

a_l_o_t of stupid touches that were all superficial. And really stupid. Edit them out and I contend you have one of the best "Star Trek" stories.

THE MT VOID

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But more often you get a popular favorite spawning a series. How many people remember the film R_o_c_k_y got the Best Picture Oscar for showing you can be down and out with no money, no talent, and no brains, and still make a success of your life if you are willing to try hard, work harder, and if someone pulls your name out of a hat. I think I was ahead of my time hating the series when it was only one film.

But R_o_c_k_y set a precedent and even the classier films are becoming series if they are popular. Upcoming we will be seeing (if nothing is done to stop them) S_t_a_n_d_a_n_d_D_e_l_i_v_e_r_I_I: A_P_P_h_y_s_i_c_s. One company has announced H_e_n_r_y_V_I: T_h_e_S_a_g_a_C_o_n_t_i_n_u_e_s, while someone else has announced he is making H_e_n_r_y_V_I_I_I. I guess somebody forgot to copyright the H_e_n_r_y_V_I name. Other sequels include M_y_R_i_g_h_t_F_o_o_t and S_t_a_r_T_r_e_k_4-1/2: J_u_s_t_B_e_f_o_r_e_T_h_i_n_g_s_G_o_t_S_t_u_p_i_d. It

wasn't bad enough having a black exploitation film rip-off of D_r_a_c_u_l_a called B_l_a_c_u_l_a, now there is a martial arts rip-off called F_i_s_t_u_l_a. And finally, T_r_i_s_k_a_d_e_k_a_p_h_o_b_i_a has a small town in California fighting a particularly nasty and dangerous infestation of the number thirteen.

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Modern journalism by giving us the opinions of the uneducated,
keeps us in touch with the ignorance of the community.

-- Oscar Wilde

Yet Another Batch of Midi-Reviews
by Dale L. Skran Jr.
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B_u_r_s_t_e_r by Michael Capobianco
Bantam Spectra

This book first came out in 1990, but I missed it. I actually read I_r_i_s first and was impressed enough to seek out Capobianco's earlier work. B_u_r_s_t_e_r is certainly a solid first novel, smoothly handled, with many interesting ideas and characters -- not a Hugo class novel, but an excellent first effort.

Peter Zolotin is an isolated teenager on a world-ship sent forth by a future Asian society steeped in "Scientific Capitalism" -- obviously derived from a Japan-dominated society. Apparently the "West" has turned inward and used cybernetics in vaguely described but forbidden ways to create an increasingly inhuman (to the Asians) society. The world ship is an attempt to unite the "Eastern" nations in a meaningful project. A few scientific bases exist on Mars, but humanity is falling slowly into decadence.

Just as the ship arrives at Epsilon Indi, contact with the Earth is cut off and a tremendous burst of radiation is observed coming from that sector of space. Peter Zolotin is selected to enter "stasis" and return to Earth in an effort to find out what has happened. There is a lot to the plot -- scientists revolt, details of the world-ship social structure, artificial intelligences, unusual alien worlds, and more -- enough to keep the pages turning. My major complaint is that the technology is a little too advanced -- the stasis field especially provides an easy way out of many situations. Directed Virtuality is just another mumbo-jumbo space drive. Still, an excellent first effort. Recommended.

I_r_i_s by William Barton and Michael Capobianco
Bantam Spectra

This book caught my eye with its striking cover and a blurb from S_c_i_e_n_c_e_F_i_c_t_i_o_n_E_y_e describing it as "a virtually perfect blend of diamondhard scientific extrapolation and stylistically brilliant narrative." Having been bumped around for my glowing review of N_e_v_e_r_n_e_s_s I shall be more restrained. However, I_r_i_s is a very significant SF novel -- a bold attempt to write about real people at the nether edge of the future that can be reasonably written about -- the year 2097. Unlike in some other novels (Q_u_e_e_n_o_f_A_n_g_e_l_s), the technology for once seems to match the year -- very significantly advanced over what we have, but not so far as to be completely magical -- and consistent throughout. I_r_i_s is definitely "post-Gibsonian" SF -- it fully includes the possibilities of cyberspace, but this is only a part of its technosphere.

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A wealthy performing artist gathers a small crew and flies toward Neptune with the intention of founding an independent colony. I leave to your imagination the sort of technology that is both believable and capable of supporting this enterprise -- but the authors make the expedition quite plausible. On the way they discover an interesting object -- "Iris" -- which eventually turns out to conceal an ancient secret. This rather shopworn plot is not the main point, however. The story deals relentlessly with the efforts of the colonists to find meaning in their lives. The prudes are warned that there are definitely

sex scenes here, even *gasp* gay sex (10% of the crew is gay -- one man -- closely fitting the Kinsey survey), but inner space -- and outer space -- provide the real adventure.

Unfortunately, I_r_i_s is unlikely to find the wide audience that E_a_r_t_h and Q_u_e_e_n_o_f_A_n_g_e_l_s will. In some ways it is a bit rough compared to these two certain Hugo contenders, but it is a worthy effort. Recommended.

L_i_f_e_l_i_n_e by Kevin J. Anderson and Doug Beason
Bantam Spectra

I've just realized that all three of the books I'm reviewing today are "Bantam Spectra" editions. I'm certainly going to look a lot more closely at this line in the future. L_i_f_e_l_i_n_e is definitely the least of the three volumes. It takes place in a less than plausible near future where computers and biotech are only somewhat more advanced than we have today, but where *three* space colonies occupy cis-lunar space. Kibalchich is Soviet (a Stanford Torus), Orbitech I American (a double Torus), and the Philippine Aguinaldo an O'Neil Sunflower. Via fairly unlikely circumstances the Philippines have purchased the Sunflower at cut-rate and colonized it. Overall, I found the background unconvincing.

A nuclear war breaks out, and *surprise* -- the colonies must learn to overcome their differences and work together to survive. I forgot to mention it, but there is also a mining colony on the moon. The interesting aspect of this scenario (and it is more a scenario than a novel) is that it illustrates quite well the difficulty of surviving an Earth-destroying accident in the early stages of the colonization of space. Only interstellar dispersion is likely to really up the odds of our long-term survival. Some novel ideas of low-cost intercolony travel are presented, but the characters are flat and the plot only mildly interesting.

I'll be looking for future works from Anderson and Beason, but I hope they read I_r_i_s before they write another novel.

CROWN OF INFINITY by John M. Faucette
and
THE PRISM by Emil Petaja
A book review by Frank R. Leisti
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C_r_o_w_n_o_f_I_n_f_i_n_i_t_y is one half of an Ace double book. The other story is Emil Petaja's story, T_h_e_P_r_i_s_m. These are the wondrous books of old, when one story was just short enough to be matched to another and really give the reader their money's worth. Both of these stories were published in 1968 and so reflect a growing history of science fiction plots and character development.

In C_r_o_w_n_o_f_I_n_f_i_n_i_t_y, we are introduced to the history of the Star Kings. This noble and undefeated group of people, remnants of a destroyed world -- the Earth. The story chronicles the development of hiding methods, genetic mutations, war machine developments against the Masters of the Universe, a ruthless race that will scorch any planet where there are signs of intelligent life. It happens to do this just when a new fleet from Earth is on a shakedown cruise with a new non-detection screening of energies.

From these members of the fleet, they send out male/female pairs with germ banks of ova to the future of the race. With each conflict, we find the resources of the strained survivors searching for answers as they work against the centuries to approach the science and technology of the Masters. Each of these individual stories show times of glory or of righting wrongs in the ceaseless struggle to emerge victorious over the Masters of the Universe. Yet, even when wrongs are corrected, and errors are made, the question still remains -- what force totally destroyed the Star Kings.

The answer is embedded with the story and draws true parallels to life and the advancement of science when faced with war and utter destruction. The moral questions that we are able to pose in peace have no place in a war of survival and the genetic manipulations and deprivations that the now future Star Kings draw on are not questioned at all.

A truly adventurous book, linking the old stage combat against a superior foe with wile and cunning. The sacrifices that are made, the staggering losses are lessened by a feeling of remoteness from the fact as we skip through time and space to watch the chronicles of the Star Kings.

While the plot is standard, the characters shine in brief glory, we get the impression of massive changes over time, yet the people seem to stay the same. An interesting mixture of history, war and the ultimate outcome make a becoming story from this dated novel. I would rate it +1

on the Leper scale.

T_h_e_P_r_i_s_m, the second story on the Ace Double book, brings a completely different story to the reader. In this future world, people have been conditioned from birth into different coloured races. There are the black, brown, green, blue, and gold. With birth conditioning, each race is pigmented, labeled and fixed into a permanent position in society. The story paints a terrible picture, where the intelligent races deliberately create disabilities in human embryos for either the entertainment or work that the society requires.

For the chosen few, the golds, they have a life of leisure, limited only by their position of power, yet lacking in most of the schooling usually demanded by the top rulers of a nation or world. The real kicker in this society is that everyone is marked and known fully in the depths of the computer system running the world. When every action that is taken is monitored, rebellion is difficult indeed. This story leads us through the final steps of the rebellion -- first by recruiting a person who does not exist in the computer.

Kor, the hero, lives as a heroic muscleman on a quest for his Princess. By overcoming the most difficult of odds -- sacrificing others on the way, he becomes a puppet of the star watchers. Of course, being a hero is easy stuff -- when you might be dead the next minute. Kor and his Princess team together to plan to bring the Prism society to an timely end.

Manipulations and simplistic political maneuvering add colour to this story, yet there is very little character development. In this novel, the story is the goal, and the plot tends to be overworn with many other examples in both fiction and real life. There is one interesting surprise in store for the reader when encountering the ruler of this world.

A remembrance of earlier days in science fiction, when the idea was subtlety drawn in a backdrop of a good versus evil story, is present in this novel. I would rate it a middle 0 on the Leeper scale.

ALICE

A film review by Mark R. Leeper

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Capsule review: Rod Serling could have done a lot more with this story in a lot less time. A Bloomingdale's sort of woman gets magical means to examine her life. If you think that is unbelievable, wait until you see what she decides to do with the knowledge! Good actors in most roles but the lead. One of Woody Allen's worst misfires. Rating: low 0 (-4 to +4).

Woody Allen's work is getting spotty these days. It was once true that an Allen film could be depended on to be worth seeing. He cannot be faulted for a C_r_i_m_e_s_a_n_d_M_i_s_d_e_m_e_a_n_o_r_s and at least H_a_n_n_a_h_a_n_d_H_e_r S_i_s_t_e_r_s was a popular success, but every once in a while one of his films goes really wrong. It is hard to imagine Allen thought he could make anything great out of the material in A_M_i_d_s_u_m_m_e_r_S_e_x C_o_m_e_d_y. It was surprising the film was at all watchable. But B_r_o_a_d_w_a_y_D_a_n_n_y R_o_s_e left one feeling more could have been done with the material. And that feeling is a lot stronger with A_l_i_c_e. This is a film that has an intriguing concept and a terrific cast, yet ends up as dry and

uninteresting as its title.

The title character is played by Mia Farrow. Farrow's performances are an acquired taste, but to the best of my knowledge Woody Allen is the only one who has ever acquired it. Alice is the air-headed wife of a very successful executive when she is given magical means to examine her life, the lives of her friends, and her relationship with her family. What she discovers is that she does not like her husband, for good reason. She does like her sister, with whom she has had a difficult relationship. She sort of likes a man to whom she has been attracted (played by Joe Mantegna). Eventually her life comes together in a hokey and stereotyped way.

And how does she get the means to examine her life? She has back pain and goes to a mysterious doctor in Chinatown (played by Keye Luke, who incidentally died of a stroke on January 12). Dr. Yang treats her with opium and magic herbs that give her the power to see ghosts or become invisible or change her personality. In spite of the fact that Yang is benevolent, this is all Fu Manchu stuff, and Allen should be ashamed to write it into a film.

There are, of course, a few good lines in the script to remind us that Allen could be writing good comedy if that was what he wanted to do. It is hard to find a good role for Bernadette Peters, but she does have a very good comic scene in this film. And a single scene is all that many of the name actors got in this effort. Cameo actors include Gwen Verdon, Cybill Shepherd, Julie Kavner, Patrick O'Neal, and Bob Balaban. Alec Baldwin has a small role as a ghost who is usually seen in shadows. And there are a lot of shadows in this dark film--dark in color and often in tone. I rate this one a disappointing low 0 on the -4 to +4 scale.

EVE OF DESTRUCTION
A film review by Mark R. Leeper
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Capsule review: A few interesting ideas are lost in the mindless action and violence in this less than stellar story of a distaff "Terminator" with a bomb in her chest. Rating: -1 (-4 to +4).

_ _ E _ v _ e _ o _ f _ D _ e _ s _ t _ r _ u _ c _ t _ i _ o _ n is the sort of science fiction film that

nobody

minds if you call "sci-fi." It is an action film with a poorly thought-out science fiction premise that happens on a few nice ideas, but generally wastes them. It seems that missiles are not a very subtle way to place a nuclear bomb. Instead, the government is going to use a robot who, short of surgery, cannot be distinguished from an attractive blonde. Inside the robot's chest is a nuclear bomb about the size of a soup can. Inside the robot's head are many of its inventor's memories, experiences, and attitudes. In front of this head is the inventor's face. The inventor is Dr. Eve Simmons and the robot's name is Eve VIII. So the robot really is the Eve of Destruction (get it?). Baghdad would know something was up if we shot a nuclear missile at them, I guess, but would never notice anything strange if a tall, leggy blond walked into town. Eve VIII is being tested--with full nuclear capability!--in real world situations such as going to the bank. Suddenly she runs into the unexpected, her temporary controller is killed, and she starts running loose in the real world like a female Terminator. She is following instructions programmed into her head but also enjoying new-found toys such as Uzi machine guns. Anti-terrorist Jim McQuade (played by Gregory Hines) and Eve Simmons (played by Renee Soutendijk) must team up to out-fight and out-think the robot.

Nice things could still be done with this idea, but nothing really interesting comes out of it. A little if made of the idea that the woman and the robot will have some of the same thoughts, but mostly it is a contrivance to make the needle a little easier to find in the haystack and at the same time to make it a little more dangerous. Eve VIII takes particular exception to being called "bitch" and always uses it as a trigger to go violent. The audience knows that via repetitions, but Dr. Simmons shows no sign of knowing it. And when late in the film, McQuade seems to know the trigger, we can only conclude that he learned it reading the script.

The robot is made of some material that is not greatly damaged in a seventy-mile-per-hour impact, but still feels real in a slow breast fondle. That's the material rocket scientists have been looking for for years!

There is occasionally a little fun here, but overall the film is mostly for a drive-in-style audience. I rate it a -1 on the -4 to +4 scale.

MY TOP TEN FILMS OF 1990
A film article by Mark R. Leeper
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This list is made with at least a couple of qualifications. It is relatively easy for a major critic to make a list of what he or she considers the best of the previous year and to have such a list complete by the middle of January. I do not see nearly so many films and many take a long time to reach my area. Many films open to a very small release in time for the Academy Award nominations and do not make it to the boondocks of New Jersey for many months into the following year. Some only make it into video stores. Some do not even make it there. Last year I made my list at the end of January to meet Evelyn's deadline. In February I saw E_n_e_m_i_e_s: A_L_o_v_e_S_t_o_r_y. It most certainly would have made my list. Later I saw T_r_i_u_m_p_h_o_f_t_h_e_S_p_i_r_i_t, which may be the only film to date at all accurately to dramatize the concentration camp experience. The accuracy of this list would be much improved if the publication date were late February and still later would make it more accurate. Evelyn feels, however, that readers lose interest in the previous year's films in early February. This is not so much my list of top ten films as it is a list of what seemed to me to be the top ten at the of January.

A further regret, and my second qualification, is that this list includes only theatrical films. On a previous list I included an HBO Movie of the Month, A_D_a_n_g_e_r_o_u_s_L_i_f_e, as the best film of its year. However, I have nowhere near comprehensive coverage of made-for-television and released-first-on-television films. I cannot hope to integrate them accurately into this list, so I will not even attempt to include in some of the few I have seen. I will, however, highly recommend the PBS documentary T_h_e_C_i_v_i_l_W_a_r and the "virtual film" from the Hallmark Hall of Fame, D_e_c_o_r_a_t_i_o_n_D_a_y. Both were moving and would have made my top ten list, probably in the top half. The HBO film C_r_i_m_i_n_a_l_J_u_s_t_i_c_e would very likely have been a contender for the list.

Asterisks on the ratings below indicate they were adjusted from my original rating after later consideration.

1. MOUNTAINS OF THE MOON -- The story of one of the great expeditions of history--and of the controversy that surrounded it--is brought to the screen spectacularly and intelligently. While the film takes a few liberties with the facts, I found it a better adventure tale than H_u_n_t_f_o_r_R_e_d_O_c_t_o_b_e_r and give or take a fact or two, it is all a true story. Rating: high +3*.

2. AVALON -- A loving portrait of a Jewish family in post-World-War-

II Baltimore makes A _ v _ a _ l _ o _ n one of Barry Levinson's best films to date. Levinson has a real talent for dialogue and for creating memorable characters. This is a film to be enjoyed more than

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once. Rating: +3.

3. DANCES WITH WOLVES -- Epic portrait of a Sioux tribal life as seen through the eyes of a Civil War officer. American Indians have rarely or never been portrayed so believably and sympathetically. Its biggest flaw is that the White Man does not seem as realistically portrayed. The films resembles W _ h _ i _ t _ e _ D _ a _ w _ n and F _ a _ r _ e _ w _ e _ l _ l _ t _ o _ t _ h _ e _ K _ i _ n _ g in plot and spirit. Rating: +3*.
4. GOODFELLAS -- A very realistic view of organized crime follows the life of a minor organized crime figure from 1955 to almost the present. The structure is autobiographical at some expense to the dramatic impact. Rating: low +3*.
5. REVERSAL OF FORTUNE -- Famous lawyer Alan Dershowitz defends Claus von Bulow in this adaptation of Dershowitz's book. While none of the characters is anyone you would really want to know or even deal with, some of the re-assessment of what appears initially to be an "open and shut" case is reminiscent of T _ w _ e _ l _ v _ e _ A _ n _ g _ r _ y _ M _ e _ n. Rating: high +2*.
6. AWAKENINGS -- What is it like to wake up after having slept for decades? What is it like to discover the means to wake such people up? Robin Williams and Robert DeNiro star in one of the most intriguing films of the year. Rating: high +2*.
7. THE GODFATHER PART III -- The Corleone saga continues in another story of honor and revenge. This is not the Best Picture of 1990 but it is good enough that it will probably be nominated for that honor. While it is less than totally original, major similarities to the other parts may well go unnoticed. Rating: high +2.
8. FLATLINERS -- An original and hypnotic horror film. The music, the acting, the photography, and the script all get very high marks. It is a horror film with intelligent characters who do things rather than have things done to them. Strong on atmosphere

and intriguing in ideas. Rating: high +2.

9. EDWARD SCISSORHANDS -- The worlds of John Waters and Jean Cocteau meet in a remarkably good fantasy film from Tim Burton and the screenwriter he has needed all along, Caroline Thompson. Rating: +2*.
10. THE COOK, THE THIEF, HIS WIFE & HER LOVER -- HBO is hiring established directors to do segments of its "Tales from the Crypt" series. Peter Greenaway didn't wait to be asked. He lovingly made a two-hour horror comic story with some hilarious detail. Somehow it is being treated as an art film. A unique film that certainly will not be for all audiences. Rating: +2.