

This year the big flap at the Oscars was over Barbra Streisand. She directed the film T_h_e_P_r_i_n_c_e_o_f_T_i_d_e_s, which was nominated for Best Picture. Yet somehow the Academy snubbed her by not nominating her for Best Director. If her film is nominated for Best Picture, of course she should get nominated for Best Director.

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After all, do they think these films direct themselves? Apparently a fair number of people agreed with that argument and referred to it at the microphone, as if getting a film nominated for Best Picture without getting a nomination for Best Director was some sort of sexist put-down. Never mind the fact that you really have one group of people nominating for Best Picture and another group nominating for Best Director. Now, mathematicians know that

$$5 - (5 - n) = n$$

What does that equation mean? It means you have approximately as many people being nominated for Best Director whose film does not get nominated for Best Picture as you have directors with Streisand Syndrome. This year B_e_a_u_t_y_a_n_d_t_h_e_B_e_a_s_t and T_h_e_P_r_i_n_c_e_o_f_T_i_d_e_s got a Best Picture nomination without a Best Director nomination. And by an odd coincidence, two is also the number of people who were nominated for Best Director for films that did not get nominated for Best Picture. Those snubbed directors were John Singleton for B_o_y_z_N_t_h_e_H_o_o_d and Ridley Scott for T_h_e_l_m_a_&_L_o_u_i_s_e. Unspoken in Streisand's accusation is that it was prejudice that prompted the Academy to honor these two men and not her. Yet it has to be a very selective sort of prejudice to honor the director of T_h_e_l_m_a_&_L_o_u_i_s_e and not Streisand. T_h_e_l_m_a_&_L_o_u_i_s_e was not generally thought of as being strongly anti-feminist as a picture. Maybe it was a prejudice to nominate John Singleton in Streisand's place. Again, it is a selective prejudice since Singleton is black and also the youngest director ever nominated. We could be talking about the divide-and-conquer strategy that prompted George Bush to nominate a conservative Black to the Supreme Court. But that would require an absurd conspiracy by the directors who voted. (Are you listening, Oliver Stone?)

At heart the question is, can you have someone be the Best Director without having the film nominated for Best Picture? Suppose you were able to make a H_e_n_r_y_V to rival Branagh's in quality using actors only from your son's kindergarten class. Now that would be

a real feat of direction, even if you only came close to Best Picture. That would mean some film would be nominated for Best Picture but not for Best Director. Even in the ads for T_h_e_P_r_i_n_c_e_o_f_T_i_d_e_s they talked about how beloved the book was. The actors were ones with known box-office drawing power. The technical credits--if somewhat over-florid--were expert. And it was a little too obvious that the director was in love with the lead actress. Given that, it is probably clear that this was candidate for Best Picture with Best Director nomination.

2. Among the films that Jack Arnold directed are:

IT CAME FROM OUTER SPACE (1953)

THE CREATURE FROM THE BLACK LAGOON (1954)

THIS ISLAND EARTH (1954) [co-directed uncredited with Joseph Newman]

REVENGE OF THE CREATURE (1955)

TARANTULA (1955)

SPACE CHILDREN (1957)

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THE INCREDIBLE SHRINKING MAN (1957)

MONSTER ON THE CAMPUS (1958)

THE MOUSE THAT ROARED (1959)

Arnold really helped to define the 1950s science fiction film. Reportedly it was not until the late 1980s that Jack Arnold found out that for years studies of the science fiction film had referred to "the Jack Arnold science fiction film" as a separate category to be studied.

Jack Arnold (October 14, 1916 - March 17, 1992)

Mark Leeper

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It is clear that thought is not free if the profession of certain opinions make it impossible to earn a living.

-- Bertrand Russell

THE RUNESTONE
A film review by Mark R. Leeper
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Capsule review: Rent this one for a Friday night and make some popcorn. There is a monster loose in New York and its roots are in Norse mythology. If the plot is less than totally

original, the writing and acting are good and the cast is impressive. Rating: high +1 (-4 to +4). (Minor spoilers below)

By this point there is little original that can be done with the stale plot that some myth about a fabled monster has a basis of truth and the beastie is loose in a modern city. And, of course, nobody believes that the myth can be true. It was even a weekly television series, K_o_l_c_h_a_k: T_h_e_N_i_g_h_t_S_t_a_l_k_e_r. T_h_e_R_u_n_e_s_t_o_n_e does just about the best that can be done. First, it uses a genuine myth and, at the same time, not a myth that has been over-used. In Norse mythology the world end sin a battle between Aesir and the powers of Hel, led by Loki. One of Loki's children was the monster wolf Fenrir. It was really Fenrir and his wolf-cub children who bring about Ragnarok, the great icy apocalypse of the world--icy because one of the wolf-children stole the sun. It is Fenrir who killed and devoured Odin. Previously Tyr once allowed the gods to capture Fenrir, but at the cost of his right hand--bitten off by the great wold. Just what all this has to do with modern-day New York is rather neatly set up in the plot of T_h_e_R_u_n_e_s_t_o_n_e.

Willard Carroll directed and wrote the screenplay based on a novella by Mark E. Rogers. The writing is actually very crisp and witty without lowering itself to self-satire or camp. These are several throwaway jokes, some actually quite funny., but the main plotline is still taken seriously. Because the script is so well-executed, the producers were able to attract a surprisingly good cast. Top-billed, though not quite the main character, is Peter Riegert of O_s_c_a_r and C_r_o_s_s_i_n_g_D_e_l_a_n_c_e_y, playing Gregory Fanducci, a likable sarcastic Italian policeman with a taste for Pez candy. William Hickey, who played the aging godfather in P_r_i_z_z_i's_H_o_n_o_r, has a decent-sized role as an eccentric expert in Norse mythology who tries to straddle the old gods' world and the modern world. Alexander Godunov plays a clockmaker with mystical ties to the old world. And at the center of all the activity is Joan Severance, playing young artist Marla Stewart.

I do not know if this film has had a theatrical release. After seeing a positive review I rented it on tape. Like last year's W_a_r_l_o_c_k, this is not a great film, but it is certainly a fun film. Great for a Friday night watch after a hard week. I give it a high +1 on the -4 to +4 scale.

REMAKING HISTORY by Kim Stanley Robinson
Tor, 1991, ISBN 0-312-85126-X, \$18.95
A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper
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Ghod, I love Robinson's work!

Okay, everyone who was just looking for a thumbs up or down vote now knows where I stand on this collection, so I feel free to discuss the stories at somewhat greater length.

R_e_m_a_k_i_n_g_H_i_s_t_o_r_y is the title of the collection, the title of one of the stories, and the book's theme as well, with several of the stories embodying that theme.

"A History of the Twentieth Century, with Illustrations" (originally published in 1991), "Remaking History" (1989), "Vinland the Dream" (1991), "Muir on Shasta" (1991), and "A Sensitive Dependence on Initial Conditions" (1991) all look backward at history, not forward to the future as SF (usually meaning "science fiction") is expected to do. Yet they're all SF ("speculative fiction") in their own way.

The title story, "Remaking History," is a straightforward alternate history: what if the Iran hostage rescue had succeeded? But even here, in what is the first of these stories that Robinson wrote (or at any rate published), history is examined on multiple levels: what did happen, what might have happened, how what happened is portrayed in the media, and so on. These are ideas Robinson will return to over and over. The interlocking of events, how one thing leads to another and the slightest coincidences can change history, are themes that Robinson here begins to explore.

"Muir on Shasta" would appear to be an historical fiction about John Muir. Yet Robinson gives it a mysticism in Muir's visions of past and future that makes it something more, while at the same time slipping in a subtle reminder that we are often unable to interpret correctly what we see--how much more difficult to interpret things second-hand.

"Vinland the Dream" is a perfect pairing with "Remaking History"--it's about remaking history. What if all the evidence of Norse exploration in Canada and elsewhere in North America had been faked by someone in the early 1800s? What if he h_a_d "remade history"? In "Vinland the Dream" some archaeologists discover the truth, making them sort of Schliemanns in reverse, turning fact into myth. What motive would the hoaxer have? Was he just a practical joker or a Norse chauvinist, or was he trying to give us dreams? In both "Vinland the Dream" and "Remaking History." Robinson looks at

how our perceptions of history give direction to our lives.

"A Sensitive Dependence on Initial Conditions" is not a short story--it's not fiction at all (though everyone seems to refer to it as such). In this essay, Robinson tries to use the conceits of physics to describe and understand history. Certainly the application of chaos theory (to which the title refers) to history is not new, but I think Robinson's use of the wave-versus-particle duality from physics to embody the Great-Man-versus-historical-materialism duality in history is a new and original approach to this ongoing debate. The only parts of "A Sensitive Dependence on Initial Conditions" that might be construed as fiction are Robinson's many scenarios for how Hiroshima and Nagasaki might have turned out differently, and how those changes might have affected the future, and so on. The twists and turns that Robinson draws give the reader a glimpse of how complicated it all is: a writer of alternate histories can pick one scenario and make it sound reasonable, even inevitable, but Robinson shows how many different paths are possible and helps demonstrate Niven's contention that alternate history is just too easy to write.

"A History of the Twentieth Century, with Illustrations" puts into practice, if you will, a lot of what Robinson explores in the first three stories I mentioned. A historian is trying to put together a book that is "A History of the Twentieth Century, with Illustrations," and as part of that is trying to make sense of the century and of the feeling of one man in 1902 who said, "I believe Man is good. I believe that we stand at the dawn of a century that will be more peaceful and prosperous than any in history." Robinson's Frank Churchill tries to reconcile that with the millions of war dead, measured--in a series of powerful images--as how many Vietnam memorials they would fill: one every six weeks for World War I (which lasted 220 weeks in all), a hundred and twenty for the Jews killed in the Holocaust, and so on. Most of Robinson's readers will remember Vietnam; this takes their image of a horrifying big war and shows them how small it was in comparison to the rest of the century. Again, our perceptions of history are shown to be flawed; our lives are shaped by myths rather than realities. Only by returning to a simpler era can Churchill find some understanding, but also some humility: we are no longer "Man," but simply "man."

"The Part of Us That Loves" is an up-to-date look at the Gospel stories of Jesus's miracles in a town which seems oddly stuck in the 1950s. In spite of that (or maybe because of it--it gives the story a sort of "soft-focus" feel that reinforces the theme), Robinson conveys a strong message. What the message is--aye, there's the rub. To the mystic, it would be that the age of miracles is not past, or has come again; to the secular humanist, it may be that we make our own miracles. Given Robinson's attractions to the ambiguities of history, I don't doubt for a moment that this ambiguity is intentional. This story also marks a return to the

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musical theme that Robinson had in such earlier works as "In Pierson's Orchestra" and "Coming Back to Dixieland," both from the 1976 O_r_b_i_t_1_8.

R_e_m_a_k_i_n_g_H_i_s_t_o_r_y also contains what is described on the dust jacket as "Robinson's controversial South African sequence, 'Down and Out in the Year 2000,' 'Our Town,' 'A Transect,' and 'The Lunatics.'" What makes these a South African sequence escapes me. The first seems to be a straightforward "our cities are going to hell" look at the future--well-done, but having no discernible connection to South Africa. The second is set in Tunisia. The third is set in Montreal and South Africa through a most peculiar space-warp. But then one might expect that of a story titled "The Transect." It seemed similar in some vague undefinable way to Michael Bishop's "Apartheid, Superstrings, and Mordecai Thubana." I doubt either copied the other; Robinson's is from 1987, Bishop's from 1990 (I believe), but it's probably one of those odd coincidences. Then again, maybe I see a resemblance where no one else does. It wouldn't be the first time. ("Mark, doesn't that look like so-and-so?" "No.") "The Lunatics" is also connected to South Africa, not by being set there, but by being a parable of what might happen there (though recent events seem to make it less likely). Robinson takes some very traditional science fiction trappings and does some very modern things with them.

The five remaining stories form no special "cycle." "The Translator" is a basic science fiction tale of a human negotiating between two aliens with the "aid" of a mechanical translator. One

wonders if this 1990 story didn't serve as partial inspiration for
_ S _ t _ a _ r _ T _ r _ e _ k : _ T _ h _ e _ N _ e _ x _ t _ G _ e _ n _ e _ r _ a _ t _ i _ o _ n 's
"Darmok" (first broadcast in

September 1991)--both have to do with coping with languages having
very different structures. ("Doesn't that look like?" "No.")

In "Before I Wake" humanity is stricken by a malady that prevents a
person from staying awake for more than a very short period at a
time, and how it changes us. "Rainbow Bridge" is a coming-of-age
story involving environmental concerns and Navaho mysticism.

"Glacier" is a sort of slice-of-life story about the return of the
glaciers; Robinson does it competently, but it has been done before.
And finally, "Zurich" is about one man's (internal evidence suggests
a man rather than a woman, though it is never stated) attempt to
outdo the Swiss at cleanliness. But I detect in this a certain
mean-spiritedness against the Swiss (as contrasted with the South
American musician, for example) that makes the story almost
unpleasant to read. It seems to be attacking an entire people--for
being too clean, no less!--and as such not at all typical of the
sensitivity and humanity most of Robinson's other works shows.

In spite of this one small disappointment (even Jove nods, as
they say), I _ h _ i _ g _ h _ l _ y recommend this collection.

A DOG IS LISTENING by Roger A. Caras

Simon & Schuster (Summit), 1992, ISBN 0-671-70249-1, \$20.

A book review by Mark R. Leeper

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I grew up with a dachshund with whom I was very close. Over
the years I have given considerable thought to dog psychology in
general and to the intelligence of my dog in particular. My own
conclusion is that a dog's mind is very much like a human mind.
Most of the differences are morphological. That is, suppose a baby
was born with a good brain but physically deformed to be shaped like
a dog. You would have a human brain and mind in a dog's body. My
suspicion is that the resulting creature would grow up

indistinguishable from a bright but not exceptional dog. A cat's mind is, I think, very different from a human's mind; a dog has a very human-like brain using and coping with a different-shaped body. One more conclusion of my own: anyone who tells you they have a dog who believes himself to be human is a very poor observer of canine behavior. Dogs may not think in those terms, but they know dogs and humans are different.

The jacket of Roger Caras's A D o g I s L i s t e n i n g (subtitled "The Way Some of Our Closest Friends View Us") claims Caras has written over fifty books on animals, including A C a t I s W a t c h i n g. This is sort of an obvious followup to that book. Caras's style is informal, perhaps too much so for my taste. His book is indexed but has no chapter titles and no table of contents. His style is chatty and anecdotal. He digresses far too easily from what would seem to be his chapter's topic, though with no titles who can tell? There are lots of photographs and drawings (historical and new) of dogs, some captioned and some not. Some have bearing on the surrounding text, though his choice of illustrations is often enigmatic. I am not a formality freak, but there are good reasons for chapter titles in order to let the reader know what is going to be discussed. I want to know what Caras's conclusions are about canine behavior and what brought him to these conclusions. Some of it is there ... sort of ... if you can find it.

Caras starts with an introduction telling about his farm and the wide variety of animals he has collected. Caras introduces the reader to his whole family because they will be showing up anecdotes later.

Chapter one starts with an explanation of the domestication of the dog fifteen to twenty-five thousand years ago. Then somehow he jumps to a canine pack behavior of intolerance to pups born different, and ends talking about how when there is a stranger on the farm different dogs will bark for different reasons--some to brag that they heard first, some to be part of the meeting.

There is then a chapter on each of the five senses that humans share with dogs. It will come as little surprise to most readers that a dog's hearing and sense of smell are far more acute than a

human's. Humans hear up to about 40,000 cycles per second. By some estimates, dogs hear up to 100,000 cycles per second. This is very near to constituting a different sense entirely. Perhaps we will never know what information is carried in those ranges and that we are missing. Caras ascribes to hearing the acute discomfort that dogs feel in electrical storms. Caras illustrates his discussion with stories of dogs he has known jumping through plate glass windows in thunderstorms. One of his dogs actually ran into another state to escape the noise of Caras shooting a gun as target practice. (Caras makes clear that his shooting is limited to inanimate objects and that he neither would nor could shoot at an animal.)

Again in sight dogs have it all over us, at least for range of vision. With peripheral vision we see a wedge of about 120 degrees; dog's eyes are more to the side and, depending on if we have bred for flatness of face or not, can see a wedge 230 degrees. We have the edge on color perception. Dogs can see very subdued colors. (Caras does not discuss this, but up until relatively recently it was assumed that dogs were completely color-blind, based on anatomical studies. We see colors with the cones of our eyes; they have no cones. Ergo, they are color-blind. Behavioral studies recently have shown, however, that somehow dogs do have some limited color perception.) Connected with sight comes an uncanny knowledge of ballistics. They can tell where a thrown object will fall or where precisely it will pass by them. Caras confuses his dogs throwing helium balloons.

Next comes the dog's super-sense, the sense of smell. There is no good metric on how much better a dog detects smells. Anatomically, a dog just has a lot more capacity and a dog's sense of smell is obviously dozens of times more acute, as well as the dog's having a nose that gives directional smelling. Dogs can pick up a scent as weak as one particle per trillion. We get used to a smell and stop noticing it; dogs apparently do not filter out a smell in this way. One bloodhound of record once followed a scent for 114 miles. Still, there are some strong scents like manure or skunk that a dog does seem to like.

Related to scent is taste. Dogs evolved to hating bitter as a sort of warning. They like sweet and salty tastes. They are not fond of hot flavors like jalapenos or odd flavors like peppermint. These again are defense mechanisms. Beyond that, t e g u s t i b u s. One dog of note liked kosher dill pickles.

Much of the chapter on touch is about where dogs like to be scratched. Caras thinks that a dog likes to have his chest scratched because--at least in the male--that part gets rubbed

during sex. Similarly, scratching behind the ears simulates foreplay. Cuddling is a holdover from the dog mother's care.

Dogs and some other animals have another sensory organ humans lack. It's called the vomero-nasal area or the Jacobson's organ. Caras suggests the sense is a sort of "air-tasting." It appears to be another chemical receptor like smelling or tasting. We can only guess at what it is telling the dog. Caras discusses sensory feats of dogs that go beyond what we can perceive. Possibly there is magnetic field detection. Dogs appear to detect impending earthquakes. One woman prone to violent seizures of several types can lead a much more normal life because her dog somehow detects a seizure coming on before the woman herself is aware of it. The dog pushes her to a bed to cushion her pending fall.

Next comes a section that is generally on dog's emotions. Included is the story of Greyfriar's Bobby. Caras talks about a poodle who got a nail polish treatment and insisted on showing her nails to all the human guests at a party. Caras ascribes this to a sense of humor in the dog.

I could not relate well to the next section. Caras argues that dogs actually think rather than just have a set of conditioned responses. Apparently he thinks that there is some belief in the scientific community that a dog's actions are all very mechanical. I guess that deep down you cannot falsify that assertion, but then you could make the same assertion about any human but yourself. It is fairly clear to me that dogs reason. An anecdote at this point tells of a bloodhound Caras had who was a loving parent. But when his daughter, a puppy of eight months, appeared to be about to growl and snap at Caras's mother-in-law, the hound bounded across the room and knocked his own daughter into a refrigerator, nearly knocking her out. The puppy learned a lesson and did not growl at humans again. Apparently the father bloodhound saw a nasty incident brewing and pre-empted it.

Caras concludes with sections on the evolution of the dog from its Jurassic ancestors to the present and a discussion of the various breeds. About the only real interest here is the odd fact that on the evolutionary tree canines and ursines are very close and had a relatively recent ancestor: bears and dogs are close relatives.

Overall Caras's style is a bit too chatty and while he does have something to say about the "canine condition," he never really

comes to grips with his subtitle and tells us how dogs view humans.