

and see they have taped a travel poster over the front of their console color television and have a little black-and-white television sitting on top of it. The color television is on, understand; I can see images flitting on it on the other side of the travel poster. Now, my in-laws are professed enemies of

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technology. My father-in-law has come to terms with two pieces of machinery, his (mechanical) typewriter and his car. Any other sort of machinery, mechanical or electronic, he looks on with the greatest suspicion. He will call an electrician to change a fuse or a plumber for a drippy faucet. One of my experiments in uplift was to buy him a whistling tea kettle to heat water for coffee in to replace the little open saucepan he usually uses. They hated it and within weeks melted it on the burner. He also stopped using his camera because he claimed it took only black-and-white pictures. At one point he tried to convince me that computers and a career working with them were both bad things. Things were better before computers. What was his career? He was an air traffic controller for the Air Force. HMMMM!

Anyway, so I ask, why have you taped a travel poster over your television? Well, it seems the color television had a failure of some component that was intended to keep the picture from looking like something by Salvador Dali. So they taped a travel poster over the picture and put on top another television. But the little black-and-white sounds like it has a comb and a piece of tissue paper where it should have a speaker. They watch the black-and-white's picture and listen to the sound from the color television. All by themselves my in-laws had stumbled onto the concept of modular television.

So anyway, the next night I ask Evelyn if there is anything on the televisions. Well, there is but it is on channel three. My mother-in-law tells me we can't get that--the television picks up only UHF. Why's that? It just does. So I take a look. The television has a VHF antenna but the two wires where it attaches to the television are hanging loose in space. I tighten them into the two screws for the connection and channel three comes into view. "There's the picture but where's the sound?" my mother-in-law asks. It is true that the sound quality is pretty bad. We try

other stations and the sound is still very bad. I can't seem to adjust the sound. My mother-in-law tells me she really needs the sound. Now I know that attaching the VHF antenna has nothing to do with the UHF sound. It must have picked that moment for something to go wrong. So now it is my fault there is no sound.

Where is this all leading? It is in this way I have discovered the basic intelligence of S_t_a_r_T_r_e_k's Prime Directive. You don't try to bring technology to cultures not ready for it. I thought Newton Lee might be interested in that one.

2. The Jewish Museum in New York City is having a special exhibition, "Golem! Danger, Deliverance and Art," through April 2. An extended review of this exhibit appeared in the December 16 NEW YORK TIMES. Just for a quick background, a reprint of the introduction to an extensive article on the golem by Mark Leeper is attached; the full article appeared in the 09/04/85 issue of the SF

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Club newsletter, available at your local SF Club library. For the moment, suffice it to say that a golem is a statue, usually made out of clay, that is brought to life by mystical means. It is a Jewish legend, but golems figure prominently in German folktales. Almost definitely golem stories were the inspiration for Mary Shelley's F_r_a_n_k_e_n_s_t_e_i_n.)

The Jewish Museum is at Fifth Avenue and 92nd Street. Its hours on Sundays are from 11 AM to 6 PM (according to my latest schedule). And just a reminder: it is **not** open on Saturdays. [-ecl/mrl]

3. Do the dead return??? Who knows? Perhaps they do. The only way to find out for sure is to give the dead a try. In this spirit we are going to try to resurrect the institution of discussion meetings at Middletown. On February 8 we will celebrate Ash Wednesday by trying to bring discussion meetings back from the dead. We will have a discussion of the new movement in science fiction, cyberpunk. If you want to suggest specific books to discuss, send us mail and let us know. Join us and see if the art of conversation about science fiction still lives. More details to follow.

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ETERNITY by Greg Bear
Reviewed by Dale Skran
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Mr. Bear has produced an entertaining and imaginative sequel to E_o_n. _E_t_e_r_n_i_t_y isn't quite new enough or thought-provoking enough to be Hugo material, but your time will be well spent. Mr. Bear's envisionment of the contrasts between people who have access to extremely powerful cybernetic and other technologies is very convincing to me. I thought E_o_n would have a shot at the Hugo, but apparently it

didn't find its audience.

Eternity improves on the characterizations in Eon, and things fit together better. There is less of the "well, time for sex" interjection that was to be found in Eon. The alternate Earth part is the weakest since nothing that happens there really affects events very much. I found the final explanation of the Jart mentality and motivation fairly consistent.

THE ARCHITECTS OF HYPERSPACE by Thomas R. McDonough
Reviewed(?) by Dale Skran
Copyright 1988 Dale Skran

Avoid this turkey--"Jules Verne of the 80s" indeed. With sentences like "Plum carried a quantarifle and Sean a cyrogun of his own design. Each bore a roidknife--the sign of an experienced asteroid miner--sheathed on his thigh," I found it impossible to get past the first few pages. The author is a JPL SETI expert and this is his first novel. It shows.

RAIN MAN

A film review by Mark R. Leeper

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Capsule review: Barry Levinson's occasionally humorous drama of a razzle-dazzle car salesman and an autistic savant. This is perhaps Hoffman's most demanding role since his performance as Ratso Rizzo in M_i_d_n_i_g_h_t_C_o_w_b_o_y. R_a_i_n_M_a_n is one of the few films really worth seeing this holiday season. Rating: +2.

These days we see a lot of films about outsiders and how they see and fit into our society. S_p_l_a_s_h! showed us the theme with a mermaid; S_t_a_r_m_a_n, E.T., B_r_o_t_h_e_r_f_r_o_m_A_n_o_t_h_e_r_P_l_a_n_e_t, and any number of others have used aliens; M_o_s_c_o_w_o_n_t_h_e_H_u_d_s_o_n and even R_e_d_H_e_a_t did it with Soviets. Of course you do not have to go to another planet or the Soviet Union to find outsiders. We have institutions full of people whose view of the world is radically different from yours or mine. But where is the pleasure of seeing a film about people with so-called mental disorders? That is the stuff of television movies perhaps, but they rarely make it into theatrical films as anything but killers. But if anyone is going to make an original theatrical film about mental disability, few filmmakers can do it as well as Levinson.

Barry Levinson is one of these days' all-too-few filmmakers who is willing to take a chance on the type of film they make and then make it work for them. Besides making T_h_e_N_a_t_u_r_a_l--perhaps the best sports film ever--he made an enjoyable film about salesmen of aluminum siding, and, of course, his two best-known films, D_i_n_e_r and G_o_o_d_M_o_r_n_i_n_g,V_i_e_t_n_a_m. With the possible exception of G_o_o_d_M_o_r_n_i_n_g,V_i_e_t_n_a_m, his films are fresh and different from anything else being made.

In Levinson's latest film, R_a_i_n_M_a_n, Tom Cruise plays Charlie Babbitt. Babbitt is the kind of car dealer that the man who sold you your last car would really like to be, the kind of salesman you hope never to run into, and the kind of salesman which on your salary you probably never w_i_l_l run into. Charlie is a wheeler-dealer who may have his hand in many pots but when we see him he is dealing in ultra-expensive cars, razzle-dazzling them past the EPA, and making enormous profits. He uses people like toys and loves only money. At the death of his father his only emotion is greed. He is all ready to happily inherit millions, but instead gets a shock. At the reading of the will he finds out that his father has chosen to leave the bulk of the estate to someone else. (Why? Well, I may be the only reviewer in the world who doesn't give away that plot twist.) The actual beneficiary is Raymond, an autistic savant. What is an "autistic savant?" It is a person who generally lives in a world of his own, but in just a few skills he is good enough to boggle the mind.

Now Raymond (played by Dustin Hoffman) has a rather remarkable mind. Like most autistic minds, his usually is off in a twilight zone of unrelated thoughts. He talks a sort of verbal fruit cocktail. Yet at the same time he is capable of incredible mental gymnastics. Given two three-digit numbers he can visualize their product and simply read it off. Overturn a box of toothpicks and he can almost instantly count them just by looking. Given a date, he knows its day of the week. (Actually, I can do this one myself, but it takes me twenty seconds or so; Raymond knows instantly.) Charlie formulates a scheme to steal the inheritance, but as it progresses Charlie finds he must spend more time with Raymond than he ever expected.. Initially Charlie has no sense of wonder about Raymond's mind, Charlie is just one more person to use. But eventually Raymond's lightning flashes of numerical brilliance and his innocence begin to win over even Charlie.

As with M_i_d_n_i_g_h_t_C_o_w_b_o_y, Dustin Hoffman does not play the main character--at least the character was not written that way. But let us face it, the day that Hoffman cannot out-act Cruise, he might as well hang it up. This is Hoffman's movie as much as or more so than M_i_d_n_i_g_h_t_C_o_w_b_o_y was. Tom Cruise does an adequate acting job and no more is really necessary. Even if Cruise were a much better actor than he is, when Hoffman is on the screen all eyes would still be on Hoffman. If Hoffman fails at all in this film, it is in not really giving us enough insight into Raymond's mind. We see enough of Raymond's world-view to whet our appetite to see more, but we never get sufficient insight into who his mind works. Perhaps nobody but an autistic savant knows how an autistic savant thinks. But in a very disappointing holiday season's crop of films R_a_i_n_M_a_n stands out like Raymond himself does. Rate it a +2 on the -4 to +4 scale.

DIRTY ROTTEN SCOUNDRELS

A film review by Mark R. Leeper

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Capsule review: Enjoyable remake of B_e_d_t_i_m_e_S_t_o_r_y with only minor variations. The contest for ascendancy between two gigolos still makes a very funny comedy, perhaps more so because it has less competition than the story had in 1964. It is much like seeing a new production of a play you once enjoyed. It loses a point for borrowing so but from the original but still rates a +1.

Back in 1964 Ralph Levy, a television director, made the first of only two theatrical films he was to make before returning to television.

B_e_d_t_i_m_e_S_t_o_r_y was for the time a minor and somewhat fluffy comedy about two gigolos' contest to see which one would have to leave a French Riviera town too small to support more than one gigolo. There was Lawrence, played by David Niven, who had made Beaumont-sur-Mer his private hunting ground for finding rich women to fleece. And then there was Freddy, a brash young American soldier with no respect for the culture and no affection for the women he was preying on. Freddy was one of Marlon Brando's most memorable roles and perhaps the only time Brando ever got to play broad comedy. And Brando was hilarious throughout the film, but particularly when Freddy was pretending to be Ruprecht, who was the retarded product of too much inbreeding of

nobility.

With only minor changes to most of the script--if memory serves, most of the film even has the same dialogue--the script has been effectively recycled to make D_i_r_t_y_R_o_t_t_e_n S_c_o_u_n_d_r_e_l_s. B_e_d_t_i_m_e S_t_o_r_y's script was by Stanley Shapiro (who also produced that film) and Paul Henning. D_i_r_t_y_R_o_t_t_e_n S_c_o_u_n_d_r_e_l_s' executive producer Dale Launer cut some scenes (including a few of the better gags), rewrote the ending, and put his name in front of the other two for screen credit. The story remains the same. Whoever can be the first to charm \$50,000 from visiting soap queen Janet earns the right to rule the roost in Beaumont-sur-Mer. The loser must leave town. The new director, Frank Oz, does little with the principle characters that Levy did not. Michael Caine, the new Lawrence, plays his role surprisingly David-Niven-ish, right down to the thin moustache. Frank Oz seems to have known what he wanted from the part but his ideas were formed by seeing the earlier film. Steve Martin puts a little more of his own interpretation into Freddy, but in places like the Ruprecht scenes he is more mimicking Brando than creating his own character.

What is surprising about seeing the remake is how good the writing seems to be today. In 1964 one would have hardly considered B_e_d_t_i_m_e S_t_o_r_y to have had a really well-crafted script. Yet today that same

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script seems to be much closer to the caliber of A_F_i_s_h_C_a_l_l_e_d W_a_n_d_a than to that of B_e_e_t_l_e_j_u_i_c_e or S_c_r_o_o_g_e_d. It deals in genuinely funny situations, not just funny personalities. What was ordinary writing in 1964 is well above average in 1988. Had this been a completely original script, D_i_r_t_y_R_o_t_t_e_n S_c_o_u_n_d_r_e_l_s would have gotten an easy +2. As it stands it still gets a high +1 on the -4 to +4 scale.

The Golem: An Introduction
An article by Mark R. Leeper
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Back when I was ten or eleven years old I used to get monster movie bubble gum cards. They usually had familiar stills from monster movies. One, however, puzzled me a bit. It looked like a human-shaped furnace with glowing eyes and a disproportionately big fist. It was labeled simply "The Golem." There was no explanation as to what the Golem was. Since I usually recognized what was on these cards, I filed in the back of my mind that there is something called a "Golem" that I wanted to know more about. It didn't occur to me to look in a dictionary any more than it would to look up "Godzilla." Dictionaries never have the really interesting words!

A month or so later my parents were going to a Yiddish play put on at the Jewish Community Center. It was called "The Golem," and was written by H. Leivik. Now I knew darn well that my mother did not go to plays about monsters that looked like human-shaped furnaces with glowing eyes and disproportionately big fists. She saw B _ r _ i _ d _ e _ o _ f
 F _ r _ a _ n _ k _ e _ n _ s _ t _ e _ i _ n
when she was growing up and decided on the spot that any story with a monster was stupid. It had to be just a co-incidence of name, right? Well, my parents came back from the play and told me I would have liked the story..."it was weird." It was about a rabbi who made a man out of clay. At this point I realized that the bubble gum card and the play were somehow related, and even more surprising, this monster was somehow a Jewish monster.

I did some research into Golems and discovered that they are indeed creatures of Jewish folklore that have been the subject of monster movies. (Incidentally, there turned out to be one other traditional Jewish monster, a dybbuk. It is a possessing spirit, not too unlike the one in T _ h _ e _ E _ x _ o _ r _ c _ i _ s _ t .)

There are apparently several Golem stories in Jewish folklore, but I have found nothing but fleeting references to any Golem legend other than "The Golem of Prague."

The story is set in Prague in the 16th Century. The Jewish community is threatened by blood-libels--claims that they were murdering Christian children and using their blood to make matzoh. (Actually, Jewish law strictly forbids the consumption of any blood at all.) A Christian who murdered a child and planted it in a Jew's house could report the Jew. The Jew would be executed and his property would be split between the Christian who reported him and the government. Clearly the ghetto needed a very good watchman.

Rabbi Judah Loew used information from the Kabbalah--the central book of Jewish mysticism--to learn the formula by which God first made man out of clay, and with the help of two other pious men built a man

out of clay and brought him to life. The final step of this process was to place God's secret name on a parchment and place it in the forehead of the Golem.

Loew's Golem was between 7-1/2 and 9 feet tall and had tremendous strength, but had a very placid and passive disposition when not under orders to act otherwise. He also lacked the one faculty that only God can give, the power of speech. Because this giant was passive and mute, people in the ghetto assumed he was half-witted and the word "golem" has also come to mean "idiot."

One story about the early days of this Golem was probably inspired by "The Sorcerer's Apprentice." The Golem was told to fetch water, but was not told how much. The result was a minor flood. This tendency to do what he was told to do, not what he was expected to do, has endeared the Golem story to computer scientists like Norbert Wiener. It may also be part of the basis of Asimov's robot stories.

At night the Golem guarded the ghetto, catching all would-be libelists red-handed. He single-handedly ended the possibility of successfully blood-libeling the Jewish community. Loew then got the Emperor to end the practice of letting blood-libelers profit from their actions. When the Golem was no longer needed, Loew removed the parchment, returning the Golem to being a statue, and the statue was laid to rest in the attic of the synagogue.

A popular variation on the story has the Golem rebel and become an uncontrolled monster before being stopped and returned to clay. It has been speculated that Mary Shelley patterned F_r_a_n_k_e_n_s_t_e_i_n on this story.

The Golem has appeared several times on the screen, though only once in an English-language film. The first cinematic appearance was in D_e_r_G_o_l_e_m (1914) with Paul Wegener in the title role. The story deals with the modern discovery and re-animation of the Golem. This was apparently a lost film until it was found again in 1958. It still is almost never seen.

Wegener returned to the role in a second German film, also called D_e_r_G_o_l_e_m (1920). This film is loosely based on "The Golem of Prague." The Jews are portrayed as being weird magicians who live in a strange

expressionistic ghetto. In fact, the early parts of the film seems to presage the anti-Semitism that was soon to engulf Germany. One of the most interesting touches of the film is the subplot of Prince Florian. The beautiful Prince Florian wants to save the rabbi's daughter from the destruction that is to come to the Jews. However, Florian is so unctuous and disgusting that when he is killed by the Golem, the viewer is more relieved than shocked, and perhaps that is just what was intended. In any case, the Golem is able to avert destruction of the Jewish community. Then the Golem's own love for the rabbi's daughter is denied and he becomes a dangerous monster only to be destroyed by a child's hand. The rabbi then praises God for twice saving the Jews of

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the ghetto.

Wegener may have also made a lesser known German film, T_h_e_G_o_l_e_m_a_n_d_t_h_e_D_a_n_c_e_r, in 1917. The actual existence of this film has never been established. A French-Czech film called T_h_e_G_o_l_e_m was made in 1935. Harry Baur starred in the story which was done much in the style of a Universal horror film. The story deals with another tyrannical attempt to destroy Jews. Through much of the film, the rediscovered Golem remains chained in a tyrant's dungeon. Just when things are at their blackest, the Golem comes to life and destroys everything, once again saving the Jews.

A number of Czech comedies have been about the Golem, including T_h_e_G_o_l_e_m_a_n_d_t_h_e_E_m_p_e_r_o_r's_B_a_k_e_r (1951). In this, the Golem ends up as an oven for the baker.

The only English-language Golem film I know of is a British cheapie called I_t! (1967) with Roddy McDowell. A psychotic museum curator who lives with the corpse of his mother acquires the Golem of Prague and uses it for his own purposes. In the end, the Golem survives a nuclear blast that kills his master and he quietly walks into the sea.

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