

anyone's future, but you'll think for a long time afterward. And you'll remember the spider and the jug of water. But then, maybe John was wrong. We are, after all, still alive more than 40 years after the first A-bomb was exploded.

THE MT VOID

Page 2

2. Mark this one on your calendar, folks. Two good films. (Well, most films we show are good, but these two are particularly good.) On November 19, at 7 PM the Leeperhouse fest will be showing two solid films.

The South in Conflict

INHERIT THE WIND (1960) dir. by Stanley Kramer

BELIZAIRE THE CAJUN (1986) dir. by Glen Pitre

First we will show INHERIT THE WIND. You probably have at least heard of this fictionalized account of the Scopes "Monkey" Trial. Great performances by Spencer Tracy, Fredric March, and Gene Kelly as, respectively, the two competing lawyers and the cynical Northern journalist. (In the original trial they were Clarence Darrow, William Jennings Bryan, and H. L. Mencken.) The issues of freedom to teach evolution make this film more relevant today than when it was made 27 years ago.

Next is BELIZAIRE THE CAJUN. Never heard of this one, have you? It came out last year to strong critical acclaim and then didn't play anywhere that I ever saw until it came out on cassette. BELIZAIRE is about the Cajun community in pre-Civil-War New Orleans. Belizaire is a man who lives by his wits and, if possible, defends his people from Klan-like vigilantes trying to rid New Orleans of Cajuns. There is a Mark-Twain-ish feel to this story well-acted and accompanied by a great score of Cajun music provided by Michael Doucet (who also did the Cajun music for THE BIG EASY).

3. I am reading THE FORGE OF GOD by Greg Bear. Here we have one more story in which the aliens come to Earth already knowing how to speak English. How do they know? The usual: "We have been monitoring your radio broadcasts for years." Well, other people have pointed out how crazy our radio broadcasts of shows like

"Burns and Allen" and "I Love Lucy" would have driven them crazy by now. I will pass that obvious observation by. What I want to know is, if they learned English from radio broadcasts, how come they talk to us with sound? I mean, the connection between radio waves and a perturbation of the air (which is what sound is) is less than obvious. Anyone who learned our language that way would only talk to us with radio waves. Mr. Alien would be there and his lips would be moving or whatever but no sound would come out. Instead you would have to go over to your radio and flip it on to translate what they are saying back into English. An how easy is it to learn English syntax based on radio waves? It would be like this sort of electromagnetic perturbation follows this kind but not that kind. That isn't so easy to do. Does anyone but me think about these things???

Mark Leeper
MT 3E-433 957-5619
...mtgzz!leeper

NIGHTFLYERS
A film review by Kimiye Tipton
Copyright 1987 Kimiye Tipton

I read the George R. R. Martin novella last year and was looking forward to the movie. He seemed to have taken the best ideas from A_l_i_e_n and 2_0_0_1 and combined them with a drawing room murder mystery--not the most original science fiction but great drama.

Unfortunately, I couldn't even recognize his novella in N_i_g_h_t_f_l_y_e_r_s. Instead of interesting and different female characters, we got three women who looked so much alike I couldn't figure out who was supposed to be whom (all blond, beautiful cheerleader types). The male characters went to the other extreme, with emphasis on physical differences (giant black chef, diminutive blond wimp) rather than character.

The special effects seemed decently done (I admit I wasn't concentrating) but the logic of what occurred was absent. I was too appalled at people without spacesuits conversing in a spaceship with the

hull breached above them to notice whether the underpinnings were showing.

But it was the ambience of the movie that proved to be the most crushingly boring part. Maybe we could call it spaghetti space opera. It's that dark, monotonous pacing that I associate with poorly dubbed Italian s-f or horror movies (the kind Commander USA features). I began wishing for major faux pas so I could find s_o_m_e_t_h_i_n_g to enjoy in this picture. Well, there was one howler when a couple of women were trying to break into the ship's computer, getting garbled machine language, and one of them suggested, "Look for a menu!"

This is the kind of film that gives science fiction a bad name. I rate it 2.5 on a scale of 10. Don't even rent the video (probably due next month).

Three Film Reviews
by Mark R. Leeper
Copyright 1987 Mark R. Leeper

SOLARIS

S_o_l_a_r_i_s is one of those films I'd wanted to see for years. I have heard claims that this Soviet film is was of the great science fiction

films of all time. It is, after all, based on a novel by Stanislaw Lem, a Polish science fiction writer, who is considered to be very good and very artistic. Well, under it all, S_o_l_a_r_i_s has a rather nice concept. The problem is that there is so much and so little it is under. The so much is about 150 minutes; the so little is what is happening in the story. The plot could have been done in a half-hour. It is not particularly original. On the planet Solaris, a human base with 80 people has been almost entirely wiped out by an enigmatic alien force that creates three-dimensional versions of images it finds in the humans' minds. In the great sentient ocean of Solaris, as in the film, there is a great deal happening beneath the surface, but exactly what remains a mystery. This film is for the very patient only. Rate it a 0 on the -4 to +4 scale.

LA JETEE

This 25-minute science fiction film was shown at the Cinema Village in New York with S_o_l_a_r_i_s and packs about the same impact--which isn't to say a whole lot--in about one-sixth the screen time. It is a science fiction story told almost entirely by photographs. I say "almost" because one scene has noticeable movement. The main character is a man in a post-nuclear war future who is haunted by an incident he witnessed as a small boy but has never understood. In the post-war future, he is the involuntary guinea pig of a time-travel experiment that allows him to go back and take a second look at the remembered incident. For a 25-minute film, L_a_J_e_t_e_e has a high idea content and packs quite a wallop. It only looks better seen with the ponderous S_o_l_a_r_i_s. Rate it a +1 on the -4 to +4 scale.

THE HIDDEN

Intentionally or not, T_h_e_H_i_d_d_e_n has a lot of ideas in common with Hal Clement's N_e_e_d_l_e. It concerns an alien criminal and an alien policeman who has chased him to Earth. Each gets around by finding a human to invade and control. The criminal seems to have quickly acquired a taste for fast cars and bad music and he's willing to kill to get either. The script calls for a lot of filler of some very standard types: car chases and gun battles. But basically it is a good story and not a bad film. Rate it a +1 on the -4 to +4 scale.

MATEWAN
A film review by Mark R. Leeper
Copyright 1987 Mark R. Leeper

Capsule review: A great propaganda film in the best traditions of Sergei Eisenstein. An engrossing account of the birth pangs of the coal miners' union in Matewan, West Virginia, as seen purely from the union's point of view. Rating: +2. Disclaimer: No political intention should be inferred from this article. I am addressing issues of filmmaking style only.

I think a lot of people were very surprised when R_e_d_s came out. Warren Beatty had been in some okay films but he had never shown any great talent. Then he made R_e_d_s and people realized that somewhere inside him there was a serious filmmaker with something to say. John Sayles's track record has been only moderately better than Beatty's. His films had been mostly low-budget pieces, usually with a social message. Included are films like R_e_t_u_r_n_o_f_t_h_e_S_e_c_a_u_c_u_s_S_e_v_e_n, L_i_a_n_n_a, and B_r_o_t_h_e_r_f_r_o_m_A_n_o_t_h_e_r_P_l_a_n_e_t. M_a_t_e_w_a_n is very much Sayles's R_e_d_s. It is a detailed historical piece done on a reasonable budget and it is a very moving film.

M_a_t_e_w_a_n is the story of how the union came to the mines of West Virginia. It is the story of open warfare between the miners and the company who had kept the miners in virtual slavery. Each side has its general. Leading the miners is Joe Kenehan, an idealistic young union man with visions of a worldwide union. Leading the fight for the company are Hickey and Griggs, mercenaries brought in to put down the insurrection of mine workers and to get the mines turning a profit again. There is a lot of history in M_a_t_e_w_a_n, but it does not detract one iota from the story-telling.

But while in some ways M_a_t_e_w_a_n is similar to R_e_d_s, in some ways it is very different. R_e_d_s was sympathetic to the socialists, but showed them reasonably realistically, warts and all. Sayles instead was trying to make a perfect propaganda film and, with some borrowing from masters like Eisenstein, I think he has made it. M_a_t_e_w_a_n is the American equivalent of B_a_t_t_l_e_s_h_i_p_P_o_t_e_m_k_i_n. In two and a half hours of film Joe Kenehan shows absolutely no faults at all. He is intelligent, considerate, idealistic, committed, self-sacrificing, and courageous. Hickey and Griggs show not one single virtue. They are mean-spirited, rude, lecherous, impious, selfish, and they kill people. Sayles is taking no chances that you might not know who are the good guys and who are not.

The miners are a little more human. The whites start out bigotted against the blacks and Italians brought in to break the strike, but Kenehan shows them that the only real fight is the union against the

company and all the workers eventually come to love each other. In B_a_t_t_l_e_s_h_i_p_P_o_t_e_m_k_i_n one of a group of jubilant revolutionaries yells, "Down with Jews!" only to be shouted down by others who understand "the real fight."

You see almost nothing of characters who favor the company side other than Hickey and Griggs. Sayles wants no possibility of them being humanized in any way. In the climactic "Battle on the Tracks" they are simply brought off a train and seen at a distance without any humanizing close-ups. Characters who are humanized include the callow young boy, innocent yet resourceful, who was always anti-company but who gets to see at close range just how despicable the company men are and, in an almost too perfect substory, he becomes a hero of the strike. We also see others uncommitted at the beginning who are won over by the justice of the strike.

M_a_t_e_w_a_n, in its copious cinematic quoting from Eisenstein, right down to the "mourning of the dead" scene, undercuts its own credibility. It is too perfect a propaganda film to be really trusted on its facts. It is, however, a really fine propaganda film and does everything Eisenstein would have tried for. It is moving and affecting. It pulls all the right strings. As such it is a pleasure to watch. Rate it a high +2 on the -4 to +4 scale.

