

how silly an excess having all that surface area really was. Who really can use 60 square feet of words all at once? It is a much better idea to have only four or five square inches of just the information you want right at your finger tips. You can store the rest on a chip or a tape or something and have the wonderful world

THE MT VOID

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of electronics bring you just the information you want.

In this spirit I was most impressed to see that the more reverent among us no longer have to turn to The Good Book for inspiration, now technology has made it possible to access The Good Electronic Calculator. Yes, for just about 200 smackers you can get yourself the Bible in handy pocket calculator format. This little baby has the entire Bible in its little chips. You can call up any verse you have a need for and scroll down it to your heart's content. Now you may have thought that technology had done great things for religion before. You, yourself, may have found your faith strengthened by a vacuum-formed polyethylene inspirational statue on your dashboard or may have gone to sleep with your eyes fixed on a cross made from glow-in-the-dark, luminescent plastic. But take it from me, you've ain't never had your faith goosed up the way it is going to be when you actually have the honest-to-god Bible right there in silicon and batteries and plastic, the way it really was intended all along. (Oh, incidentally, they really ought to change that name "Bible." It comes from the Latin word "biblia" for book. With Latin dead and books dying, they really h a v e to come up with a name that is more in tune with the times and isn't inadvertently pushing competitors' products.)

But, hey, if you are going to go to look for this baby don't expect to find the Bible on any sort of a standard-looking calculator. I mean this is not just your standard Holy-Trinity-on-a-four-banger. But this gizmo shouldn't look like other calculators, just like the Bible isn't like any other book. It is in a smart-looking casing that not only reminds people of a scroll, but it stands up a little better on a desk. It comes in a very reverent deep-red color. I kind of thought that there should be a discount for Jews who would need less of the memory. It would have been a clever design to be able to snap out a New Testament chip and either give a discount or be able to snap in an Apocrypha chip. Hey, speaking of that, I

hope it has an interface where you can snap in a bunch of Talmud modules. That could be really useful.

And all this runs on four size-AA batteries. They didn't say but I suspect that they don't even have to be long-life batteries. Someone Else will take care of the long life. But I am sure that after the first night of playing with this new electronic Bible it can sit on a shelf and collect dust like the best standard Bible you have ever owned.

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DARKMAN

A film review by Mark R. Leeper
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Capsule review: This film does not have gaps in its logic, it has gorges. Sam Raimi's transition from horror to science fiction shows up serious problems in his plotting. Five people wrote the screenplay, but it plays as if it were ten. And a bigger budget is pushing Raimi's visual sense to the pretentious. A sad disappointment after his E_v_i_l_D_e_a_d_I_I. Rating: -1.

Sam Raimi is a director who came from out of nowhere to become a major name in the horror film genre. His film E_v_i_l_D_e_a_d (1983), produced on a shoestring, was nonetheless a very impressive debut. He had a lot of novel variations on what was basically a zombie film. Raimi's second film, E_v_i_l_D_e_a_d_I_I (1987), proved to be a terrifically inventive horror film with an amazing array of weird twists and visual playing. You have little idea watching E_v_i_l_D_e_a_d_I_I what is likely to happen next but you can be fairly sure it will further twist the horror

film clichés into a knot. With D_a_r_k_m_a_n Raimi is taking on the comic book superhero film and trying to twist it the way he twisted the zombie film in his previous efforts.

With D_a_r_k_m_a_n, however, Raimi is telling a more complex story than before and it shows up weaknesses in his story-telling abilities. In fact, by making the short trip from horror/fantasy to what is basically science fiction, Raimi has managed to turn his greatest virtue into his greatest flaw. What was good about the E_v_i_l_D_e_a_d films, particularly the sequel, was the feeling that just about anything could happen. That is the same feeling we get with D_a_r_k_m_a_n, but it is a fault. As a fantasy, the E_v_i_l_D_e_a_d films take place in a world of the supernatural. D_a_r_k_m_a_n occurs in the world of the rational and it has a much more complex plot. With a rational film you have the right to observe that something does not make sense.

Liam Neeson plays Dr. Westlake, a scientist working on synthetic flesh à la 1932's D_r._X. His girlfriend Julie Hastings (played by Frances McDormand) runs afoul of some particularly sadistic heavies and they horribly disfigure Westlake in an attempt to kill him. To treat Westlake, his doctors cut his pain sensors, a standard procedure operation that leaves Westlake with great strength and also makes him just a little mentally unbalanced. As his doctor (Jenny Agutter in a cameo) explains, this is pretty generally what the operation does. The first question to ask is why there are not a bunch of very strong people running around. Even if, as the doctor suggests, the vast majority of people who have the operation do not survive, wouldn't the few who do have the Darkman's strength?

Westlake, disfigured, then escapes and hides in sewers with perhaps more than just a slight tip of the hat to the 1943 P_h_a_n_t_o_m_o_f_t_h_e_O_p_e_r_a. Eventually he finds a place and stocks it with very advanced scientific equipment. (How does he find such a nice place that is just abandoned? Where does he get the equipment? Who knows?) He uses his synthetic flesh to make computer-generated masks that are perfect replicas of people using only the information in a single photograph. (Bosh--he could not possibly get all the information he needs from so few photographs.) When he puts on the mask he can look so much like the other person as to fool even close associates. (How does he get the

right voice? Assume the right stature?) Apparently after having built this laboratory with his own hands he suddenly discovers that all along his hands have been as badly destroyed as his face. (How could he do as much as he did without realizing the state of his hands?) The logic of D_a_r_k_m_a_n is not just bad, it is shockingly bad.

The technical credits are somewhat better. The score by Danny Elfman is somewhat in his B_a_t_m_a_n style but stands fairly well on its own. With his first real budget, Raimi has managed a number of nice visual effects though at times he almost borders on being pretentious. One such touch has Hastings watching the death of her lover. First the background fades to a graveyard, then her clothing fades to a black mourning dress. A number of visual touches seem to borrow from A_l_t_e_r_e_d S_t_a_t_e_s. But there are also surprising visual gaffes such as shots shown in mirror image with tell-tale backwards lettering. At one point we see a truck with a clown smile face on it destroyed and seconds later we see it miraculously undestroyed. The tone of the film abruptly shifts to tongue-in-cheek toward the end, damaging the feeling.

D_a_r_k_m_a_n has been getting some very favorable comment from critics. And I tried to turn my mind off and just enjoy the film. But I have to say D_a_r_k_m_a_n did not do very much for me. I give it a -1 on the -4 to +4 scale.

THE WITCHES

A film review by Mark R. Leeper

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Capsule review: Jim Henson's last film is a charming modern fairy tale of a boy foiling a plot by the witches of England. It captures some of the fun horror of traditional fairy tales. Unfortunately, it loses some of its inspiration about mid-film. The story would be ideally suited to animation and doing it in live action is an impressive if not altogether necessary feat.

Rating: low +2.

The perfect medium for showing imaginative images visually is animation. With animation, if you can visualize it, you can put it on a screen. 1973's F_a_n_t_a_s_t_i_c_P_l_a_n_e_t, while lacking in story values, may well be the most visually imaginative science fiction film ever made. Unfortunately for animated fantasy, S_t_a_r_W_a_r_s came out four years later and showed that imaginative live action was coming of age and animated fantasy became a sideshow. Only the Japanese seem to recognize the possibilities of animation as a medium for fantasy, and even in Japan fantastic animation is falling short of the real potential of the medium. In the United States and Europe audiences want live action even if it is at the expense of imagination. Films such as B_a_t_m_a_n and D_i_c_k_T_r_a_c_y are trying to impress the world with how well they can overcome problems that would not even arise with animation. D_i_c_k_T_r_a_c_y was able to make some expensive boxoffice stars really look much like the comic strip characters. B_a_t_m_a_n was less successful visually in making Jack Nicholson look like the Joker. Both of these films could have had better stories and looked absolutely perfect had they been animated, but they would have died at the boxoffice. Audiences really want live action and are quite willing to sacrifice story values and imagination for the thrill of seeing things done in live action.

T_h_e_W_i_t_c_h_e_s is a fine new live-action fantasy film that almost matches in imagination and charm what Walt Disney was able to do with animation back in the 1940s.

Fairy tales are not all sweetness and fun, and they are not just for children. Most fairy tales are horror stories told on a level that all ages can appreciate them. And that is just what T_h_e_W_i_t_c_h_e_s is. From the very beginning this film lays down some blood-curdling folklore about witches. Some of it is really the stuff paranoia is made of. Witches can live right next door, they smell children from great distances, they have no toes. Take note, those of you who feel children must be protected from the sort of scary stories that children have been raised on from time immemorial. The stories are told to young Luke (played by Jasen Fisher) by his Norwegian grandmother (played by Swedish actor/director Mai Zetterling) and it is a good thing she told him. He

shortly has to fight a convocation of the witches of England in their plot to turn all English children into mice. And shortly is how he has to fight them, since he is one of the first two children turned into mice.

Jim Henson used his Muppet technology to portray the mouse Luke when he does something non-mouselike. When a trained mouse can be used, it is. The problem there is that the Muppet mouse has a cute face that the real mouse apparently found very difficult to mimic. The combining of realistic mouse movements with a humanlike personality for the mouse would be, of course, much simpler for Disney to do in animation than it was for Henson to do in live action, and the result would have been much more successful. The makeup for the witches is similarly nicely executed. Anjelica Huston's Grand High Witch makeup fails to convince totally that this is really the face of a living being, but it is well-detailed.

T h e W i t c h e s is, and is likely to remain, Nicholas Roeg's only children's film. (He claims he made it for his own newly-born child.) Allan Scott's script, based on the novel by Roald Dahl, raises some gooseflesh early on, but loses much of its power to chill once Luke is a cute mouse and the story concentrates more on his mission than on the horror of the witches. Scott also manages to throw in some double entendres clearly not intended for the younger audience. In smaller roles there is Rowan Atkinson (television's Black Adder) as a hotel manager clearly of the Basil Fawlty style. Bill Peterson (Dickie Bird in Bill Forsythe's C o m f o r t a n d J o y) plays the father of a mouse who once was a gluttonous child.

It would be unfair to down-rate this film because it is not doing anything to advance animated film. The film as it stands i s charming and works (at least generally) in live action. It is a nice fantasy and deserves some credit for not aiming specifically at a youth or teenage market. It is just a decent fantasy film that is there for whatever audience it finds. I rate it a low +2 on the -4 to +4 scale.

