

have been patched up and back to the way things were at the beginning of the hour. [-mrl]

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2. We were waiting for a train at Penn Station and dropped into a bookstore across the street to pass some time. I picked a section more or less at random--I often do that in libraries and bookstores. I found myself in the classics section and there were two college-age women looking in the same section. I eavesdropped on their conversation. "We had to read this for school." Now I decided to try without looking to figure out what book they were discussing. "It was awful." Hmmmmmm! That doesn't narrow it down. Awful is a matter of taste, after all. "It was about a man who turned into a ROACH!"

Hey, I know that story. I wasn't assigned it, but I also read it when I was in college. No, it wasn't awful. At least I didn't think so. But it wasn't very good either. It was just a silly sort of idea. It isn't a cockroach, by the way, but it seems to be an insect of some sort. But it wasn't particularly motivated that the guy should turn into an insect. Then I read it again a year or so ago. I was amazed by how much better it had gotten over the years. Here I thought Kafka was dead and he is running around really brushing up his stories.

This is actually not the kind of story you should read as an adult. When you are young you tend to assume that your spirit and your body are much the same thing. As you get older you can better appreciate how your own physical limitations affect your expectations for yourself. The duality of the mind and the body is really Kafka's theme.

Our next book discussion at noon on February 15 will be Franz Kafka's METAMORPHOSIS. [-ecl]

3. Our next discussion book, Franz Kafka's METAMORPHOSIS, has everything going for it: it's considered literature, it has a bug-eyed monster, and it's short. So we expect a really big turn-out.

Of THE METAMORPHOSIS, Maurice Sagoff (in SHRINK LITS) says:

Gregor Samsa wakes to find
He's a bug--the cockroach kind,
But it's really not surprising
Life's been so dehumanizing--
Lack of meaning, warmth and joy
Bugged him since he was a boy.
Now in monstrous insect shape
Still unable to escape,
He takes refuge on the ceiling
Which exacerbates the feeling
Of the household. Papa shies

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apples at him. Mama cries.
(Parents should receive their due
But "My son the cockroach?" Fooh!)
Next, the servants try to scat him,
Sister plays her fiddle at him--
Nothing helps. He pines. He dies...
Presto! All the family ties
Seem to strengthen; no one glooms,
Sister actually blooms!
Vulgar selfish life resumes.
(If you crave interpretation
Of the Kafkaesque relation
To the world of man and mind,
Critics say it's best defined
As: "Gnostic-Manichaeism, in the sense that the
Absolute here, as a pure origin of Being, is
just as powerless in its transcendent remoteness
as it is inaccessible, whereas the earthly creation
is basically one of dreariness and corruption.")
So. Excuse the interruption.

4. SLAN by A. E. Van Vogt (Ziggurat Productions, produced by Bob E. Flick, directed by Perry Jacob, performed by The Third Radio Theatre) (an audiotape review by Boris Sidyuk)

When Ziggurat Productions offered to send me a copy of their first publication, SLAN, I was very glad to have known that there finally appeared this good kind of literary production. Since my childhood I thought that would be very good if audiobooks came to the market. I myself made several audio recordings with my friends, but, of course, they were amateurish. Then I received a few audiobooks from the States. All of them were either short-cuts from famous movies or read by a single actor. Then I received a copy of SLAN and played it....

GENERAL: The first impression hammer-hit my head with great pleasure. All sounded excellent. This is a professional work of highest level, real treasure not only for pure SF fans but also for any people who love strong-built audio dramatic presentations. Perfect text-book-to-dramatic-presentation adaptation, excellent actors selection, good sounds. The movie is made so good that you can play it many times one by one and enjoy it. All these make the masterpiece of Bob Flick and Perry Jacob an outstanding event of past several years. Evaluating this work in 10 degrees scale I can place 10 for new impression, 9 for first take impression and 9 for not boring after 5 times of listening. Total GENERAL estimation is 9.33.

ANALYSIS: The main achievement of the authors is that they almost don't use so-called author's text explaining what's going on between dialogs. Sometimes they use characters' comments during an action. That plays good role in temp. All the time an action is on non-paused with waste comments according to Vogt's text. The first part of the movie is back-sounded a little bit worse than the second. Seems the authors experimented with the first part to have the second absolutely perfect. And, even if all sounds are good, very often they not so realistic as they should be. Because of that some moments are dissonant. Certainly, these are small bugs

only--any program, either a software or a dramatic presentation has ones. So: plot--9, actors--8, music and sounds--7, for directing and editing--9. And I would recommend a better artworks for covers. Total ANALYSIS estimation is 8.25.

CONCLUSION: The most interesting thing in listening this audio movie is that you have different feelings and impressions depending of conditions you're listening it in. I myself noticed three differences. Your own experience may give more. The usual way is to lie down and listen through headphones in an absolutely dark room or with eyes closed. But you will have much more interesting results if you do this walking around a town. In this case you feel yourselves like taking part in the event which sound and this is absolutely excellent. Another great experience is to listen Ziggurat's SLAN and simultaneously play DOOM on a computer. The two last make perfect pleasure. So: 10 points for pleasure in combinations.

TOTAL RATE: 9.2.

RESUME: This makes this type of Science Fiction to be a very good spending of your free time. Another prospective competitor to usual books.

5. Top Ten Films of 1994 (film comment by Mark R. Leeper):

Each year I try to hold off as long as possible in listing my top ten films for the previous year. This year is it easier than in previous years to close off a top ten list in mid-January. Frankly there is not much coming out in the next month or so (not from 1994). 1993 was a great year for films and 1994 was not nearly as good. Somehow all the 1994 films I was looking forward to I have already seen.

1. THE SHAWSHANK REDEMPTION: This is a beautifully told and photographed story of a man who transforms an entire prison through his humanity. With acting and production values uniformly excellent, this film works on both the literal

level and as an allegory. It could well make it to the status of being a classic like ONE FLEW OVER THE CUCKOO'S NEST. Rating: low +3 (-4 to +4).

2. QUIZ SHOW: QUIZ SHOW is an intellectual EIGHT MEN OUT. It is an in-depth look at a little-remembered scandal that made national headlines back in 1958. Once the public realized that TV quiz shows were rigged to promote ratings, they would never look at television in quite the same way again. Robert Redford directs from a terrific, ironic screenplay. Rating: low +3 (-4 to +4).
3. LEGENDS OF THE FALL: This is an old-fashioned epic of an early 20th Century Montana ranching family and the coming of more urbanized life styles. An alienated father and three very different sons pull in different directions to different fates. The film features nice photography and a rich score. Rating: low +3 (-4 to +4).
4. HOOP DREAMS: Surprisingly engaging documentary that follows two promising inner-city basketball players from high school recruiting to freshman year at college. The story is surprising both in its completeness and the dramatic power it has, considering it is not a script that could be planned in advance. Rating: high +2 (-4 to +4).
5. PULP FICTION: What would you get if Robert Altman tried to do a super-violent crime film, a cross between SHORT CUTS and SCARFACE? Quentin Tarantino tells a weird collection of inter-connected crime stories peopled by a weirder collection of thugs than Damon Runyan could have imagined on drugs. This is a film with comedy, heavy violence, some terrific dialogue, and a whole lot of entertainment. Rating: high +2 (-4 to +4).
6. A CLEAR AND PRESENT DANGER: This is the best spy film to be released in several years. It is also the most intelligent film in the Jack Ryan series based on the Tom Clancy novels so far. Screen credit goes to three top-notch screenwriters. There is one breath-taking action sequence, a generous dollop of government skullduggery, and a plot that will seem to be taken from headlines of recent U.S. history. This is as good as any of the James Bond films. Rating: high +2 (-4 to +4).
7. CRONOS: This Mexican horror film is genuinely a cutting-edge art house monster movie. It is visually striking, has a real "what-happens-next?" plot, and some intriguing human relationships. It has been a long time since a new monster movie has played to art film audiences, but this one is worth it. Rating: high +2 (-4 to +4).

8. DOOMSDAY GUN: Once again HBO's docu-dramas prove that there are good films being made for cable. The story of Gerald Bull and his attempts to build a super-gun for Saddam Hussein's pre-war Iraq was under-reported in the press, in spite of the natural fascination of the material. This film is a sort of TUCKER-meets-Tom-Clancy based on fact. Rating: +2 (-4 to +4).
9. HEAVENLY CREATURES: New Zealand film director Peter Jackson, famous for his BAD TASTE, creates a very odd but fascinating film about the darker side of imagination. The film tells the true story of two 1950s teenagers who are pulled into a vortex of creative fantasy and drawn to a bloody and violent conclusion. This is a surprising and inventive film that blends fantasy and reality in ways you haven't seen before. Rating: +2 (-4 to +4).
10. THE LAST SEDUCTION: Even without a good story, this film would be fascinating if only for the characterization of Bridget Gregory. Linda Fiorentino plays a brilliant, calculating, manipulative woman. Steve Barancik has written a taut, steamy murder thriller that has already played on cable and is now getting only a tiny theatrical release. THE LAST SEDUCTION is worth seeking out. Rating: +2 (-4 to +4).

The next ten films in alphabetical order, each rated +2:

- CARL, MY CHILDHOOD SYMPHONY
- CLERKS
- INTERVIEW WITH THE VAMPIRE
- MISS AMERIGUA
- NELL
- RED ROCK WEST
- THE SHADOW (Okay, so it fell apart near the end. Up till

then it was a very good representation of the pulp and radio hero.)

- SIRENS
- THE STORY OF YUNNAN
- WHAT'S EATING GILBERT GRAPE

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6. BOYS ON THE SIDE (a film review by Mark R. Leeper):

Capsule: This is a road picture that runs out of gas toward the middle, then takes a turn toward familiar territory. Three very different women have an interrupted journey together across country and learn to love each other as they bond. The film often seems artificial, but it does have some good comic touches and some expected moments of warmth.
Rating: low 1 (-4 to +4) [Minor spoilers.]

In SLEEPLESS IN SEATTLE, the characters talk about "chicks' films." There they mean romance, but there is something else that is much more a chick's film. There is a whole sub-genre of films like RICH AND FAMOUS, BEACHES, STEEL MAGNOLIAS, and TERMS OF ENDEARMENT. They are bittersweet explorations of women bonding with each other through good times and bad, often to the beautiful and lush strains of a score by Georges Delerue. [His title theme for RICH AND FAMOUS is one of the most beautiful film themes I know.] Delerue died in 1992, sadly, but the kind of films he scored go on with the latest entry being BOYS ON THE SIDE.

Actually BOYS ON THE SIDE begins atypically for a women's picture with two very different women sharing a cross-country ride. Jane (Whoopi Goldberg) is a crude club singer who makes racist comments

and tells cab drivers to go back to Pakistan. Robin (Mary-Louise Parker) appears to be a slightly ditzzy real estate broker with a penchant for banal Carpenters songs. Along the way they pick up Holly (Drew Barrymore), the girlfriend-victim of an extremely obnoxious drug-dealer and junkie. While there is an initial tension between Jane and Robin, of course women of goodwill always learn to respect each other eventually.

Curiously, near the middle the film seems to run out of steam and its apparent whole reason to be. Suddenly it is no longer a road film and the plot, after a short section of aimlessness, goes off in another direction. In an almost artificial manner the major women, and even some of the minor, get to show both positive and negative traits. It is better than painting them as saints, but it appears to be just a bit too deliberate. Overall, however, the film plays it safe, pushing the right buttons and espousing the right causes. Director Herbert Ross knows his audience a little too well.

Whoopi Goldberg is obviously winning as an actress, but her acting range has always seemed to me to be very limited. She has a more restrained performance in "Star Trek: The Next Generation," and Steven Spielberg definitely got her to act in THE COLOR PURPLE, but

she and most of her directors are content to let her play the same character time after time. In BOYS ON THE SIDE she is playing a woman with a personality almost identical to the one in JUMPING JACK FLASH or SISTER ACT. This is a film in which she could have shown some real dramatic range, if nothing else as an investment in her own career. The meatiest part in the film actually is Mary-Louise Parker's and while her role is not as flamboyant as is Goldberg's--in fact it appears very unpromising at the beginning of the film--she makes much better use of opportunities the story affords her. We see more different facets of her personality and even of Barrymore's than of Goldberg's.

After a promising start this film gives us little besides a few nuances in Parker's character that we have not seen better elsewhere. Rating: low +1 on the -4 to +4 scale. [-mrl]

7. MIAMI RHAPSODY (a film review by Mark R. Leeper):

Capsule: David Frankel writes and tries to carve out a piece of Woody Allen territory with this film that borrows much of the style we associate with Allen. His story is just too slight to hold the gags together. Rating: 0 (-4 to +4)

David Frankel, who wrote and directed MIAMI RHAPSODY, has a style much too close to Woody Allen's to be a coincidence. He starts with a jazz song, Louis Armstrong's rendition of "Just One of Those Things," under fairly plain-looking credits. Allen would use white on black, Frankel uses lavender on black, but it clearly is a conscious imitation. And the dialogue has the main character making just the sort of wisecracks that Woody Allen would write. And at least an imitation of Allen at his most creative would be amusing. Unfortunately, the story is slight and more than a little boring. Part of the problem is that the whole plot can be described in two sentences. I will not divulge the second sentence here, but the first is that Gwyn Marcus (Sarah Jessica Parker) cannot commit to her relationship with her fiance because every other couple she knows has a relationship that is falling apart because of infidelity. The plot, told in flashback and flashbacks-within-flashbacks goes through one relationship after another, mostly in her own family, and each relationship has one or both people fooling around on the side. The plot has more detail than that, of course, but it all adds up to Gwyn's unwillingness to commit in her relationship. Parker's Gwyn narrates the film staring right into the camera, then popping into connecting dramatized anecdotes about her family. Her father (Paul Mazursky), himself a philanderer, correctly suspects her mother of infidelity.

The mother is played by Mia Farrow who appears in this imitation Woody Allen film purely for the artistic challenge of the role, no doubt. Other flashbacks show Gwyn's siblings, each totally self-absorbed and happy to cheat on any relationship he or she has.

Sarah Jessica Parker is clearly a Woody-Allen-like character, alternately indignant and sarcastic. One can almost hear Allen's delivery of some of her lines. But she has a good delivery and a screen presence that may get noticed after this film. Antonio Banderas plays Antonio, the male nurse of Gwyn's grandmother who gets involved with the weird relationships in the Marcus family. Gil Bellows is Gwyn's fiance, who seems likable enough in the role as just about the only decent person in the film, but he does not have a lot to do. Kevin Pollak is also memorable as Gwyn's older brother who leaves his own pregnant wife for the wife of his business partner.

Perhaps MIAMI RHAPSODY could have worked better as a comedy with more likable characters. Instead there is a cold satisfaction in the poetic justice that these characters are screwing up their lives and will likely continue to do so. In spite of the warm Miami settings, this is a cold comedy about people it is hard to like or care about. The story is told with affection for this family, but Frankel is not yet a good enough writer to make us care for his characters. This film gets a 0 on the -4 to +4 scale. [-mrl]

Mark Leeper
MT 3F-434 908-957-5619
m.r.leeper@att.com

Admiration, n. Our polite recognition of another's
resemblance to ourselves.

--Ambrose Bierce

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