

effort to read him, even in translation, the rewards are well worth it. Mainstream critics have compared him to Borges. Some of Lem's books are F_i_a_s_c_o, S_o_l_a_r_i_s, C_y_b_e_r_i_a_d, and T_h_e_F_u_t_u_r_o_l_o_g_i_c_a_l_C_o_n_g_r_e_s_s. We will discuss him and other continental SF authors

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on Wednesday, 10 May, in the MT Cafeteria -- look for the SF sign.

And apropos of this, the following question appeared in rec.arts.sf-lovers from ZZASSGL@cms.manchester-computing-centre.ac.uk:

For years I have read the books by Lem and been amazed by the fact that they are translations from the Polish. How on Earth do you translate a book like the Cyberiad and still retain the original intent of the author. I know that some of the translators of Lem's books have won international awards for their efforts.

Has anybody read the Polish editions of Lem's books? Are they better in the original? Are the translations different in any way - such as specifically Polish jokes or references being changed?

To which Arthur replies,

I tried to read C_y_b_e_r_i_a_d in Polish, and partly succeeded. I am not really a native speaker, and Lem does seem to use very complex grammar and a sophisticated vocabulary ([unlike] most US SF except Delany and Disch). Unfortunately, I have not read the English translation of C_y_b_e_r_i_a_d, so I cannot really say what has been lost (I am sure I lost a lot due to my inadequate Polish). S_o_l_a_r_i_s, which I read in English translation, was still quite a difficult read (compared to Tarkovsky's film of it, which is one of my favourite films). F_i_a_s_c_o's first chapter is a lot like S_o_l_a_r_i_s (again, I read it in

the English translation), but the rest of the book is almost colloquial in comparison. I should probably read the Polish original of F_i_a_s_c_o (i hope he did not write it in German, which I know less well) and compare the two.

Certainly this will be an element of discussion Wednesday as well.
[-ecl]

2. It is difficult to realize in these times when special effects have taken over science fiction films that there was a time when only a few science fiction films could afford to put in much in the way of effects. They were "A" films made mostly by George Pal. The one studio that really could afford to put good effects into its "B" films was Columbia, which had the services of Ray Harryhausen--the former apprentice to the man who did the effects for the original K_i_n_g_K_o_n_g, Willis O'Brien. On May 11, at 7 PM,

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we will show a trilogy of B-films Harryhausen made for Columbia:

Wonder on a Shoestring -- Films of Ray Harryhausen

TWENTY MILLION MILES TO EARTH (1957) dir. by Nathan Juran

IT CAME FROM BENEATH THE SEA (1955) dir. by Robert Gordon

EARTH VERSUS THE FLYING SAUCERS (1956) dir. by Fred Sears

(Note: All are decent; these films are shown in the order of general fan respect. Maltin rates the films 2-1/2, 3, and 3, respectively.)

Returning from the planet Venus a United States spacecraft crashes nose-first into the coastal waters off Sicily. On board are the crew--dead but for one nearly dead survivor, and the gelatinous embryo of a mysterious creature from Venus. Harryhausen created and animated the creature for TWENTY MILLION MILES TO EARTH, combining aspects of dinosaurs and humans. The early scenes of the creature prove that Harryhausen could really make his creatures act.

In IT CAME FROM BENEATH THE SEA, "it" refers to a mammoth octopus driven to seek new food sources which attacks submarines and modern

cities. The scene of the octopus attacking the Golden Gate Bridge has become a minor classic. The crisp business-like style was modeled on THEM.

EARTH VERSUS THE FLYING SAUCERS was an experiment in using stop-motion animation for craft and buildings being destroyed rather than creatures. The result is one of the more spectacular science fiction films (certainly of the B films) of the 1950s. The battle with the saucers over Washington DC climaxes the film and in some ways surpasses the imagination of WAR OF THE WORLDS.

3. WNYC (broadcast channel 31) will be rerunning the BBC version of John Wyndham's DAY OF THE TRIFFIDS, starting May 14 at 9 PM and running an hour a week for three weeks. This is a very close adaptation to the book and, in fact, you can follow almost page-by-page from the novel what you see on the screen. Do not confuse this with the inferior Howard Keel film; this is a very intelligent adaptation of a very good science fiction novel.

4. Mark's editorial on cotton in food drew the following response from Estes Slade:

O.K., enough is enough! I've sat and watched you rip at nearly everything man has worked hard at to create. I usually say "Not bad! Not bad!". But now my bearded friend, you've gone too far.

How could anyone accuse the Potato Chip Industry of feeding us nothing but cotton? If you'll read the

label carefully you'll note that in most cases it reads: "Cottonseed and/or Palm Oil, and/or Linseed Oil and/or peanut..." It seems to me that even THEY don't know what's in the chips. Maybe the label should read: "Cottonseed and/or Palm oil and/or fingernail and/or right thumb and/or Pixie and Dixie..."

Actually the name "potato chip" should tell the American public that IF they find any REAL potato at

all they should consider themselves lucky.

P.S. You are forgiven if you decide not to print opposing views.

Well, as you can see, we're always more than willing to print opposing views. [-ecl]

5. The Middletown branch of the Science Fiction Club has purchased Hugo nominees R_e_d_P_r_o_p_h_e_t (by Orson Scott Card) and I_s_l_a_n_d_s_i_n_t_h_e_N_e_t (by Bruce Sterling). [-ecl]

6. Note that the MT Chairperson has a new room number and a new e-mail address. [-ecl]

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Iron rusts from disuse, stagnant water loses its purity,
and in cold weather becomes frozen; so even does inaction
sap the vigors of the mind.

-- Leonardo Da Vinci

FIELD OF DREAMS
A film review by Mark R. Leeper
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Capsule review: A complex and witty fantasy film that features great performances by James Earl Jones and Kevin Costner. Even if you do not like our (stupid) national pastime, this film about ghosts of the White Sox and a quest is a solidly entertaining fantasy. Rating: low +3.

I do not like baseball. And because I do not like baseball, baseball films do not work on me as well as they do on other people. Most baseball movies assume that there is something somehow noble about playing baseball. I don't buy that. A good baseball for me is one that would still be good if you substituted professional wrestling as the game. P_r_i_d_e_o_f_t_h_e_Y_a_n_k_e_e_s just does not stack up very well under this criterion. You have to consider baseball important to respect Gehrig. B_u_l_l_D_u_r_h_a_m is an okay but not great character comedy. B_a_n_g_t_h_e_D_r_u_m S_l_o_w_l_y would still be a good study of the relationship of two men. I find that even with no respect for baseball, T_h_e_N_a_t_u_r_a_l remains a fine fantasy allegory of talent and treachery, of darkness and light. Now another baseball fantasy has come along with enough human values, enough fine acting, and a good enough script that it is well worth seeing even if (like me) you hate baseball. F_i_e_l_d_o_f_D_r_e_a_m_s is a real surprise: a (usually) genuine piece of quality writing for the screen.

Kevin Costner plays Ray Kinsella: a would-be ball player's son, a college activist in the late 1960s, and now an Iowa farmer. One day while working in the field he hears a disembodied voice tell him, "If you build it, he will come." After days of puzzling over hearing the message repeated, he has a vision that the "he" is Shoeless Joe Jackson of the White Sox (and, incidentally, of E_i_g_h_t_M_e_n_O_u_t), a personal hero of Ray's dead father. "It" seems to refer to a baseball diamond to be placed in Ray's cornfield. In time, the eight convicted White Sox have been wished out of the cornfield and are playing baseball in the field. Then another message comes and Ray finds himself on a mysterious mission to Boston to find controversial 1960s writer Terence Mann, supremely played by James Earl Jones. Jones's performance is quirky and brilliant. Mann's first meeting with Ray is worth the ticket price all by itself. Ray continues his ridiculous set of tasks and quests until at the end it all comes together and makes sense.

Faults? Well, over the rest of the story there is superimposed a rather prosaic "save the farm" plot that gets into the way of some of the better story-telling. Then toward the end of the film there is a rather gratuitous piece of cheap suspense. It is needed for the larger plot--almost every shot in this film is--but the actual cause of the suspense seems forced. Universal has taken a chance on an intelligent fantasy film with a complex script and has made one of the best films of

the year. I would give it a low +3 on the -4 to +4 scale. Pity it was about baseball.

VERNE MILLER

A film review by Mark R. Leeper

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Capsule review: Stupid and often incoherent teenage fantasy of a gangster film. Rating: -2.

I like gangster movies, particularly when they are based on true events. Now for months I've been seeing this one in the video store, daring me to rent it. It was called V_e_r_n_e_M_i_l_l_e_r and claimed to be the true story behind the notorious gangster and the Kansas City Massacre. Well, I'd heard of the Kansas City Massacre but had never seen it dramatized. I decided I would bone up on Verne Miller in my various reference books, then see how accurate the film was. Well, my first bad omen was that neither Sifakis's E_n_c_y_c_l_o_p_e_d_i_a_o_f_A_m_e_r_i_c_a_n_C_r_i_m_e nor Nash's B_l_o_o_d_l_e_t_t_e_r_s_a_n_d_B_a_d_m_e_n bore a listing for Verne Miller. This books have a lot of obscure hoods and if they didn't list Miller he must really be obscure.

So the film starts up and it was done by Alive Films. It seems to me Island and Alive merged to form the prestigious Island Alive, which released films such as T_h_e_K_i_s_s_o_f_t_h_e_S_p_i_d_e_r_W_o_m_a_n. The film claims to be the true story of Verne Miller. As I am watching, I look up the Kansas City Massacre. Yes, there is a reference to how a V_e_r_n Miller took part. I really believe that they are going to give me the true story if they cannot even get his name right! But except for the name this is one of the rare films that square with what historians say. That's because Miller is so obscure that the historians say next to nothing. In any case, it is hard to believe that the true story of Miller is as dull as this film, which concentrates more on Miller's sex life than on his career. We learn that he had a mansion staffed with twelve servants, all attractive women, most of whom had very liberal ideas of what their duties were. And all look like they come from the 1980s, not the 1920s.

This film sports the crudest and least accurate portrayal of Al Capone on record. It is just full of lines such as, "You like sex? You like to travel? Well, fuck off." I know that one would have gone over

big in my junior high. This is amateur filmmaking all the way. I would rate V _ e _ r _ n _ e _ M _ i _ l _ l _ e _ r a -2 on the -4 to +4 scale.

SCANDAL

A film review by Mark R. Leeper

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Capsule review: Fine, engrossing docu-drama about the Profumo affair that toppled the British government in 1963. Many fine ironies in the script. Is it redundant to say that John Hurt turns in a good performance?
Rating: +2.

Dr. Stephen Ward is the son of a vicar and a successful osteopath. His hobby is hobnobbing with the real newsmakers in the upper circles of the British (and some foreign) governments. One way he does this is that he finds young women who have natural beauty and develops them like a one-man finishing school, giving them some class and making them the kind of women men in government like to be around. Just having these women around makes Ward popular with his inner circle. When a friend in MI5--the British equivalent of our FBI--gets interested in Ward's activities along these lines it begins a chain of events that will eventually topple the British Conservative government.

S _ c _ a _ n _ d _ a _ l is the engrossing story of Stephen Ward and the entire Profumo affair. The story tells how Ward (beautifully and slightly seedily played by John Hurt) finds Christine Keeler (played by Joanne Whalley-Kilmer) as a somewhat cheap-looking in a girlie show. Like Pygmalion, or perhaps Svengali, he shows her a bit of the rich life and

begins tutoring her and friend Mandy Rice-Davies on how to get it ("you have to be very clever or very beautiful"). As the film portrays him, Ward has a passion for beauty and wants to be intimately but totally platonically involved in the lives of the women he has transformed. His interest is not sex, but helping his "babies" get what they want and at the same time Ward wants the feeling that, like James Bond, he is a man with power. This power, like the gratitude of the women he has transformed, he firmly refuses to exploit for any tangible advantage. His biggest payoff is the irony that the woman he trained has managed to have simultaneous affairs with the British Secretary of State for War John Profumo and Soviet military attache Eugene Ivanov. But just as Ward is seduced by a feeling of importance, Christine is also when the newspapers learn of the scandal two years later. And only when the government desperately needs a scapegoat does Ward realize how vulnerable he has left himself.

S c a n d a l seems very much the British equivalent of the American S t a r ' 8 0. While that film's Paul Snider does not have Dr. Ward's unselfish goals, both men are puppet masters who instinctively know how to make women attractive and how to make them stars. Both films depend very heavily on erotic photography independent of their narrative values. Both films tell of Svengali destroyed by overreaching himself.

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The film is sprinkled with familiar actors. Joanne Whalley-Kilmer was previously the nurse in T h e S i n g i n g D e t e c t i v e. Ian McKellan plays the nervous Profumo with appropriate style considering he has the strangest-looking hairdo of the pre-punk era. We see little of Deborah Grant as Mrs. Profumo, but a side note of interest is that the real Mrs. Profumo was Valerie Hobson, who played the title role in B r i d e o f F r a n k e n s t e i n. (Think about it before you try to correct me.)

S c a n d a l punctuates its story--as so many films about the recent past do--with a broad choice of music of the period. But no piece of music is better used than "[Listen,] Do You Want to Know a Secret" superimposed over a montage of scandal-laden newspaper headlines. This is one more entry in a run of good recent films. I rate it a +2 on the -4 to +4 scale.

