



fiction films and that C\_r\_e\_e\_p\_i\_n\_g\_C\_r\_u\_d is my choice for the best science fiction film made entirely on location in Lake Tahoe I have ever seen. It is extremely popular in Nevada, though due to its supposed connection to a prostitution ring, it has been blacklisted in the rest of the country.

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T\_h\_e\_y\_S\_a\_v\_e\_d\_H\_i\_t\_l\_e\_r's\_E\_l\_b\_o\_w is a clever little surrealistic comedy about the trials and tribulations of a group who have inherited a collection of odd World War II souvenirs. Filmed in alternating night and daylight (often within the same scene), this is an excellent example of film noir e blanc.

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2. ALTERNATE GEOMETRIES edited by Mel Bourbaki (Springer-Verlag, ISBN 2-718-28182-8, 1994, \$4.99) (a book review by Mark R. Leeper):

Well, Mel Bourbaki is back with another mind-bending alternate world extravaganza. While I enjoyed the first two (A\_l\_t\_e\_r\_n\_a\_t\_e\_G\_r\_e\_e\_n\_V\_e\_g\_e\_t\_a\_b\_l\_e\_s and A\_l\_t\_e\_r\_n\_a\_t\_e\_S\_h\_i\_r\_t\_P\_a\_c\_k\_i\_n\_g\_M\_a\_t\_e\_r\_i\_a\_l\_s), I found this one

slightly lacking in imagination. I think that Euclid's Parallel Postulate is pretty much self-evident to even the casual reader. I think that it is one thing to say that someplace else there is kale with roots like a carrot and to follow that idea through, but you can see right on a piece of paper in front of you that the Parallel Postulate is true and it is pretty tough to envision it any other way. Maybe it's the focus. There seems to be a subgenre of science fiction these days that concentrates on knocking the old masters like Euclid, mostly by people not fit to carry Euclid's pencil-box, if he had a pencil box. Some of the ideas here are well thought out, but the authors keep knocking their heads against the difficulty in suspending disbelief. (The claim has been made that this category is aimed at adolescent boys of all ages, without a strong foundation in mathematics, so I'm sure some will say that's why I find it usually dull and often offensive in its glorification of purely abstract mathematics, but there you have it.) Only the alternate world aspect of this anthology made it intriguing to me, and I found that part was often a let-down. Why? Well, let's see.

First, though, let me talk about the b\_e\_s\_t ideas. "The Land Where All Lines Meet" by Georg Friedrich Bernhard Riemann (and isn't that a mouthful?) is set in a world where every line intercepts every other line. This seems to have the nastiest implications for the transportation industry. Railroad locomotives have to be designed with wheels that are flexible enough to move in and out and travels on any set of tracks are limited by the fact that some place the two rails have to come together and the locomotive tends to fall over because the base is too small. On the other hand human relations turn out to be totally affected. There is less petty crime and far more violent crime since if a criminal is robbing somebody he is virtually assured that the victim will run into him again. Since all paths eventually meet, the victim has only to wait long enough and he is sure to run into the criminal again. The criminal, knowing this, is more likely to kill his victim or not to bother robbing him in the first place. If killing is the choice the police have only to wait long enough since the killer is

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totally certain to return to the scene of the crime. There were many good ideas that could have been explored but for reasons not entirely clear, Riemann kept returning to the same concepts.

The other intriguing story was Nick Lobachevsky's "A Life in the Saddle." He tells his story in a world where there are many different parallels to given line through a given point. In this world society has never really had much chance to develop since human relationships are very short. All work that is accomplished is done by people who are constantly in each other's presence since once two people separate, they can never be certain of finding each other again. What little architecture that can be built is extremely shoddy and prone to falling apart since one is never really sure in building a four wall structure if the fourth wall will or will not meet the first. To improve the chances most buildings are built with three walled sides and a fourth that is left open to the elements.

The next best story in the anthology is "Kikuyu and the Gnu Yu Rode In On" by newcomer Mike Resnick. He presents a universe in which all lines in space and time converge in pre-revolutionary Kenya.

Resnick tells a good story but one wonders why the universe would choose such an arbitrary point on which to center.

From there the stories fall off rapidly. Patrick Robertson contributes (if that is the word) a story "If I Ran the Circus" in which the whole question of Euclid's fifth postulate because there is only one line in all of space time and it goes straight back to some idealized point in the past.

Will Clinton's story "Random Acts of Kindness, Other People's Money" starts with a similar premise to the Robertson story. Time travelers go back in time to find the idealized point only to discover that it cannot be found. They conclude that the line took too sharp a turn to the right and the travelers could not follow it.

Albrecht Durer adds a touch of artistry with "Affine Mess You've Gotten Me Into" which has a painter enter his own painting and finds himself in a world where one can actually walk to the horizon. In this world any two lines do meet, but only once. If they do not meet any place else they always meet on the horizon as a rendezvous of last resort. The horizon then, in this world, functions as sort of a singles bar for pickup lines which seem to arrive at the horizon in polyester suits and listen to ear-splitting music. Unfortunately, they are doomed to frustration since the horizon affords them little privacy and meeting at the horizon they find they cannot get together anyplace else.

Adam Baum's "The Long Way Round," is set in the world of spherical geometry. A man stopped for suspected drunk driving is told to

walk a straight line and suddenly finds himself on a great circle. The anthology concludes with Rene Descartes' "At Seventh Avenue and 52nd Street." It is set in an alien, dehumanized future. A man complains to his bartender that everyone and everything in the world is being reduced to numbers. When the bartender asks the man if the numbers do not make things easier the man responds "I think not" and instantly disappears.

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### 3. MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING (a film review by Mark R. Leeper):

Capsule review: Imagine a film with the point of view of T\_h\_e\_I\_m\_a&\_L\_o\_u\_i\_s\_e but set in medieval Italy. No, it is not even that good. There is some nice Italian scenery, but the film reeks of feminist rhetoric with a blood-thirsty man-hater as its hero. Rating: -2 (-4 to +4).

With the coming of April, I felt it would be nice to see a warm-weather sort of movie and the video release of M\_u\_c\_h\_A\_d\_o\_A\_b\_o\_u\_t\_N\_o\_t\_h\_i\_n\_g seemed about right. The title makes it sound as if it is a carefree sort of film. W\_r\_o\_n\_g! What we have is a particularly vicious exercise in political correctness and anachronism. What this film gives us is almost two hours of tiresome lecture on how wise and good women are and how stupid, gullible, and vicious men are. The story is set in some historical never-never land. The film never even bothers to tell us exactly when. Even C\_o\_n\_a\_n\_t\_h\_e\_B\_a\_r\_b\_a\_r\_i\_a\_n, itself set in a historical never-never land, at least gives you some context as to when to place it. But the two films have similar approaches, at least in their polyglot cultures. M\_u\_c\_h\_A\_d\_o\_A\_b\_o\_u\_t\_N\_o\_t\_h\_i\_n\_g seems to be set mostly in Italy, maybe late 13th Century, but we have Spanish names indiscriminately mixed into this witch's brew. In any case, it does not matter. The characters and their attitudes are all 1990s, or at least how somebody sees the 1990s.

I knew I was in trouble from the very beginning when the film opened with a song about how faithless and useless men are. That would be bad enough, but director Kenneth Branagh puts the words on the screen and all but puts a bouncing ball with them. So the whole audience is reading as well as hearing his sexist diatribe against men. The song is sung by Beatrice, the hero of the piece. (But not the Hero of the piece. A rather insipid female character is given the name Hero. I am surprised Beatrice is given a name like "Beatrice" rather than "Sisterhood" or just "Woman." Perhaps the name conjured up some picture of women beating men.) Beatrice hates all men, for good reason no doubt. At the beginning of the film she is haranguing against Benedick, who has been off to some war, risking his life for people like Beatrice. But her hatred is

still strong. (It's as if she is saying, "Women, take note. Do not let absence soften your heart. Always remember who the Enemy is. Your country will lie to you about who your enemies are. Just remember the real foe is Man.")

What follows is intended to be a comic mix-up of treachery. There is a good schemer and a bad schemer. The good schemer is case in anachronistic black. (Denzel Washington is good, but he is not convincing as a medieval Spaniard. I suppose, though, that one must be politically correct in one's casting.) The evil schemer is played by Keanu Reeves, whose acting is the dramatic equivalent of the sound "thud." His scheme is to prevent a marriage from taking place and for this he is branded the villain of the piece. Little mention is made of Beatrice's own scheme. As the film wears on, Beatrice has softened on Benedick but now hates Claudio. She gives Benedick the task that if he loves her (oh, he now loves her for some reason) he should kill Claudio. That is on the pretext that Claudio has caused Hero's death, but Beatrice knows it is not true. She merely wants to see Benedick kill Claudio. The film never says that Beatrice, trying to arrange murder on what she knows is a false pretense, is doing a bad thing. The victim, after all, is only a man. If women murder innocent men, well, all men are guilty of something or other--maybe for being "potential rapists." "Men are deceivers ever," as Beatrice says. It is open season on killing them, ladies. That seems to be the theme of this rather odious piece of cinema. And what about the law? Well, here the law is represented by Dogberry (Michael Keaton) and he comes off as being even less than human. This film is one diatribe against men after another.

The photography of Italy is very nice when it does not have some jerk of a man dancing in a fountain. (I have never seen a man dance in a fountain--but the director wants to make men seem a trifle flighty along with all their other failings.) The screenplay is by William Shakespeare, more than likely the pen name for some woman who has been spending her time in feminist bookstores. Rating: -2 on the -4 to +4 scale.

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It'd be kind of silly if we killed ourselves off after all this time. If we do, we're stupider than the cave people and I don't think we are. I think we're just exactly as stupid and that's pretty bright in the long run.

--John Steinbeck,

## The Short-Short Story of Mankind

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