

1. The Lincroft group will be having the first of their Hugo-award-related discussions on Wednesday, July 27. This one will discuss Orson Scott Card's novel S_e_v_e_n_t_h_S_o_n, a tale of folk magic in an alternate America. Card has won the Hugo and the Nebula for two years straight now--will he make it three? S_e_v_e_n_t_h_S_o_n is very

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different from his previous winners (nder's G_a_m_e and S_p_e_a_k_e_r_f_o_r_t_h_e_D_e_a_d), so only time will tell. Join us in Lincroft to discuss this novel. [-ecl]

2.~Hot, isn't it? Yuh! Wouldn't you like a way to cool off? How about a film festival to help you beat the summer heat? How about going out to sea? Well, not now, but during the Napoleonic wars. Now that would be cool and refreshing. Our next film festival will take out on ships of the line with the British Navy. On Thursday, July 28, 7PM the Leeperhouse film fest will be bringing you:

High Adventure on the High Seas

DAMN THE DEFIANT! (1962) dir. by Louis Gilbert

CAPTAIN HORATIO HORNBLOWER (1951) dir. by Roul Walsh

Boasting a cast of Alec Guinness, Dirk Bogart, and Anthony Quayle and a script by Nigel Kneale (who created the incredible Quatermass stories), DAMN THE DEFIANT tells the story of the mutiny aboard the H.~M.~S.~Defiant. The historical detail is reputedly excellent.

C.~S.~Forester's self-doubting navel hero, on whom was based such science fiction characters as Commander Grimes and Captain James T. Kirk, comes to the screen played by Gregory Peck (a little too pretty to play Hornblower, but then this is Hollywood). This film is based on the first three novels Forester wrote about Hornblower. Politics makes strange bedfellows as the Admiralty sends Hornblower to the west coast of South America to give aid and support to a dictator who, like Britain, opposes Spain. One problem: this "ally" fancies himself some sort of a god and may prove a worse and more unpredictable enemy than Spain could ever be. The novel, BEAT TO QUARTERS, was excellent and the film version is a lot of fun. The second half of the film covers the next two novels a little more superficially, but still enjoyably.

3. (This is a true story, told here for the first time.)

I was awakened from my reverie by the scream of an enraged bull elephant. It sounded close, closer than I would have thought. How could I have let a big animal like that get so close without my knowing it? And how was it just yards away, maybe feet? And as yet I had not fathomed the true nature of the threat.

If there is one thing I have learned it's that nature is treacherous and unpredictable. Yeah, I had read in college about how wonderful nature was, how it was fragile, how to had to be protected. Maybe that's all true. But maybe also these people who told me that had never really pitted themselves against nature at full force. Maybe they'd had a little bit of nature and not seen it at its full power. Like someone standing in a shower can't really guess how powerful the ocean's riptides really are. A little bit of nature can be gentle; a lot can be deadly. Ask

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primitive man how fragile nature really is. Civilized man has isolated himself from nature and has forgotten so much.

Sure, I'd heard bad things about this territory. Little half-jokes. But who knew what was to come? I'd lived here for a decade, gone to work, heard the jokes about the mosquito being New Jersey's state bird, but it wasn't until that night, the night of the screaming elephant, that I had really pitted myself against nature. One thing for sure. When you hear the scream of a bull elephant that close in New Jersey, something is really wrong. I reached for my remote control unit, stopped the movie on my VCR, and listened to the sound. The backyard, for sure. I cautiously turned on the lights and looked through the glass doors--nothing. Nothing to be seen. Then a suspicion dawned on me. My air conditioner had been maintenance-free for nine years. Could that be an illusion? Maybe the big fan needs oil once in a while.

I yelled to Evelyn to turn off the air conditioner at the thermostat. At the sound of the click, the screaming in the backyard subsided. "Oil," I said. A little 10W40 in the right place was what was called for.

Ah, but it wouldn't be so easy. There were screws that had to be removed, screws that had corroded in place. Yet they would have to be loosened before I could get to the "oil here" hole--odd that I'd never noticed it before. Engrossed in my work with my back to the yard, I was completely surprised by the initial attack. I have new respect for the movie J_a_w_s. Those unexpected attacks with their suddenness are just like the real world, but at least with a shark you know the instant of the attack. A far more subtle beast is the New Jersey mosquito. Out of the skies come eight or ten, driven mad by the smell of blood and sweat and eventually fear.

Out of the night they came at me, one after another. You see them there hanging over your legs, your arms. Sometimes you can scare them away before they attack....

Sometimes you can't.

For a half-hour I struggled. I knew I had a job that had to get done. Sometimes I worked. Sometimes I defended myself. Occasionally I killed one, but the only way to do that was to slap it against my own leg. I have mixed feelings about killing. My philosophy says kill no animal that does not threaten my life, but to see the dead carcass of a foe lying there, even on my own leg, is to taste a small victory.

The work was slow, but in the end victory was mine. I struggle back to the protection of the house. Yes, the final victory was mine, but at what a cost! Six bites on one leg (including the vulnerable ankle), two on the other. One on the back. And one

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renegade mosquito loose in the house. It had come in with me. I would have to hunt it down. Capture it. Perhaps kill it. No one would be safe in the house until that dirty job was done. But that was a job for another day. For now I rested.

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HIGHWAY OF ETERNITY by Clifford D. Simak
Del Rey, 1988 (1986c), 0-345-32497-8, \$3.50.
A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper
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This is one of Simak's last books before he died and an excellent example of why science fiction has suffered a great loss. Simak wrote old-fashioned science fiction. He never got caught up in New Wave, or cyberpunk, or metaphysical ramblings. The Science Fiction Book Club never had to put warnings about sex or language on his books. He just told good stories and somehow managed to entertain without resorting to any gimmicks.

Highway_to_Eternity is about time travel and aliens and monsters and all the stuff science fiction used to be. Jay Corcoran and Tom Boone travel back in time and discover refugees from the far future, escaping from the "alien Infinites" and the monster they have unleashed. Simak draws a limited number of characters, but draws them well and keeps the reader interested. The plot moves along without being contrived. Recommended, but then the same is true of just about any Simak novel.

THE AQUILIAD, VOLUME II: "Aquila and the Iron Horse" by S. P. Somtow

Del Rey, 1988, 0-345-33868-5, \$3.50.

A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper

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S. P. Somtow seems to be the new permanent name of Somtow Sucharitkul. Under the latter name he had published S_t_a_r_s_h_i_p & _H_a_i_k_u and T_h_e_A_q_u_i_l_i_a_d. The first novel he had published under that name was V_a_m_p_i_r_e_J_u_n_c_t_i_o_n (in 1985) and it seemed at the time that he would use Sucharitkul for his science fiction and Somtow for his horror fiction. Now, however, his earlier books are being reissued under the name S. P. Somtow, and I must conclude that he has given up the fight of trying to get people to pronounce (or spell) his name correctly.

This book is (not surprisingly) a sequel to T_h_e_A_q_u_i_l_i_a_d. Nine hundred years after the Founding of Rome (or around 200 A.D. to those who follow the strange Christian religion), Rome rules the world--or most of it--including Novum Terrum, which Bigfoot exists, technology seems to be at the level of about one hundred years ago on our Earth, and a deranged traveler from the future is trying to destroy the world.

Like most sequels, this did not live up to the first book. The parallel namings begin to grate after a while: the main character is Equus Insanus, which is okay, but that the city on Manhattan Island is called Eburacum Novum (Eburacum being the Latin name for that town in Britain that the local inhabitants call York) and is overseen by a colossal statue of Dionysius, which is also called--for some very contrived reasons--the Statua Libertaris is just too, too cute. The conflict between the Roman way of life and the Lacotian (Amerind) way was belabored far too heavily. I just don't believe that any society, or even any small part of a society, could survive solely on a diet of hummingbird tongues and other such delicacies; even decadent Roman nobles would eat mostly carbohydrates and more mundane meats. But Somtow keeps returning to how decadent the Roman diet is versus the healthier Lacotian diet, how barbaric the Romans are for killing aurochs (bison) from a ferrequis (train) for sport with no intent of eating them, etc., etc., etc. The result is that a plot that would have been served by a novella becomes a novel. Maybe this particular alternate

world has lost its initial wonder and become too familiar, but the second novel is a great let-down from the first.

THE WIZARD OF 4TH STREET by Simon Hawke
Questar, 1987, 0-445-20842-2, \$3.95.
A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper
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I was looking for further books in Hawke's "Time Wars" series when I ran across this novel. Normally wizards and magic in New York City would not be a combination that would attract me, but this seemed different. And it was. I mean, where else can you find an Arthurian, post-holocaust, heist novel?

I suppose you're asking how one can have an Arthurian, post-holocaust novel (not even counting the heist part). Well, it seems that after it all fell apart (due to "the abuse of the ecosystem"), Merlin was rescued out of his tree and taught the world a better way, relying on magic rather than technology. The result, of course, is the same, except that taxis run on levitation and impulsion spells rather than gasoline, and the police use avoidance spells instead of cordoning off an area with physical barricades. Wyrdrune, a student adept, tries to steal some "magic stones" during an auction. Unfortunately, another, more experienced, thief named Kira is trying to steal the same stones at the same time, and the two of them have to join forces as the police (and others) attempt to retrieve the stones. Naturally, since the stones are magic, more than money is involved...a lot more.

Other than the rather heavy-handed ecological message (since we

_d_o_n'_t have levitation and impulsion spells, it's rather pointless to suggest those as a cure for the pollution caused by internal combustion engine), _T_h_e_ _W_i_z_a_r_d_o_f_ _4_t_h_ _S_t_r_e_e_t was, like Hawke's other novels, an enjoyable summer read--nothing remarkable, but a pleasant enough way to while away the hours at the beach, where the cancer you'll get from the sun is totally natural and not attributable to any pollution.

DRUID'S BLOOD by Esther M. Friesner
Signet, 1988, 0-451-15408-8, \$3.50.
A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper
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As the cover indicates, this is a Sherlock Holmes alternate history novel. Well of course any novel which has Sherlock Holmes is an alternate history from ours, but you know what I mean. Actually, this novel doesn't have Sherlock Holmes; it has Brihtric Donne, and Dr. John H. Weston as his companion. Britain is a kingdom where magic--mainly Druidic magic--rules, and which has been isolated from the rest of the world by powerful spells. Victoria is queen by virtue of her powers; she's also very beautiful and very sexual. In our universe, however,

she's also descended from James I through the German line. This is clearly impossible in this Druidic world, so where did she come from? And why do people have Christian names like John? Oscar Wilde is a character in this novel, as is H. G. Wells (his time machine really works!), as is Charles Dickens--how does this alternate world manage to come up with all the same people as ours, doing basically the same things (all right, so Dickens's novel is called _ A _ Y _ u _ l _ e _ t _ i _ d _ e _ C _ a _ r _ o _ l, but you get my drift)? Oh, well, I suppose if the world were different enough to be logical, it would be just another wizardry novel instead of a Sherlock Holmes alternate history novel.

This quibble aside, how is the book? Well, there are two halves to this question. First, how is it as a Sherlock Holmes novel? Holmes, or rather Donne, is a bit too scientific for my tastes--though in this case, it's a knowledge of magic rather than science that he uses. He doesn't make a lot a deductions based on observation, but rather decides what is possible and what isn't based on his knowledge of the laws of magic. Though he occupies a similar niche in his Victorian society that Holmes occupied in ours, he doesn't fill it in at all the same way. It's not unlike finding Martin Hewett has taken up lodgings at 221B Baker Street.

Second, how is the novel as an alternate history novel? Well, as I observed, there seem to be a lot of unlikely characters in an England isolated from the rest of the world. The history seems to have been molded to be similar to ours whether or not that makes sense.

Oddly enough, however, taken as a whole the point is reasonably enjoyable. If one indulges in the "willing suspension of disbelief" that is supposed to be the stock in trade of a science fiction reader, one can find the story as almost as enthralling as a real Holmes story.

The magical background in this, as in _ T _ h _ e _ W _ i _ z _ a _ r _ d _ o _ f _ 4 _ t _ h
_ S _ t _ r _ e _ e _ t, works well to increase the enjoyment. Though my objective judgement says this book had problems, my subjective judgement says that I enjoyed it. So my recommendation is to give it the benefit of the doubt and read it.

DREAMS OF AMAZONIA by Roger D. Stone
Penguin, 1985, 0-14-009573-X, \$6.95.

A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper
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Though part of the Penguin Travel Library, this is not so much a travelogue as a history of Amazonia. Stone devotes only one chapter to his travels--limited--in Amazonia, and eight chapters to the history of the region, with particular emphasis on attempts to "develop" it or in some fashion exploit it. Some tried farming, some tried mining, some tried logging--in the end, none were truly successful and Amazonia swallowed them up. In the process, of course, much damage was done, and continues to be done, to the area. Even today, cities on the Amazon look like the Wild West crossed with the Lower East Side; towns look like the Wild West alone, with pigs and chickens wandering down the streets. People continue to try to make a living farming along the river; when we were there three years ago we saw a lot of smoke from "slash-and-burn" fires. The animals have all fled the settled areas and retreated to the deeper jungle; only birds remain in any abundance along the river itself. Stone has no real solutions to the problem of how to convince a poor country not to use what resources it has, and no one really knows what long-term effect the continued attempt to "civilize" Amazonia will have..

THE OTHER NILE by Charlie Pye-Smith
Penguin, 1986, 0-14-009564-0, \$6.95.
A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper
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In 1984, Charlie Pye-Smith decided to retrace his steps of ten years previous and travel up (not down, as the back cover blurb says!) the Nile from Alexandria to...well, to as far as he could get. The political situation in Ethiopia was such that travel there was not possible, but he did manage to get into the Sudan. His travels took him to places that tourists on a package tour never see, and perhaps do not want to see. Some were depressing, some were dangerous, and some were just unusual, but all were the sort of place that I wish I had the independent spirit to go to. I'm not quite like the American tourist Pye-Smith met in his hotel who claimed to have been "all over Egypt" in four days, but neither am I the sort to travel through the Sudan hitching rides on trucks. (Perhaps this shows some sense on my part, however--since a woman traveling in this fashion through a strict Islamic country would not be favorably received.) Torn between the desire to see all the "sights" and the desire to feel like I've seen the "real" country, I tend to opt for a group tour and try to get away on my own for a little while. Sometimes this works well; other times it is a disaster. Still, as part of a group, at least I have the feeling that if I did disappear (was hit by a car, mugged, kidnapped by terrorists), s_o_m_e_o_n_e would notice. So I make the sort of trade people make every day: freedom for security. To compensate for this, I read books by people who do go off on their own, who do see things I won't see and places I won't go. (When Richard Burton sneaked into Mecca and wrote about it, I'm sure his readers said, "I" d never do that, but I surely would like to read about it.)

So for all you people who wish on the one hand to see the Nile Valley on your own, but on the other wouldn't dream of actually doing it, here's the book for you. Pye-Smith doesn't spend a lot of time describing the Pyramids or the Sphinx. Rather, he talks about the markets (the real ones, not the tourist traps), the cafes, the desert monasteries (rarely mentioned in guide books), the poverty, the effect of sharia (Islamic law) on the Sudan, what a third-class train carriage is like. The tourists he sees are arrogant and offensive. Does he only note the offensive ones and ignore the ones who try to fit in, or are they all arrogant? If so, where does he fit in? Except for this nagging feeling that Pye-Smith is trying to set himself apart as better

than all other travelers, this book gives a good view of the Egypt most of us will never see.

COMING TO AMERICA

A film review by Mark R. Leeper

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Capsule review: John Landis directs Eddie Murphy and makes a film that reminds one of Lubitsch and Capra. One of the most unpromising movies of the year turns out to be the best comedy since M_o_o_n_s_t_r_u_c_k. This is the best film Landis or Murphy has made to date. Rating: +2.

Let me not mince words. I have liked some of John Landis's films, but too many have seemed like extended comedy sketches. He is generally weak on characters and weaker on storyline. Eddie Murphy is a standup comic who can be funny but whose films have had little of quality beyond his jokes. His acting range is dwarfed even by John Wayne's. Both Landis and Murphy are symbolic of what is going wrong with screen comedy. The only current comedy I wanted to see less than John Landis's Eddie Murphy comedy C_o_m_i_n_g_t_o_A_m_e_r_i_c_a was A_r_t_h_u_r_2_o_n_t_h_e_R_o_c_k_s. Then I heard that C_o_m_i_n_g_t_o_A_m_e_r_i_c_a was supposed to be a departure for Landis and Murphy. It got good reviews on television. So I tried it. C_o_m_i_n_g_t_o_A_m_e_r_i_c_a is to date the high-water mark for Landis's directorial career and it is the best film Eddie Murphy has ever been in. Even more than B_u_l_l_D_u_r_h_a_m, it is a throwback to earlier comedies. Watching it, I was reminded of comedies by Lubitsch and Capra, and of stories by O.~Henry. The storyline is simple and predictable like an O.~Henry story, but it is told with warmth.

Prince Akeem of Zamunda--played by Murphy without a lot of smirky

highjinks, but with dignity and sincerity--objects to the wife his father (regally played by the great James Earl Jones) has chosen for him. Instead he decides to go to America and find someone he wants. He wants someone with a mind and a will of her own who wants him for himself. This ploy is a familiar one: he will pretend to be a poor man and find a wife like commoners do. With him he takes his faithful servant Semmi. Arsenio Hall plays Semmi so well one wishes the two roles had been reversed.

Landis has assembled a very good cast for this story with Hall, Jones, Shari Headley (very appealing as the woman Murphy wants to marry), and John Amos as her father, who runs an imitation McDonald's restaurant so close that the McDonald's corporation is going to sue him any day. In addition, there are a raft of minor characters who add depth and texture to the film. The liberal sprinkling of minor characters is a characteristic of the good classic comedies but in recent years we see less of it because they take good writing and they take away screen time from the major stars. In C_o_m_i_n_g_t_o_A_m_e_r_i_c_a they do away with that problem by having Murphy and Hall play many of the minor characters in Rick Baker's heavy makeup.

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Just to show I was not totally bowled over by this film, I will say that there were problems with the scenes in Zamunda. It should be a never-never land, but Zamunda seems more never-never than most. Perhaps my geography is bad, but for a heavily forested African kingdom, the vegetation seemed all wrong. It is a very wealthy kingdom in which baby elephants have the big ears of African elephants, but the adult elephants have the small ears of Indian elephants. On top of all this, the matte work to show the African palace is abominable.

These are definitely quibbles, but they are noticeable and still I give C_o_m_i_n_g_t_o_A_m_e_r_i_c_a a strong +2 on the -4 to +4 scale. Landis and Murphy, how about more of the same. (Oh, and you will have no problem finding the reference to S_e_e_Y_o_u_N_e_x_t_W_e_d_n_e_s_d_a_y.)

