

raise while having 100% of its members are officially on record as opposing. Do you think that 90% of the Colombian government would be in the pharmaceutical business if they could wangle a deal like our legislators have? I doubt it.

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And now our Congress is now coming up with another proof that it is the wiliest set of legislators money can buy. This morning I have heard of a new device, a new congressional concept that will further make our legislators he envy of every crooked politician throughout the world. Our Congress has invented the concept of the "stealth bribe." It came up in a discussion on NPR about the nation's leading medical problem, tobacco. Many congressmen are trying to have it appear that they are not getting their cut of the tobacco company obscene profits. What they say is that they cannot tell if they are getting tobacco money or not because the tobacco companies are so diversified these days. They can get scads of money from tobacco companies and never realize it! And the tobacco companies are too polite to ask for anything in return. Honest, this is what this congressman said.

Now does he really believe that tobacco companies are going to go to all this effort to sneak him money without telling him they want him to vote for tobacco? Or does he really believe that once his secret backers tell him who they are and that he has been bribed it is unethical to vote his conscience. I guess once you know who is stuffing greenbacks in your pocket if you don't vote their way it might not be ethical. And worse you might not be bribed again.

2. There was a mistake in last week's review of G_r_u_m_p_y_O_l_d_M_e_n. The end of the first paragraph should have read: "Her presence in Wabasha is never very well explained, nor is what she lives on, nor even her interest in Max and John. But her presence will transform them." And the beginning of the next should have been: "Jack Lemmon and Walter Matthau are almost a classic comedy team after T_h_e_O_d_d_C_o_u_p_l_e, T_h_e_F_o_r_t_u_n_e_C_o_o_k_i_e, and T_h_e_F_r_o_n_t_P_a_g_e."

3. THE CASE OF THE TOXIC SPELL DUMP by Harry Turtledove (Baen, ISBN 0-671-72196-8, 1993, 367pp, US\$5.99,) (a book review by Evelyn C. Leeper):

This is, I suppose, an alternate history of sorts. Magic works, all the gods and goddesses and other supernatural beings are real, and so on. Yet except for a few minor name changes (the District of Columbia is the District of Saint Columba, for example, and Los Angeles is Angel City), everything else is pretty much the same. While this is extremely unlikely in a real alternate history (is that an oxymoron?), it hardly matters here however, since this story is n_o_t trying to be a classic alternate history story. I mention it only for those who have come to expect Turtledove to write alternate history stories.

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There are two aspects to this book: plot and puns. The plot involves David Fisher, an inspector for the EPA (Environmental Perfection Agency) and his investigation of a possible leak at a toxic spell dump. This leak appears to be causing babies to be born without souls. The puns are layered on top of the plot--often, in my opinion, obscuring it completely. It's too easy to get so wrapped up in spotting puns that you stop following the storyline. And Turtledove is shameless when it comes to puns. Not only does he refer to an overweight psychic and a Britisher who contacts spirits from the past as "the large medium and the English channeler," but he doesn't shirk from talking about the "devil with a blue dress on" or even including as narrative almost an entire verse of "Love Potion Number Nine." It may seem an odd criticism, but I think Turtledove's plot is interesting enough that the constant puns hurt, rather than help, the book. Conversely, the puns are good enough that you sometimes wish the plot didn't distract you from them. I like sushi and I like hot fudge, but they don't mix well either.

One aspect of the premise I found fascinating, if a bit paradoxical, was the idea that all religions were "right." With the constant proof of them in everyday life, people in Turtledove's

universe are more religious--because they really believe that they will be punished if they're not. Aside from what ramifications this has for free will and faith versus proof, it leads me to wonder why the god(s) of one religion don't (or can't) punish the believers in a different religion. David Fisher is an observant Jew (actually another nice touch--one rarely finds the heroes of novels to be observant Jews, or even observant anything-elses), but why? He recognizes that all other religions are "true," so why does he remain Jewish? Is conversion not allowed? If so, what does that do to religions that require "informed consent" (i.e., you can become a full member only when you are old enough to make your own choice)? Do these religions never form in this universe? Does it have only religions one is born into? (Or baptized into at birth?) Maybe this whole subject interests me because I've been reading about why people change their religion and it seems to be more a social or emotional thing than that they decide they actually believe the formal tenets of one religion over another. (Lots of stuff here in case there's a sequel, I guess.) At any rate, Turtledove gives one a lot of food for thought here, and this may be somewhat of a surprise in a book that is basically a comedy-adventure.

It may be just my personal taste for religious-based science fiction and fantasy, but I found T_h_e_C_a_s_e_o_f_t_h_e_T_o_x_i_c_S_p_e_l_l_D_u_m_p enjoyable and surprisingly meaty. If you have an appreciation--or at least a high toleration--for endless puns, I strongly recommend it.

4. SCHINDLER'S LIST (a film review by Mark R. Leeper):

Capsule review: I have said before that it is impossible to make a film about the Holocaust that does justice to the subject. S_c_h_i_n_d_l_e_r'_s_L_i_s_t comes as close as any film could. This is a supremely powerful depiction of the banality of evil and--for once on film--the seductiveness of good. I will not

rate this film and hence compare it to other films like S_t_a_r_W_a_r_s. I think this is the best and most important film I have ever seen.

The people who are most revered by the Jewish religion are the great rabbis and the righteous non-Jews who have risked their lives to save the lives of Jews. Unfortunately, history provides ample opportunity for people to enter the latter category. One of the greatest of that category was Oskar Schindler. He was a real person made famous, or more famous, as the main character of Thomas Keneally's novel S_c_h_i_n_d_l_e_r's_L_i_s_t, now adapted for the screen by Steven Zaillian and directed by Steven Spielberg.

The Austrian-born Schindler (his home town of Zwittau became part of Czechoslovakia in 1918) was a self-styled tycoon, a playboy, and an aristocrat who early in World War II had a scheme to make money in the recently conquered Poland using Jewish slave labor leased to him by the SS. The Jews would be willing to work for him, he reasoned, because it really was in their best interest to be paid off in tradable goods. Later the reason became that work is preferable to extermination. These Jews are rounded up and sent to Plaszow Forced Labor Camp, so Schindler moves his operation closer to the camp, actually creating a sub-camp to save lives within a camp intended to destroy them. His manufacturing is able to save most the "Schindler Jews" from being ground up in the worst excesses of the Holocaust, but not from witnessing them. So from their point of view we can see both the best and the worst in people of that time. And with Spielberg's startling camera work making extensive use of hand-held cameras for a feel of immediacy, we witness the excesses also--admittedly toned down but still shocking.

At first Schindler's motives are callous exploitation of the condition of the Jews. As he explains, if he is going to get labor he would rather pay the SS for Jewish slaves than hire Poles. "Poles cost more," he says simply. Though Schindler's motives are part selfishness and part humanity, the audience and probably Schindler himself never know just how much of each. And often just when the audience thinks it knows, the rug will be pulled out. After a last-instant rescue of his Jewish accountant, Schindler turns angrily on the poor man asking him "If I were five minutes

later, then where would I be?"

I think not even the mammoth documentary S_h_o_a_h has more vividly shown the real horror of the Holocaust. Documentaries do not have the latitude to expand on people's personalities and involve the viewer in the lives of the characters to the degree a drama does. We see in the film a situation in which people who want to live have no formula, no possible strategy, that will save them. In our own times even those who claim to know God's will give you a formula for salvation. Nazis would murder people because they were uncooperative and they would murder people because they were too cooperative. There is no way to act or behave that could reliably increase your chances of survival. Schindler sees all this and as one of the few people who can influence Goeth, the commandant of Plaszow, he cleverly manipulates him to save a few lives. Schindler treads a dangerous tightrope always appearing to be acting in his own selfish interest and hiding an ulterior motive of doing good, apparently often hiding it even from himself. He is a living contraction to his own philosophy that war never brings out the good in men, only the bad.

Spielberg's style has been criticized for getting in the way of the storytelling, but I did not find myself at all bothered by stylistic touches. At times he is even fairly inventive. During moments of chaos he will show a montage of apparently random scenes, yet the viewer can pick out scenes to form small sub-stories. Spielberg plays with shadow and light throughout the film. He focuses in on the smoke from a Shabbos candle and later on the smoke and ash of the chimney at Auschwitz. Most of the film is black and white and that helps to build the atmosphere and gives his visual images a sharper edge. When there is violence it really is more shocking in black and white in part because it does not compete with any number of gory color films. Blood is still disturbing when seen in black and white. The use of monochrome also allows Spielberg to highlight a point of attention in a scene much as color was used in Z_e_n_t_r_o_p_a. In a scene of chaos Schindler's eye follows one little girl and so does ours because her red coat is the only piece of color in the scenes. Unfortunately the film stocks are not quite matched and one can always tell when Spielberg is about to use a color effect.

In some ways the script of the film is more subtle than the novel. In an early scene we overhear a small part of a conversation. "They always weather the storm," someone says. In the novel the same phrase is used saying to whom the word "they" refers. However, the meaning still comes across in the film without spelling it out for the viewer. Small details of people's reaction to what was happening and details of what people had to do to survive have never been better depicted in a film.

Liam Neeson's performance certainly will be noticed as the aristocratic and enigmatic altruist, Schindler. But in 195 minutes there is not one single bad performance. Ralph Fiennes's Goeth is a vicious child, killing people like a little boy shoots down plastic Indians. Ben Kingsley as Itzhak Stern is small and mousey, constantly on edge. He is no stranger to stories of the Holocaust having played Simon Weisenthal on HBO's film _ T_ h_ e _ M_ u_ r_ d_ e_ r_ e_ r_ s _ A_ m_ o_ n_ g _ U_ s_. Apparently this gave him the opportunity to begin a relationship with Weisenthal and Holocaust survivors allowing him to prepare for this role.

In the English language words get deflated from over-use. The word "genocide" gets applied to many political situations that fall far short of true genocide. And the word "searing" applied to a drama is also overused. If you want to see a genuinely searing drama or to understand the true meaning of genocide, this is the film to experience. For twenty-one years I have considered _ A _ M _ a _ n _ f _ o _ r _ A _ l _ l _ S _ e _ a _ s _ o _ n _ s to be the best film I had ever seen. I have never said any other film was better in all that time. I do not change that choice lightly, but I now think that _ S _ c _ h _ i _ n _ d _ l _ e _ r' _ s _ L _ i _ s _ t is the best film I have ever seen.

5. TOMBSTONE (a film review by Mark R. Leeper):

Capsule review: The story of the Gunfight at the O.K. Corral is told with some OK performances, OK photography, and for once nearly OK attention to the facts. As a piece of storytelling, it has some problems. Rating: high +1 (-4 to +4). Following the review is a discussion of the historical accuracy of the film that may contain minor spoilers.

So many films have been made about Wyatt Earp and the famous gunfight at the O.K. Corral that it almost qualifies as its own subgenre of the Western. Films such as _ T _ o _ m _ b _ s _ t _ o _ n _ e , _ T _ h _ e _ T _ o _ w _ n

T_o_o
T_o_u_g_h_T_o_D_i_e; M_y_D_a_r_l_i_n_g
C_l_e_m_e_n_t_i_n_e; G_u_n_f_i_g_h_t_a_t_t_h_e_O._K.
C_o_r_r_a_l;
H_o_u_r_o_f_t_h_e_G_u_n; and D_o_c have reenacted the gunfight with little respect for the truth. Almost none agree on what happened and each is certainly correct that all the others got the facts wrong. It may come as a surprise to some that the Earps were no paragons of virtue any more than the Clantons were and that there were no crew members of the Starship Enterprise present. In fact, this dirty little gunfight lasted under three minutes and was no more dramatic nor much different in character than gang gunfights that take place in the streets of New York City frequently. However, somehow this particular gunfight has become legend and has been dramatized inaccurately many times. One of the problems that films have had

is that the gunfight itself is most famous part of the Earp-Clanton conflict, yet it happened toward the middle of the proceedings, and it settled very little. That makes it difficult to build a film around. Kevin Jarre has written a script that gets a lot of the facts right, a lot of the facts wrong, and almost nearly accurately tells what happened leading up to the gunfight. Unfortunately, from there on it plays even more fast and loose with even what is known happened after the gunfight. Or at least it gives way to legend, speculation, and to its own outright fictionalizing.

The early 1880s was a time of colorful gunfighters in Arizona. This is a story that involves some of the most famous. The plot begins with Curly Bill Brocius (Powers Booth) and his gang including Johnny Ringo (Michael Biehn) shooting up a Mexican wedding. At the same time three Earp Brothers are settling down in Tombstone, Arizona to find peace. Wyatt particularly wants to live peacefully, so he waits until he is in town for at least ten minutes before he starts making enemies. One of the ways Wyatt makes enemies is by renewing his friendship with Doc Holliday and thereby inheriting Holliday's numerous enemies, but Wyatt was talented at making enemies all by himself. Wyatt also meets and falls for Josephine Marcus, a free-thinking Jewish actress from San Francisco, stealing her from her lover, the County Sheriff Johnny Behan. Though under-stressed in the film, this was also a cause of

much of the trouble that was to come.

Kurt Russell is only a moderate actor but under George Cosmatos' direction he gives a reasonable and even understated performance as Wyatt. That means he brings to the role less baggage than does Val Kilmer in the somewhat more flamboyant role of Doc Holliday. Holliday was sickly, but Kilmer is a bit too close to death for a bit too much of this film. Kilmer starts being too hard to believe. Dana Delany is less attractive than the real Josephine Marcus, based on available photos, but she does exude a charming spontaneity. Powers Booth as Curly Bill Brocius and Michael Biehn as the Latin-spouting Johnny Ringo are colorful but have little opportunity to be engaging. Charleton Heston and Harry Carey, Jr., are around as a tip of the hat to classic Westerns, but neither has a very important role. Perhaps for the same reason Robert Mitchum narrates the film.

Moments of this film are genuinely exciting, though more because of style than plot. The opening has films of the old West, mixed with footage of the original T_h_e_G_r_e_a_t_T_r_a_i_n_R_o_b_b_e_r_y, and a fake shot or two of Kurt Russell as Earp, all in scratchy prints and on narrow screen. Jumping from that to wide screen and color is an impressive touch very similar to one at the beginning of R_o_a_d_W_a_r_r_i_o_r. It will, however, lose that impact on video. And the film does have a few dramatic scenes internally like the requisite sunsets. But it takes more than style to tell the story and in some ways the storytelling is muddled. At times perhaps it

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sacrifices dramatic effect for accuracy. For example, it has not concentrated on the Clantons and McLaurys until the famous gunfight, so it is not clear why they are so important as to merit the shoot-out when it comes.

This is an entertaining retelling of the story, often with insight into the principal participants. Director Cosmatos only occasionally raises the story to actual excitement. Overall, I would give the film a high +1 on the -4 to +4 scale.

FURTHER COMMENTS ON HISTORIC ACCURACY: (Some spoilers follow.)

A great deal has been written about the event covered by this film and while the Old West is not a particular interest of mine, I did do some reading about this famous gunfight and about Wyatt Earp during and after a recent trip to Arizona. Similar interests served me well in reviewing the recent G_e_r_o_n_i_m_o: A_n
A_m_e_r_i_c_a_n
L_e_g_e_n_d.

Jarre's script gets as much wrong as right in this story. But still that is a far better average than most films about Tombstone. Wyatt is shown to be a peaceful man who just wants to retire in Tombstone. Sheriff Behan does not even know he is coming. In truth Earp played either side of the law that suited his fancy. He had been a horse thief, a bunco artist, a card cheat, and worse. At the time he went to Tombstone it is true that he had recently basked in a reputation as a lawman. Actually he was more a sort of hired thug for the law in a number of cow towns, usually using his fists more than guns. But he had little respect for the law itself except as a meal ticket and was occasionally thrown out of jobs for taking bribes. The script is correct in that he had been in only one real gunfight before the events of the story though many were to come. The film has Wyatt making the unlikely decision to settle in Tombstone and Sheriff Behan surprised that he has come. Actually Wyatt came to Tombstone invited by Behan. He came actually hoping to replace Behan as Sheriff, could not, and took the job of deputy (not just before the gunfight as the film says). If he could not steal Behan's job he could and did steal Behan's lover, Ms. Marcus.

Wyatt more or less abandoned his own common law wife, Mattie, who was loyal and n_o_t a drug addict. She, however, did have to become a prostitute to support herself after being abandoned and committed suicide shortly thereafter at the age of 30. Incidentally, Wyatt himself was part owner of several whorehouses, as were other members of the Earp family.

The major historic failure of the film was that there was no mention of the Wells Fargo stagecoach robbery that Earp accused the Clanton's of and the Clanton's accused Doc Holliday of. For that matter the importance of the Clanton family was understated.

Brocius and Ringo were only loose allies of the Clantons who were the Earp's main enemies.

Holliday's lover is called Kate so I presume that she was intended to be Big Nose Katie Elder. Apparently they got a much more attractive woman for the role than the actual person. That is probably true for all the women but Josephine Marcus, who was the one woman of the story who really would still be attractive by today's standards.

I have been in the Birdcage Theater, now a tourist museum, and they obviously had a v_e_r_y accurate reproduction. I doubt those scenes were shot in the real theater, but the reproduction is so accurate it is difficult to tell. Similarly the Corral itself looked just about perfect. This film had as accurate a dramatization of the gunfight at the O.K. Corral as I remember. The dialog is taken from court testimony. When I get the film on video I will run it in slow motion and see if the action follows the court testimony also.

It is a little difficult to get hard facts on what happened after the famous gunfight due to the prevalence of liars on each side of the conflict. That is what makes legends, I suppose. Many people believe that Johnny Ringo committed suicide and that was what the court ruled, though there is good evidence he was murdered. (Wyatt, years later, claimed he had killed Ringo, but Wyatt lied a l_o_t.)

So overall, the accuracy could have been a l_o_t better and could have been a l_o_t worse.

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We cannot take anything from granted, beyond the first mathematical formalae. Question everything else.

-- Maria Mitchell

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