

Morgan Sullivan (played by Jeremy Northam) is a nerdish sort dominated by his overbearing wife. But the job he is taking is anything but nerdish. DigiCorp and Sunways are among the two most powerful corporations in the world. They are vicious rivals. DigiCorp has hired him to spy on Sunways. His job is to not be very noticeable. He is to attend conferences under the false name Jack Thursby and during the conference to turn on a recorder disguised as a pen. Sullivan is fascinated by his new world of codes and skullduggery and allows himself to be pulled into the strange labyrinth of industrial espionage and the cold war of the two giant corporations. Almost immediately the boring conferences get more interesting when he starts seeing an Asian woman (Lucy Liu) who may also be playing the same game.

Though films with a similar plot have been made, I found this one genuinely exciting, and to me it has the feel of a science fiction novel. While some of the ideas now familiar, standard paranoiac fantasies, I think the execution is great, creating genuine excitement. This is a lot for a seven-million-dollar production to do. The film has little homages to films like NORTH BY NORTHWEST, SECONDS, and THE MANCHURIAN CANDIDATE.

There are some interesting visual tricks. The film begins almost black and white as Sullivan is unsure of himself in the shadowy world of industrial espionage. As his character develops and becomes more sure of himself the colors fill in more and more vivid. Sullivan's very world has changed. Jeremy Northam traverses the path from nerdish to superman with impressive grace. Only Lucy Liu seems a little out of place in a role that really did not need her martial arts skills, but could have used an actress that fitted in better with the story. Director Vincenzo Natali (CUBE, NOTHING, and SPLICE) has a sure hand and could be a major talent.

This film is actually much better than Natali's higher profile films CUBE and SPLICE. I rate it a +3 on the -4 to +4 scale or 9/10.

Film Credits: <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0284978/>

What others are saying: <http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/cypher/>

CYPHER plays occasionally on cable and it available from NetFlix.

[-mrl]

This Week's Reading (book comments by Evelyn C. Leeper):

When I started reading science fiction in high school and college, I read the classic authors of the time: Asimov, Clarke, Heinlein, and later Hal Clement and Robert Silverberg, and (in a retro moment) Olaf Stapledon. Time passed, and my "go-to" authors became authors such Kim Stanley Robinson and Connie Willis. (Along the way Jorge Luis Borges became a permanent fixture.)

Then I went through a phase of focusing on less well-known authors: Jeffrey E. Barlough and Christopher Priest for novels, and Bao Shu, Ted Chiang, Rhys Hughes, and Ken Liu for short fiction. (Okay, Ted Chiang is not exactly obscure, nor is Ken Liu.)

And now? My "go-to" authors of today are Becky Chambers, Sylvia Garcia-Moreno, and Martha Wells.

So my current reading that I would recommend (without long or even short reviews) includes Ted Chiang's "Op-Ed from the Future--It's 2059 and the Rich Kids Are Still Winning" (<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/27/opinion/ted-chiang-future-genetic-engineering.html>), Ken Liu's "Timekeeper's Symphony" (https://clarkesworldmagazine.com/liu_09_22/), Becky Chambers's RECORD OF A SPACEBORN FEW, and Sylvia Garcia-Moreno's THE DAUGHTER OF DOCTOR MOREAU. [-ecl]

Mark Leeper
mleeper@optonline.net

Quote of the Week:

Happiness is having a large, loving, caring, close-knit family in another city.

--George Burns

Tweet

Go to [our home page](#)