

Rebellion? Well, maybe there were a couple of okay months. -ec]
So starting this issue, this is the place to look for financial
advice.

THE MT VOID

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Item 1: ...uh...give me a second. Uh. Don't take any woo.... No.
Well, maybe we'll start next week. Maybe.

2. Blah, blah, blah. Blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. Blah. Blah.
Blah. I am going to run away with Madonna. Blah. Blah. Blech!
What a revolting idea that is! There's got to be someone better
than Madonna! Blah.

3. This issue contains the first +4 review I think I have written
for the Notice. Just for you 3% reading this. [Actually Mark also
gave a +4 to DRAGONSLAYER which he reviewed in the 07/10/81 issue,
but he didn't specify a precise rating in that review, so I guess
he's technically correct. -ec]

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EMPIRE OF THE SUN
A film review by Mark R. Leeper
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Capsule review: Live a lifetime of experience in a short two and a half hours of film. A constantly inventive film conveys a sense of wonder about flight and a whole lot more. This is how to make a historical film.
Rating: +4.

Every once in a while I _d_o give a film a +4.

E_m_p_i_r_e_o_f_t_h_e_S_u_n is J. G. Ballard's semi-autobiographical novel recounting his experiences as a boy in China during the Japanese occupation in World War II. Tom Stoppard has adapted it for the screen and Steven Spielberg proves to have the talent of a Kubrick in directing the film. Spielberg does things nearly impossible in film. He has combined a spectacular with a highly personal film, even mixing them in the same scene. The scene in which Jim gets separated from his parents in a veritable ocean of fleeing humanity is both emotionally moving and

immense. This is a film filled with one strange and vivid incident after another, one memorable scene after another, yet one never feels there is too much frosting and not enough cake. This film proves that somewhere underneath the highly commercial director is a man of great artistic talents that all too rarely get used. It is incomprehensible that the director of I_n_d_i_a_n_a_J_o_n_e_s_a_n_d_t_h_e_T_e_m_p_l_e_o_f_D_o_o_m also directed a film of the sensitivity of E_m_p_i_r_e_o_f_t_h_e_S_u_n.

Jim (played by Christian Bale) is a boy with a very believable obsession: flight and airplanes. It is easy for me to believe this obsession with flying would strike a responsive chord in Spielberg; I know it does in me. His father became wealthy in the textile industry in Shanghai in a European community incongruously identical to one that one might find in Britain. Jim has led a sheltered life. His big concern is building airplane models and studying aircraft. His ambition is to join the Japanese military, not for political reasons, but because they have planes. Jim's simple existence is about to come to an end. The Japanese Imperial forces are about to seize Shanghai and Jim will have to fight to stay alive.

This story could have been told prosaically, but there is little prosaic about E_m_p_i_r_e_o_f_t_h_e_S_u_n. With Ballard's, Stoppard's, and Spielberg's imaginations creating images there is nothing stereotypic about this film. It is amazing that such a story could be told of conflict and suffering, and yet there is not a single villain and every character who speaks is fresh and new. There is a sense-of-wonder observation of the Japanese--bringers of planes to China--and of the Americans who build the huge "Cadillacs of the sky."

Just as H_o_p_e_a_n_d_G_l_o_r_y--a comparable but less fully realized autobiographical film--gave us insights into the roots of John Boorman's love of fantasy, E_m_p_i_r_e_o_f_t_h_e_S_u_n more than explains why Ballard writes science-fictional mega-disaster novels in which we see how titanic, world-crushing events affect common people's lives. Perhaps the only thing that cuts against the credibility is that it is difficult to believe so many beautiful and enigmatic incidents could have happened to one boy.

E_m_p_i_r_e_o_f_t_h_e_S_u_n also demonstrates that Spielberg is an

intelligent businessman. Apparently he had only three weeks to film in China. But he took much better advantage of that time than Bertolucci took of a much longer time in filming T_h_e_L_a_s_t_E_m_p_e_r_o_r. In China the price of an extra is something like a dollar a day. Bertolucci uses this advantage in perhaps one or two scenes--notably Pu Yi's coronation as seen from above. But Spielberg puts us in the middle of an ocean of panicking humanity as Shanghai is evacuated. Bertolucci tells us about history; Spielberg makes it happen to us. Bertolucci distances us from his characters; Spielberg puts us inside his.

This is the best film I have seen this year. Perhaps the best in several years.

LEONARD PART 6
A film review by Mark R. Leeper
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Capsule review: Bill Cosby knows how to do amusing spy stuff. He did it often enough on I_S_p_y. But this film is the kind of stuff he thinks you want to see. This film is aimed at a seven-year-old mentality and serves as a textbook on how to be insulting to your audience in product placements. Rating: -1.

Back in the mid-to-late 1960s, NBC-TV had the highest-rated television show. The show was I_S_p_y starring Robert Culp and Bill Cosby. These were still the early days of color television for many people and I_S_p_y had enjoyable plots and was filmed in interesting locations like Hong Kong or Mexico. The stories were good (at least for American commercial television), and the locations were great, and Cosby was terrific as Alexander Scott, the Rhodes scholar turned wise-cracking secret agent. He was the number two man to Culp's Kelly Robinson. Well, in those days you were more interested in the second man anyway. The first guy was dull as white bread. Think of T_h_e_M_a_n_f_r_o_m_U_n_c_l_e, S_t_a_r_T_r_e_k, Martin and Lewis, Abbott and Costello, Rowan and Martin. The top banana is there to give the audience someone to identify with and the second guy is the one with the real personality.

Cosby was great as an irreverent spy. He was what you would get if you took the "Beverly Hills Cop" and injected him with 60 more IQ points and about a gallon of class. The idea of an Alexander-Scott-like character as Cosby knows how to play him in a spy adventure is a pretty good idea. Well, Cosby has returned to the spy business in a film called L_e_o_n_a_r_d_P_a_r_t_6. Neither the title nor the poster really encourages me that this is the film I could have hoped for. The credits do list Tom Courtenay (who played the title character in L_o_n_e_l_i_n_e_s_s_o_f_t_h_e_L_o_n_g_D_i_s_t_a_n_c_e_R_u_n_n_e_r and the powerful Strelnikov in D_o_c_t_o_r_Z_h_i_v_a_g_o).

The film also stars Joe Don Baker and Moses Green, who has real dramatic abilities. So what kind of a film has Cosby--who also starred and provided the story--put together? He has put together a film that shows exactly what he thinks will sell. He has put together a film aimed at a seven-year-old's mind. He has wasted Gunn and spit on Courtenay. Anyone who has any respect for Cosby should be forced to watch this film to see what Cosby thinks of his audience.

Cosby plays a super-super-secret agent who has saved his country five times before in five stories that (mercifully) have never been told. He has now been retired for seven years doing little but be rich. The film is filled with lots of "rich lifestyle" jokes that were boring in A_r_t_h_u_r and are worse in L_e_o_n_a_r_d. And in the rich jokes is where Courtenay gets used, as Leonard's butler! An evil force is controlling small animals like squirrels and frogs and getting them to kill people.

The CIA asks for Leonard's help but he is too busy trying to win back his ex-wife. He is also having trouble with small animals, but with him it is the shrimp his ex-wife is throwing at his face. Hey, if you get the giggles seeing people pour food on Cosby, this is the film for you. Well, eventually Leonard gets his act together enough that he is ready to go after the baddies. That's when the film starts to go downhill.

And talk about product placements! There is a certain brand of flavored sugar-water that Cosby hawks when he isn't movie-making, so why should he stop when he is? But of course he does it realistically and artistically. In one action scene he opens a refrigerator in a fancy restaurant's kitchen and it is full of cans of the stuff--more than the restaurant would use in two years! In another scene, he is in his fantastically well-appointed exercise room in his mansion and there is a vending machine for the stuff. Why he'd put a vending machine in his own exercise room is never explained. But the best placement is where he is having a conversation with someone and is holding a bottle of the stuff (where he finds it in glass bottles anymore, I have no idea!) placed so it is the part of the scene nearest the camera. He is holding the bottle so that the name is centered for the viewer. And he is holding it at the bottom third of the bottle in a way nobody holds a bottle, but he has to hold it that way so his hand does not cover up the name! Oh, yes, another scene is backstage at a theater and there, piled up, are literally hundreds of bars of soap of an easily readable brand.. Just why an acting company needs several hundred bars of soap is unclear, particularly since this particular soap is recommended for hands only.

Being fair, this film does have a few funny gags. I am going to be generous and give it a low -1. After all, it is the holiday season and also Cosby has done good work a couple of decades back.

Dinosaurs--Past and Present
A museum exhibit review by Mark R. Leeper
Copyright 1987 Mark R. Leeper

Without eternal vigilance the world gets changed under you and everything you know and love becomes subverted. There are conspiracies everywhere to take away those things that you have grown up with. I don't know if you are aware of it, but the dinosaurs you grew up with and loved are gone. Little by little, so-called modern theories have changed the shape and behavior of dinosaurs. They are no longer the dinosaurs we loved as kids. I had seen it happening a bit at a time: a new theory here, a new interpretation of the fossil record there. Each time I nodded like a fool and said to myself, "That's interesting." It never occurred to me how much the cumulative effect of all these changes had been. Now I feel like I'd be a stranger in the Triassic, Jurassic, or Cretaceous. Nothing is like I picture it any more.

Nothing so drove home to me the fact that my beloved dinosaurs has passed me by as seeing the temporary exhibit "Dinosaurs--Past and Present," showing now through January 3 at the American Museum of Natural History in New York. The exhibit contains hundreds of pictures and sculptures of dinosaurs representing our current understanding of the huge reptiles.

This is a traveling exhibit and I am surprised it even showed at

the American Museum of Natural History. One of my pet peeves against the Museum is that it prides itself on its dinosaur collection. It even published a book, D_i_n_o_s_a_u_r_s_i_n_t_h_e_A_t_t_i_c, bragging about its collection.

So what irritates me? It still has the brontosaurus skeleton as the centerpiece of its Great Hall of Dinosaurs. And what's wrong with that? Well, there was no such animal. A brontosaurus skeleton is what you get when you put a camarasaurus skull on an apatosaurus body. Some bone hunter made that mistake a long time ago. Then five or six years ago most decent museums sawed off the camarasaurus skull and replaced it with the apatosaurus's more elongated skull. The name brontosaurus is now nearly acceptable for apatosauri, but the head is quite a different matter. Incidentally, the trachodon is also an incorrect form; it is actually an anatosaurus.

But as a concession to the fact that our view of dinosaurs is changing--not characteristic of the rest of the Museum--there is currently an exhibition showing how our view of dinosaurs has changed over the years since they were first discovered. The first fossils recognized as having come from a species of prehistoric reptile were found around the 1820s and identified in the 1840s. The images of dinosaurs from that time make them look like very fat iguanas.

Also represented, of course, is the artwork of Charles Knight. Knight is to dinosaur art what Chesley Bonestall is to space art. If

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you grew up with an idea of what dinosaurs looked like, it was probably based on Knight's paintings and murals--many originally done at the turn of the century. They were later printed in L_i_f_e magazine and a variety of books from that publisher and others. I read in the 1970s that virtually all paleontologists who studied dinosaurs claimed to have gone into the field because they were inspired by Knight's artwork. Only in the last decade or so did the concept of what dinosaurs looked like start varying to any degree from Knight's concepts.

One of the big changes is in posture. Knight's dinosaurs dragged their tails on the ground. Lots of dinosaur footprints have been found. They never have tail tracks between them. Bipedal dinosaurs like allosaurus and tyrannosaurus don't walk upright anymore (like the fictional Godzilla). They are almost always shown walking bent over

with their spines almost level or no more elevated than 45 degrees. On the other hand, stolid old quadrupeds like apatosaurus/brontosaurus now are often portrayed as rearing up on their back legs like horses.

The one discomforting thing about the exhibit is that the impressions vary as much from one modern artist to another as they do from Knight's turn-of-the-century impressions. we are much less certain of what dinosaurs looked like than we were a decade ago, it seems.

Oh, this report would not be complete without mentioning the most controversial piece of the exhibit, the lizard man. There is a man-sized figure that looks humanoid but has reptilian features including claws instead of hands. The head is almost reminiscent of a praying mantis. Had what now seem likely to have been celestial events not killed off the dinosaurs, this is what they would have evolved toward, it is theorized. They would have become more and more manlike. No doubt if dolphins had become the dominant intelligent life forms on Earth, the death of the dinosaurs would be seen as nipping in the bud the dinosaurs' headlong evolution toward becoming lizard-dolphins.

HANOI HILTON

A film review by Mark R. Leeper

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Capsule review: This is a pretty credible story of POWs held by the North Vietnamese. In spite of what has been read into it, it is n o t a right-wing polemic defending the war. It i s a tribute to the courage and ingenuity of POWs in defying their captors. As such it is one of the best films about the Southeast Asia war.

Rating: +2.

The film industry seems unsure how to show the Vietnam War in film. They want so desperately to please, but they are not sure what the buying public thinks of the war. When they think the public wants to see films that say the war was terrible, they make films like A p o c a l y p s e N o w. On the other hand, the audience that is into beefcake stars wants to feel we could have smeared the enemy, so they get films of macho stars either breaking out of POW camps or back in to rescue Americans still there. The poor film industry is aiming at a fragmented target of public opinion. But they sure know that it is public opinion they have to match. If they don't show the war exactly the way the public thinks of the war, it will cost them big bucks at the boxoffice. Hey, "if you want to deliver a message, send a telegram." That's the old adage of the film industry. No film about the war has shot so far wide of the public opinion mark as H a n o i H i l t o n. You may remember it--it may have played a week at a theater near you.

H a n o i H i l t o n is the story of the men interred in a POW camp in Hanoi. Most of the men believed in what they were doing. Perhaps they did not believe in the war, but they did believe in not being broken by their captors. The films paints the POWs as heroic, the captors as cruel, and the news and movie media as being dupes used by the Vietcong. None of that is too great a leap of imagination. There is nothing particularly hard to believe in the entire film. My understanding is that POWs endorse the film as being fairly realistic. The plot is not unusual or particularly new. It just shows how prisoners found ways to communicate with each other and support each other under interrogations that sometimes included torture. Again, nothing new for the cinema--there were similar films about World War II--but then POW camps probably have not changed that much either.

There has been some comment about how unfairly a visiting celebrity--obviously intended to be Jane Fonda--is treated by the film. My personal belief is that Ms. Fonda was at this point a woman very committed to her ideals who had already been shown some of the destruction that air bombing had done in North Vietnam. That would have meant she had reason to be unsympathetic to the downed airmen and unsympathetic is all the film accuses her of being. A journalist earlier in the film is portrayed as much worse.

H a n o i H i l t o n certainly appears to be a reasonably accurate portrayal of one aspect of the Vietnam War. In spite of a lot of unfavorable comment by other reviewers, I think it deserves a +2.

SAMMY AND ROSIE GET LAID
A film review by Mark R. Leeper
Copyright 1987 Mark R. Leeper

Capsule review: Soap opera minus the drama.
Several detestable characters interact with each other.
Rating: -1.

Stephen Frears has directed a film that made it as a solid directorial success to his credit. He directed M_y_B_e_a_u_t_i_f_u_l_L_a_u_n_d_r_e_t_t_e for British television. It was picked up for international release and became one of the more successful art-house releases of the year, in spite of minor protests from the Pakistani community. The film shows Pakistanis in Britain and the portrayal included positive and negative characterizations. Frears's second international release is S_a_m_m_y_a_n_d_R_o_s_i_e_G_e_t_L_a_i_d. As might be imagined, there was something of a stir over the title. The MPAA refused to register the film under that title. Finally S_a_m_m_y_a_n_d_R_o_s_i_e_G_e_t_L_a_i_d was released without an MPAA rating. Well, was S_a_m_m_y_a_n_d_R_o_s_i_e_G_e_t_L_a_i_d worth the bruhaha? Not as far as I am concerned.

Rafi (played by Shashi Kapoor) was a high official in the Pakistani government who has come to London to live with his son and daughter-in-law: Sammy and Rosie. Their marriage is falling apart; each is taking other lovers as often as possible. All of the couple's friends seem to be interested in sex and little else. Rafi is shocked to see open lesbian relations among the friends. But then what right does Rafi have to be shocked? While he was in office in Pakistan he ordered brutal tortures vividly described in detail. There is a race riot going on outside. Claire Bloom has a small part as Rafi's once and current lover. Her part is, however, important in that she is the only person in the film who demonstrates any value as a human being.

This was not my cup of bile. Rate it a -1, taking into account its artistic pretensions. For entertainment value, it is not up to the stag films its title is reminiscent of.

Star Trek Funnies III
Anonymous
Provided by Seth Meyer and William Chao

The scene: A full-brass competency hearing, called after Captain Picard surrenders to a crippled Ferengi shuttle that has two mortally wounded crew members on board. Picard has been stripped of his rank and transferred to an ore-freighter. The top brass are now discussing the issue of who should take command of NCC-1701D.

Attending the meeting are:

Fleet Admiral Montague, Commander of Starfleet
Admiral Abdallah, Chairman of Picard's competency board
Admiral Wu, CIC of the First Exploration Fleet
Vice Admiral Phillips, Surgeon General of Starfleet
Rear Admiral Solok, Starfleet Personnel Records Officer

Montague: So then, Mr. Solok, it is your opinion that we should not give command of the Enterprise to Commander Riker?

Solok: It is my logical conclusion that the Commander would not be able to perform the duties of a starship captain.

Phillips: I'm forced to agree with Admiral Solok, sir. Riker's

psychological profile shows that he would be forced into a nervous breakdown within two weeks. He would be torn apart by the contradictory needs to lead the away teams and to protect his own life. In one simulator run, he put himself on report for trying to beam down to a hostile planet.

Montague: So we must choose another officer. Any recommendations?

Abdallah: During the hearings, Picard spoke very highly of Lieutenant Commander Data's knowledge of starship operations. I would consider him first.

Solok: Mr. Data also has a highly logical mind, aside from his peculiar desire to be human.

Phillips: I'm afraid I have to dissent with you on this one. Despite Data's qualifications, he just doesn't have the intuitive inspiration it takes to command a starship.

Solok: I fail to see the logic in...

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Phillips: Besides which, his judgement circuits need a major overhaul. He rattles off an entire thesaurus entry at the slightest provocation.

Wu: I'd have to go with Phillips too, sir. We just can't have him stop in the middle of a critical situation with a monologue of similar events in history.

Montague: Very well then, Data is out. Is there anyone left worth considering?

Solok: For obvious reasons, Lieutenant Commander Troi cannot be considered.

Wu: Absolutely not. We can't have a starship commander freeze every time an unexpected emotion appears.

Phillips: Lieutenants Worf and Yar are out, too. Much too aggressive.

Wu: Yes, that would get us into more trouble than someone who surrenders all the time.

Montague: Enough of whom we can't consider! The purpose of this meeting is to find someone who *can* command the ship.

Abdallah: Lieutenant LaForge seemed a good possibility during the hearings. He was another officer of whom Picard spoke well.

Phillips: No, we can't have him either. The bioelectronic device he wears causes him constant pain. He can overcome it well enough to man a bridge station, but it's just too much of a distraction for the multiple responsibilities of command.

Montague: (exasperated)So, am I to understand that in your opinions, there is no one at *all* who is qualified to command NCC-1701D?

(A long silence, during which Wu and Phillips exchange glances. Solok resolutely refuses to meet anyone's eyes. Abdallah also seems to be hiding something. Slowly but surely, understanding finds its way into Montague's expression. He doesn't like the answer he's reached.)

Montague: Admiral Wu, I sincerely hope I'm wrong about this. You aren't considering Ensign Wesley Crusher, are you?

(Wu opens his mouth a moment, then shuts it and looks away. Montague rolls his eyes in shocked disbelief.)

Montague: I can't believe it. Of all the foolish, ridiculous notions...

Wu: You have to admit sir, he does have a prodigious understanding

of starship systems and operations.

Abdallah: Even Picard had to admit that much, after Wesley's first tour of the bridge.

Solok: As well as a superb analytical and theoretical ability.

Montague: That's not the same thing as *experience*! He's a 15-year-old boy, dammit! There's no way that he could command a starship as well as a highly trained adult!

Solok: Admiral, may I respectfully suggest that you temper your emotions? They are not very productive to the purposes of this meeting.

Montague: (pauses, glaring at Solok) Yes... very well, Mr. Solok. (another pause, gains control of himself) Now, may I ask just how you justify your recommendation that a 15-year-old boy be placed in command of a starship, rather than an experienced and trained adult?

Solok: I feel it necessary to point out that your concern with his age, rather than his skills or abilities, is rather illogical.

Wu: He *has* shown considerable knowledge of starship operations and engineering. His intuitive engineering insight allowed him to mentally lay out a circuit that would have taken weeks for anyone else to design.

Solok: A similar phenomenon to humans who can add 15 10-digit numbers, or extract 8th-order roots of 25 digit numbers, in a matter of seconds. The only difference is that he possesses this ability for physics and engineering, rather than mathematics.

Montague: All right, I'll grant that he's an engineering whiz kid. That still doesn't justify putting him in command of a ship.

Abdallah: There are other incidents, sir. There have been repeated times in which Ensign Crusher has deduced the key to a crisis, but resolution was delayed by the fact that no one would listen to him. Giving him command would ensure that he would be heard.

Phillips: My psychological profiles show that he has a profound maturity that has gone largely unnoticed. He puts on a show of childishness to avoid being too threatening to the less competent adults surrounding him. Every so often his true maturity will come through-- he often jokes to his mother about her actions stunting his emotional growth.

Montague: (taking a last, desperate shot) But what about combat ability? That was, after all, the issue that brought up this meeting in the first place.

Wu: Ensign Crusher has proven his ability there, too. In a simulator run, he faced five Ferengi vessels in what was intended to be a "Kobayashi Maru" test.

Montague: ...and?

Wu: The first thing he did was request visual communication, and demand an immediate surrender. The Ferengi, after getting over their initial shock at seeing a 15-year-old Terran commanding, collapsed laughing and babbling about the moronic practices of us Terrans.

Ensign Crusher took advantage of the 30-second delay and, rigging the ship's phasers for a simultaneous five-way burst, disabled all of the Ferengi opponents.

(Montague is silent for a long while, then slumps his shoulders in defeat)

Montague: Very well, then. Let the record show a unanimous decision to promote Ensign Crusher to Captain, and assign him to command the U.S.S. Enterprise.

(The other panel members file out, leaving Montague alone in the conference room. He mutters something incoherent about wanting to beam the young captain into an antimatter pod.)

