



What do you want?

We want access to your data.

THE MT VOID

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Who is your client?

That would be telling... We want information ... information ...  
information.

You won't get past my firewall.

By hack or by crack we will.

Who are you?

The new web server No. 2.

Where is web server No. 1?

You are web server No. 6.

I am not a web server, I am a secure compute server!

[The sound of mechanical laughter.]

[-mrl]

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3.THE ARRIVAL (a film review by Mark R. Leeper):

Capsule: This is a tired retread of too many action films with an unnecessary science fiction premise thrown in. Some of the special effects are reasonable, but there is a great deal of silliness in the plot. If you really are looking for something original and

different to see this summer you will find that THE ARRIVAL is not much of a departure. Rating: high 0 (-4 to +4) [A discussion of some of the ideas follows the main review, but at least one of the comments might be a spoiler.]

Start with a standard conspiracy and cover-up story. However, instead of making the villain be the government or the Mafia or enemy agents, this time make it be aliens. That gives you a little latitude for a few nice special effects and allows you to exploit the publicity for INDEPENDENCE DAY. That seems to be what happened with THE ARRIVAL. The plot is pretty much a standard loner-on-the-run not knowing whom he can trust that has been around since THE 39 STEPS and probably longer. David Twohy proves that it does not take a whole lot of effort to make this tried-and-true suspense formula into a science fiction film. Two previously wrote and directed DISASTER IN TIME, and there he did a reasonable job. That

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adaptation of C. L. Moore's "Vintage Season" added adventure elements to a classic story and arguably actually improved on the original. However he also co-authored the script for WATERWORLD, which depended too much on all-too-familiar action film devices. With THE ARRIVAL he is back to re-framing the all-too-familiar, once again writing and directing.

Zane Zaminski (played by Charlie Sheen) is a radio astronomer working for NASA on the Search for Extra-terrestrial Intelligence project when he receives a signal from space that seems to be a message from something intelligent. Bringing it to his supervisor, Gordian (Ron Silver), he finds that some people, and especially Gordian, seem more anxious to hush up the discovery than to act on the tremendous implications of the signal. Zaminski finds himself fired and the tape of the intercepted signal is destroyed. He determines that he can search for the signal again by hijacking all the television satellite dishes in the neighborhood, re-rigging them so that he can direct them at will, and using them to try to again find his signal. The information he gets is sufficient to tip him off that there is something odd that has to be investigated in Mexico and the chase begins in earnest.

Twohy's script really needed to use its science fiction premise more effectively in the plot. Too often the premise of the aliens is relegated to McGuffin. If a character is hanging onto something for dear life, does it really make this a science fiction film if the thing held onto is a radio telescope rather than the Statue of Liberty? Does it make the story any more exciting? And for an action plot, THE ARRIVAL's is rather flaccid with only one scene of any real tension, and that involving poisonous insects and not aliens. Charlie Sheen could have used a winning performance to his credit, but his radio astronomer is neither winning nor believable. Lindsay Crouse, whose wooden performance was the only major problem with HOUSE OF GAMES, gives an only slightly better performance here. Tony T. Johnson is the little boy next door, to whom Sheen can explain what would not otherwise be obvious to the audience. Teri Polo, the Christine Daae of the 1990 TV version of THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA, is along as the female companion of Zaminski, but neither the character nor the actress is very much help.

I somehow think that David Twohy wanted to have made a science fiction film, but did not have his heart in writing science fiction. This chase/action film gets a high 0 on the -4 to +4 scale.

SPOILER... SPOILER... SPOILER... SPOILER... SPOILER... SPOILER...

The idea that Zaminski could build his own radio telescope to find the signal again is ludicrous since it would take more money than he could put into the project and putting all the television satellite antennas out of commission would give him away before he

could use the scheme. My guess is that this handful of small dishes would not accomplish his purpose in any case. Radio telescopes have to be really large because they generally use very large wave lengths, though admittedly the script says that Zaminski was looking in the FM band. The Very Large Array near Socorro, New Mexico has 21 antennas, each 81 feet high and 422 feet in diameter. They are on a Y-shaped rail track 22 miles across. They can be brought in to the center in a tight configuration or spread out over the whole track, having the equivalent effect of looking with a wide-angle lens or with a telephoto lens. However, this array is

very often used in conjunction with other radio telescopes in other parts of the world so the huge array that so astounded Zaminski at one point in the plot should not have been even a novel idea to a real radio astronomer. Another problem that is conveniently overlooked is the length of time it takes the aliens to communicate with "something that moves like a star" and not a satellite, so presumably it is a star. There is also a plot problem involving the note that Kiki left for his grandmother. [-mrl]

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#### 4. DRAGONHEART (a film review by Mark R. Leeper):

Capsule: DRAGONHEART is an uneven high fantasy with a few bad ideas but also some very majestic scenes. Its major flaw is to build the dragon too much around Sean Connery's looks and mannerisms and to use topical humor that spoils much of the fantasy atmosphere. DRAGONHEART seems aimed at a younger set, but there are also enough very nice ideas in the film and a sufficiently created world to make this a film watchable by adults. Rating: +2 (-4 to +4)

Some of my best friends do not understand why I am an admirer of the film DRAGONSLAYER. I am not as a rule a reader of fantasy and when I am culling my collection of books, the books that have dragons on the covers seem to be among the first candidates to go. Dragons have been almost as over-used in fantasy novels as vampire have been in horror novels. Yet though I am not a fan of dragon stories, still I found myself totally floored by DRAGONSLAYER for some of the plot turns, many of the touches in the script, and especially for Vermithrax Pejorative, the most magnificent dragon ever portrayed on the screen. It is difficult to just put wings on a something that just looks like a dinosaur or a serpent and expect that it will seem like something that could fly. Yet it just takes one look at Vermithrax Pejorative to know that she was meant to soar in the air and not walk on the ground. But as much as I liked DRAGONSLAYER, I knew few people had my admiration for that film.

At least I thought they did not until I saw the trailers for DRAGONHEART. They did not show a lot of the dragon, but what I could see reminded me of DRAGONSLAYER and made it look like it could almost be a sequel. Sadly, DRAGONHEART is not the follow-up film I would have wanted, but it does have some moderately sophisticated fantasy ideas and its dragon is a nice construction, if not as aerodynamic as old Vermithrax Pejorative. In fact, one really doubts that DRAGONHEART's dragon really would be able to fly.

In this film dragons are an old race that is dying out in large part for having been killed off by humans. That seems particularly short-sighted on the part of the humans since the dragons, we are told, are mystical creatures who for some unexplained reason love humans and want them to prosper and be happy. They seem to be perfectly happy to forgive humans for wiping out their race. DRAGONHEART is the story of the friendship between the last dragon left in the world (voiced by Sean Connery) and the knight and dragonslayer Bowen (played by Dennis Quaid), the man who killed the second-to-last dragon. Draco, as the dragon is nicknamed--we are almost but not quite told his real name, bears no animosity toward Bowen for being responsible for the death of the last few of his species. Draco just wants Bowen to help him stand up for humans. If this seems a little saccharine, well, this is no DRAGONSLAYER. But I am getting ahead of myself. As the story opens Bowen is the teacher of Einon (Lee Oakes as a boy, David Thewlis as a man). Einon is the son of a powerful tyrant king, and he is killed in a peasant uprising. Einon's mother, Aislinn (Julie Christie, in entirely too much makeup for 984 A.D.), takes the dead boy to a local dragon who performs a mystical operation somehow wedding the bodies of the dragon and the boy. The operation is a success, but the boy is almost immediately seduced by the dark side of his own power. Bowen is angered at what the dragon has done to Einon and goes off in search of dragons to slay. Twelve years later (or just exactly one millennium ago) Einon has become a worse tyrant than his father and the dragonslayer Bowen comes upon the dragon he will come to call Draco. After a rocky start the two become fast friends.

The initial conceit of having a dragon not just sound like Sean Connery, but also have the mannerisms and even look a bit like him is one of the biggest mistakes in the making of this film. Certainly it will add to the box-office appeal of the film, but it robs the dragon of much of his mystical appeal and his credibility on the screen. Granted, Connery is a better choice on which to base a dragon than, say, Rodney Dangerfield. But fantasy works best when one can suspend disbelief and put oneself into its world. The casting of Connery as dragon is too much of a reminder that we cannot take all this literally. Some of the humor really tests our suspension of disbelief. There is a comic dig at President Clinton, there are at least two crotch jokes, there is a joke

stolen from the "Wizard of Id" comic strip. But those are the bad touches. Much of the script by Charles Edward Pogue is intriguing as the dragon becomes a major character in the story. His code forces him to be an ally to some humans, notably the down-trodden, some of whom are responsible for the killing off of his species. And yet his closest ties are with his worst enemy. He is not a monster, but more an erudite person. Perhaps he is more close in behavior and attitudes to Chinese dragons than to the fearsome creatures of European lore. Incidentally a look at the closing credits indicates that much of the production was done in Eastern Europe, particularly Slovakia, and that is a part of the world where dragon lore is both popular and a local tradition. A traveler in Eastern Europe quickly loses count of the number of artistic renditions seen of St. George and the Dragon, and one rather suspects that the reason is not because people have a fascination with St. George. The plot calls upon a number of high-fantasy traditions and even has a short speech by King Arthur voiced, if I am not mistaken, by an uncredited John Gielgud.

Dennis Quaid is starting to show his age, but does passably well as Bowen even if his accent is a bit uneven. Connery hams it up a little as the dragon, but that is perhaps what is necessary to render him so delightfully in to the form of the great beast. Pete Postlethwaite give a rare, overdone performance as a comic relief man of the cloth who fancies himself a poet. On the other hand David Thewlis (of NAKED, BLACK BEAUTY, and RESTORATION) could have put a little more oomph into his villain. Coincidentally, Postlethwaite and Thewlis both had parts in the recent JAMES AND THE GIANT PEACH. Director Rob Cohen previously directed DRAGON: THE BRUCE LEE STORY, and directed the upcoming DAYLIGHT which had a trailer at the showing of DRAGONHEART.

Rather than a fantasy that would work well for all ages, this turns out to be a juvenile, but one good enough that adults can enjoy it--which is not quite the same thing. I rate it a +2 on the -4 to +4 scale. [-mrl]

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You can't learn too soon that the most useful thing  
about a principle is that it can always be  
sacrificed to expediency.

--W. Somerset Maugham