

sentence (wondering what that rush of air was, and where I've gone) and rush off to the book store.

Tim Powers, who wrote T_h_e_A_n_u_b_i_s_G_a_t_e_s, has written a swashbuckler. It has pirates, ships, battles and swordplay. But, it also has

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magic, spells, intrigue, rituals and greater powers (no pun intended). All of the elements are done well: the plot, the characters, the atmosphere, and the magic. Tim Powers has created a fully realized Caribbean in which he plays out his story. Since I abhor spoilers, there isn't much I can say about the plot. There are several subplots, including the required ones about love and loyalty. But there are others - about the pursuit of power, the battle between magic and technology, and and the price of knowledge - that make this far more than a standard swashbuckler.

Powers adds a twist to the usual relationship between iron and magic and weaves it into the story so well that I expect to see it adopted by other authors. In fact the magical episodes are so good and so important to the story that I don't begrudge the time spent on them at the expense of the swordplay. Speaking of which, unlike Ellen Kushner's novel S_w_o_r_d_s_p_o_i_n_t, O_n_S_t_r_a_n_g_e_r_T_i_d_e_s does not cheat you out of the climactic swordfight towards which it progresses throughout. Tim Powers delivers a magical swashbuckler in every way.

2. There are in life just a handful of those moments, those instants when the chaos suddenly becomes order, when the planets line up, when understanding and enlightenment come, when suddenly you feel that the universe is in fact ordered and sane and perhaps no so far beyond the human intellect to comprehend. Martin Gardner calls it the "Aha!" experience. Colin Wilson claims these moments keep mathematicians young and is why some mathematicians lived extraordinarily long lives. It is the moment when all the pieces of the puzzle fit together. It is one brief instant of interstellar insight. It is the sortori! It is the blinding instant of truth, understanding, knowledge. I have had one of those instants.

And, as so often happens with enlightenment, the instant was

brought about by the least likely and most intellectually unpromising circumstances. In this case a woman friend of mine got her hair set in what is commonly known as a "permanent." And it was a particularly unflattering permanent. This is not usually the stuff of cosmic enlightenment, but what usually is?

Now understand that I, myself, am a fairly conservative dresser. I have maybe seven or eight pairs of pants and perhaps twice that many shirts. So there are at most about 128 possible pairings of shirts and pants and of that number, probably over a hundred of the pairings give you a combination of shirt and pants that do not look too bad together. I have learned to recognize the handful of combinations that do not go together. My method of getting dressed is to hang the last pair of pants I wore (or got from the wash) on the left of the array of hanging pants and to take the pair on the far right and wear them. Then I pick a shirt, almost at random, double-check that it will not form one of the "forbidden pairings,"

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and that's the shirt I wear. This makes for an ordered existence but let's face it, I'm not going to make the cover of _G_e_n_t_l_e_m_a_n'_s _Q_u_a_r_t_e_r_l_y.

My wife Evelyn, on the other hand, dresses with what I once dared to call a "sense of humor." That, indeed, may be what it is, but there are better and safer ways to put the same idea to a woman. Evelyn seems to be able to wear (well!) a broad array of clothing, much of which would have made Salvador Dali seasick. She will wear to work a deerstalker cap (a sign of her great love of Sherlock Holmes), a jacket she got (used) from a Canadian Air Force Uniform, and/or a pair of baggy imitation leather pants that I have cautioned her on many occasions make her look like a patent leather tuning fork. Evelyn will put one of these combinations to wear to a party and ask if I think she should wear this outfit. I'll have to remind her, no, I don't drink.

Well, as I say, Evelyn will occasionally ask my opinion of what she is wearing and I will give her as frank an opinion as I can with polite language. She will weigh and consider my opinion for approximately the half-life of a muon particle and then decide that she is going to wear whatever she damn well wants to wear.

Okay, fine. So far I am not happy with the situation, but it does not have any deep philosophical implications. It is simply a disagreement about a small matter of taste. (Well, perhaps not so small.) But then when I see Evelyn later, say after she has worn said outfit to work, she tells me everybody told her how nice she looked. Everybody? Yes, just about everybody she ran into commented on what a pretty outfit she was wearing. Now it is conceivable that, say, near strong magnetic forces you could find a field that strongly distorts aesthetics. But if so it is a new force and one I know nothing about. And if so it is an effect that has not been catalogued in any work of physics I have ever heard of. Clearly there is some phenomenon going on here that goes beyond that which is known and accepted, or so I was afraid. This sort of event would happen periodically and fairly frequently over the length of our relationship and it began to bother me more and more.

Then my friend came to work with a permanent. And there I stood looking, mouth open, at this hairdo that looked more like a three-dimensional map of the convection currents in a boiling pot of Oodles of Noodles. And she saw me staring at this thin on her head and asked, "What do you think of my new hair style?"

"Uh...it's very attractive. It frames your face very nicely."

"Well, thank you."

And then came the flash.

3. While we are discussing physics, I would like to ask a question of the people who have a better understanding of it than I do. Much of our knowledge of the size and age of the universe has implicit in it the following assumption: if objects A and B are fixed in space and A is giving off light at a certain frequency, B will receive the light at the same frequency. It seems to be true over short distances within our experience, but the same was true of Newton's laws. I guess if light shifts to the blue side over

great distances, distant objects that are red-shifted really should be red-shifted more: they are traveling away from us faster than we think. Then they took less time than we think to get to their present position, so the universe would be younger than we think. Natural red-shifting of light would similarly make the universe older. I am aware Michelson-Morley showed the speed of light to be constant (at least in a vacuum), but are we sure the frequency of light is conserved by traveling great distances in a vacuum?

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Egotists always have the last word. Once and for all they establish the fact that their minds cannot be changed.

-- Marcel Proust

INDIANA JONES AND THE LAST CRUSADE

A film review by Mark R. Leeper

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Capsule review: Forget that Indian thing. This is the r_e_a_l_R_a_i_d_e_r_s_o_f_t_h_e_L_o_s_t_A_r_k_I_I. Slightly more realistic than R_a_i_d_e_r_s, a little more concentration on character, and less on chases, this is a solid action adventure film putting the series back on track. George Lucas needs a hit and for the first time since R_e_t_u_r_n_o_f_t_h_e_J_e_d_i he deserves one. Rating: high +2.

It is no real secret. The Hollywood wonder-boy of twelve summers ago and much of the time since, George Lucas, is hurting for money. Things have not really panned out for him. H_o_w_a_r_d_t_h_e_D_u_c_k, which featured the greatest technological duck special effects the screen has ever seen, laid an egg. And it was n_o_t a golden egg. That was only one of several projects that have enhanced neither Lucas's fortune nor his reputation. Lucas needs a hit. That much seems to be fact. My opinion is that Lucas knows how to have a pit if all he wants is a hit rather than trying something new and original. He just makes another one of his series films. It takes too long to do a S_t_a_r_W_a_r_s film, so he did another Indiana Jones film instead. The one drawback is 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 was a disappointment and done much more in the Spielberg style than in the style Lucas put into R_a_i_d_e_r_s_o_f_t_h_e_L_o_s_t_A_r_k. Spielberg directs all the Indy films, of course, but I suspect some of the exaggerated cartoonish feel of the second film was Spielberg's. And many of the fans preferred the style of the first film. All Lucas really needed for a hit was to do again what he did with R_a_i_d_e_r_s. And he did. The style of the first film is back. Welcome back.

I_n_d_i_a_n_a_J_o_n_e_s_a_n_d_t_h_e_L_a_s_t_C_r_u_s_a_d_e semi-fulfills Lucas's unrealistic promise that each episode would be a prequel to the one made before it. Harrison Ford is not getting younger. So of the three films, this takes place the latest, but there is an extended flashback in which we learn a lot of H=how Indiana Jones became Indiana Jones. The young Indy is played by River Phoenix, who almost resembles a young Harrison Ford, and in fact played Ford's son in M_o_s_q_u_i_t_o_C_o_a_s_t. In Indy's early adventure we see where he got a lot of what he becomes and even what he wears. When he gets older we also get introduced to his father (voiced, and in later scenes played, by Sean Connery). Indy is once again after a Biblical treasure. Earlier it was the greatest prize of the Old Testament, the Ark of the Covenant. This time it is the greatest prize of the New testament, the Holy Grail.

Do you remember what you liked about the first film? If you said Karen Allen, you are out of luck. This time Indy's female sidekick is Elsa Schneider (played by Alison Doody), the most attractive of the

traveling companions of the three films, but also the one with the least real personality. That means in this aspect, as in most aspects, this is better than the second Indy film but not up to the original. If you said you liked just about anything else about the original--the gritty chases, the fights, the baroque Nazi military equipment, the ancient sites that are gamuts of booby traps, the snakes, whatever--you are in luck. It is all back and more. You also get Indy's love/hate relationship with his father. You get to see more of Sallah and Marcus Brody (played by John Rhys-Davies and Denholm Elliot respectively). One disappointment is that they did a Nigel-Bruce on Denholm Elliot's character (i.e., they turned a perfectly serious and interesting character into a buffoon). But for almost any reason that you liked the first Indy film, you will also like the third. On the -4 to +4 scale, I

give R_a_i_d_e_r_s_o_f_t_h_e_L_o_s_t_A_r_ka +3, 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

a flat 0, and I_n_d_i_a_n_a_J_o_n_e_s_a_n_d_t_h_e_L_a_s_t

C_r_u_s_a_d_e a high +2, missing a +3

only for its lack of originality.

