

participated in once myself. In wood shop. Just after hitting my thumb. And we're not sure how far it would have gone because they embed wire mesh in the glass in the windows of high schools. But I digress....

THE MT VOID

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Anyway, I was trying to understand their wording.

"Hey, we have some bad news for you."

"What dat?"

"You have been using steroids."

"[gasp] I have? Is dat what Coach was puttin' in dat cattle syringe? I thought he said it was some kinda super-vitamin."

I mean, does anybody really believe it comes as news to anyone that they are using steroids? The news is that they have been mainlining enough of the stuff that it is detectable in blood tests. You are supposed to get as close as you can to the detectable line without going over. That's the Olympic spirit. That's what makes the Olympic Games so great. And that's our President's message on the importance of physical fitness. That's why he picked as our symbol of physical fitness the great Arnold Schwarzenegger. "Arnie," the President says affectionately, "can benchpress the National Debt." Of course, he said that a year or so ago. The National Debt has gotten a whole lot bigger since. Arnie is, however, George Bush's official unofficial National Hunk, Austrian accent and all. And what is Arnie but a human testimonial to "Success Through Steroids." Is it any wonder that our Olympic team is getting little surprises like being told they use steroids. It's a wonder they don't have to be told things even more obvious, like don't pee in the sink. Or do they?

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Most moralists have been so obsessed by sex that they
have laid much too little emphasis on other more
socially useful kinds of ethically commendable conduct.
-- Bertrand Russell

DOOMSDAY BOOK by Connie Willis
Bantam Spectra, ISBN 0-553-35167-2, July 1992, \$10.
A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper
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The gist of D_o_o_m_s_d_a_y_B_o_o_k can be summed up in two sentences:
"It's no fun to come down with an unknown disease in 14th Century
England. It's not much better in the 20th Century." The first part
may seem obvious, the second less so (though the parallels to AIDS
are definitely there). One of the main things Willis does is show
us that our comfortable notions about how we're protected by
technology and medical advances are based as much, if not more, on
wishful thinking as on hard facts.

Willis does this by telling two stories in parallel: one of
Kirvin, who has traveled back to 14th Century England to study it
first-hand, and one of the rest of her research team left behind
(ahead?) in the early 21st Century. Kirvin was sent back to 1320,
well before the Black Plague burst into Europe (and hence England)
in 1348. So why does she fall ill almost immediately upon arriving?

And why, in spite of all her language training and her embedded translator, is she unable to understand or make herself understood to anyone around her?

Back (forward?) in the future, things are not much better. Immediately after sending Kirvin back in time, the technician collapses with an unknown flu-like illness, and cannot report the exact coordinates Kirvin landed at. (There is almost always drift from the target coordinates, and Kirvin can't be retrieved unless her landing coordinates are known.) He lies delirious for days, while Kirvin is lost and more and more people in the present fall ill.

Obviously there are a lot of elements of mystery, and far be it for me to ruin any of them for you. Suffice it to say this is a book about sickness and plagues and dying, and how people react to it. Many reviewers have lauded Willis for giving an accurate portrayal of a plague in a pre-Industrial, pre-germ-theory society. But to students of history, this won't be particularly new, although Willis does her usual excellent job of giving us realistic people we can believe in and care about. No, it is the parallelism that is unique here. For all our progress, Willis says, a new disease can easily bring us back to the problems of 600 years ago. Consider the Influenza Epidemic of 1917 to 1919 which killed 25,000,000--the same number as the Black Plague of 1348-1666. Yes, the world population was higher in 1918, but the Black Plague lasted over three hundred years, the Influenza Epidemic only three. (During the Influenza Epidemic, 4600 people died in one week in Philadelphia.) And millions died of the bubonic plague in India between 1921 and 1923.

Even with the more advanced technology of Willis's 21st Century, all is not easy. Technology can break. People can make mistakes. Things can go wrong. And people can die.

Willis even keeps the reader in the dark about the ending, not an easy task given the book's structure, but she manages to set up the situation so that more than one outcome is possible. (I hope this is sufficiently vague.) I am not entirely happy with the ending, but it's a minor quibble.

I strongly recommend D_o_o_m_s_d_a_y_B_o_o_k, for what it teaches about the reality of history (if you don't have a strong background in history), and for what it teaches about the reality of the present (even if you do). (And for all those people who think Willis writes only humorous fiction--this will change your mind.)

THE ROWAN by Anne McCaffrey
A book review by Frank R. Leisti
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Anne McCaffrey has created another sympathetic hero, a superstar, gifted with abilities beyond those of normal people. The star in this story is "The Rowan," a Prime. After the ability of ESP was scientifically proven, colonies expanding from the Earth have relied on people with this paranormal ability. On the planet Altair, a freak weather induced accident brings the mental cries of a three-year-old female child. When her cries interrupt the smooth workings of the current Altair Prime, whose duties include the teleportation of sending and receiving goods and personnel, a frantic effort is made to locate this girl.

The use of a clairvoyant searcher brings forth two prophecies about the girl. She is discovered in the remains of the lost mining colony of Rowan, hence her name, The Rowan. During her growth, she is trained and supported by other lesser talented people who attempt to provide her a rounded life. To replace her parents, she is given a Purza, a fur-covered mechanical construct that can be programmed to adjust itself to The Rowan. Her attachment to this Purza proves to be a strong stumbling block as she is trained and developed to bring her to the state where she might become the first Prime.

The subsequent life of The Rowan is filled with boredom, especially as she and others believe that she can not teleport herself through space without suffering extreme agony. Of course, the conflict that she finds herself involved in, provides the backdrop against which she must pit her beliefs and her talents.

The Rowan is a story with love and honor, missteps and foolish actions, a sense of reality mixed with the unreal. Yet the weaving of the tale is made to bring the reader into the state of cheering for The Rowan as she conquers herself as well as her enemies.

It seems that yet again, Anne McCaffrey has set up another viewpoint into the fabric of science fiction where another world/universe is created. While this is similar to her story of the Crystal Singer, of the female superstar, she is borrowing certain characteristics from E. E. "Doc" Smith's stories of the Galactic Primes. The grading of the ESP abilities of people is slightly different, using T-1, T-2, ..., T-9, etc., designations; however, the people with the top abilities are referred to as Primes.

One can also compare the changes brought about when the lead character, The Rowan, meets her potential lifemate, Jeff Raven. Her life completely changes as the result of sensing him. In a similar

fashion, Lessa of Pern has a generation of growth when she meets her lifemate, F'lar of Benden Weyr.

Although she has developed this story from a short story I read years ago, it is good to feel the forces which shape the character of The Rowan. I look forward to reading the next related book.

On the Leeper scale (-4 to +4), I would rate this story as a low +2.

UNFORGIVEN
A film review by Mark R. Leeper
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Capsule review: A film to debunk most of the myths in other Western gunfighter films. Perhaps Eastwood made U_n_f_o_r_g_i_v_e_n as an act of contrition for glorifying violence in so many of his previous pictures. In any case, this is a very adult and intelligent Western about myth and reality. Rating: high +2 (-4 to +4).

"This is the West. When the legend becomes a fact, print the legend."

Newspaper reporter in T_h_e_M_a_n_W_h_o
S_h_o_t_L_i_b_e_r_t_y_V_a_l_e_n_c_e

I understand that the Marlboro Man died recently. For years he represented the spirit of the Old West with a tattooed hand holding a pack of Marlboros while he sat around the campfire or rode a magnificent horse through snowy prairies. The cause of his death, in wonderful irony if not total coincidence, was lung cancer. He spent the last part of his life doing public service messages to warn people against smoking. The myth of the macho smoker and the reality were, in his case, very different. He lived off the myth, but at some point he realized the myth was dangerous and wanted

people to know the reality.

I picture Clint Eastwood as having gone through a similar moral crisis. He was the Man with No Name who could kill men by reflex. He was Dirty Harry, who made his day by gunning down punks. Eastwood made his living by that image. Perhaps there are even kids in urban high schools and even junior highs who have patterned their own gun skills on Eastwood's. Perhaps that was a concern of Eastwood's; perhaps not. But he certainly has made a film about the myth and reality of gun fighting. Saul Rubinek plays a small but very central role as W. W. Beauchamp, who follows around the great gunfighters and writes dime novels that glamorize the life of the gun. He turns the dirty, disgusting, demeaning profession of killing into exciting and completely inaccurate accounts for avid readers. U_n_f_o_r_g_i_v_e_n is a story of gunfighting as it really was--and it was a little less romantic than killing chickens for a living. Eastwood produced and directed a powerful and nightmarish Western.

It is 1880 in the flyspeck town of Big Whiskey, Wyoming. Two cowpokes are in town taking advantage of the local whorehouse. One of the whores makes an ungenerous comment and her client goes after her with a Bowie knife. In the dark, his partner may have tried to restrain him, but the end result is a woman cut up very badly.

Unforgiven

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Sheriff Little Bill Daggett (played by Gene Hackman) wades in to bring peace. In his judgement, it is the owner of the whorehouse who has been wronged and must be paid off in valuable ponies. Whores, being whores, do not need to be paid back. This is not a decision which goes over well with the women. They decide to pool their money and offer \$1000 to anyone who will kill the two men, whether it is one or both who are guilty.

A young gunslinger, anxious to make a name for himself (played by Jaimz Woolvett), decides he can collect if he teams up with the legendary gunfighter Bill Munny (played by Clint Eastwood). Marriage has made a very different man of Munny and now he is a widower with two children to raise, a failing pig farm, and nightmares of the men he has killed. In spite of being incredibly out of practice, he decides to go along, but only if his old partner Ned Logan (played by Morgan Freeman) will join them.

U_n_f_o_r_g_i_v_e_n is a dark Western. It is dark in tone and often dark in photography. It is a murky film about murky moral decisions. Nobody is totally good; nobody is totally bad. While there is not a lot to redeem to cowpoke who sets the whole fiasco in motion, there is at least a modicum of understanding of why he did what he did and the feeling that his intended punishment may outweigh his crime. I could be wrong, but it seems to me his partner was only well-intentioned and he too is pulled far too deeply into the mess that ensues. If the timing had been different, Hackman's character as a sadistic sheriff could have been inspired by Daryl Gates. He combines a laudable desire to defend justice with a dangerous desire to define it.

This film shows a surprising bitterness about the myths of the Old West. Yet where they are debunked, the film rings true. Sleeping out under the stars may be nice, but with storm clouds it is a different matter. the great gunfights of the West are about as romantic as the great gunfights of Vietnam. An obvious "happy ending" is foreshadowed and then avoided. And one nice touch of bitter irony it would be a pity to miss: the saloon and whorehouse that is the core of the hellhole town of Big Whiskey, Wyoming, is called "Greeley's."

U_n_f_o_r_g_i_v_e_n ranks up with T_h_e_O_u_t_l_a_w
J_o_s_e_y_W_a_l_e_s as one of
Eastwood's two best films. I give it a high +2 on the -4 to +4
scale.

ANTONIA AND JANE
A film review by Mark R. Leeper
Copyright 1992 Mark R. Leeper

Capsule review: At first glance Antonia and Jane appear to be a real fox and an unattractive washrag. Yet each wants to walk in the other's shoes. Beeban Kidron tells her story with plenty of wit, but the result comes off far too short and a bit episodic. The wit along the way satisfies more than the story does. Rating: +1 (-4 to +4).

Jane frumps her way through life. She never knows how to act or how to dress. Jane thinks that everyone else has read the book H_o_w_t_o_F_u_n_c_t_i_o_n_i_n_t_h_e_W_o_r_l_d and nobody ever offered it to her. To make matters worse her best friend, whom she envies and hates, has just about everything. Antonia lives the good life. Married to the lover she stole from Jane, she has a responsible job high in the publishing business and a beautiful home. She also goes to the same psychiatrist that Jane does. From her point of view her life just goes from bad to worse. From her point of view her life stagnates while Jane has the courage to reinvent herself constantly and to explore new aspects of her personality.

Jane Hartman (played by Imelda Staunton) finds herself constitutionally unable to complain or assert herself. She floats like a cork on the currents of life, letting the tides of others' wills push her one way and then another. And like the cork, she never floats half in the currents and half out. She has a series of freaky relationships, like one with a boyfriend unable to have sex until he has been read to from the works of Iris Murdoch. Meanwhile her lifelong friend and rival Antonia McGill (played by Saskia Reeves) faces a different set of problems, mostly bred of her fast-track lifestyle. Her husband has an unfortunate taste for variety in bedmates. Her own extra-curricular activities do not satisfy her and only serve to complicate her life in bizarre ways.

Beeban Kidron, who previously directed O_r_a_n_g_e_s_A_r_e_N_o_t_t_h_e_O_n_l_y_F_r_u_i_t presumably made A_n_t_o_n_i_a_a_n_d_J_a_n_e from BBC television. Kidron gives some Woody Allen twists to the old saw of the grass growing greener on the other side of the fence. The writer seasons her story with plenty of clever wit, but in an end that comes much too soon in this 79-minute film, the story amounts to no more than a humorous platitude. I rate A_n_t_o_n_i_a_a_n_d_J_a_n_e a +1 on the -4 to +4 scale.

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