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or http://sf.www.lysator.liu.se/sf_archive/sf-texts/MT_Void/.
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1. URL of the week: <http://www2.best.com/~contento/0start.html>. An on-line version of William Contento's first two volumes (through 1983) INDEX TO SCIENCE FICTION ANTHOLOGIES AND COLLECTIONS. Great for finding all those stories you want to read again! [-ecl]

2. Meetings again! Since people seem to be saying they prefer the older SF to today's, we figured we try the Retro-Hugo nominees: novels and novellas nominated from 1946. See the schedule above. One nominee not listed (two actually) is FOUNDATION AND EMPIRE, which had two of its component parts listed, which is the middle novel of a trilogy. Another is C. S. Lewis's THAT HIDEOUS STRENGTH, the third book of a trilogy. If you'd like to discuss these, please let us know.

Reminder: Meetings are in the MT cafeteria. Mark and I will try to grab a table down the right-center aisle of the seating area. [-ecl]

3. Hugo Factoid of the Week: 232 people have been nominated for the Hugo in the fiction categories, and 66 people have won (not counting this year). Next week: who has been nominated the most times in the fiction categories? [-ecl]

4. The film TWISTER has been given a PG-13 for "intense depiction of very bad weather." That has to be a first.

5. I recently had an opportunity to re-watch one of the early Japanese monster movies, RODAN, made in 1957. This film is perhaps second only to the original GOJIRA (here somewhat butchered into GODZILLA, KING OF THE MONSTERS) for actual interest value as opposed to pure entertainment. But this time it is the American version that has interesting idea, not the Japanese version. When they brought the film over, David Duncan wrote a prologue. Duncan was a science fiction novelist who also wrote for films. Most of his writing is forgotten today and his one claim to fame today might be that he wrote the screenplay for George Pal's TIME

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MACHINE. (David Duncan is not the same author as the currently writing Dave Duncan, by the way.)

The main purpose of the prologue was to show some American faces so American audiences will have some reason to think of a monster in Japan as an international problem. There will, of course, be some people in the audience who just twelve years earlier were fighting for their lives against people like the characters in the film. What they show in the prologue are two nuclear tests (one called improbably "Mission Gigantic"). After showing the tests, the narrator asks, "What have these tests done to Mother Earth. Can the human race continue to deliver these staggering blows without Mother Earth striking back?" It suggests the following story is about a possible aftermath of such explosions. Well, it is not the most cogent argument. It is hard to take seriously the idea that the way Mother Earth will strike back is with an arsenal of prehistoric monsters underground that it has that it will release as a result of nuclear tests. But the idea that Mother Earth might retaliate is still with us and taken fairly seriously by some. And, in fact, it has more than a grain of truth.

The name given to this semi-mystical and semi-scientific idea is

"Gaia." It suggests that the eco-system actually has defense mechanisms to protect itself. But unlike a lot of mystical ideas, this one to some extent is true. Nature breeds for stable equilibria, in a way. The sort of thing that happens is that an increase in prey leads to an increase in predators. An increase in predators leads to a decrease in prey. A decrease in prey leads to a decrease in predators. A decrease in predators leads to an increase in prey, and the cycle begins again. If the effects become greater and greater then eventually the prey goes down to the point where it cannot continue the population, and it dies out and the predators die or go away. That would be an unstable equilibrium but if that were likely it would have happened long ago we would not be observing the predator/prey balance.

Now, if humans come along and kill off some of the prey themselves, they artificially kick off a cycle. They kill off prey, so the predator population decreases and the count of prey increases again. It is in equilibrium. Nature has defended herself. That is the Gaia concept, that Nature defends herself. Another example is that there are definitely bad effects from burning out the Amazonian forests, but the effects are more muted than expected. Why? Fewer forests mean more carbon dioxide in the air. Forests live on carbon dioxide. They love it and it helps them grow. Forests grow thicker all by themselves and turn carbon dioxide into oxygen. Killing off forests fosters growth in other forests and Nature has once again defended itself.

So the Gaia people are partially correct. There is no conscious spirit in nature, but nature really does defend itself. But Duncan

may be assuming a bit much when he suggests that nature is going to have a ready response to nuclear weapons and that the natural restoring force to the effects of nuclear weapons is for nature to cough up some flying pteranodons to counteract the effects. This just does not sound like a cycle that Nature would have seen very frequently in the past. Not that it isn't an amusing image. [-mrl]

6. MULHOLLAND FALLS (a film review by Mark R. Leeper):

Capsule: Four beefy L.A. cops trample the law to solve a case with national implications. This is a film with a terrific look and a very strong cast but a shockingly weak script with a wafer-thin story that is full of superficial characterizations, plot contrivances, and holes. This clearly was a film with more budget than intelligence. Rating: 0 (-4 to +4)

Well, somebody must have believed in this script. I am not sure why. I suppose the reason may be that it is a murder mystery that has a setting of post-war Los Angeles and environs. And the plot has to do with political conspiracies and sex. Perhaps someone thought this could be the new CHINATOWN. MULHOLLAND FALLS has terrific photography by Haskell Wexler, one of the great cinematographers. There are a surprising number of name actors even in tiny roles. This is a film that was given every advantage the Zanuck organization could give it. But it was all to bring to the screen an amateur script that often verges over into the Idiot Plot, the plot that moves forward only because somebody, usually the villain, acts like a complete idiot. ("Mr. Bond, this is the reactor keeps my whole island running.")

Max Hoover (played by Nick Nolte), Coolidge (Chazz Palminteri), Eddie (Michael Madsen), and Relyea (Chris Penn) are the kind squad of cops that give the Los Angeles Police Department the reputation it enjoys after the Rodney King and O. J. Simpson cases. They come on like the Untouchables (in the movie) and have no respect for hoods, gangsters, or due process of law. After an initial sequence that shows just how far beyond the law that they are willing to operate, they are called in on a mysterious case. A woman has been found dead in the desert, and Max obviously knows the woman, but is keeping that to himself. The woman was found actually imbedded IN the desert as if she had fallen off a cliff, but there are no cliffs around from which she could have fallen. From the dialogue it is clear that our squad of deep-thinking policemen cannot figure out how that is possible. To their credit, nobody in my audience shouted the answer at the screen, but we are just a few minutes

into MULHOLLAND FALLS and it is clear this was not going to be a mind-stretching film. And it certainly is not. Multiple times there are scenes which do not make sense, such as characters being frisked by experts who somehow miss little things like eight-inch blackjacks. The logic of this film is on the level of a bad James Bond movie with the bad guys making major and stupid errors in judgment. That is actually a shame because both the police enforcement squad and the secret they uncover individually have a basis in truth. What is far-fetched is the scripting and not the basic plot.

Why Nick Nolte's agent let him play opposite Chazz Palminteri is anybody's guess, but it certainly was a mistake. Playing a scene opposite James Earl Jones, Howard da Silva, Chazz Palminteri, or Rin-Tin-Tin, you are in a battle for the audience's attention and you are probably going to lose. Nolte is okay, but Palminteri manages to make his own every scene in which he plays. Palminteri is really along mostly for comic relief from a tension that rarely manages to materialize. Second billing goes to Melanie Griffith in a decidedly secondary part as Max's wife. Her character is not even a major character in the story, though she does get some opportunity to act. John Malkovich does have a pivotal role as a general as well as a scientist working for the Atomic Energy Commission who was involved with the murdered woman. The casting department seems to have gone out of its way to get name actors in even some of the tiniest roles. People like Bruce Dern, Rob Lowe, and Louise Fletcher show up for parts as small as three sentences and then are seen no more. Direction is by New Zealander Lee Tamahori who directed ONCE WERE WARRIORS.

With a few good revisions on the script by Pete Dexter this could have been a major film and worthy of the attention that was lavished on it. As it is this is a film that has great style, but weak substance. I rate it a 0 on the -4 to +4 scale. [-mrl]

7. ANNE FRANK REMEMBERED (a film review by Mark R. Leeper):

Capsule: This documentary contains just about all that is known about Anne Frank and her diary that one cannot get from the diary itself. After having been a best-seller, a popular play, and a film there is little need to replay the contents of the diary in more than a superficial manner. Jon Blair's account tells us fairly completely the rest of the story. There are, thank goodness, a decent number of documentaries about the Holocaust, but this one does one of the best jobs of

bringing the events down to human terms-- precisely the virtue that the diary had. Anne Frank is presented not as a saint but as a human with faults. This film won the Academy Award for Best Feature-length Documentary for very good reason. Rating: +3 (-4 to +4)

When I write a review of a film, particularly a historical film, I often try to give context for the story in the film. I try to create a frame to surround the film telling many of the incidental things that would be of interest to a viewer. That is what the feature-length documentary ANNE FRANK REMEMBERED does for the book THE DIARY OF ANNE FRANK and its dramatic adaptations. It generally assumes that the viewer has read or seen some version of the true story of the Jewish family that hid from the Nazis for two years in the cramped attic of an Amsterdam factory. Instead of having extensive excerpts from the book, this account tells the viewer nearly everything else of value to someone who is experiencing the story. It starts with the background of the Frank family, their lives and especially their times. Anecdotes are told of Anne's school experiences. The film tells how the Frank family went into hiding and gives a quick summary of their lives those two years in the stifling attic. There Anne's closest confidant was the diary she had been given on her 13th birthday. After telling how the family was betrayed and captured it goes into detail about their lives and the lives of people they knew in the camps. It tells of the death of Anne Frank and her sister. The liberation, the re-discovery of the diary, its publishing, public reaction, the play the film, and authenticity challenges are all covered. This is everything known about the story Anne Frank and her diary that one cannot get from the book itself.

Jon Blair, who previously made the documentary SCHINDLER, had to be not just skillful but extraordinarily lucky to find some of the material presented. Details about Anne and her personal life are presented by Hanneli Goslar, Anne's friend from age four. They were separated by Anne's hiding, but she coincidentally was able to find Anne when they both were interned at Bergen-Belsen concentration camp and was nearby when Anne died. One interview brings out the mixed emotions toward Anne of Peter Pepper, the son

of the dentist who shared Anne's hiding place and whom Anne dubbed Dr. Idiot. During the period of hiding Anne seemed to conflict with every adult in the attic except her beloved father and these conflicts seem to make her even more real. Blair is even able to interview one of the burglars who preyed on the factory below the attic. In Anne's accounts of these incidents the Franks could do nothing but wait in silence for the criminals to leave for fear of letting be known their presence. The one major question that Blair must leave unanswered is who it was who eventually betrayed the hiding place of the Frank family.

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Blair recreates in harrowing detail the life that Anne must have led in the camps and the fates of the people who hid in the attic. Only Otto Frank survived, but there is information and eyewitness accounts of what happened to most of the people from the attic. Blair documents how Anne's spirit was broken as she went from Westerbrook to Auschwitz to her death from disease at Bergen-Belsen. Blair speculates that had she held on to that spirit she could have survived the month between her death and liberation.

Blair mixes 1940s footage with material he shot and interviews with people who are now dead. Some of the people he brought together for the first time since the 1940s. The film is narrated by Kenneth Branagh and selections are read from the diary by Glenn Close. While the photography is mostly understated, there is occasionally a haunting image in the photography. One shot makes the tower over the railroad entrance to Auschwitz look extraordinarily like the head of some giant ogre with glowing eyes from some fairy tale that could not match for violence what actually took place here.

I suppose I would rate ANNE FRANK REMEMBERED a +3 on the -4 to +4 scale, though I have not given it the same sort of thought I usually give a rating. I take the subject of the Holocaust very seriously and would have a very hard time objectively comparing this film to, say, RICHARD III or THE GODFATHER. [-mrl]

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Whom the mad would destroy, first they make gods.
--Bernard Levin

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