

2. I was sitting on a plane--on a business trip, no less--and I look across the aisle and what do you think I see? A woman is reading FORTUNE magazine and it says on the cover in big yellow eye-catching letters, "Are you paid enough?" Now, how many people do you think you are going to see who are going to say they **are**

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paid enough? Are there really people out there who tell themselves, "You know, my work is worth less than what I am getting paid for it"? Not that there aren't people out there whose work really is worth only a tiny fraction of their income. But I don't see Madonna getting all upset that she is overpaid. She probably doesn't think she is. In spite of overwhelming evidence.

The cover goes on to say that unless you are earning FOUR TIMES your age the answer is probably NO!. Uh-oh! Then I do a quick mental calculation and breath a sigh of relief. Yes, I probably do earn four times my age. More even. Every day. Well, that is counting only work days. The only thing is that from the looks of the suit the guy is wearing, I don't think he is figuring things the same way I am. I don't think he got on the cover of FORTUNE by figuring things the way I do. He got on the cover of FORTUNE by thinking about things very differently than I do. He is on the cover of FORTUNE, and I am on the cover of the MT VOID. And to make matters even worse for him--which sounds like an eminently good idea for anyone who has seen that suit--come next month someone else is going to be on the cover of FORTUNE and I am still going to be on the cover of the MT VOID. And the month after that. Okay, so I am in a rut. But he is in that suit and the rut feels a lot more comfortable.

The one thing that bothers me is that there are a bunch of guys in similar suits where I work. Well, maybe a different building but the same company. And these guys are reading the same magazine. And wearing the same suits. And it makes them mad. They look at that magazine and they say to themselves, "I can wear a silly suit, just like that guy. I just know I can wear a silly suit with the best of them. Hey, I bet I can wear an even sillier suit. Just imagine. I should be able to earn four times my age. I think I should be able to earn my age in months. Why shouldn't I earn my age squared every day? How about half my age cubed every week? Or

maybe pi times the exponential of my age in decades?" So what does that leave for the rest of us? We are lucky if we get four times our age each day. Some of us. I just wish FORTUNE wouldn't give these people on suits ideas. [-mrl]

3. THE INDIAN IN THE CUPBOARD (a film review by Mark R. Leeper):

Capsule: Generally fine special effects almost bring to life this children's film with an intriguing premise but with little idea what to do with it. It finally needs some contrived plotting to infuse some danger and excitement. The film has nice moments and even some allegory, but not enough of anything to make a

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great children's film. Rating: +1 (-4 to +4)

Omri gets some unusual gifts for his ninth birthday. His (Asian) Indian friend Patrick (Rishi Bhat) gave him a toy (American) Indian. And his brother found a two-foot-high wooden cupboard and gave that to Omri. Neither is so great a gift by itself, but together they form a lot more than the sum of the parts. Omri locks the Indian in the cupboard and when morning comes he finds that strange noises are coming from the cupboard. When he opens it, there in place of the toy Indian is a real living Iroquois, just about three inches tall. Little Bear (played by Litefoot) is bewildered to find himself plucked from 1761 and the French and Indian Wars. Even stranger, he is so small and in a world he does not understand. Now Omri finds he has responsibility to do what is right for Little Bear, a miniature Indian who thinks Omri is a god. Omri quickly figures out that locking a toy in the cupboard an odd number of times brings the toy to life; an even number of times and the toy is just a toy. The boy wants to keep the magic cupboard a secret until he know better what to do with his new tiny friend. But he tells Patrick, and Patrick is quick to turn a toy cowboy into Boone (David Keith) a real, but somewhat goofy, cowboy. Now the two boys find they must protect the cowboy and Indian from the

real world and from each other.

This is an adaptation of the popular children's book by Lynne Reid Banks but the screenplay by Melissa Mathison (THE BLACK STALLION, E.T.) needs more of a spark to get going. There is potential in this story for some interesting relationships. Omri is, after all, huge compared to Little Bear, while Little Bear is a warrior and a mature adult, albeit from another world. Each could draw on the other's strengths. But Omri never seems to profit much from the wisdom of Little Bear and the child remains father to the man. Little Bear is treated more an interesting pet than an intelligent adult. Instead the plot is tied up with the over-acted Boone, wild and weird, who never becomes much more than a caricature. The personalities of the solid and intelligent Little Bear and the silly Boone never mesh on the screen.

Seeing this film on the same day I saw the 1957 film THE INCREDIBLE SHRINKING MAN, I found it clear that visual effects have come a long way since the 1950s. Most of the scenes combining characters of each scale are utterly believable. There is some problem with Little Bear being more in focus than his background, but I think Jack Arnold would have loved to have the effects technology for his film. Yet Arnold was able to give far more interest value to his characters than Frank Oz ever manages here.

THE INDIAN IN THE CUPBOARD wastes opportunities to use its clever premise in any but the most superficial ways. This is a film that shows more technique than imagination. I give it a +1 on the -4 to +4 scale. [-mrl]

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

Capsule: An amiable multi-story film about the acquaintances of a likable manager of a Brooklyn smoke shop. Some of the goings-on are a little too convenient with the story-teller polishing the stories a little too much to be believable, but perhaps that is the point of

the film. SMOKE is a film that may be more subtle than most viewers realize. Rating: high +1 (-4 to +4). This review contains minor spoilers.

All is not what it seems with SMOKE. This is not a film that is about the people who know Auggie Wren, though one could be fooled into thinking that really was the subject of the film. Really this is a film about story-telling and what makes a good story. Like SHORT CUTS, SMOKE is a collection of short stories. It has no main plot but rather several subplots unfolding at the same time, mostly revolving around the wise and worldly Auggie Wren, operator of the Brooklyn Cigar Company, a small smoke shop. Auggie runs into a broad cross-section of humanity while running the shop and he is a natural-born story-teller. One has the feeling, though the film never says it, that we are seeing not reality but Auggie's enhanced versions of the stories. Each story seems a little too much like a polished Auggie story to be taken literally. Only as we get toward the end of the film do we get an inkling about why that is and while it is open to interpretation, in my opinion it is probably that we are one more level removed from the characters than we are in most films. Auggie is telling us these stories in his own style. And we might expect that sort of subtle playfulness from a screenplay by Paul Auster, the author of the enigmatic novel THE MUSIC OF CHANCE, recently adapted to film. Auster is also the author of "Auggie Wren's Christmas Story," which actually appears in the film, though there it is written by the character Paul Benjamin (a penname Auster has used). So apparently Auster has written himself into the story or perhaps he is just subtly playing with us again.

The film has a complex chain of simple stories. Auggie (played casually with open shirt by Harvey Keitel) has a favorite customer Paul (William Hurt), a once-good writer who has not been able to get his life together since the loss of his wife. His life is saved by troubled black teenager Rashid (Harold Perrineau, Jr.) who later sets out to find his (Rashid's) missing father Cyrus (Forest Whitaker). Meanwhile Auggie's ex-lover Ruby (Stockard Channing) shows up with demands on Auggie.

Auster has a hypnotic story telling style that makes the viewer want to just go along for the ride, though after the fact the stories seem more contrived than they originally seemed. There are certain symmetries in the stories, reminiscent of those that director Wayne Wang had in his previous film THE JOY LUCK CLUB. Certain plot elements show up repeatedly in the stories. Parent-child relationships seem to show up in many different forms. Stolen goods that end up going for a good purpose is another repeated plot element.

Adam Holender's camerawork manages to capture a certain charm to the streets of what could have been a tense area of New York. And Wang's style combines with Auster's style and Rachel Portman's music to make this a warm, if somewhat paradoxical film. I give it a high +1 on the -4 to +4 scale. [-mrl]

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The kiss originated when the first male reptile licked the first female reptile, implying in a subtle, complimentary way that she was as succulent as the small reptile he had for dinner the night before.

-- F. Scott Fitzgerald

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