

notice. (We didn't want you to miss it.)

2. The next discussion meeting will talk about (and possibly rank)

the Hugo nominees for best short story of 1992. The stories are:

"The Winterberry" by Nicholas A. DiChario (in A _ l _ t _ e _ r _ n _ a _ t _ e

K _ e _ n _ n _ e _ d _ y _ s),

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"The Mountain to Mohammed" by Nancy Kress (in A _ s _ i _ m _ o _ v' _ s Apr), "The Lotus and the Spear" by Mike Resnick (in A _ s _ i _ m _ o _ v' _ s Aug), "The Arbitrary Placement of Walls" by Martha Soukup (in A _ s _ i _ m _ o _ v' _ s Apr), and "Even the Queen" by Connie Willis (in A _ s _ i _ m _ o _ v' _ s Apr).

Without giving too much away, let me say that these represent a wide range of topics and style. "The Winterberry" is an alternate history about John F. Kennedy, "The Mountain to Mohammed" is set in a future in which medical treatment is heavily regulated, "The Lotus and the Spear" is another in Resnick's "Kirinyaga" series, "The Arbitrary Placement of Walls" is about the ghosts of a woman's past, and "Even the Queen" is Willis's response to those who go perhaps too far in "celebrating" their heritage.

There are no free electronic copies this year, but I suspect one of the major libraries in the area must have A _ s _ i _ m _ o _ v' _ s available, and since they are short stories, a single evening in an air-conditioned library should suffice. [-ecl]

3. In the 1870s Sudan was governed by an Egyptian suzerainty--that is, the government had autonomy in domestic issues, but in all its foreign affairs it was ruled by Egypt. And Britain more or less controlled Egyptian interests in the Sudan and was using its power to stamp out the Muslim-backed slave trade. But the Sudan also did not control its own affairs. The man most responsible for the war against the slave trade with General Charles "Chinese" Gordon. He was called "Chinese Gordon" because he came to the Sudan already a hero from the wars in China--but that is another story. Gordon had once again made a hero of himself making both friends and enemies in the region but substantially stamping out the slave trade.

But, even while Gordon was in the Sudan, the Sudanese mystic Muhammad Ahmad proclaimed himself to be The Mahdi--a title meaning

"the one guided by Allah." The Mahdi was one of the most powerful and mysterious men in history. In 1881 the Mahdi's unstoppable waves of The Mahdi's followers overthrew the suzerainty of Sudan. The Mahdi's forces rolled over Egyptian and British forces in powerful religious fervor. The British government wanted to act to save the forward-looking (British-sympathizing) Egyptian governors of the Sudan from the fundamentalist and fanatic Mahdists. And they didn't want to do anything that would entangle them in a costly war. So they privately asked General Gordon to go on his own initiative and evacuate the Egyptian government from the capital city of Khartoum and save them from the tremendous forces of the Mahdi. Even even the heroic Gordon believed that retreat was the best policy, and they privately asked him to back that policy, they would save face in not supporting the Egyptians.

Gordon's heroic reputation was really what the British parliament thought he would need, but they reconned without his Gordon's heroic ego. Gordon saw that the tremendous forces of The Mahdi

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would undoubtedly engulf the entire region. Gordon took it into his head that rather than retreating, he had to take a stand against The Mahdi, fortifying rather than evacuating Khartoum.

The story of the next fifteen years is very nicely covered by two very good adventure films that happen to dovetail together extremely well. On Thursday, August 5, at 7PM, the Leeperhouse film festival will tell the story of that next fifteen years in the Sudan.

Britain Against the Mahdi
KHARTOUM (1966) dir. by Basil Deardon
THE FOUR FEATHERS (1939) dir. by Zoltan Korda

Charleton Heston plays General Gordon and Laurence Olivier is The Mahdi in the 1966 film K_h_a_r_t_o_u_m. This is the story of two powerful opponents whose names will forever be entwined. It is the story of General Gordon's stand at Khartoum. It is the story of one man taking a stand against an entire religious movement. I have always found this to be one historical film which is intelligent and exciting. This is not just the clash of two men or two armies, but of two world-views. George MacDonald Fraser says "K_h_a_r_t_o_u_m is

a spectacular devoted to [Gordon's] last mission, and as an action picture has its share of good blood-and-thunder sequences, is extremely well acted, and contains beautiful photography of the Nile.... All told, K_h_a_r_t_o_u_m does well by history in the broad sense, and great pains have been taken with small detail, giving the film an authentic period quality." Also starring is Richard Johnson. And what would a British historical film be without Ralph Richardson? Here he plays Gladstone. I have always had a particular fondness for this film, sort of one step behind L_a_w_r_e_n_c_e_o_f_A_r_a_b_i_a.

We move forward by historic chronology, though backward by cinematic chronology, to the best of many adaptations of A. E. W. Mason's novel T_h_e_F_o_u_r_F_e_a_t_h_e_r_s. This story is not so close to the prime movers of history, but you do see what happens to Sudan. The story centers on a young man Harry Faversham (played by John Clements) from a military family who decides he does not want to go fight in some far off corner of the world. He is branded a coward by those nearest and dearest to him. He decides he must prove his courage. Well, when you are really out to prove something that everybody doubts, you sort of go overboard. Harry certainly proves his valor and courage in a sort of rousing adventure that Maltin goes overboard and gives 4 stars to (Scheuer gives it 3-1/2, I might say it is worth about 3). Again there is a lot of good photography and a fair amount of good adventure. I would place this a few steps beneath K_h_a_r_t_o_u_m, though it is way ahead of the G_u_n_g_a_D_i_n sort of historical British-military film. It stars C. Aubrey Smith, and, of course, Ralph Richardson.

(Note: these are both long, so we will try to start on time.)

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HARVEST by Robert Charles Wilson
Bantam Spectra, ISBN 0-553-37110-X, 1993, \$12.
A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper
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What if aliens offered us the chance to live forever--if the only price we had to pay was to give up being human? That is the

premise of Robert Charles Wilson's latest book, H a r v e s t .

As might be expected from the premise, H a r v e s t is more a study in characters than an action story, though there is a very impressive storm sequence. Wilson looks at the world through the eyes of those few who chose to remain human. And they are a motley crew--a doctor, a fundamentalist Christian, a car salesman, a politician, two teenagers, a farmer's wife, an Army colonel, a retired worker. They have little in common--except their decision. What makes some choose one way and some another is one of the main questions of the book, but Wilson never satisfactorily answers it, and indeed, towards the end H a r v e s t becomes very much like an update E a r t h A b i d e s , as the remaining humans cope with lack of electricity, the search for food, and so on. Wilson also makes a few flubs. He says that on election night, "a long Republican ascendancy over the White House had come to an end," obviously expecting Bush to win in 1992. (Internal evidence says the story takes place in 1996.) He also seems to think Lima is in a time zone between Los Angeles and Anchorage, while it is actually in the same time zone as New York.

In spite of these minor quibbles, however, I would still recommend H a r v e s t . Wilson at least touches on the nature of humanity, and his characters and their reactions to the situation and to each other may give us some clues, if not to t h e answer, at least to a n answer.