

the movie A_t_t_h_e_E_a_r_t_h'_s_C_o_r_e. I saw the movie and liked some of the concepts in it. Almost immediately afterwards I saw the book in a store rack. Since the cover said the movie was based on the book (and already being familiar with the

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concept that the book is usually better than the movie) I read it (actually I bought it first, then I read it). The book really captured my imagination and soon lead me through the rest of the Pellucidar series, and eventually to other Edgar Rice Burroughs works. Eventually this lead me into other works of SF and Fantasy. I found other authors like H. P. Lovecraft and Micheal Moorcock. As time went by ERB slipped to the back of my collection. Sooner or later my interest in superheroes (yeah, I read comic books too) lead me to early SF and the pulp heroes. This lead me back to ERB. Unfortunately, I had given away most of my ERB books! So, I went on a quest to rebuild my collection, and recently completed it. What this rather roundabout tale means is that the completion of my ERB library gave me an excuse to recommend the book that got me started in all this in the first place, A_t_t_h_e_E_a_r_t_h'_s_C_o_r_e!

A_t_t_h_e_E_a_r_t_h'_s_C_o_r_e involves the rather accidental discovery of a world inside the Earth by the main character and his companion. This world is filled with the descendants of prehistoric creatures, human tribes, and the intelligent pterodactyls called Mahars. The Mahars control the area that the two characters arrive in, and feed off of the local human populace. The story rapidly involves itself in the attempts of the main characters to unite the local tribes of humans to destroy the nasty rotten Mahars (who are all female, by the way). Anyway, the book is classic Burroughs. The Mahars are not portrayed in even a remotely sympathetic manner, the humans win, and the main character gets the girl. What more could you ask

from a novel? (Don't answer that!) So, if you want to talk about the message that Burroughs was trying to present by making the Mahars female, or if you just want to talk about how the slime-of-the-Earth Mahars got what they had coming to them, then come to the Lincroft SF club meeting! (Just think, this book could start a bigger flame war than mentioning the word Homosexual in rec.arts.startrek!)
[-njs]

2. Corporate America seems to be broken into an artistic camp and a technological camp, and each tries to distort time in opposite directions for its own profit. I know that sounds like verbal fruit cocktail, but let me explain what I mean.

What got me thinking about this is a blurb I saw on a book. Some new science fiction writer was called "reminiscent of David Drake."

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Now I wonder how many of us really reminisce about David Drake. I think the one Drake novel I read I read about two years ago. I tend to think of Drake as a newish author. Now I find some blurb-writer is reminiscing about the "good old days when Drake was being published." Generally when you see a book that says, "In the tradition of ..." you would expect a long tradition. At least you would think it would take at least a couple of decades for a tradition to form. Yet within a year or two of when Stephen King got popular, you already heard about authors writing in his "tradition." Now there are writers writing in the tradition of Clive Barker. You can call Barker many names but "traditional" is not one. Cyberpunk is already a separate form of science fiction writing in the tradition of William Gibson.

Madison Avenue wants us to feel that a car or a dress or a tie that is two years old is out-of-date. Volkswagon found that it was not profitable to have a car, the Bug, that looked timeless. I think they change their design now periodically. These are artistic industries. They function by styles that they want to change often enough to increase their profits.

On the other hand, it seems to me that I remember an AT&T ad from

the early 1970s in which a Bell Labs engineer commented that the 1990s "were bearing down on us like a freight train." We have to be prepared. She was talking about data networking, I think. Picturephone* was developed and basically wasted because it was way ahead of its time. When I worked on data networks they had me looking at support for TTY33s. There are still a bunch of them around. Technology tends to take long intervals of time and think of them as short.

And the funny part of all this is that I would think that technology moves and changes much faster than the artistic styles and it changes for better reasons, not just whims or experiments. Draw what conclusions you want.

3. I have just received a promotional letter from Lisa Ives, Junior Publicist (their title, not mine) for Jeremy P. Tarcher, Inc., describing Alexei and Cory Panshin's new study of science fiction,

T_h_e_W_o_r_l_d_B_e_y_o_n_d_t_h_e_H_i_l_l. Ives starts out by saying, "I rarely read science fiction. I certainly never read about science fiction

but a job's a job and my assignment was publicity for Alexei and

Cory Panshin's T_h_e_W_o_r_l_d_B_e_y_o_n_d_t_h_e_H_i_l_l: S_c_i_e_n_c_e_F_i_c_t_i_o_n_a_n_d_t_h_e

Q_u_e_s_t_f_o_r_T_r_a_n_s_c_e_n_d_e_n_c_e. I almost didn't want to start but when I did I found myself fascinated, surprised, informed, amused,

* Picturephone is a registered trademark of AT&T.

delighted and excited. I'm sure you will be too." And she concludes, "If you read and review one science fiction book this year, you will have none better than T_h_e_W_o_r_l_d_B_e_y_o_n_d_t_h_e_H_i_l_l. ... Please, take a look at this book even if you wouldn't go to E.T. or a Star Trek film if your life depended on it."

Now, this may be a very good book--certainly Panshin's track record indicates it's worth a look--but this letter is hardly the way to promote it. Ives (who will probably remain a "Junior Publicist"

unless she sharpens up her act) starts out by admitting she knows nothing about science fiction, and in fact seems to actively dislike it. So why in the seven galaxies should I believe her statement "If you read and review one science fiction book this year, you will have none better than T_h_e_W_o_r_l_d_B_e_y_o_n_d_t_h_e_H_i_l_l" when she's already admitted she has no idea what's going on in science fiction? And what's more, why should I believe that a non-science-fiction fan liking this book means it's of any value to a science fiction fan? (Even assuming that I put any credence into such statements by publicists who admit they're doing this just as a job?) And finally, she gives away her position by equating science fiction with E.T. and Star Trek.

If Tarcher wants to promote science fiction books, they would be better off getting someone who knows something about the field, or at least doesn't glory in his or her ignorance. [-ecl]

4. Last week I mentioned MAD magazine. I think the above merits comparison with an article MAD did on testimonials. One was an ad for a hat company called "Framis," and showed a German shepherd in a straw hat and had the message, "'I'm not human,' says Rin Tin Tin, 'but if I were I would definitely wear a Framis hat.'" I hope this publicist learned her lesson to tell Evelyn a pleasant-to-hear lie than the unpleasant truth. I learned that years ago.

Mark Leeper
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A heretic is a man who sees with his own eyes.
-- Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729-1781)

JOHNNY HANDSOME
A film review by Mark R. Leeper
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Capsule review: A lion-faced petty criminal is given a new face and a new life if he is willing to turn his back on two murderers who betrayed him. Yet another crime film set in New Orleans with a rather nice bleak tone at times. Rating: high +1.

John Sedley is going to get a second chance at life. Mickey Rourke plays John Sedley, who was born with massive cranial deformities known as "lionheadedness." In spite of Sedley having a good mind, his life has been a sequence of rejections, scrapes with the law, and foul-ups. Most recently he was involved in a heist in which two of his partners, Sunny Boyd and Rafe Garrett (played by Ellen Barkin and Lance Henriksen), murdered John's best friend, made off with the takings, and left John to take the rap. Then as an added stroke of viciousness they try to have him killed in prison. But the prison doctors want to give John a new name and a new, much improved face. He can take his new life or he can go back to his old life. His surgeon thinks he will go for the new life; Drones, the cynical police detective (played by Morgan Freeman) is convinced that John's unfinished business will just be too strong an attraction.

Want to know which he does? Well, director Walter Hill is known for violent action pictures such as 4 8 H o u r s and R e d H e a t. Hill seems to specialize in stories about particularly sadistic criminals and likes to create killers for whom simple killing seems too light a punishment. And Boyd and Garrett are no exceptions. Hill brings Rourke back to New Orleans, the site of Rourke's popular A n g e l H e a r t, although the New Orleans atmosphere is almost ignored in J o h n n y h a n d s o m e, indicating that Hill is nowhere the stylist that Alan Parker, director of A n g e l H e a r t, is. To Hill's credit, however, he does get some atmosphere by subduing the color of the film. (In spite of what Ebert and Siskel say, a good stylist really can create a bleaker feel in a scene with color than with monochrome. It is just easier to create a mood in monochrome.)

J o h n n y H a n d s o m e does not have a particularly original plot. Basically the same story was told 53 years earlier in T h e M a n W h o L i v e d T w i c e. For that matter, both are really at heart T h e C o u n t o f M o n t e C r i s t o. But J o h n n y H a n d s o m e is a better made film than most of Hill's other chase films. The mere fact that one particularly obnoxious woman in my audience irately complained because it did not have the ending she expected indicates that Hill is doing something right. I give it a high +1 on the -4 to +4 scale.

IN COUNTRY

A film review by Mark R. Leeper
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Capsule review: This film is not so much an attempt to help the audience understand the Vietnam war vet--it is more a tribute and its message is diluted by unnecessary subplots. Rating: low +2.

In the American film industry, lifting a taboo is like opening a floodgate. Sex was a taboo for a long time; so was very graphic violence. Neither seems to be a particularly scarce commodity in current films. Another subject that filmmakers felt they had to stay away from for a long time was the Vietnam war. The assumption was that films about an unpopular war would probably be unpopular also. Right into the mid-1980s the film industry was still making more films about World War II than it was about Vietnam. But now there seems to be at least three or four major films a year about the Vietnam war and its after-effects. Many are thoughtfully and intelligently made. Presently running there is both Brian DePalma's C_a_s_u_a_l_t_i_e_s_o_f_W_a_r and

Norman

Jewison's I_n_C_o_u_n_t_r_y. The latter has gotten quite a bit of favorable comment.

I_n_C_o_u_n_t_r_y is the story of Samantha Hughes (played by Emily Lloyd) who, in the summer following her high school graduation, begins asking questions about her father's death in the war. Samantha lives in the small town of Hopewell, Kentucky, in amongst several Vietnam veterans, all of whom are haunted by their war memories and who, in fact, seem to be constantly living in the shadow of the war. Samantha is spending the summer with her uncle Emmett Smith (played very convincingly by Bruce Willis in one of his rare serious roles). The climax and culmination of her summer and the film is her visit, with her uncle and her grandmother, to the Vietnam War Memorial in Washington DC.

What makes I_n_C_o_u_n_t_r_y remarkable among all the (respected) Vietnam-war-related films is how little understanding it really does

bring. The story is diluted by subplots of Samantha's and her girl friend's romantic attachments, and more time is spent with an old girlfriend of Emmett's going after him again. The latter plot is tangentially related to the war theme, since Emmett is still too disturbed to relate well to anybody. But snippet flashbacks of Emmett's war experiences are just a bit too simple and pat. The scenes at the Memorial are moving--which is to say manipulative, but in a good cause--and clearly what the entire film is aiming for. However, there is nothing in the scene that brings us closer to the war experience. Like the Memorial itself, the film brings not so much understanding for the war veteran as a tribute to the veteran. That is not so ambitious a goal, but it is sufficient. I give the film a low +2 on the -4 to +4 scale.