

to be built along the paths where wild tractors used to cross and tractors don't look before they cross, like squirrels.

And like most road signs in that part of the road, it was pock-marked and dented from where it was used for someone's target

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practice. I thought that the most badly shot-up signs were those with animals. Deer signs get shot up very fast. It isn't like New Jersey, where people are often content to put circular red stickers on the nose of the deer but they let him live. In the Southwest, indignity is not enough; a picture of a deer must be drilled through with holes. The call of such a natural target is as irresistible as a pheromone, apparently. Gun manufacturers seem to count on natural targets having this appeal and know that they do. Cars get sexy names like Jaguar, Mustang, Dart ... that sort of thing. The makers of cars figure they have to make cars as glamorous as possible. They give them these names and these fancy shiny interiors. You know and I know that if you look under that car it will be filthy, greasy, and grimy so the manufacturers want to give the car as classy an image as possible. Makers of guns know that guns have their own appeal and need no more glamor. So what kinds of names do guns get? AK-47! As far as I am concerned that is not a very sexy name. It sounds more like a serial number than a name. Then there is Glock. To me that sure sounds like it is Yiddish for some part of the body you might not want to mention in public. Then there is Uzi. That has to be one of the most disgusting names of any non-medical product.

But I was looking at this road sign with a man on a tractor, and both were very badly shot up. The human was shot up much worse than most of the deer on the deer crossing sign. I guess it feels really good, what with Man being the most dangerous game. I guess there is a natural male instinct to shoot guns. Children seem to see guns on TV and have a natural instinct to want guns. If you don't give a boy a toy gun very often he will use a banana and pretend to shoot it like a gun. Then soon he will think it is okay to peel and eat a gun. And the same instinct seems to carry over to men. Just as kids play with guns, men do too. I am for gun control, but I still point my finger like a gun sometimes. The ability to strike out at will and to be lethal at a distance is

appealing to men and there are the obvious Freudian implications. But men are not so unique. Women have their own similar instinctual behavior. Where men have an instinct for guns, women have breast-feeding. There are women fanatics about breast-feeding just like there are men who are fanatics about guns. The difference is when a breast-feeding fanatic finds someone opposed to her custom, her first instinct is not to breast-feed him. [-mrl]

2. Roger Zelazny died Wednesday, June 14, in Santa Fe of kidney failure associated with cancer. George R. R. Martin said, "He was the finest writer of his generation in science fiction. He changed the whole field. And he was one of the nicest guys I've ever known."

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He was first published in 1962 and had written more than 150 short stories and 50 books. He was considered one of the leaders of science fiction's New Wave.

His best-known works are probably LORD OF LIGHT and NINE PRINCES IN AMBER. He won had fourteen Hugo nominations and won seven:

- ...AND CALL ME CONRAD (won)
- LORD OF LIGHT (won)
- JACK OF SHADOWS
- DOORWAYS IN THE SAND
- "A Rose for Ecclesiastes"
- "The Doors of His Face, the Lamps of His Mouth"
- "For Breath I Tarry"
- "This Moment of the Storm"
- "Comes Now the Power"
- "Damnation Alley"
- "Home Is the Hangman" (won)
- "Unicorn Variations" (won)
- "24 Views of Mount Fuji, by Hokusai" (won)
- "Permafrost" (won)

He also had seventeen Nebula nominations with three wins:

LORD OF LIGHT
ISLE OF THE DEAD
DOORWAYS IN THE SAND
A NIGHT IN THE LONESOME OCTOBER
"He Who Shapes" (won)
"The Doors of His Face, the Lamps of His Mouth" (won)
"Devil Car"
"The Moment of the Storm"
"The Keys to December"
"The Mortal Mountain"
"The Engine At HeartSpring's Center"
"Home Is the Hangman" (won)
"24 Views of Mount Fuji, by Hokusai" (won)
"Permafrost"

3. BATMAN FOREVER (a film review by Mark R. Leeper):

Capsule: Biff! Pow! Style delivers the inevitable knockout punch to substance in the "Batman" series. Joel Schumacher takes over the directing reins and gives us the poorest film yet in the series. Poorly-constructed scenes total to a story of two thinly-motivated villains warring on a badly-paired new Batman and Robin. Bat guano! Rating: -1 (-4 to +4)

You can tell that a series is transforming to a product when the original creative people start having less and less to do with the new chapters. You get substitute directors and maybe there are substitute actors trying to look like the originals. For BATMAN FOREVER Tim Burton still produces but Joel Schumacher (FLATLINERS) directs and Michael Keaton is replaced by Val Kilmer in the title role. Now don't get me wrong. I am not going to hold up the previous "Batman" films as being anything admirable. The second film did achieve a Fellini-esque bizarreness at times, but neither is really good cinema in any sense. BATMAN FOREVER has a new

director and a new star and a new, even thinner feel. The new MTV-generation priorities say that the image on the screen is everything. Intelligence behind that image is as useless as the new rubber nipples on the Batman suit.

As long as something looks good on the screen it doesn't matter any more how much sense it makes or in this case doesn't make. We have two totally nonsensical villains. The slightly better-motivated villain is The Riddler (played by Jim Carrey). His grudge against Bruce Wayne/Batman seems to be that Wayne Industries was not sufficiently interested in his new broadcast entertainment system. I suppose he doesn't like the idea of getting rich all by himself. Harvey Dent (played by Tommy Lee Jones) turned into the villain Two-Face because a baddie threw acid in his face. Batman tried to save him but his bat-reflexes were just instants too slow to protect Dent. The grudge against Batman makes absolutely no sense in either case, but the writers are apparently afraid that better motivation would slow the action. Another new character is Dr. Chase Meridian (Nicole Kidman), supposedly a respected psychologist. Do real psychologists actually call people "wacko?" Do they really psychoanalyze people on the basis of two or three sentences? I doubt it, somehow. As if these three people aren't enough to complicate Batman's life, Bruce Wayne also gets a ward, Dick Grayson (Chris O'Donnell) soon to be Robin, he whom he comics call the "boy wonder." Now Robin may be a wonder of sorts, but he is a bit beyond the "boy" stage. He rides a motorcycle and occasionally needs a shave. Just why someone his age needs a court-appointed guardian is not clear, particularly because the guardian looks to be only about five years his senior. Robin, as comic readers expect, becomes Batman's partner, hiding his identity by choosing a costume that is almost exactly like the one that thousands of people saw him wear as Dick Grayson, circus acrobat. However Robin seems a perfect match in some ways and instantly knows how to operate all the Bat-gear.

The problem with the script is that there is so much that happens with little explanation. This is a film that seems to have been shot from the first draft of a script. Meridian makes a date with Batman, then has second thoughts about dating him and on the date tells him that she does not want to date him. The message would have been less confusing if she had not waited for Batman in bed

and had not met Batman wearing only a sheet. Meeting a man dressed in only a sheet sends signals that are likely to be misinterpreted. While the police and Batman are combing the city for Harvey Dent, the Riddler decides to team up with him and instantly finds him. How? Don't ask questions like "how." One plot situation after another happens with no logic. Even the old 1940s Batman serials had more thought about the logic of their scenes.

Val Kilmer as Bruce Wayne and the Batman seems younger than Michael Keaton. He seems too young for the role, in fact. And he is not the most effective actor one could wish in the role. Admitted neither was Keaton and Kilmer at least has a prominent jawline. Jim Carrey is his usual weird self which makes him much more convincing once he dons the Riddler suit than he was as a mere mortal. His Riddler is a reasonable facsimile of the comic book villain, but his E. Nygma is a bit too much of a Jim Carrey comedy act. Tommy Lee Jones does adequately by Two-Face, but never manages to bring the additional flamboyance to his role that would be needed to stand out from all the noise and the weirdness that is going on.

Visually the style has taken over the film. There just isn't enough cathedral here for all the gargoyles. The skyline of Gotham City, which had an interesting baroque look in BATMAN now has just too many statues and building decorations to be credible--art nouveau ad nauseum. But the worst mistake is to have too many spectacular but incoherent action scenes. Burton's fight scenes have been accused of being unexciting, but at least the viewer knows what Burton is trying to say. Too often you are seeing big objects crashing into other huge thingamabobs and falling into big holes without enough of an idea of why or what is supposed to be happening. Think about it too long and you miss the next big crash. Scenes are choreographed for things to work out too perfectly too much of the time. Objects swing from cables that are just exactly the right length for something else to happen. Even an incredible story needs credible underpinnings and there are just not enough. The real super-villain is The Director who breaks more laws of physics than The Riddler can break laws of Gotham. Visually the effects are generally more believable than the action, though there are some exceptions. The new Batplane looks like a toy, but overall the effects are quite good.

There are certainly times during the endless sequences of senseless action that the film does achieve the feel of the title. Or maybe it is more like BATMAN INTERMINABLE. But I think for me that a better title would be BATMAN NEVER AGAIN. This film gets a -1 on the -4 to +4 scale. [-mrl]

4. FORGET PARIS (a film review by Mark R. Leeper):

Capsule: Billy Crystal is trying to make his own WHEN HARRY MET SALLY. He stars, directs, co-writes, and produces a somewhat lackluster tale of a romantic relationship evolving over four years. Only occasionally is the film as funny as it wants to be, and neither Crystal nor Debra Winger are as appealing as the film counts on them as being. Rating: 0 (-4 to +4)

Every once in a while a love story comes along about two people that the audience can feel are just made for each other. They have just the right chemistry, like Bacall and Bogart. It can happen any time from even an unlikely pairing. So don't feel too bad if you don't find that chemistry in a film like FORGET PARIS. FORGET PARIS is the forgettable new romantic comedy from the usually reliable writing team of Lowell Ganz and Babaloo Mandel (of PARENTHOOD and CITY SLICKERS) who just happened to hit an off film this time. Being released shortly after FRENCH KISS by itself might make this a hard film to remember, but the writing certainly does not help.

Billy Crystal, the star of WHEN HARRY MET SALLY, is trying to recapture the success of that film by starring in a similarly themed film. This film could even be a missing chapter from that film. But this time Crystal also produces, directs, and co-writes the screenplay. I am no judge of whether he succeeded in capturing the style of the earlier romantic comedy since neither film did a whole lot for me. Here the story of Mickey (Billy Crystal) and Ellen (Debra Winger) is told in flashbacks to the very impressionable Liz (Cynthia Stevenson), the fiancée of Mickey's friend Andy (Joseph Mantegna). Her reactions to this rather dull love story are way over the top. She provides roughly the same function that canned laughter provides to a bad TV sitcom.

The story covers something like four years in the relationship of a couple including some hard times. One would expect a little bit of aging, but the only real difference we see in Mickey and Ellen is that there is a lot less chemistry between them at the end than

there was at the beginning. The relationship undergoes a number of predictable strains including secrets from their past lives, irritation family members, jobs that are incompatible, jobs that put the characters under stress to make life-style changes, and each person just plain not liking the other's life-style. Each situation is played for comic effect and none is as endearing as the character Liz seems to think it is.

To pad out the romantic humor the filmmakers have thrown in some sports humor. Mickey, it seems, is a basketball referee for the NBA and one who is none too popular with the fans. This gives

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Crystal a chance to contrast his height to the likes of Kareem Abdul-Jabbar. The pairing is not as funny as it is intended and Crystal might do well to study films like DESIGNING WOMAN to see how to integrate sports into a comic film. But some attempts at humor work better than others. A sequence involving a pigeon does pay off with some big audience laughs, but generally the humor is on the level of Mickey telling Ellen that she must not use his razor to shave hair in any part of her body. Crystal assumes the incongruity of the scene and his own basic cuteness will make this a funny scene. Wrong bet. There is nothing very winning about these two people.

This film needs any two of more appealing characters, bigger laughs, or a more sympathetic audience. I rate this a 0 on the -4 to +4 scale. [-mrl]

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If there were a verb meaning "to believe falsely,"
it would not have any significant first person, present
indicative.

-- Ludwig Wittgenstein

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