even I have to have a change of pace once in a while.

J_u_m_p_e_r is a classic adventure-type, wish-fulfillment story. Seventeen-year-old Davy Rice discovers one day that he has the ability to "jump" (teleport). (In a nod to Alfred Bester's T_h_e_S_t_a_r_s_M_y_D_e_s_t_i_n_a_t_i_o_n, he discovers this when he first jumps accidentally to avoid a beating. Gould credits Bester and other

authors in his acknowledgement.) After experimenting a bit, Rice discovers he can jump at will, but only to places he can visualize. (Now you know who buys all those one-way tickets!) At first he uses this power somewhat frivolously, but then turns it to more serious purpose.

One can't demand too much realism from what is essentially an adolescent power fantasy (could he really outsmart e_v_e_r_y_o_n_e in the CIA?), and if you turn off your objections to such details you can have a lot of fun with this book. My one caveat is that although this description makes J_u_m_p_e_r sound like a juvenile/young adult novel, there are scenes of violence, and abuse is an on-going theme. With that warning, I recommend this book.

3. WHAT'S EATING GILBERT GRAPE (a film review by Mark R. Leeper):

Capsule review: W_h_a_t'_s_E_a_t_i_n_g_G_i_l_b_e_r_t_G_r_a_p_e is a delicate story which combines pathos and humor and which manages to avoid cliché while saying something about unsung nobility. Johnny Depp plays the modern equivalent of a Capra-esque hero. Rating: +2 (-4 to +4)

The American film industry has the capital resources to attract some of the best international directors to make what are essentially American films. Often these directors see the U.S. through the eyes of an outsider, and let the viewer see his own

country with a fresh perspective. It is this sort of freshness that directors like Louis Malle bring to films like A_t_l_a_n_t_i_c_C_i_t_y. Lasse Hallström, who made the charming M_y_L_i_f_e_a_s_a_D_o_g about one character with low self-esteem, now has made an American film with an older, but similar character. In filming Peter Hedges screenplay based on Hedges's own novel he gives us his view of a very small American town and a sort of people who rarely are depicted in films.

The setting is the fly-speck town is Endora, Iowa (though W_h_a_t'_s

E_a_t_i_n_g_G_i_l_b_e_r_t_G_r_a_p_e was actually shot in Texas). A major town event occurs each year when the local Airstream Trailer club drives a convoy of the aluminum campers past the town. Gilbert Grape (Johnny Depp) always brings his mentally retarded younger brother Arnie (Oscar-nominated Leonardo DiCaprio) to watch the campers go by. Arnie is usually a real handful--nearly 18, he is a wild animal requiring constant attention. Among Arnie's distressing habits is climbing the town's water tower from which he needs to be rescued by the police. Gilbert has had to control Arnie and be the de facto father of the family since his own father committed suicide many years earlier. Gilbert's mother is hyper-obese--in the range of 500 pounds--and she too needs more care than she is able to give.

Gilbert himself is an unassuming man, a clerk at a tiny grocery that is dying from the competition of a huge supermarket nearby. Like a George Bailey in I_t'_s_a_W_o_n_d_e_r_f_u_l_L_i_f_e, he is without realizing it the person on whom many depend and whom few seem to appreciate. Everyone seems to rely on him and take him for granted. On top of that he lets himself be used in an affair with a bored and unstable housewife (a thankless role for Mary Steenburgen). With the constant need to corral his brother, avoid the husband of the Steenburgen character, handle a sister jealous of attention given to Arnie, protect his mother from embarrassment by doing things like secretly reinforce the floor weakened by her weight, Gilbert gets little pleasure from life. Enter Becky (Juliette Lewis of C_a_p_e_F_e_a_r and H_u_s_b_a_n_d_s_a_n_d_W_i_v_e_s) who is temporarily stranded in Endora when her grandmother's camper has engine trouble. Becky has a friendly but worldly nature that allows her to see the nobility in Gilbert that others overlook. While the ending is a false step, the rest of the film more than compensates.

W_h_a_t'_s_E_a_t_i_n_g_G_i_l_b_e_r_t_G_r_a_p_e is a story that could easily have been mishandled by making Gilbert too sugary noble, but Hedges and Hallstrom create characters of depth and resonance. And he is able to get some impressive performances, especially from DiCaprio. In his films Depp has been a sort of modern James Dean who gets some sympathy from the audience playing hurt and confused people. But Depp's acting has never been the high point of any of his films. Here, at least, he is better than usual and creates a character

with some credibility. But even better is DiCaprio whose retardation is so well portrayed my wife was unsure if perhaps DiCaprio himself isn't actually retarded. (Though some thought tells one it is extremely unlikely.) Darlene Cates, in her first performance gives real humanity to the obese Momma.

W_h_a't'_s_E_a_t_i_n_g_G_i_l_b_e_r_t_G_r_a_p_e reminds one of settings like those of T_e_n_d_e_r_M_e_r_c_i_e_s and characters out of Capra. I give it a +2 on the -4 to +4 scale.

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

Capsule review: T_h_e_C_h_a_s_e is satire of chase films that takes some funny knocks at TV-news, but otherwise offers little. The film works neither as an action film nor as a comedy. THE CHASE manages to drag even at a short 87 minutes. Rating: low 0 (-4 to +4).

Adam Rifkin is back in the driver seat for his third film. Rifkin directed the film N_e_v_e_r_o_n_T_u_e_s_d_a_y (which I'm sorry I haven't seen) and the surrealist comedy T_h_e_D_a_r_k_B_a_c_k_w_a_r_d (which I'm sorry I did see). He is back with T_h_e_C_h_a_s_e. Rifkin's talent is improving at high speed--faster, in fact, than the chase in T_h_e_C_h_a_s_e. His latest does not have an incredibly greasy-looking Judd Nelson with a third arm growing out of his back and does not leave the audience with something akin to flu symptoms. So Rifkin is showing real signs of improvement. Just not enough.

The plot of T_h_e_C_h_a_s_e is little more than the title might suggest. Charlie Sheen plays Jack Hammond, a man running from the police but spotted by them at a convenience store. To escape he takes as hostage Natalie Voss (played by Kristy Swanson) and flees only to be chased by the law and several live-tv-news teams all the way to the Mexican border. Along the way he gets to know his hostage who turns out to be the daughter of the "Californian Donald Trump," Dalton Voss (Ray Wise). Some of the film's satirical edge, in fact most of what works, is aimed at the news team and the absurd risks they take for ratings, chasing along with--and often ahead of--the police anxious to beat the competition to a story.

This film is appears to want to be a madcap satire of a particular type of film, much as A_i_r_p_l_a_n_e was for a different sub-genre, but in this case neither the humor nor the action carries film. The humor is all on a fairly lukewarm level that is sometimes helped but more often hindered by Sheen's deadpan serious delivery. There are chuckles, but they are often miles apart. The action scenes are often mechanical and punctuated with overly familiar-looking

stunt crashes. The premise seems to be that we are watching a high-speed chase, but we never get much of a sense of speed. We see the two leads talking with the rear-projection showing the police cars following them, but you rarely have the feel that the speed gets over the speed limit. Sheen is just not attentive enough to the road and the scenery does not seem to go by all that fast. That may seem like a picayune point, but it gets in the way of the storytelling. We do see some of the requisite explosions and carnage--both fairly mechanical--but it doesn't seem clear exactly why for the speeds shown.

Sheen's acting is flat and dry throughout in a film in which there was little real acting required. Kristy Swanson, who played the title roles in D_e_a_d_l_y_F_r_i_e_n_d and B_u_f_f_y_t_h_e_V_a_m_p_i_r_e_S_l_a_y_e_r competes with Sheen to see who can more underplay a role. Trying his hand at acting is rock musician Henry Rollins as one of the pursuing policemen who seems more interested in impressing an interviewer riding along with him than in actually capturing Hammond.

This is a comedy whose engine seems unwilling to turn over and which never manages to get all its sparkplugs to fire. I give it a low 0 on the -4 to +4 scale.

5. Neglected Fantasy and Science Fiction Films (film comment by Mark R. Leeper):

One of the things I like to do occasionally in my film reviews is to make reference to some very good film that I doubt most of my readers have heard of and that I would like to call some attention to. There are a lot of decent films, and a handful of very good ones, that at this point may exist only in the film libraries of obscure television stations, and when these few prints disappear the films will be gone. I would like to generate some interest in four of these films, if not to help save them, at least to alert people that if you do get a chance to see these films, it is a rare chance and you should give them a try.

Of course, there are a lot of obscure films that are showing up on videotape today, many of them very poorly-made films, and it is ironic that some terrific films are being over-looked, but in each case I think I can understand why some producer would think the film would not sell well on tape. There are three science fiction films and one horror film. However, none of the film has special effects. Particularly for science fiction, people have come to expect visual effects. I guess they feel that if they do not really enjoy the story then at least there will be something interesting to watch. These films are just actors in front of a camera, perhaps with a very rudimentary make-up effect thrown in

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(but very little). Three of the films are in black and white and unfortunately that is also considered to be a strike against a film. I still recommend these films highly to watch for.

_ T_ h_ e_ M_ i_ n_ d_ B_ e_ n_ d_ e_ r_ s (1962) (directed by Basil Dearden)

This film combines Cold War thriller elements with science fiction and a compelling human story. A scientist working on sensory deprivation commits suicide and is discovered to have been passing secrets to the Soviets. Was he to blame or could his mind have been twisted while under the influence of the sensory deprivation tank? The government decides to experiment to find out. Another scientist working in the same field (played by Dirk Bogarde) is very devoted to his wife and family. Can they change that in his personality while he is in the tank? This film is well-acted, enthralling, and atmospheric.

_ U_ n_ e_ a_ r_ t_ h_ l_ y_ S_ t_ r_ a_ n_ g_ e_ r (1963) (directed by John Kirsh)

A secret project is working on space exploration right in the heart of London. The approach to exploration is a novel one. Rather than sending the whole human into space, they are working on a sort of technological out-of-body experience. Project your mind to another planet and there have it take on physical form ... invasion by mental projection. The rub is that scientists on the project

are being killed in some mysterious way involving super-high energy. And the wives of some of the scientists seem to have no background that project security can trace. The script is tense and the acting is quite good, with a cast that includes John

Neville (_ A _ S _ t _ u _ d _ y _ i _ n _ t _ e _ r _ r _ o _ r , _ T _ h _ e

_ A _ d _ v _ e _ n _ t _ u _ r _ e _ s _ o _ f _ B _ a _ r _ o _ n

_ M _ u _ n _ c _ h _ a _ u _ s _ e _ n) and

Jean Marsh (_ U _ p _ s _ t _ a _ i _ r _ s , _ D _ o _ w _ n _ s _ t _ a _ i _ r _ s). (This film is so obscure that

Leonard Maltin's usually very complete _ M _ o _ v _ i _ e _ a _ n _ d _ V _ i _ d _ e _ o

_ G _ u _ i _ d _ e

overlooks it.)

_ D _ a _ r _ k _ I _ n _ t _ r _ u _ d _ e _ r (1965) (directed by Harvey Hart)

This film is only 59 minutes long and originally was intended as a television pilot, but was released to theaters to play with films such as William Castle's _ I _ S _ a _ w _ W _ h _ a _ t _ Y _ o _ u _ D _ i _ d --which it far out-classed. Leslie Nielsen plays a detective in late 19th Century San Francisco whose foppish appearance hides a man very knowledgeable and adept in matters of the occult and the supernatural. A series of unsolved murders and a friend's blackout spells may be connected and have some occult significance. Mark Richman and Werner Klemperer also star. The latter, best known as the gullible commandant from _ H _ o _ g _ a _ n ' _ s _ H _ e _ r _ o _ e _ s , does a terrific job in a sinister role.

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_ Q _ u _ e _ s _ t _ f _ o _ r _ L _ o _ v _ e (1971) (directed by Ralph Thomas)

This film is loosely adapted from the short story "Random Quest" by John Wyndham. Colin Trafford (played by Tom Bell) is a leading scientist at Britain Imperial Physical Institute when one of his experiments goes wrong. Suddenly he finds himself in a parallel London in a parallel Britain that has not been to war since the Great War in the early part of the century. Trafford here is not a physicist, but a popular playwright. He is also now married to a beautiful woman (played by Joan Collins) whose life he has made miserable with his selfish ways and his philandering. Can Colin

convince the world he is the playwright while convincing his new wife that he is different? Then there are plot complications that lead to a fast-paced climax across parallel worlds. Denholm Elliot also stars in the story which is part science fiction adventure and part love story.

Of these four films only the last is in color. At present, the only one available on video, U_n_e_a_r_t_h_l_y_S_t_r_a_n_g_e_r, is offered only by

a tiny specialty house, Sinister Cinema. Of the four, only Q_u_e_s_t_f_o_r_L_o_v_e has played on New York area television in the last fifteen years. I would much like to get my hands on copies of T_h_e_M_i_n_d_B_e_n_d_e_r_s or D_a_r_k_I_n_t_r_u_d_e_r.

A_d_d_e_n_d_u_m_f_o_r_B_O_S_K_O_N_E_3_1:
A_d_d_i_t_i_o_n_a_l_F_i_l_m_s_t_o_L_o_o_k_F_o_r
F_a_u_s_t (1926)

Director F. W. Murnau is better known for N_o_s_f_e_r_a_t_u, but there is a lot of good visual fantasy in this film version of the famous play by Goethe. There is a terrific image of the Devil spreading his cape over a village, and many other visual surprises throughout.

T_h_e_M_a_n_W_h_o_L_a_u_g_h_s (1928)

The story could be better, but Conrad Veidt is terrific in the role of a man whose face is carved into a huge involuntary grin. Veidt conveys a full range of emotions through his eyes alone. The grinning Veidt was the visual inspiration for Batman's foe The Joker.

T_h_e_D_y_b_b_u_k (1939)

At times this is very slow but also at times a very effective horror film. This was a low-budget film done in Yiddish. The "Dance of Death" scene had become an eerie classic. The story

deals with a man's soul returning from the dead to possess the woman he loved.

_ T_ h_ e_ S_ e_ v_ e_ n_ t_ h_ V_ i_ c_ t_ i_ m (1943)

Other Val Lewton films get more attention but this film is blacker and bleaker than anything ever done in film noir. This is a solid mood piece that stands above Lewton's other films. A woman searching for her sister runs afoul of murder and Satanists.

_ N_ i_ g_ h_ t_ o_ f_ t_ h_ e_ D_ e_ m_ o_ n (a.k.a. _ C_ u_ r_ s_ e_ o_ f_ t_ h_ e_ D_ e_ m_ o_ n) (1957)

This film has gotten some attention because of an allusion in a song in the *Rocky Horror Picture Show* but it is rarely seen. That

is a pity because it is quite a nice little supernatural thriller.

It suffers a little from showing the audience too much too soon, but it still is suspenseful and well-written.

_ N_ i_ g_ h_ t_ o_ f_ t_ h_ e_ E_ a_ g_ l_ e (a.k.a. _ B_ u_ r_ n, _ W_ i_ t_ c_ h, _ B_ u_ r_ n) (1962)

When Richard Matheson and Charles Beaumont co-write a screenplay based on a novel by Fritz Lieber, you just naturally expect a good thriller. This story about an empirical college professor discovering that his wife and several other professors' wives around him are actually witches is very well-produced.

_ D_ e_ v_ i_ l_ D_ o_ l_ l_ (1963)

This is a wildly uneven film, but it has many very good moments. There have been several attempts to do the stories of ventriloquist dummies who have lives of their own. This is the most intriguing treatment of the theme. For once the secret of the dummy is not a let-down.

_ C_ r_ a_ c_ k_ i_ n_ t_ h_ e_ W_ o_ r_ l_ d (1965)

The first and last ideas of this film are pretty silly, but in between this is a fairly exciting super-disaster film. Some of the visuals are spectacular. There is also some complexity to the characters.

_ Q_ u_ a_ t_ e_ r_ m_ a_ s_ s_ a_ n_ d_ t_ h_ e_ P_ i_ t_ (a.k.a. _ F_ i_ v_ e_ M_ i_ l_ l_ i_ o_ n_ Y_ e_ a_ r_ s_ t_ o_ E_ a_ r_ t_ h) (1968)

This film is finally getting a cult following and some recognition. It is much better known in Britain. The model of what a science thriller should be, it unfolds like a science fiction detective story uncovering a discovery that has greater and greater

implications about the nature of mankind. This is one of the great idea films of science fiction cinema.

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 T_ h_ e_ D_ e_ v_ i_ l_ R_ i_ d_ e_ s_ O_ u_ t (a.k.a. T_ h_ e_ D_ e_ v_ i_ l_ s_ B_ r_ i_ d_ e) (1968)

Richard Matheson's adaptation of the black magic novel by Dennis Wheatley takes a science fiction-like approach to Satanism. It is fast-paced and at times fairly intelligent. Also worth seeing is Hammer Films' other adaptation of Wheatley black magic, T_ o_ t_ h_ e_ D_ e_ v_ i_ l_ a_ D_ a_ u_ g_ h_ t_ e_ r.

 W_ i_ t_ c_ h_ f_ i_ n_ d_ e_ r_ G_ e_ n_ e_ r_ a_ l (a.k.a. C_ o_ n_ q_ u_ e_ r_ o_ r_ W_ o_ r_ m) (1968)

A vital and well-made historical fringe-horror film about one of the great villians of English history, Matthew Hopkins. Even Vincent Price does a reasonable acting job. The original musical score is actually quite beautiful, though there is a version with an entirely different and much less enjoyable score.

 S_ a_ t_ a_ n_ s_ S_ k_ i_ n (a.k.a. B_ l_ o_ o_ d_ o_ n_ S_ a_ t_ a_ n_ s_ C_ l_ a_ w) (1970)

In some ways an imitation of the style of W_ i_ t_ c_ h_ f_ i_ n_ d_ e_ r_ G_ e_ n_ e_ r_ a_ l. A 17th Century English ploughman turns up the remains of a demon and the artifact exerts satanic influence on the children of the region. This is a very atmospheric film with an authentic historical feel.

 C_ o_ u_ n_ t_ Y_ o_ r_ g_ a_ , V_ a_ m_ p_ i_ r_ e (1973)

This low-budget horror film redefined the concept of the vampire. As a reaction to the staid, hypnotic, and slow vampires of British horror films, this film makes most vampires fast moving predatory deadly animals who hunt in packs. At the time this was pretty scary stuff and the film still has a lot of its impact.

_ P_ h_ a_ s_ e_ I_ V (1974)

Two mutually alien intelligences in the beginnings of a serious war. It is really more about how each side collects information about the other and uses its physical differences against the other. Ants somehow develop a gestalt mind and prepare to make themselves the masters of the world. Visually very impressive with direction by visual artist Saul Bass (best known for creating striking title sequences for other directors' films). There is also some terrific insect photography.

_ W_ h_ o? (1974)

This fairly accurate adaptation of Algis Budrys' novel had film stock problems (!) and could not be released to theaters. That is a genuine pity. Cold War story of its near future has a scientist important to military defense in a bad accident. The East Germans get ahold of him and return him to the West more prosthetic than living matter. Now the problem is, how do you prove that he is who

he says he is?

_ T_ h_ e_ L_ a_ s_ t_ W_ a_ v_ e (1977)

Australian Peter Weir build his reputation on this strange, mystical film about a lawyer who finds he might be the fulfillment of an Aboriginal prophecy. Images of nature out of balance and an intriguing story make this story a real spellbinder. This is a hard film to pigeon-hole and the intelligence of the writing never flags.

_ D_ r_ a_ g_ o_ n_ s_ l_ a_ y_ e_ r (1981)

Lots of films try to do Medieval high fantasy, but this is probably the best. With the death of a great magician, his young apprentice must see if he has mastered enough of his master's art to destroy a terrific dragon who is ravaging the countryside. There are lots of nice touches in the script and the dragon is the best ever created on film.

_ K_ n_ i_ g_ h_ t_ r_ i_ d_ e_ r_ s (1981)

George Romero says he got this out of his system and never has to make another film like _ K_ n_ i_ g_ h_ t_ r_ i_ d_ e_ r_ s. What a pity! This was one of the best films of its year. Superficially this is the story of a traveling Renaissance Fair that features jousts on motorcycles. But it has some terrific characters and a theme of the struggle between integrity and commercialism and between idealism and practicality. And late in the film the viewer realizes that the film has also been doing something else all along.

_ L_ i_ f_ e_ f_ o_ r_ c_ e (1981)

Very few fans are willing to look beyond the naked woman and the zombies to see what is one of the most bizarre and audacious concepts for any science fiction film. Vampires, we learn, are really beings that leak lifeforce into the atmosphere like a tire with a slow leak leaks air. They must replenish the force regularly or they die. Much as we put bacteria into milk to multiply and make yogurt or cheese, some huge, incomprehensible, amoral, alien race seeds earth with vampires. The numbers of these numbers will increase exponentially, leaking more and more lifeforce into the environment so the aliens can vacuum it up.

_ A_ C_ h_ i_ n_ e_ s_ e_ G_ h_ o_ s_ t_ S_ t_ o_ r_ y (1987)

Hong Kong is making their own horror film movement for their own audience. Their films are fast-paced, usually liberally laced with comedy and martial arts, but also having some interesting horror concepts. No one such film is all that terrific (at least among the films I have seen so far) but some are astonishing and full of

unexpected touches. Look for the _ C_ h_ i_ n_ e_ s_ e_ G_ h_ o_ s_ t_ S_ t_ o_ r_ y films, _ W_ i_ c_ k_ e_ d _ C_ i_ t_ y, and _ M_ r_ _ V_ a_ m_ p_ i_ r_ e (which must have a different name in China since it is really about Chinese "Hopping Ghosts").

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The greatest burden in the world is superstition,
not only of ceremonies in the church but of
imaginary and scarecrow sins at home.

-- John Milton