

I got hooked on BROTHER SUN, SISTER MOON before I had any idea what it really was about, so I will not say here. All I will say is that it is a film about medieval times and religion. It is directed by Zeffirelli, who is best known for his film version of ROMEO AND JULIET. This film is stunningly beautiful and nearly any

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frame could be taken from the film and made into a beautiful movie poster. When I discussed this film recently on Usenet, I found people who consider this among their favorite films of all time. The songs, all very enjoyable, are sung by Donovan.

There have been a number of films made about or set around religious cults. TICKET TO HEAVEN is certainly the best. Nick Mancuso plays a young man who comes under the influence of a cult and Saul Rubinek, who is always very good, plays a friend who tries to get him back out. While the story is fictional it is fully believable.

2. About EON, Dale Skran writes:

Hard science fiction is alive and well in the form of Greg Bear, and more. Bear is one of our newest and best writers, one of what Norman Spinrad calls the Neuromantics--folks like William Gibson, Bruce Sterling, and, yes, Greg Bear. They all write Hard SF (the science includes all the sciences, not just physics) but they exceed Niven, Heinlein, Asimov, Clark, and others in that they represent the final fusion of New Wave stylists with SF. All can write rings around feeble old Asimov, or even somewhat better writers like Poul Anderson. They exceed LeGuin not by being better writers, but by carrying less political garbage around with them--any points they have to make are gently put, not put forward blatantly in the LeGuin/Heinlein tradition.

As a technician of the novel, Bear handles multiple characters, diverse civilizations, and a vast span of time as deftly as the flying Wallendas walking tightropes. EON contains among others things, a disheartening vision of our nuclear doom, a fascinating glimpse of ultimate technology, and a gritty, realistic story with characters you care about right down to the final page.

3. The next Linky book for discussion will be about Greg Bear's EON, pronounced e-YAWN! If you look "eon" up in Webster's, you find that it refers to a period of time of indefinite but great length. In keeping with this idea it is rumored that Bear asked the publisher not to number the pages of this rather thick novel. Hence the novel itself would be of great but indefinite length. The publisher, however, insisted that without numbering the pages nobody would buy the book because nobody would know how many pages they are getting for their money. However, those who respect living authors will read this book without ever looking at the page number. This should not be difficult, because I am sure nobody is going to read the book for the page numbers. I mean, why would they do that? You can see the self-same page numbers by reading any book of equal or greater length. Bear didn't even provide the page numbers; authors never do. It is the publisher intruding on the author's writing by putting a page number right there on the page as if it were part of the text. And they are distracting.

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How often do you find that in the middle of an important and imaginative passage, there is a page number sitting there that is totally predictable from the text that came before. I generally find very little suspense in the question of what number will be on the following page and can usually predict it with an error of less than 0.02%. I don't know, is it different with you guys?

Admittedly I am trained as a mathematician, but it seems to me that it doesn't take much mathematical background to be able to predict what the number is going to be on the next page, so why do they have to tell me? Hey, come to think of it, I don't see why they have to number more than the first page. You as a reader already know the number of each page but the first without looking at it. Consider it an induction problem. Assume they number just the first page. You know the number that goes with the first page, you can look at it. Now assume you know the number that goes with the n -th page. You just add one to it and to know the number that goes with the $n+1$ st page. Hence by induction, you know the number that goes with each page. So why should the publisher insult you by printing on a page what you already know? And some publishers put the title of the book there too. Jeesh! Do they really think you will forget from one page to the next? I think Bear was absolutely

right to protest. But then since you already know the number that goes with each page, even leaving the pages unnumbered, the book would still be of definite length.

Back to the Linky meeting. It will start at 12 noon sharp and will just keep going for an indefinite but extremely long period of time like any meeting that Rob Mitchell runs.

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STAR TREK: THE NEW GENERATION

"Encounter at Farpoint"

A film review by Mark R. Leeper

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S_t_a_r_T_r_e_k was a television show that was popular in syndication and the basis for four films so far. If this is news to you, welcome to the English-speaking world. With commercial television desperately trying to compete with cable, it was only a matter of time before the series was resurrected in some form. The only thing that stood in the way, probably, was that the stakes were not high enough for sufficient funds to be made available to do the television series decently. Special effects would probably be much of what the audience would want and the effects of the 1960s would look shabby and cheap in the 1980s. The demand finally justified the huge per-episode cost and production was started. Now all this has little to do with plot, characterization, or other story values. Tradition says these are of secondary import, but clearly someone was watching to make sure the series did not become another B_a_t_t_l_e_s_t_a_r_G_a_l_a_c_t_i_c_a.

The first difference that is apparent in the new series is that the traditional Alexander Courage score is present but has been pushed aside by Jerry Goldsmith's triumphant score from S_t_a_r_T_r_e_k: T_h_e_M_o_t_i_o_n_P_i_c_t_u_r_e. Both scores are good but Goldsmith's is the better. The crew composition had been rearranged in major ways--not surprising since the new series takes place almost a century later. There is an interesting recombination of humans, modified humans, aliens, and an android. A Vulcan (or perhaps a Romulan) is conspicuous in the background, but he appears to be just a phaser-carrier. Captain Jean-Luc Picard (played by Patrick Stewart, who also played Paul's teacher in D_u_n_e) is intelligent, logical, and cold-blooded, but definitely human. He could easily be as interesting as any character in the series so far. His second-in-command, Commander Ryker (played by Jonathan Frakes) is the one in the James Kirk mold. There are a number of other characters, adding loose plot-ends to be tied up in later programs.

The effects, including contributions by Industrial Light and Magic, are much more in the tradition of the films than of the television series. Some of the effects are obviously computer-aided video, but for the most part they are quite convincing. The ship, which looks like a futurized version of the old Enterprises, is supposedly much larger and houses entire families. The uniforms have once again been redesigned and are smart-looking and more tight-fitting than ever. The transporter now looks like it is sprinkling fairy dust.

The "Star Trek" universe, however, will remain recognizable to viewers of the new series. Many of the same sound effects are used. The plot, at least of the first episode ("Encounter at Farpoint"), is a recombination of plot elements from episodes of the previous series. As

unfortunate touch is a cameo of a super-annuated character of the first series. The makeup is about the worst visual effect of the episode.

Overall verdict on the series? It is way too early to tell. As a film, I would rate "Encounter at Farpoint" a +1 on the -4 to +4 scale. In fact, that was just about what I expected to rate it, but it was a higher +1 than I expected. It is the best science fiction television series since the old S_t_a_r_T_r_e_k died. (A possible exception is T_h_e_S_u_r_v_i_v_o_r_s, a very intelligent British series that was rebroadcast on Canadian television.) Sure, I'll keep watching.

STAR TREK: THE NEXT GENERATION

"Encounter at Farpoint"
(premier episode)

-

a review by
Paul S. R. Chisholm

"I hope most of our missions are more interesting. Let's see what's out there."

That's the ending note of "Encounter at Farpoint," the premier episode of 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. I'm tempted to agree. Certainly I'll continue watching even if it remains only this good, but it could get better.

The episode itself resembled the first film. That doesn't endear it to me. There were several fairly short scenes where the story stopped to pander to the more fanatical "Star Trek" zealots. One longer scene was completely irrelevant to anything else that was going on. I didn't like it at a_l_l, and I'll be annoyed if, as they could, they pull this particular stunt in future episodes. (On the other hand, just about everyone "on the Net" loved it.

"Encounter at Farpoint" seemed to be a one hour story that was stretched to two, partially by l_o_t_s of commercials.) Specifically, a traditional "Star Trek"-like story was expanded by introducing an additional bad guy. Said villain seemed very familiar from a first-generation episode (I'd spoil the story by naming it, but you'll

recognize it soon enough), but without the character twist that made him convincing at the end.

In the end, the captain took a WAG (wild-assed guess) on how to solve the problem, and got lucky. The one "threat" turned out to be pretty passive. (Anyone else notice that it fired on the wrong target?) But the crew ignores some rather important clues (which don't lead to the mystery's solution, but which seemed important at the time). And the added-in villain wasn't given any motivation.

There seems to be an attempt to make 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 more of an ensemble show that its predecessor. There's not just the bridge crew, but also the "away team", which includes the first officer but n_o_t the captain.

Some of the characters are interesting, both in themselves and in the way that they work with other individuals. In particular, the first officer, Commander William T. Ryker (Jonathan Frakes, who looks like a young Shatner/Kirk) is starting a friendship with the android, Lieutenant Commander Data (Brent Spiner), that could be as interesting as the camaraderie between Kirk and Spock. The exec also seems interested in women in general, and one woman in particular (counselor and communications officer Lieutenant Commander Deanna Troi, played by

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Marina Sirtis).

The captain (Jean-Luc Picard, played by Patrick Stewart) may or may not become more three dimensional. If he doesn't, it won't be as bad as having a completely boring Kirk in the first generation. The security officer (1st Lieutenant Natasha Yar, played by Denise Crosby), the blind navigator (2nd Lieutenant Geordi LaForge, played by LeVar Burton), and the Klingon weapons officer (2nd Lieutenant Worf, played by Michael Dorn) could get interesting. (The latter two are both played by black actors, though it's hard to tell with Dorn because of the makeup.) I don't know about the beautiful chief medical officer (Commander Beverly Crusher, played by Gates McFadden) or her son (Wesley Crusher, played by Wil Wheaton). I'm afraid they might stay pretty flat. The kid could be overdone in a minute, but with restraint, he could become an equal character.

I found some nice touches. The Federation still dares too boldly splits infinitives, but their "continuing" mission brings them "where no one has gone before." The first officer won't let the captain beam down into a hostile situation, even if it means violating a direct command. (Let's see how long that lasts.) The first time danger triggers the "whoop whoops," the captain yells, "Turn off that damned noise [about time!], and go to yellow alert!" On the other hand, the stars twinkle in orbit (sometimes, such as during the docking sequence), and the ships still "whoosh" in vacuum.

Warning (spoiling no more for you than me): the second show looks from the preview to be a remake of "The Naked Time" from the first generation. They're using a lot of old ideas, and that worries me.

If it wasn't SF, I can't imagine I'd bother. But it's not just adequate SF, it's S t a r T r e k with all the good memories that brings. I'll keep watching it. Rate it a zero on the -4 to +4 old CFQ scale (worth watching, but nothing special), and let's see what's out there.

Conspiracy '87
Con report by Evelyn C. Leeper
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Part 3

Panel: Is SF History's Dustbin?

Monday, 11am

Mike Dickinson, Robert Silverberg, John M. Ford, Gene Wolfe

This was supposedly about alternate pasts, but dwelt more on how history was used to project onto the future or to fill in details of future histories. Silverberg spoke of "that alien land, the past," and how one had to try to understand it. In B_o_o_k_o_f_t_h_e_N_e_w_S_u_n, so he claimed, Wolfe "transmutes the past into the future." The panelists agreed that authors need a respect for history.

Silverberg said that his novel G_i_l_g_a_m_e_s_h_t_h_e_K_i_n_g was an attempt to rationalize myths. Wolfe felt that the supernatural elements of Arthurian legends could be explained: the sword in the stone, for example, is a sword made of meteoric iron, and the sword from the lake is a sword made from bog iron. Many myths or customs are explained as religious in nature--amber beads in Roman burials, for example. But amber beads were probably just rubbed against wool and used as electrostatic lint removers. We try to reconstruct the mosaic from individual tiles; history is not holographic.

The old discussion of historical trends versus the individual's effects was raised. Though many believe the former is the prime motivating force, authors agree the latter is the better for writing stories. Ford suggested writing a story from the point of view of the Black Plague; someone claimed Defoe's J_o_u_r_n_a_l_o_f_t_h_e_P_l_a_g_u_e_Y_e_a_r had already done this.

The panel closed with a recounting of some useless myths--myths that exist but seem to have no reason for being. One example was Geoffrey of Monmouth's description of a giant eagle landing on the walls of the city and speaking in a human voice, but "what he said was not interesting enough to relate here." These seemed like interesting launching points for stories and maybe we'll see one or two soon.

Panel: The Unnatural History of the Vampire

Monday, 12 noon

Chelsea Quinn Yarbro, Tanith Lee, George R. R. Martin,
Suzy McKee Charnas

This panel consisted of a series of questions that each panelist had to answer, followed by a general question-and-answer session.

The first question asked what aspect of the vampire mythos the authors found most difficult to convince their audience of, but they instead responded as to what they found most confining; the answers included non-reflection in mirrors, running water, garlic, and fangs.

Yarbro claimed the only myths that have retained their popularity are the vampire myth and the werewolf myth. One suggestion was that vampires and werewolves are things we could become and dragons and trolls are not. Of course, vampirism is supposed to represent suppressed sexuality and lycanthropy is the myth of the beast within us. Someone claimed the real reason that vampires and werewolves are still popular is that they're cheap to do as movie monsters as compared to other monsters.

A lot of the mythos of vampirism--the mirror, for example--is based on people's inability to determine accurately whether someone is really dead or not. One audience member suggested the current trends in genetic engineering might result in a renaissance of the Frankenstein myth. Another person said the new mythos might be that of the superhero. Ghosts are still around, but have little inherent conflict to make ghost stories interesting. Robots may also be the new monsters, with the Three Laws of Robotics serving as the garlic and crosses to use against them.

The question of AIDS and vampirism was raised. Charnas said that her vampires could smell if someone was sick and didn't drink their blood, but this seems like a good area for some author to explore. Charnas's solution, by the way, was put in before the AIDS epidemic--she was more concerned about diseases like hepatitis when she wrote T_h_e
V_a_m_p_i_r_e_T_a_p_e_s_t_r_y.

Panel: Lysenko Lives (Scientific Myths that Serve the Cause)

Monday, 3pm

Mike Dickinson, Joe Haldman, David Brin, Brian Stableford

Because of some difficulty in finding lunch, we didn't get to this until 3:30pm, by which point several major theses had obviously been presented and discussed. Once again, I heard people talking about "memes," a concept that has been explained to me twice and I still can't remember what it is. The few odds and ends I did glean included Brin's theory that if the religious right had reached the stage of trying to discredit secular humanism by calling it a religion and pushing creationism as "creation science" or "scientific creationism," then this

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is the dying whimper of a group who claims to follow the meme of religion rather than the meme of science.

Brin also observed what I have claimed, namely that if the far right is wrong in claiming AIDS is the scourge of God and we shouldn't spend money to stop it, then the left is equally wrong in opposing all standard epidemic control procedures by claiming that they might lead to persecution of "certain groups." I'm not sure what precisely Brin advocates, but I have never understood why testing people for all (other) venereal diseases is acceptable and this one disease, more dangerous than any other, is protected. Nor do I understand how gay groups can say on the one hand that AIDS is not a "gay disease" and on the other hand insist on gay representation on AIDS commissions and explicit protection for gays in all AIDS legislation. I am not being anti-gay--I am a member of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force--but I feel that the stands taken by many groups are inconsistent. We should be fighting the discrimination and persecution as separate issues, and look at how to solve the AIDS problem rationally. But I digress.

There were also some comments on socio-biology, which Brin supports, and the preponderance of Jews in science, science fiction, and philosophy, which was said to be due to the emphasis on education in many (most?) families.

Film: _ T _ h _ e _ W _ h _ i _ p _ H _ a _ n _ d
Monday, 4:30pm

After the talk, I wandered around talking to people--people from Usenet, friends, and so forth. I offered my condolences to Lan on losing the Hugo, but he said his only regret was that the first time he lost the Hugo, there was no Hugo losers party. Maia seemed to have held

up pretty well through the convention, cast, crutch, and all. We agreed we had to get together for longer than five minutes at a time at Nolacon. The good part of going to conventions is that you get to see old friends; the bad part is that you see them for about 47 seconds each.

T_h_e W_h_i_p_H_a_n_d is an odd little film from the 1950s about a town in Minnesota taken over by Communists who have a Nazi scientist doing germ warfare there. I can see why it isn't shown very much--it is indicative of the paranoia of the time and somewhat embarrassing from the current perspective. That the totally unsubstantiated word of a reporter would bring in the police et al, guns blazing, to destroy the evil Communists is as frightening today as a film like G_a_b_r_i_e_l_o_v_e_r_t_h_e W_h_i_t_e_H_o_u_s_e, which has a (supposedly) divinely inspired President disband Congress and rule as a benevolent dictator. This, like the gut reaction of T_h_e W_h_i_p_H_a_n_d, is presented as a good thing. Most members of the audience probably would disagree.

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Play: D_i_s_a_p_p_e_a_r_i_n_g A_c_t_s: B_e_s_t
S_h_o_r_t P_l_a_y_s o_f A_l_f_r_e_d B_e_s_t_e_r
Monday, 8pm

We went to dinner at a fish-and-chips place, then everyone else (Mark, Dave, Kate, Cynthia, and Chuck) went to walk on the pier. It was getting chilly, though, and I decided that I should go back to the hotel and get a jumper rather than aggravate my cold by walking on the pier, which turns out to be pretty much like a New Jersey boardwalk anyway.

At 8pm, I went back to the Metropole and discovered there was a queue for the plays. On getting into the room, we discovered that the seats we could get were all behind tall people, so we ended up moving back to the back row and stacking a couple of chairs to get a higher view.

The four plays were "They Don't Make Life Like They Used To," "The Pi Man," "The Flowered Thundermug," and "Disappearing Act," all by

Alfred Bester. I enjoyed the first one, as I had enjoyed the story when I first read it in a Judith Merrill anthology. The second was a bit New-Wavish for me, though the actor who did it rose to the extraordinary demands put on him in what is essentially a one-man recital of, at times, totally disconnected words. The third rehashed the old idea of misinterpreting past events and objects. (See "Is SF History's Dustbin?" earlier in this report. See also M_o_t_e_l_o_f_t_h_e_M_y_s_t_e_r_i_e_s.)

Maybe it wasn't old when Bester first did it, but at this point most people would probably find it repetitious. The final play was really a playette that served to tie together the rest of the plays.

On the whole, D_i_s_a_p_p_e_a_r_i_n_g_A_c_t_s was a well-done, amateur

production. Though not up to the standards of Leicester Square, it was probably more enjoyable than R_o_s_e_n_c_r_a_n_t_z_a_n_d_G_u_i_l_d_e_n_s_t_e_r_n_A_r_e_D_e_a_d--at least Kate claimed so. It was a suitably intellectual end to a convention of more intellectual content than most held in the United States (Readercon excepted, and Readercon is much more limited).

Miscellaneous

The Program Book was a hard-cover, only the second such in worldcon history (the first was at MidAmericon in 1976).

The convention was strung out along about a half-mile of beachfront. This meant getting between items on time was difficult, particularly since the panels insisted on filling the full hour or even running over, rather than ending after 50 minutes as the Committee had intended. On the other hand, the weather was ideal--unusually sunny and around 70 degrees Fahrenheit. If it had rained the whole time we would have been miserable.

The hotel situation was even more spread-out. true, some people had asked for hotels further away to save money, but even those who requested one of the main hotels often found themselves a 20-minute walk

away. Just as last time, Brighton ended up with far more people than they expected--at least it seemed that way and the hotel situation was a

mess. We were lucky--we got our first choice and at only 20.50 pounds per person per night. The Massachusites had a smaller room in a more distant hotel with three in a room and it was 24 pounds per person per night for them.

There was a street of restaurants right by our hotel. They were on the whole good but expensive, 7 to 10 pounds for dinner. One difference between American and English restaurants is that in English restaurants everything is a la carte, including vegetables and potatoes (though there are a few plates that will include one or the other or rice). Even bread costs 50 pence or so. The problem with this is that to those who aren't used to it, dinner can end up costing more than they expect. (In Scotland, on the other hand, dinners usually include potato and vegetable.)

There were far fewer parties than at an American convention and they were much less publicized. Still, the Metropole ended up turning people away when their occupancy exceeded fire regulations. Drinking is more pervasive in Britain, with people wandering all around the convention areas with beers in hand.

I got to meet some of the people I was hoping to see, but not for long enough, and I missed others entirely.

Of the postal service problems, I will say nothing, as they are well-known. Of the complaint that the Europeans have a stranglehold on the "Western region" conventions, I will comment. My philosophical observation is that of the 48 World Science Fiction Conventions held or scheduled, only 7 have been outside the United States (one in Heidelberg, two in Australia, two in Britain, one in Toronto, and one in Holland--which won the 1990 bid). Since it is obviously easier to get votes for a European location _ a_ t a European location, it stands to reason that this will happen in the future. Therefore, my practical observation is that as long as voting for a particular region is done at a convention held in that region, inertia will keep a European convention in Europe, a United States convention in the United States, etc. Perhaps, as many have suggested, we should form a fourth region comprising Europe. This would ensure that European fans get a reasonable share of conventions and have the advantage of shifting the voting to a different region from the one being voted on. Eventually, I would envision a fifth region comprising Asia and Australia. This still leaves South America and Africa, regions that have not yet shown any great urge to host Worldcons yet.

Next year in New Orleans!

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