

1. Due to software problems (I couldn't figure out how to update the volume number), last week's MT. VOID was numbered Volume 6, Number 2. It was actually Volume 7, Number 1. (Does anyone really care?) [-ecl]

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

TO KILL THE POTEMKIN by Mark Joseph
Onyx, 1987, (1986c), ISBN 0-451-40039-9, \$4.50.
A book review by Mark R. Leeper
Copyright 1988 Mark R. Leeper

Just as there are Class B movies, there are Class B books. After a R_u_n_S_i_l_e_n_t, R_u_n_D_e_e_p and an E_n_e_m_y_B_e_l_o_w, some other filmmaker has to make a low-budget submarine film like H_e_l_l_c_a_t_s_o_f_t_h_e_N_a_v_y, just a cheap shadow of what has gone before. The later film has a melodramatic script, inferior acting (sorry, Mr. President), and is in general a weaker production. After the popularity of the Class A submarine book T_h_e_H_u_n_t_f_o_r_R_e_d_O_c_t_o_b_e_r came a series of Class B imitations. T_o_K_i_l_l_t_h_e_P_o_t_e_m_k_i_n is one such Class B coattail rider. The book is the first novel by Mark Joseph whose qualification listed in the three-sentence biographical sketch is that he has had a lifelong interest in nuclear submarines.

T_o_K_i_l_l_t_h_e_P_o_t_e_m_k_i_n is the story of a duel in the Mediterranean--d_e_f_a_c_t_o American waters in the book's setting of May of 1968--between the U.S. submarine Barracuda and the new secret Soviet super-sub Potemkin. What makes the Potemkin such a secret is that its titanium hull, the first of its kind, let's it dive deeper and go faster than any other sub in existence. In fact, it let it slip into a Mediterranean usually off-limits to Russian subs. On the other hand, the Potemkin is weighed down by handicaps rooted in the Soviet political system. The Barracuda, on the other hand, is rooted in the American political system that gives us navy men like the book's hero, Sorenson, a brilliant sonar man when he isn't drinking, smoking pot, or going off with prostitutes. At least Sorenson has a little breadth. Most of the rest the crew are water-logged cardboard. There is the rookie sonar man in whom Sorenson takes a fatherly interest. There is the Russian-hater who hides a secret past that has the roots of his political feelings. There is

Cakes, the black cook, and several others just as thin.

What made T_h_e_H_u_n_t_f_o_r_R_e_d_O_c_t_o_b_e_r so enjoyable was its volume of technical detail. Mark Joseph's "lifelong interest in nuclear submarines" has given him some detail, but an order of magnitude less than Clancy had. The deceptively thick-looking book goes quickly, due in part to large print, but also to an admittedly crisp and clear writing style. In addition, the story moves at a fair pace, at least when Joseph is not going off course and giving us chapters describing the wild times the crew has on shore leave. Like a Grade B submarine film, it has some fun, some melodrama, and some technical detail, and it goes quickly. It is a reasonable read for a summer night, but Tom Clancy need have no fear of the competition.

WHO FRAMED ROGER RABBIT
A film review by Mark R. Leeper
Copyright 1988 Mark R. Leeper

Capsule review: In a world where Mickey Mouse and Bugs Bunny really could come knocking at your door, nearly anything can happen. W_h_o_F_r_a_m_e_d_R_o_g_e_r_R_a_b_b_i_t is a rather dull mystery plot set on a really great background where cartoon characters rub shoulders with living humans. Technical credits and inspiration of having the favorite cartoon characters of the 1940s come together in one film make the plot inadequacies seem unimportant.
Rating: +2.

Back in the three or four years after the Second World War, two different sorts of films were reaching their heyday. One was the hard-boiled detective film, which made a tentative start before the war with a few films like T_h_e_M_a_l_t_e_s_e_F_a_l_c_o_n, had dried up a little during the war years, then really hit its stride with films like M_u_r_d_e_r,_M_y_S_w_e_e_t; T_h_e_B_i_g_S_l_e_e_p; and L_a_d_y_i_n_t_h_e_L_a_k_e. At the same time, Chuck Jones'

cartoon characters began taking on the shapes and styles familiar to modern viewers. But no two styles of film could be much further apart than the f_i_l_m_n_o_i_r detective story and the cartoon form. At least that was the case until Gary Wolf wrote the mystery novel W_h_o_C_e_n_s_o_r_e_d_R_o_g_e_r_R_a_b_b_i_t? Wolf set his story in those post-war years but took out the blacks that Raymond Chandler's detective called "shines" and replaced them with "toons," the characters of cartoons. In this world cartoons are just live-action films in which all the actors are toons. Adjoining Los Angeles is the ghetto where all the toon actors live, a place called Toontwon. Against this background the film W_h_o_F_r_a_m_e_d_R_o_g_e_r_R_a_b_b_i_t takes place.

And the background is what is important in this film. In the foreground is a sort of prosaic mystery story in which tough-guy (humor) detective Eddie Valiant (valiantly played by Bob Hoskins) is looking for the real killer in a murder case in which the police strongly suspect famous cartoon star Roger Rabbit. Valiant (at least initially) thinks Roger is innocent, but he is not so sure about Roger's buxom wife Jessica Rabbit. (Don't let the name fool you; she is a very human-looking toon.) The mystery story is not a very good one and its resolution is disappointingly bad, but it is unlikely that that will disappoint much of the audience. What may resonate a little is the statement against bigotry against toons or humans. The technical effect of mixing live action and cartoon will definitely dazzle most audiences. The integration of live action and cartoon, reputed to be flawless, is at least technically very, very good. Just occasionally we find Bob Hoskins looking a little too high as he talks to Roger. The animators had, after the fact, placed the top of Roger's head rather than Roger's eyes in Hoskins' line of vision. But that quibble aside, this film goes

Who Framed Roger Rabbit July 2, 1988

Page 2

many orders of magnitude beyond any previous such mixing. The cartoon characters in the real world have a three-dimensional quality, resulting from careful use of shadow--no explanation why they do not have shadowing when they appear in cartoons.

Among the interesting touches are the attempts to make toons work consistently in the real world. Clearly the laws of physics do not work the same in cartoons as they do in the real world, but when you start separating cartoon characters from cartoon settings you have to decide which side gets the ability to break with physical law. As it turns

out--logically or not--both sides get it to some extent. Roger tends to rocket around a real world room when he drinks a glass of whiskey. But a human in Toontown also gets some special cartoon protection like being able to survive falls. Apparently toons have magic both in themselves and in their setting.

W_h_o_F_r_a_m_e_d_R_o_g_e_r_R_a_b_b_i_t is a cooperation between the two traditional competitors, Steven Spielberg's Amblin Entertainment and Walt Disney Enterprises, who decided late in the production that this film would be a Touchstone film and not a Walt Disney film. Perhaps they wanted it released through their adult division because of some violence, though their professed reason was that Jessica Rabbit was a little too well-endowed and a little under-dressed for a child audience. That cooperation and either the money it brought or the inspiration of the project bred more cooperation. As Disney was one of the production companies, getting permission to use Disney cartoon characters was probably no problem, but somehow they managed to get Warner Brothers' characters, complete with Mel Blanc's voice, so you could have Daffy Duck on screen with Donald Duck and making wisecracks about Donald's speech impediment. (Donald may have been wisecracking back but with Donald, who can tell?) Woody Woodpecker and hosts of other cartoon characters are also on hand. For humans, the cast is no so star-studded but Christopher Lloyd is on hand with another weird character for director Robert Zemeckis (B_a_c_k_t_o_t_h_e_F_u_t_u_r_e). Then there are Kathleen Turner and Amy Irving who do the voice for Jessica: Turner does the speaking; Irving does the singing.

W_h_o_F_r_a_m_e_d_R_o_g_e_r_R_a_b_b_i_t is a great film for lots of reasons, many of which have little to do with the actual plot. Rate it a +2 on the -4 to +4 scale.

SHORT CIRCUIT 2
A film review by Mark R. Leeper
Copyright 1988 Mark R. Leeper

Capsule review: The sequel to S_h_o_r_t_C_i_r_c_u_i_t is a very minor film as sequels go. Minor lip-service is paid to the idea in the first film that Number Five was alive but it is basically a good guys against crooks film with only one lesser actor from the first film. There are a few laughs but hardly enough to recommend the film.
Rating: 0.

It would be hypocritical of me to say that S_h_o_r_t_C_i_r_c_u_i_t_2 is a big come-down from S_h_o_r_t_C_i_r_c_u_i_t since, frankly, I was not much of a fan of the first film. Also, I hate to see a sequel be too much like the original, and it true that S_h_o_r_t_C_i_r_c_u_i_t_2 was not much like its predecessor. What it was like was any of dozens of throw-away summer films. The basic plot could have been done as a sequel to anything from T_h_e_L_o_v_e_B_u_g to S_t_a_r_m_a_n with small variations. In fact, with the exception of Ally Sheedy's off-screen voice in one scene, there are only two characters in common with the first film. One is Number Five itself, now mysteriously called by Everyone Johnny Five; the other (I am sorry to report to all Asian Indians) is Ben, the malaproping Indian robotics specialist who is now a toy manufacturer.

Ben is in a major United States city--the script seems to imply it is New York, but you see just about every Toronto landmark except Toronto Tower itself. He makes a deal with a department store that he will make a thousand toy replicas of Number Five in time for Christmas, a deal that gets him involved with small-time thieves and big-time bank robbers. But Number Five is reduced to being just a cute character made out of electronics parts. Whether or not he is alive--the major point of the first film--has little to do with S_h_o_r_t_C_i_r_c_u_i_t_2.

All this is not to say that there were not a few fairly funny jokes in S_h_o_r_t_C_i_r_c_u_i_t_2. I remember laughing more than once at what was happening, but I frankly expect more from a movie than a few good gags. If you think that a dozen or so laughs are worth the price of an admission ticket, be my guest. My recommendation, however, is to wait to rent it or see it on cable. Rate it a flat 0 on the -4 to +4 scale--for the sake of those dozen reasonable gags.

RED HEAT

A film review by Mark R. Leeper

Copyright 1988 Mark R. Leeper

Capsule review: Arnold Schwarzenegger plays a Soviet policeman teamed with a laconic Chicago cop Jim Belushi in Walter Hill's latest police chase film.

That's the high concept and the rest of the details are filled in just about the way Hill filled them in in '48

Hours. Enjoyable as a summer throwaway. Rating: +1.

Cop films are in this year. Maybe it was the automatic success of even the very weak B_e_v_e_r_l_y_H_i_l_l_s_C_o_p and the marginally better L_e_t_h_a_l W_e_a_p_o_n. The most popular formula for the police film is the "odd couple." That's where you have two mis-matched partners who learn to love and respect each other. L_e_t_h_a_l_W_e_a_p_o_n was a case in point, T_h_e E_n_f_o_r_c_e_r was another. Formula number two is the lone cop who discovers the force is corrupt and weeds out the bad guys. B_u_l_l_i_t may have been one of the first, but there were plenty more like S_h_a_r_k_y's_M_a_c_h_i_n_e and B_l_u_e_T_h_u_n_d_e_r. The third popular plot is the "outsider." That one is like a C_o_o_g_a_n's_B_l_u_f_f and a R_o_b_o_c_o_p where someone of questionable value proves his worth. If you want to stretch a point, R_e_d_S_u_n fits in here and in category number one. Walter Hill combined plots #1 and #3 to make '48_H_o_u_r_s; he has returned to that plot combination for R_e_d_H_e_a_t.

In Moscow, perestroika has turned into booming drug traffic. Ivan Danko (played by Arnold Schwarzenegger), a muscle-bound Moscow policeman, is dispatched to Chicago to pick up an escaped pusher. He is chosen because he is already on the case and perhaps because his English is better than his Russian. In the U.S. he ends up teamed up with a wisecracking partner played by Jim Belushi. Together they find themselves in the kind of chase Walter Hill films are famous for: violent, funny, more often lethal, and with plenty of car chases--or rather in this case, a bus chase.

Hill's great understanding of Soviet culture shows up almost immediately with a scene of an apparently co-ed public bath house supposedly in a country where nudes in art are considered pornography. Of course, without this scene the film would have almost no female nudity and authenticity does not sell tickets. Then there is the obviously authentic Austrian accent his Moscow policeman has. And just to get the audience in the right mood, the opening credits have the 'R's and the 'N's backwards and no crossbars on the 'A's. O guess that really captures the Soviet feel. On a more positive note, Hill tells a reasonably enjoyable story with enough action to make the film exciting rather than realistic. Red Heat is, however, notable for not being really anti-Soviet. The Soviets are shown as occasionally having effective, if brutal, means of ridding their society of criminals. But, hey, Hill's audiences have nothing against brutal or they would not still be Hill's audiences. Red Heat could use a few new touches besides the choice of the origin of the outsider cop, but it tells its story competently. Rate it a +1 on the -4 to +4 scale.

Film Forum SF Festival Schedule

Call 1-212-431-1590 for more details. The Film Forum is located at 57 Watts Street.

Fri-Sun 7/29-7/31	The Blob
	The Adventures of Captain Marvel
	Earth Versus the Flying Saucers
Mon 8/1	Forbidden Planet
	First Men in the Moon
Tue 8/2	The Brain from Planet Auros
	Crawling Eye
Wed-Thu 8/3-8/4	Red Planet Mars
	Invasion of the Body Snatchers (1956)
Fri 8/5	It! The Terror from Outer Space
	The Monster That Challenged the World
Sat 8/6	Seventh Voyage of Sinbad
	Journey to the Center of the Earth
Sun-Mon 8/7-8/8	Alphaville
	Barbarella
Tue 8/9	Hideous Sun Demon
	She Demons
Wed 8/10	5,000 Fingers of Dr. T

Seven Faces of dr. Lao
 Thu-Fri 8/11-8/12 Thunderbirds Are Go
 Batman
 Sat-Sun 8/13-8/14 The Quatermass Xperiment
 Quatermass II
 Quatermass and the Pit
 Mon 8/15 Things to Come (full version)
 Chandu the Magician
 Just Imagine
 Tue 8/16 Fiend Without a Face
 First Man in Space
 Wed 8/17 Infra-Man
 The H-Man
 Thu 8/18 Deluge
 Captive Women
 Fri 8/19 Plan 9 from Outer Space
 Mesa of Lost Women
 Sat-Sun 8/20-8/21 Stalker
 Mon 8/22 Metropolis
 Woman in the Moon
 Tue 8/23 Flesicher Superman Cartoons
 Wed 8/24 Jason & the Argonauts
 Jack the Giant Killer
 Thu 8/25 Queen of Outer Space
 Attack of the 50 Ft. Woman
 Fri-Thu 8/26-9/1 Futuropolis and Timeless Tales of Fantasy (?)

Film Forum SF Festival July 8, 1988

Page 2

Fri 9/2 These Are the Damned
 Dr. Strangelove
 Sat 9/3 Serialissima--Serial Marathon
 Sun 9/4 Invaders from Mars
 Flight to Mars
 Mon 9/5 Catwomen of the Moon
 Frankenstein's Daughter
 Missile to the Moon
 Tue 9/6 Galaxy Express 999
 Message from Space
 Wed 9/7 Giant Behemoth
 Gorgo
 Thu 9/8 The Day the World Ended

Attack of the Crab Monsters
Monster from the Ocean Floor