

from Mars. There's a difference, though, and therein hangs a tale.

Late one March evening, California time, a science fiction author named Luke Devereaux was wrestling with a long-standing case of writer's block. Separated from his wife, in financial trouble,

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Luke was plumbing the depths of frustration and targetless resentment, and was lubricating his foul mood with booze. At 8:14, there was a knock at the door, and Luke's life took a further nosedive, as did the lives of everyone else on the planet.

The Martians show up. A billion of them, all at once, all over the globe. They just kwim here (it's sort of like teleportation, but it's none of your business, Earthling). Yes, they're short, bald, and very green, but they have Attitudes, as a future generation could say. They can see through anything, so no secrets are safe. Rude beyond tolerance and yet completely honest, the Martians take every opportunity to sneer, tattle, and belittle. Vicious practical jokes claim human dignity as victim, and occasionally human lives. Imagine John Cleese in a Monty Python skit involving frustration, and magnify that by three billion. Since Martians are insubstantial, no physical attack affects them. Yet they're not just some mass hallucination, since their voices can be recorded and their images can be filmed....

M_a_r_t_i_a_n_s, G_o_H_o_m_e is not social satire in the same sense as T_h_e_S_p_a_c_e_M_e_r_c_h_a_n_t_s, the scathing Pohl and Kornbluth attack on our consumer culture that came out at the same time. Brown isn't interested in looking at the broad social forces that shape our lives. He's more interested in the little interactions we engage in every day with each other -- the casual courtesies, the polite little white lies, and the other social amenities that can make life a little more pleasant, or at least predictable. Brown's sardonically funny book rubs our nose in the intrinsic silliness of many of our social rituals, but it's clear the alternative is worse. There's another theme in the book, as well, but to prevent spoilers I'll save that for the discussion. [-jrrt]

2. There has been an alarming proliferation in the number of funny-name restaurants. I don't know if you have ever noticed, but

the sillier the name of the restaurant, the more over-priced the food will be. Would you rather eat at the Pernicious Pickle or at Joe's Pizzeria? In my experience, if you order a sandwich and a Coke at the Pernicious Pickle you will get a small sandwich, a pickle slice, and a six-ounce glass filled with something closer to a snow-cone than a Coke. That will cost you about \$10. That is just about the same price you'd pay for Joe's Special Pizza. It's got a thick but crispy crust and plenty of tomato sauce and cheese, but they are tough to see because the sausage, pepperoni, and mushrooms get in the way.

Oh, just so I don't get sued, "Pernicious Pickle" is not the real name of the restaurant I am describing, but I've really eaten there. You have too probably. Joe's Pizzeria is real and though I haven't been back there since I moved out of Massachusetts, it really exists. And I am allowing for inflation: I think the special used to be something like \$6.50.

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So a plain name is better than a cute name for a restaurant with one exception. An awkward name is actually better than a plain name. For example, if you see a place called Number One Chinese Restaurant, it isn't infallible but it is a really good sign. Why? That is a very Chinese name for a restaurant. In Shanghai the big department store is "Number One Department Store." Somebody who names a restaurant "Number One Chinese Restaurant" probably knows food better than he knows how to make money. You won't find drinks with paper umbrellas in them or sweet and sour pork or chop suey, but you might find something authentic and maybe the food will be hot if you want it that way.

P.S. Honest to gosh, I wrote this article and it just happened we were looking for a restaurant within three hours. That part is coincidence. We passed a place with a name sort of like Joe's Pizzeria. (I won't actually plug the place here, but their name is available on request.) I genuinely got just about the best pizza I've had in New Jersey the first time I ever heard of the place. Hey, my advice works!

3. Last week I wrote about movie titles. I notice that we have out T_h_e_N_e_v_e_r_e_n_d_i_n_g_S_t_o_r_y_I_I. Now I ask you, does that title make

sense? Let's ignore for a moment that T_h_e_N_e_v_e_r_e_n_d_i_n_g_S_t_o_r_y left no room for a sequel. But if the first story was never-ending when does T_h_e_N_e_v_e_r_e_n_d_i_n_g_S_t_o_r_y_I_I take place? Or are they just telling us they intend to have an infinite number of films that will never end? But if that was the case, why didn't they call it T_h_e_N_e_v_e_r_e_n_d_i_n_g_S_t_o_r_y_I_I: T_h_e_S_t_o_r_y_C_o_n_t_i_n_u_e_s? Well, unlike the story, I think this item should come to an end.

4. Oh, you will remember that Saddam Hussein was castigating the Americans for hitting civilian targets like a baby food factory. (It was labeled "Baby Food Factory" in English with a hand-painted sign--honestly! I saw it on CNN.) Anyway there is more to that story now. Hussein is claiming that 37 civilian engineers who did not get their gas masks on in time were killed by the baby food leak.

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To tyrants, indeed, and bad rulers, the progress of knowledge among the mass of mankind is a just object of terror; it is fatal to them and their designs.

-- Henry Peter, Lord Brougham

L. A. STORY
A film review by Mark R. Leeper
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Capsule review: Steve Martin borrows the style of the early Woody Allen films in a pleasant love story told against a background of a Los Angeles of the mind. While lampooning life in Los Angeles, Martin also demonstrates

a good deal of affection for his city. Rating: high +1 (-4 to +4).

In S_t_a_r_d_u_s_t_M_e_m_o_r_i_e_s, the aliens tell Woody Allen, "We like your films, especially the 'earlier, funnier' ones." It is a running gag. Everybody in S_t_a_r_d_u_s_t_M_e_m_o_r_i_e_s likes Allen's "earlier, funnier" films. Actually, even outside of S_t_a_r_d_u_s_t_M_e_m_o_r_i_e_s, people seem to prefer Allen's earlier style, but Allen does not want to go back to it. That makes it fair game for other filmmakers. With L._A._S_t_o_r_y, Steve Martin is filling that void, picking up the earl Allen style. We have a film with a slight plot which is really mostly an excuse to tie together small skits, jokes, and sight gags about life in Los Angeles. Martin, who scripted, is every bit as loving of his Los Angeles, in spite of its faults, as Woody Allen is of New York City (and speaking as someone living in the New York area, with just as much reason).

Martin plays Harris Telemacher who in spite of his Ph.D. is a sort of television clown weather man. He breaks up with his mistress who is selfish and uninteresting and begins dating a 23-year-old nymphette, but he really wants to win a British journalist (played by Victoria Tennant) who is in town to write an elitist, snobby, put-down article about Los Angeles. Unfortunately, she finds both the town and its goofy weather man entirely charming, each in spite of its little quirks. But Harris has problems deciding what he really wants romantically and going for it. Then from the most unexpected source, a mystical force takes control of Harris's life and pushes it in the right direction. While the style is archeo-Allen, the plot is really neo-Allen and there is more than a little similarity between the plot of L._A._S_t_o_r_y and a film like P_l_a_y_I_t_A_g_a_i_n, S_a_m or even the current A_l_i_c_e.

But L._A._S_t_o_r_y's attraction is not so much plot as sidebar humor. Martin takes affectionate swipes at traffic congestion, earthquakes, the superficiality of the people, crime, and a lot more. Here and there Martin swipes a scene from some well-known source. Knowing some very basic French and Spanish will be of some assistance too.

Steve Martin deserves additional credit for letting someone else, Mick Johnson, direct L._A._S_t_o_r_y. All too often when the star of a film writes the screenplay, he feels he should direct also. Many good actors have a very hard time directing themselves, though they do not realize how hard a time they had until the film is released. Gene Wilder is one actor who cannot direct himself, for example. By letting someone else direct, Martin can concentrate on his performance. And his performance is fine in this slight but funny comedy. I rate it a high +1 on the -4 to +4 scale.

Yet Another Batch of Mini-Reviews
by Dale L. Skran Jr.
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C_h_i_c_a_g_o_R_e_d by R. M. Meluch

One of my areas of greatest interest in SF is post-nuclear war fiction. Although all-out nuclear war seems to be drifting toward the event horizon (thank heavens!) with the coming of Glasnost, a couple of books are contributed to the sub-genera every year. Wiping out the whole world and starting over, albeit with a few selected pieces of the old, is a great temptation to an author.

In C_h_i_c_a_g_o_R_e_d Meluch creates a very "American" post-war tale, at once readable without being striking in any way. A plausible yet suitably convoluted tale of revolution is told without interference from bogus mutants or other fixtures of bad post-nuclear fiction. Other than a more or less seamless intermixing of gay and straight relationships the plot had the feel of S_t_a_r_W_a_r_s with a "gutsy woman," a bad guy who isn't all bad, a priest with a secret, a brave prince, etc.

Recommended, I guess.

C_a_r_r_i_o_n_C_o_m_f_o_r_t by Dan Simmons

After H_y_p_e_r_i_o_n was nominated for the Hugo, I read it and the other nominees. It didn't take all that long to decide to vote H_y_p_e_r_i_o_n #1. At the convention, I heard a panel where it was said that Simmons wrote three (3!) Hugo-class novels in 1989 - H_y_p_e_r_i_o_n, P_h_a_s_e_s_o_f_G_r_a_v_i_t_y, and C_a_r_r_i_o_n_C_o_m_f_o_r_t. Thus I was looking forward to C_a_r_r_i_o_n_C_o_m_f_o_r_t quite a bit. This was fortunate indeed, since at 884 pages, C_a_r_r_i_o_n_C_o_m_f_o_r_t takes a lot of impetus to get through. It is well written, and the plot is engaging. There is only one problem - at 884 pages C_a_r_r_i_o_n_C_o_m_f_o_r_t is simply too long and too much to too little effect.

Mainly, C_a_r_r_i_o_n_C_o_m_f_o_r_t traces the efforts of Saul, a Jewish concentration camp survivor, to find Herr Oberst, a Nazi with a difference - the power to control humans to their deaths and derive psychic satisfaction from the process. Eventually the trail leads to other "Vampires" and other victims. Ultimately, Saul leads a small band in a suicide assault on "The Island," a place where the Vampires gather annually to stage "The Most Dangerous Game" using human pawns.

C_a_r_r_i_o_n_C_o_m_f_o_r_t has considerable narrative strength (otherwise I would never have gotten to page 700, or even page 500!) but as a shorter, more concise novel it would a rip-roaring blockbuster. In its current bloated form it wearies the eyes. This is not to say that there are long dull passages, just that not enough really happens to justify the length of the novel. Also, did I mention that C_a_r_r_i_o_n_C_o_m_f_o_r_t seems written for the screen? C_a_r_r_i_o_n_C_o_m_f_o_r_t is similar in many ways to

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Lumley's "Necroscope" series, although at once better written and less interesting.

Recommended to those who like this sort of thing. _ N_ o_ t Hugo material.

_ P_ h_ o_ e_ n_ i_ x by Steven Brust

It's been a while since I read _ P_ h_ o_ e_ n_ i_ x, so the details are slipping away. That's okay since there weren't many details worth mentioning. Vlad splits from his wife and gives up his job with the organization and goes off to find his fortune. Uh? Ya, he kills someone in the middle of the book and gets saved by his powerful friends. He meets a God or two and there is some magic. Personally, I think Brust is running out of ideas and doesn't know what to do with Vlad.

Not recommended.

THIRD ANIMATION CELEBRATION
A film review by Mark R. Leeper
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The folks who put together the Internation Tournee of Animation usually put together compilation of award-winning and other animated films that have come to their attention. Then every once in a while they put out an "Animation Celebration." There is no obvious criterion for why films show up in the Tournee or the Celebration unless the Celebration has older films not discovered in time for the Tournee in their respective years. Like the Tournee, the Celebration seems to play only in major cities, and then only in one theater per city. Presumably the distributor knows the business, but it has always seemed that there is a wider market than the film seems to play to. I have yet to see one of these compilations that was not worth the seventy-minute-or-so drive to new York City to see.

A major disappointment this year was that the Angelika Theater in New York had run out of leaflets. The leaflets make the pieces much easier to remember and to review. For each animated film they give credits, length, and a picture from the film. This year we ran outside and copied the list of animated films off the poster, where they were in alphabetical order, not play order. That is the order in which I will review them. I will rate them poor (P), fair (F), good (G), very good (V), or excellent (E). This rating is overall for the animated film.

Good animation will not make up for bad story-telling, for example. In all the Tournees there has been only one I call really excellent, a British fantasy, "Skywhales." Incidentally, spoilers follow.

- "The Animated Star-Spangled Banner" (Skip Battaglia, USA): To the sound of a grade-school class singing "The Star-Spangled Banner" we see what appear to be children's illustrations of the song with several puns where they did not quite understand the words. (F)
- "Bonehead" (Michael A. Korey, USA): A rather stupid joke dramatized in 3-D computer animation. Bonehead eats records rather than playing them. (P)
- "Darkness, Light, Darkness" (Jan Svankmajer, Czechoslovakia): Clay body parts pull themselves together to form a complete body that does not fit into the room that is the setting. I missed the point. (F)
- "Istanbul (Not Constantinople)" (Linda Przyluska and J. Otto Sibold, USA): The title song with illustrations in two or three styles of animation. (The song was familiar in spite of my not recognizing the title at first.) The song was more interesting than was the animation which only distracted. (F)

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- "Lava Jr." (Randy Bauer, USA): Presumably an allusion to "Luxo, Jr." Similar animation but with lava lamps. Not very interesting. (P)
- "Mr. Tao" (Bruno Bozzetto, Italy): Just okay gag from the creator of A I I e g r o n o n T r o p p o. A wiseman climbs a hill. (F)
- "New Fangled" (George Griffin, USA): Madison Avenue brain-storming session with animated images of what the people are describing. Images mutate as the idea changes. (F)
- "Personality Software" (Sylvie Fefner, Canada): A light treatment of a serious science fiction theme. Want to change your personality? With software and a slot in your head you can change your personality or gain new talents. But the software is good for

only six hours. Not bad. (G)

- "Plymptoons" (Bill Plympton, USA): Short and very creative little cartoons from MTV (I think). Some very imaginative. (G)
- "Poumse" (Mikhail Aldashin, USSR): Don't ask me what the title means. A trader brings capitalism to a small tropical island. This one actually has a pro-capitalist message.
- "Reading Room" (John Schnall, USA): One man's noise keeps annoying another man at a library reading room. The gag this leads up to is not worth the wait. (F)
- "Ren Hoek and Stimpy in 'Big House Blues'" (John Kricfalusi, USA): This is a much more traditional cartoon. Cat and chihuahua get themselves caught by the dog catcher. At the dog pound they meet new friends, but at least one is put to sleep. Perhaps a little too real for some kids. (G)
- "Snowy & the Seven Dorps" (Vincent Cafarelli and Candy Kugel, USA): Bright colors on black background much like the similarly-themed "A Warm Reception in L.A." (by the same pair). High-spirited but basically just bum-rapping the entertainment industry.
- "Still Life" (Georges Le Piouffle, France): A nice little fantasy inspired by Giuseppe Arcimboldo's "Summer," a portrait in pieces of fruit. A stray piece of fruit from the painting is attacked by a villainous knife and fork. (G)
- "This Is Not Frank's Planet" (Mike Wellins and Mark Swain, USA): In spite of one or two nice visual puns, this is a rather foolish little story of two hippy-like aliens visiting a planet for a purpose only one knows. (P)
- "War Story" (Peter Lord, UK): Very inarticulate World War II veteran telling about his experience defending London. Action is

illustrated in claymation. The sound may be from an actual interview. Nevertheless this one is frustrating to follow and has little payoff. (P)

- "Welcome" (Alexei Karaev, USSR): The best piece of the show is the story of a moose who lets a beetle ride in his antlers only to find the beetle inviting others to join him. The multitudes then feel their numbers give them the right to order the moose around by democratic principles. The allegory is anti-something. I saw it as anti-democratic; my wife thought it was anti-communist. But it is entertaining and thought-provoking. (V)
- "The Wiseman" (Bill Plympton, USA): An incomprehensible wiseman goes through physically impossible changes while giving a lecture. Unoriginal. (P)
- "Zeno Reads a Newspaper" (Ferenc Cako, Hungary): A man goes through physically impossible changes while reading a newspaper. Unoriginal. (F)

Sprinkled throughout are a series of small animated pieces about Dr. N!Godatu, a white, middle-class woman in spite of the name. These sketches are not nearly as cute or as funny as they were intended to be. Strictly for fans of Charles Schultz's Woodstock. Call them fair.

That makes five poor, nine fair, four good, and two very good entries.

ONCE AROUND

A film review by Mark R. Leeper

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Capsule review: Boston Italian family has its problems when their daughter brings home as a lover a flashy, boorish salesman. Salesman overpowers the family and tests the strength of relationships. Comedy-drama has more to it than it may at first seem. Rating: +2 (-4 to +4).

The Bellas are a closely-knit Italian family living near Boston. They have little oddities but they accept each other and as a family they work. Then Renata (played by Holly Hunter) breaks up with her boyfriend and decides she wants to sell condos for a living. She goes to a sales class in St. Martin and brings back a lover. Sam (played by Richard Dreyfus) is an over-ripe salesman with a phenomenal sales record and some odd Lithuanian ways. Sam is welcomed into the family with a big smile that wilts when he is not looking. He simply does not fit it. He upstages family members with extravagances and he overpowers family events with the subtlety of sales pep rallies. As time passes the pressures increase until the family is seriously in danger of splitting up. Is Sam a genuinely destructive force or is the real problem in the family's unwillingness to accept a newcomer who is do different from themselves?

O_n_c_e_A_r_o_u_n_d is directed by Lasse Hallstrom, the Swede who directed M_y_L_i_f_e_a_s_a_D_o_g. Like Louis Malle, Hallstrom has insights into American life that an American director might miss. By the same token, however, he misses details such as the inappropriateness of Hunter's accent. She is the main character and she could have really used an accent coach. Dreyfus is, however, well-cast, if not too much

differently from his role in T_i_n_M_e_n and even T_h_e

A_p_p_r_e_n_t_i_c_e_s_h_i_p_o_f

D_u_d_d_y_K_r_a_v_i_t_z. The casting of Laura San Giacomo and Gena Rowlands as Renata's sister and mother are both fine. Especially good is Danny Aiello as Renata's father Joe. Much of the friction that makes the story is between the Dreyfus character and the Aiello character. Joe Bella goes through a lot of changes in the course of the film and Aiello is a joy to watch. Also notable is co-producer Griffin Dunne as Renata's boyfriend.

Hallstrom has a good eye for the small dramatic incidents of life

and also the daily ironies. While the film is largely about Sam's idiosyncrasies, it takes at least one meaning of its title, O _ n _ c _ e _ A _ r _ o _ u _ n _ d, from a strange custom of Joe Bella: on important family occasions he traditionally drives around a traffic rotary. But for a little heavy-handed melodrama toward the end, this is a nice comedy-drama worth seeing. I give it a +2 on the -4 to +4 scale.