

to clear up some problems in the sale of some jewels from Tsarist Russia. Initially a political fanatic and patriot, she finds herself falling in love with a gigolo (played by Melvyn Douglas) and with Western decadence in Paris.

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I had a chance to hear a 1939 radio adaptation of the film, complete with laugh track, just recently and after the fall of the Soviet Union. You would think that after the film's attitudes about the Soviet Union have been vindicated, that the dogma Ninotchka recites would sound even sillier. Au contraire. The Communism may have failed, but what sounded like absurd Soviet political correctness in 1939 just sounds politically correct in the 1990s in the United States. The supposedly indoctrinated Ninotchka would be very much at home in the 1990s United States.

Let's look at Ninotchka in the first part of the Lubitsch film. Start with the basic situation. Three Russians in Paris are waiting on a train platform for an envoy from Moscow and suddenly realize, to their surprise, that the envoy is the plainly dressed Garbo.

Iranoff: What a charming idea for Moscow to surprise us with a l_a_d_y comrade.

Kopalski: If we had know we would have greeted you with flowers.

Iranoff: Ahh, yes.

Ninotchka: Don't make an issue of my womanhood. We are here for work, all of us.

Ninotchka is always practical. On seeing the suite of rooms her predecessors had rented in the fancy hotel:

Ninotchka: How much does this cost?

Iranoff: Two thousand francs.

Ninotchka: A week?

Iranoff: A day.

Ninotchka: Do you know how much a cow costs, Comrade Iranoff?

Iranoff: A cow?

Ninotchka: Two thousand francs. If I stay here a week I will cost the Russian people seven cows. Who am I to cost the Russian people seven cows?

These conversations were apparently amusing to 1939 audiences. Replace Russia with a corporation and we could be hearing Melanie Griffith in W_o_r_k_i_n_g_G_i_r_l. Even more so at the end of the scene, when Ninotchka has already formulated an action plan and sends Kopalski to get the best lawyer in Paris and Iranoff to get her the section of the Civil Code on properties. In 1939 this was very

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unusual characterization for a film. Today it is nearly cliché.

Ninotchka seems obsessed with hard facts and figures, to the amusement of Leon (played by Melvyn Douglas). They have the following exchange in the street when they first meet. Ninotchka is flat and expressionless throughout and very businesslike:

Ninotchka: Correct me if I am wrong. We are facing north, aren't we?

Leon: Facing north. Well, now, I'd hate to commit myself without my compass. Pardon me; are you an explorer?

Ninotchka: No, I am looking for the Eiffel Tower.

Leon: Ah. Good heavens, is that thing lost again? Oh, are you interested in a view?

Ninotchka: I am interested in the Eiffel Tower from a technical standpoint.

Leon: Technical? No, no, I'm afraid I couldn't be of much

help from that angle. You see, a Parisian only goes to the top of the Tower in moments of despair to jump off.

Ninotchka (still deadpan): How long does it take a man to land?

...

Ninotchka (still deadpan): I'm interested only in the shortest distance between these two points. Must you flirt?

Leon: Well, I don't have to but I find it natural.

Ninotchka: Suppress it.

These days a response stronger than "suppress it" might be given, but still her reactions do not seem at all out of keeping with the United States in the 1990s. the same conversation ends with:

Ninotchka: You're very sure of yourself, aren't you?

Leon: Well, nothing's happened recently to shake my self-confidence.

Ninotchka: I have heard of the arrogant male in Capitalistic society. It is having a superior earning power that makes you that way.

Leon: A Russian! I love Russians! Comrade, I've been fascinated by your Five-Year Plan for the last fifteen years.

Ninotchka: Your type will soon be extinct.

The rhetoric is somebody's idea of Stalinist rhetoric, but the concerns seem quite modern. One final exchange to show Ninotchka's 1990s pride at being able to take care of herself and her unwillingness to be dominated by others:

Ninotchka: My father and mother wanted me to stay and work on the farm, but I preferred the bayonet.

Leon: The bayonet? Did you really?

Ninotchka: I was wounded before Warsaw.

Leon: Wounded how?

Ninotchka: I was a sergeant in the Third Cavalry Brigade. Would you like to see my wound?

Leon: I'd love to.

Ninotchka: [throws head forward to show back of neck] A Polish lancer. I was sixteen.

Leon: Poor Ninotchka. Poor, poor Ninotchka.

Ninotchka: Don't pity me. Pity the Polish lancer. After all, I'm still alive.

The irony, of course, is that while the Stalinist system that N_i_n_o_t_c_h_k_a was satirizing has fallen, the attitudes that were being lampooned have not fallen with it. The revolution that Ninotchka was so committed to at first may indeed still be taking place. Ernst Lubitsch may have thought he was only poking fun at another country, but he was actually poking fun at the future. He probably never expected the day would come when Ninotchka would seem the most normal character in the film.

2. The next discussion book, James Hogan's E_n_t_o_v_e_r_s_e is available in paperback at Encore Books in Middletown in the Pathmark Shopping Center at the corner of Route 35 and New Monmouth Road. [-ecl]

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...mtgzfs3!leeper

MATINEE

A film review by Mark R. Leeper
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Capsule review: Teenage love, the Cuban Missile Crisis, and a likable, stop-at-nothing film producer make for a film that is a lot of fun. It also has something to say about the nobility of the bad sci-fi films of the 1950s and 1960s. The writing flounders a bit in the second half but the memories are terrific. Rating: low +2 [-4 to +4].

This one is going to be hard for me to be objective about. I think Joe Dante may be a couple of years older than I, loved the same films I loved when I was growing up. He and I subscribed to the same monster magazines and probably had the same books in our libraries; we idolized the same filmmakers; we were both walking encyclopedias about the same films. Now he has reached into his past, grabbed it, and put it on film and at the same time he put a lot of my past forward too.

It is October 1962 in Key West, Florida, and the second biggest thing happening in the world is the Cuban Missile Crisis. People are going crazy because they might die at any minute. But right now the big thing happening is that Lawrence Woolsey is coming to town. The great William-Castle-like filmmaker of lousy monster movies is coming to key West to test-market M_a_n_t!, the story of a man turning into a giant ant. Woolsey is a genius at promoting his films and uses every trick in the book and some never in any book to fill the seats with joy buzzers below and frightened kids above.

M_a_t_i_n_e_e is a film with a terrific first half. This is a film that manages to tie together a teenage love story, a serious anti-war theme, a satire of science fiction films, and the comic story of Woolsey trying to have a successful sneak preview. John Goodman's Woolsey is extremely well-written, appearing at first to be a stop-at-nothing self-promoter and then proving to have the char, and natural showmanship of a Will Rogers. Cathy Moriarty plays Ruth Corday, a great foil for Woolsey. She stars in M_a_n_t! and then brazenly has to don a nurse's costume and play the ersatz "nurse in attendance" at the showing. All the time she is letting Woolsey know exactly how stupid the entire proceedings are. Moriarty is great, but the role feels as if it was written for Mary Woronov. Simon Fenton (of T_h_e_P_o_w_e_r_o_f_O_n_e) plays Gene Loomis, starting in high school and dating for the first time. Currently he is coming home to a family terrified of the missile crisis and worried for the Navy father who is off enforcing the embargo of Cuba.

It is a great start, but the screenplay by Charlie Haas falls apart in the second half. Much of the logic of the story breaks down with some of the plot not making sense at all. No film made in the 1950s ever combined so many gimmicks to bring in an audience. But that exaggeration is almost acceptable compared to the miles-over-the-top lampoon of the 1950s and 1960s films themselves. Any film with the budget M_a_n_t! required really would have been better crafted. The writing might have been dull, but it is unlikely to have been so melodramatic or vaudevillian. The distorted style of M_a_n_t! is inconsistent with the rest of the film.

Part of the fun of M_a_t_i_n_e_e is picking out all the allusions to 1950s and 1960s films. Of course, there are the seat vibrators of T_h_e_T_i_n_g_l_e_r, the insurance policies of M_a_c_a_b_r_e, and the monster unveiling of T_h_e_F_l_y, but see if you can recognize the music borrowed from the 1950s Universal sci-fi films and even snatches of H_o_u_s_e_o_f_F_r_a_n_k_e_n_s_t_e_i_n. Even the "M" in the M_a_n_t! logo is borrowed from T_h_e_D_e_a_d_l_y_M_a_n_t_i_s. And the film is peppered with actors from 1950s films. Not Kenneth Tobey for once--at least I did not notice him--but Robert Cornthwaite, Kevin McCarthy (who plays General Ankrum, a reference to Morris Ankrum who often played upper-rank military men), and William Schallert. Also present in nice ironic roles are Dick Miller and John Sayles. Sayles, of course, is rarely an actor but he got his start writing P_i_r_a_n_h_a, A_l_l_i_g_a_t_o_r, B_a_t_t_l_e, B_e_y_o_n_d_t_h_e_S_t_a_r_s, and T_h_e_H_o_w_l_i_n_g, the first and last directed by Dante.

While I cannot recommend every minute of M_a_t_i_n_e_e there is enough pleasure here to make this one well worth seeing. My rating would be a low +2 on the -4 to +4 scale.

Hugo Recommendations
by Evelyn C. Leeper

Since the Hugo nominations are due in a couple of months, I thought I'd suggest what I think are good choices. If other people have works they want to recommend, let us know and we can include the suggestions in future issues.

Novels (>40000 words):

Kim Stanley Robinson -- RED MARS
Gore Vidal -- LIVE FROM GOLGOTHA
Connie Willis -- DOOMSDAY BOOK
Jane Yolen -- BRIAR ROSE

Novellas (17,500-40,000 words):

Bradley Denton -- "The Territory" (F&SF, July)

Novelettes (7500-17,500 words):

Pat Cadigan -- "No Prisoners" (ALTERNATE KENNEDYS)
Donna Farley -- "The Passing of the Eclipse" (UNIVERSE 2)
Nancy Kress -- "Eoghan" (ALTERNATE KENNEDYS)
W. M. Shockley -- "A Father's Gift" (IASFM, April)
Robert Silverberg -- "Looking for the Fountain"
(WMHB4: AA; IASFM May)

Short Stories (<7500 words):

Pat Cadigan -- "50 Ways to Improve Your Orgasm" (IASFM, April)

Kristine Kathryn Rusch -- "The Best and the Brightest"

(ALTERNATE KENNEDYS)

Kathe Koja -- "By the Mirror of My Youth" (UNIVERSE 2)

Pat Murphy -- "Going Through Changes" (F&SF, April)

Lawrence Watt-Evans -- "Truth, Justice, and the American Way"

(ALTERNATE PRESIDENTS)

Connie Willis - "Even the Queen" (IASFM, April)

Dramatic Presentation:

"Fool's Fire"

PRELUDE TO A KISS

SHADOWS AND FOG

ZENTROPA

ELVISSEY by Jack Womack

Tor, 1993, ISBN 0-312-85202-9, \$12.95.

A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper

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Well, I suppose it's only reasonable that after reading three books centering on God and Jesus, I should proceed to a book set in a future where the main religion is the Church of Elvis. And, in fact, the parallels are intriguing, especially with Monteleone's _ B _ l _ o _ o _ d _ o _ f _ t _ h _ e _ L _ a _ m _ b: both deal with unwilling messiahs, called forth by fallible human beings to save the world. And because those who summon them are fallible, things don't go as planned.

_ E _ l _ v _ i _ s _ s _ e _ y is part of Womack's "Dryco Chronicles," set in a world

forty years in the future in which most power is held by Dryco Corporation and Elvis is not just the King, but the Messiah as well. Dryco figures that if they actually had a live Elvis, they could exert even more control, so they decide to pick one up by sending a couple through a "gate" to get Elvis from a parallel world which is eighty years behind and where, in addition, Lincoln was assassinated in 1861, resulting in a somewhat different world than ours--or than the world Dryco knows as its history. Still, John and Isabel manage to cope, right up until they find Elvis standing over the body of his mother, whom he has just shot. Then things get really weird.

My main complain is still the futurespeak that Womack has invented (would language really change that much in only forty years?), but it was less annoying than in T_e_r_r_a_p_l_a_n_e. That may be because I'm getting used to it, or it may be because it's tempered by the need of the main characters to use more understandable language when communicating with people in or from the parallel world. Or maybe it's the wordplay Womack throws in: "Call me Isabel," the main character says at one point. And later, on the telephone, John asks, "Information, help me. Get me Memphis, Tennessee." In any case, it's probably only slightly more difficult than the language in Heinlein's T_h_e_M_o_o_n_I_s_a_H_a_r_s_h M_i_s_t_r_e_s_s, and easier than that of Russell Hoban's R_i_d_d_l_e_y_W_a_l_k_e_r.

Though part of the "Dryco Chronicles," E_l_v_i_s_s_e_y can be read as a stand-alone and is, in my opinion, better than the earlier works in the series. Start with this one and then decide if you want to try the other ones.