

been known to drive hundreds of miles just to be present at the event. It is so rare in fact that a star shines over the house and perfect strangers come knocking at the door to see the event. Excuse me, there is someone pulling into the driveway.

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Okay, I'm back. They'd missed it by over twenty minutes. I told them all about it. (I wonder who they were?) Anyway, so as I was saying, I often tell people that I have never met a cuisine I didn't like. Not quite true. As a kid I was a very finicky eater. But since I was a teenager I have liked pretty much every new food I have tried, and certainly any cuisine. And I think Evelyn has come to depend on this. She tends to buy odd foods she finds in the grocery. If they are well-made, I generally like them unless they are something I have disliked since I was a kid. Well, she bought a can of something called "Kasha and Gravy." Well, my record remained unblemished. I'd had this Eastern European delicacy as a seven-year-old and I can tell you that it ranks up there with lutefisk and gefilte fish. Not that it has that strong a smell or flavor. No, it is sort of like hominy grits that have gone even more wrong than hominy grits. Kasha doesn't have a whole lot of flavor, I guess. It is amazingly tasteless. It is the smell that is amazing. It does not smell like food. I am not sure what it does smell like. Pick four cans of various repair materials at a hardware store, add a fifth can--an open can of kasha--and ask a blindfolded man to pick which one was food by smelling the cans. I doubt that the kasha would be picked more than the expected one-fifth of the time.

So here Evelyn was. I had told her from hard experience that I refused to eat any of the stuff, so she started fixing it for herself. She pushed it out of the can into a heating dish and it stood there, a mottled brown-and-white cylinder. It looked a lot like the dog food I used to serve my dachshund and smelled only a little bit worse. It not only smelled worse than the dog food, it smelled worse than the dog, and believe me, that's going some.

Anyway, so she sort of trowels the stuff flat in the dish and heats this paste up in the microwave. I looked outside and my whole back yard was lit up from some light overhead. By the time I looked

back the kasha was out of the microwave. (Aren't microwave ovens great? I want to get a new one that doesn't smell of kasha). So I am sitting here with a helpful I-told-you-so look on my face and watching as Evelyn takes a bite. Do not go gently into that contrition. Rage, rage against the admission of an error.

Evelyn looks at me with this sweet and sour look on her face and says, "I wonder what I can put on it to make it better?" "How about eight feet of topsoil?" I think to myself.

A few minutes later I am looking at what she has in front of this dish of kasha. I kid you not, there is a jar of barbecue sauce ("Hey, podner! Ya want ta try some good old-fashioned kasha barbecued Texas-style?"), a jar of jalapeno sauce ("Si, back home we call it Kasha Juarez."), a bottle of A-1* Steak Sauce ("That's

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not just ordinary kasha--now it's s_t_e_a_k_k_a_s_h_a!"), some sugar, and a jar of instant coffee (well, I'd rather not think about these).

Evelyn's first comment was, "Well, canned kasha is probably not as good as fresh kasha." "Even worse?" I thought; I'd only had the fresh stuff. The mind boggles! And then after a few more bites she says, "Maybe I'll just have a salad."

(Uh, sorry, I'll have to finish this story some other time. Someone's at the door.)

2. The preceding was written on Valentine's Day(!). Not surprisingly, given this sort of behavior, people ask me what I see in Mark. My only reply is to quote Jessica Rabbit: "He makes me laugh." [-ecl]

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...mtgzz!leeper

I'm not sure which upsets me more: that people are so unwilling to accept responsibility for their own actions, or that they are so eager to make the government regulate everyone else's.

-- unknown

* A-1 is a trademark of someone.

HALBERD, DREAM WARRIOR by Lloyd St. Alcorn
Signet, 1987, ISBN ?, \$?
A book review by Pat Huff
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This is a sword-and-sorcery novel, heavier on the sorcery, although there's enough fighting and gore for "sword" enthusiasts. And it's labeled "DREAMQUEST #1 -- an indication that it's intended as the start

of a series. There are plot-to-come hints in this book that kept me thinking almost all the way through it (until the last 15 pages) that a particular scene was coming between major characters -- but alas, it'll be in Book 2 (maybe).

His main characters are Vikings -- Danyeel, a tribal judge; his oldest son, Valdane, murdered on page 1 but appearing in some flashbacks; Halberd, his wisest son (his mother Thessah is telepathic and Halberd has the gift of prophecy). Halberd's fighting companion, Usuthu, is a Mongol.

Halberd has two quests, to become a better shaman and to avenge his brother's murder. Valdane was brutally murdered by his own wife (an early incident of husband-abuse?). So he battles other shamans and mystic warriors, and at times mythic happenings and inhabitants of Asgard -- dragons, ravens, dwarves, an agent of Loki. Ghosts, curses, and treachery cross his path. His path leads him to a winter crossing of the Atlantic Ocean in search of the New World.

The writing is evocative, the dialogue reads well, the author portrays a mix of cultures and teaches some Asgard mythology along the way. I rate this a +2.5 on a -4 to +4 scale. Even a hero shouldn't have so much good luck in one challenge after another....

SOMA by Charles Platt
Signet, 1988, ISBN 0-451-15764-8, \$3.95
Book review by Arthur Kaletzky
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At first glance this book seems to be an unpromising "X writing in the universe of Y" production, with a very conventionally armed soldier, albeit one also equipped with a sensitive-looking face, on the cover. However, X is Charles Platt, a former editor of N_e_w_W_o_r_l_d_s, so I approached the book with interest. (Y is Piers Anthony, whose work I do not know.)

My interest was rewarded in a very unusual way. This is the first science fiction piece I have read which is predominantly and explicitly sado-masochistic. The book is well crafted, and the S&M does not swamp the science fiction -- it is a good novel of the science fiction genre with sado-masochism as a dominant, non-SF theme, much in the way that Le Guin's T_h_e_D_i_s_p_o_s_s_e_s_s_e_d is an excellent science fiction novel with anarcho-syndicalism as a theme. Perhaps I am unfair to Platt in comparing his novel to one of Le Guin's best works, but the comparison is to s_o_m_a's disadvantage. The sadistic, masochistic, and sexual events make for an exciting read, and Platt invents imaginatively (the best invention is a genetically engineered human population whose women enjoy pain and telepathic hatred directed at them -- but only up to a threshold) but I was finally appalled by all the pain and violence -- and also by how much I enjoyed reading the book.

In summary, S_o_m_a is an excellent science fiction novel, but only if you can tolerate all the blood, gore, pain, and suffering, and don't feel guilty about it, as I did.

DOVER BEACH by Richard Bowker
Bantam Spectra, 1987, ISBN 0-553-26810-5, \$3.95
A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper
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Richard Bowker has written that unusual combination, a science-fiction mystery. What's more, he's been successful at it. He manages to avoid many of the problems in this endeavor (how to give your readers enough information to make sense of the book) by setting his work not in the far future with whiz-bang technology, but in the "day after tomorrow," where tomorrow just happens to be World War III. Though only a "limited" nuclear war, World War III has fixed technology at something approximating our current level, so you don't discover that the murder was committed with some new, just discovered weapon, or by the murderer teleporting in from Venus, which the detective realizes because he found traces of fluxon in the teleportation chamber and fluxon occurs only on Venus.

The result, I think, will appeal to both science fiction and mystery fans. Science fiction fans will appreciate the care taken in the post-holocaust setting, including several science-fiction in-jokes and the interesting use of England as the new utopia to which Americans try to travel, rather than the usual vice versa. Mystery fans get a new hard-boiled detective story inspired by classic hard-boiled detective stories (said inspiration applying to both Bowker and Wally Sands, the protagonist, who is patterning his new career after the great private eyes), and the science involved (there is more than just the post-holocaust setting) is not of so esoteric a nature that the non-scientific reader would not be able to follow it. As to where in the store you'll find, that's anyone's guess. It's labeled "novel" on the spine, so it could be in the science fiction section, the mystery section, or even the "fiction" section (don't booksellers realize that science fiction and mysteries are fiction?). But make the effort to love for it--it's worth it.

THE TIDES OF GOD by Ted Reynolds
Ace, 1989, ISBN 0-441-80894-8, \$3.50
A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper
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"Terry Carr's Ace Science Fiction Specials" are back, albeit edited by Damon Knight now that Terry Carr is gone. (It is a somewhat sobering realization that it was never "Terry Carr's Ace Science Fiction Specials" when Carr was alive, just "Ace Science Fiction Specials.") T_i_d_e_s_o_f_G_o_d is the tenth in this series (the third so-called "Ace Science Fiction Series") and continues its high level of quality.

The premise of T_h_e_T_i_d_e_s_o_f_G_o_d is that in the 33rd Century humanity, which had been the beneficiaries of Kroc technology for many centuries, but only under Kroc tutelage, has finally been given a spaceship of its own, with one condition--its first mission must be to seek out the Enemy and destroy him. This enemy is a being which sends out some sort of beam or radiation that causes religious fervor and irrationality in all who are within its range. This is the cause of the "Dark Years" from the 4th to 14th and the 22nd to 29th Centuries--these were the periods when this being passed close to Earth. (It's strange that the dates are all given in our current calendar, though Reynolds does use the designation "C.E." rather than "A.D.") Anyway, as the ship approaches the Enemy, people on the ship are gradually taken over (brain-washed, as it were) and those who are the most susceptible turn against those who are still trying to complete their mission.

In many ways, this is old-fashioned science fiction: a spaceship out to destroy a powerful enemy. The attempt to give a scientific explanation for religious fervor is laudable, but fails on a couple of counts. First, it fails to explain where religious feelings come from when the being is elsewhere in the universe. And second, giving this being as the cause of the religious fanaticism in Europe during the 4th through 14th Centuries conveniently avoids asking what was going on in the rest of the world. Were there witch-hunts in North America? Inquisitions in China? Crusades in Africa? I don't think so, and this apparent ethnocentrism is a major stumbling block to my acceptance of the book's premise.

The other flaw is that this book fairly screams "Sequel coming!" at the end. perhaps it represents the author's wish to avoid offending anyone, but at the very end, the book fails to resolve the issues it has raised. All the speculation about the nature of God is left as speculation, fine in a philosophy book, but dissatisfying in a novel which has implicitly promised to answer all its questions, and then fails to do so. It's like reading a murder mystery and being told at the end, "Well, we're still not sure who did it." Yes, it's true, there are a lot of clues and readers can draw their own conclusions, but that's not what I expect from a novel. Recommended with reservations.

NEW YORK STORIES

A film review by Mark R. Leeper

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Capsule review: Disney/Touchstone anthology fails to do anything great. I recommend that audiences see the first and third segments and skip the second one. I am not sure how they'd do that.

The multi-episode film, while it goes back at least as far as D. W.

Griffith's I n t o l e r a n c e, had its real blossoming in the 1940s and 1950s with films such as D e a d o f N i g h t, O h e n r y' s

F u l l H o u s e, F l e s h a n d

F a n t a s y, Q u a r t e t, and T r i o. In the 1960s it was mostly

reserved for the

horror film, with entries such as B_l_a_c_k_S_a_b_b_a_t_h_S_p_i_r_i_t_s
_o_f_t_h_e_D_e_a_d_,
the non-horror B_o_c_c_a_c_c_i_o'7_0, and a whole series of horror anthology
films from Amicus Films of Britain. Arguably, even last year's A_r_i_a
might be included, but in general multi-episode films have almost
disappeared. Now Disney's Touchstone has given three popular directors
a chance to work with a shorter-than-feature-length piece.

"Life Lessons" by Martin Scorsese has Nick Nolte as a popular
artist who is behind schedule painting for a show of his works coming up
in three weeks. His girlfriend, just returning from a fling with
another man, comes back to live in Nolte's studio and re-begin a stormy
relationship with Nolte. The artist channels his rage into a painting
fury. The story has a not-too-surprising semi-twist ending. There is a
lot of shouting, a lot of loud 1960s music, and one nice piece of music
from Puccini's T_u_r_n_a_d_o_t. There is sound and fury, signifying something,
but perhaps not enough. I would rate this segment a low +1 on the -4 to
+4 scale.

Francis Ford Coppola's "Life Without Zoe" is essentially a
children's film, a genre Coppola does surprisingly well in. His
Zoetrope company made the very good T_h_e_B_l_a_c_k_S_t_a_l_l_i_o_n_.
Coppola falls
just a little flat here. "Life Without Zoe" is about a poor little
fantastically rich kid who lives under the guardianship of a kindly and
funny butler in a posh New York hotel. By sheer force of good, Zoe is
able to solve a big problem for her father and to bring about the
reconciliation of her parents. You don't have to be poor to be happy.
Aren't you pleased? I give this one a -1.

The final segment, "Oedipus Wrecks," is a Woody Allen fantasy about
a little Jewish nebbish whose life is made miserable by his embarrassing
and manipulative mother. Deep down he wishes for her just to disappear.
Some supernatural force grants his wish only to make things a lot worse
for him. While never hilarious, this film has more jokes per minute
than any film Allen has made since L_o_v_e_a_n_d_D_e_a_t_h. I rate it a +1.

Overall, I give N_e_w_Y_o_r_k_S_t_o_r_i_e_s a high 0 on the -4 to +4 scale.

THE ADVENTURES OF BARON MUNCHAUSEN

A film review by Mark R. Leeper

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Capsule review: Once again the ever-so-slightly exaggerated adventures of the great Baron are told. Terry Gilliam brings many of the great images of the Munchausen stories to the screen but the story that ties them together has problems. Rating: high +1.

The Adventures of Baron Munchausen is purported to be the final installment of a "trilogy" of films directed by Terry Gilliam, the animator for the "Monty Python" television series. And while the first two, Timotee Bandits and Brazzil, were based on original screenplays, Baron Munchausen is an adaptation of the famous adventures which are for Europe sort of what the Oz stories are for the United States. The earliest Munchausen stories were first published in 1785. Since then the tall tales have taken many forms. Many Americans first became aware of the Baron through NBC's 1933 radio program The Jack Pearl Show, in which Pearl played the Baron. There have been at least two previous film versions, one from Germany in 1943 with Hans Albers as the Baron and one from Czechoslovakia in 1961 with Milos Kopecky. The latter used to show up on New York television and did some very imaginative combining of live actors and animation. Terry Gilliam's version is the latest version, and like the 1961 and probably the 1943 versions, visually it owes very much to one of the great book illustrators of all time, Gustave Dore.

The story of Gilliam's film is not taken from the book but rather is a tying together of the more imaginative scenes that Dore illustrated but in what is at times a more rapid-fire pace. And only "at times," because the pacing of Baron Munchausen is extremely uneven. As in Timotee Bandits, Gilliam has little idea of which of his sequences are really entertaining and which are simply dull. More than once the viewer feels like telling Gilliam that he has made his point, is wasting precious screen time on an idea that has no more to offer and should get on with things. Then as often as not the next scene is a gem.

The story has a small theatre company putting on their production of "The Adventures of Baron Munchausen" in a city besieged by the Ottoman Turks. As the pallid play proceeds who should arrive but the Baron himself to give his own account of his adventures. The story is difficult to relate from there, not just because it is hard to tell what is fantasy and what is reality, but because the script actually contradicts itself as to what is its actual story line versus story-within-story. Hence the story line does not bear close examination. Somewhere in all this is the Baron's bet with a sultan and a trip to the moon with Robin Williams playing a very strange moon man. There is a

visit to Vulcan's forge, and another to the belly of a huge fish.

Baron Munchausen

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Finally there is a stupendous battle between the Ottoman Turks and the Baron's friends, who amount to virtual super-heroes.

Like the 1961 version, this film is a treat more for the eye than for the mind. Scenes of the city under siege are done with tremendous historical realism. Some scenes of fantasy are done with great imagination. Then just when the proper mood is established, Gilliam will throw in an anachronistic reference and get a chuckle from the audience at the expense of the mood.

_ T_ h_ e_ A_ d_ v_ e_ n_ t_ u_ r_ e_ s_ o_ f
_ B_ a_ r_ o_ n_ M_ u_ n_ c_ h_ a_ u_ s_ e_ n
is a film that when it is good is very, very good, and when it is bad, it can be quite bad. It is a tough film to rate overall, but probably deserves a high +1 on the -4 to +4 scale--better than _ T_ i_ m_ e_ B_ a_ n_ d_ i_ t_ s, not as good as _ B_ r_ a_ z_ i_ l.

