



town they crushed the minimal competition and now that they are moving out they are taking business and taxes with them. They brought hardship by their coming and by their going. The program interviewed a WalMart executive who said that it was a tough decision. Makes you almost feel sorry for them, doesn't it? I

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mean having to make a tough decision like that. But somehow it had a familiar ring to it. I think the week before they had a piece on major corporations downsizing. (Oops no, rightsizing. No, dammit, FIRING EMPLOYEES. Let's stop trying to find better and better euphemisms. Jeez, let's lead the world in the production of something besides creative euphemisms!) But what that story was talking about was how these companies cut expenses by firing employees and for a short time their profits look good. Hey, if you want a quick shot in the arm, stop production entirely and sell only what you have already produced. You won't spend anything on producing your product and it will be a while before your sales start to drop. Well, they don't do that but they do fire employees. Then their customers start feeling the effect of the downsizing in decreased customer service or decreased production or any form of decreased output. The customers go elsewhere. The executives say to themselves, "Wow, times really are hard," and what do they do? They see that a few months ago they improved the economic picture by firings. Hey, it looks like it is time for yet another tough decision. What I want to know is if this decision is so dang tough, how come so many executives in so many companies are licking their chops and lining up to make it? [-mrl]

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3. Starting in January 1996, Middletown meetings will be held in the cafeteria rather than in a conference room. This will make it easier for people to eat lunch \*and\* attend the meetings. Since we won't have a reserved table, people planning to attend should familiarize themselves with what Mark or Evelyn look like. The December meeting will be held in MT 5T-415 as usual. [-ecl]

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4. TIME SHIPS by Stephen Baxter (Voyager, ISBN 0-00-648012-8, 1995, 630pp, L4.99) (a book review by Mark R. Leeper):

TIME SHIPS is a remarkable novel if not a great one. It reminds me of the reasons I first got interested in reading science fiction in the first place back when I discovered the early masters. There have been several sequels written to H. G. Wells's THE TIME MACHINE--Baxter even did a panel to this effect at the last World Science Fiction Convention--but this one is unique in multiple ways. It is the first one of this length, about five hundred pages. This is not a virtue in itself, I tend to think that science fiction novels are getting too long, but this one was enough fun that I never felt it dragged. It also is unique in that Baxter got this one authorized by the heirs of Wells. This probably was considerably easier for him than it might have been for other authors of sequels since the subject of this piece is not

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just the idea of time travel. That is a road that has been heavily traveled by other authors and Baxter was unlikely to add any unexpected turns. Instead the subject is at least in part H. G. Wells and his writing. In fact, if you are one of those people who have read only THE TIME MACHINE and THE WAR OF THE WORLD (or perhaps not even that) of Wells's science fiction you will likely miss or at least not appreciate much of what is going on or why Baxter is doing what he is doing. The novel has more than a seasoning of other Wells science fiction writing and even some references to some very obscure works. An example of this is in the spoiler at the end of the review.

Of almost equal interest to his references to Wells is the writing in the style of Wells. One tends to think of the writing of a century ago as being perhaps more flowery and less readable. It was not until I read Stephen Baxter's recreation of Wells's style that I remembered how comfortable and concrete was Wells's prose. Wells let the ideas and the plot create the mood and seems to put more effort into communication than into artistry.

Still, in some cases Wells's writing is better than Baxter's. Where our 19th Century time traveler might not understand

scientific theory that came along after his time (though usually before ours), he has his scientific Morlock along to explain things. (Yes, there is a likable Morlock in the story.) Baxter ends each chapter with a cliff-hanger; Wells did not. That and some contrived coincidence damages the book, but overall this is the most enjoyable piece of science fiction I have read this year, I would like to see it spark a revival of interest in Wells but even if it doesn't, it is a fun read.

(Minor spoiler: I wanted to give an example of how Baxter uses Wells's minor works. In THE WORLD SET FREE, Wells wrote in 1914 about the effect on warfare of bombs powerful enough that one could destroy an entire city. He called them "atomic bombs" and the name that he coined was applied to an invention thirty years later. An atomic bomb does show up in the story, not surprisingly though Baxter can be much more accurate on the effects of the bomb. He could be more accurate, but I am disappointed that he was since surprisingly Wells's concept of an atomic bomb is in some ways more horrifying than what atomic bombs turned out to be.) [-mrl]

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5. TECH-HEAVEN by Linda Nagata (Bantam Spectra, ISBN 0-553-56926-0, 1995, 368pp, US\$4.99) (a book review by Evelyn C. Leeper):

This is Nagata's second novel, and it is set in a more accessible future than her first (THE BOHR MAKER)--at least for one thread. In TECH-HEAVEN, the story revolves around cryonic suspension: the

freezing of the dead in the hopes of reviving them when a cure for their disease or injury is found. Nagata takes the current discussion of this subject and uses it for a fairly straightforward future thriller sort of novel. This thread does not get much beyond the questions being asked already: Is it fair to spend millions to preserve the dead rather than to improve the lot of the living? What about the legal issues of rights and property? Is a frozen person really dead?

It's the last question than Nagata expands on in her other thread,

which follows the "soul" of the main character's husband, who has been frozen. Some may find this intriguing, but I found it unconvincing and difficult to follow. (Maybe the two go hand in hand.) The main plot is full of convenient characters and familiar concepts. For example, one powerful member of the main character's family is opposed to cryogenics, giving Nagata a ready-made conflict. Nanotechnology is the solution to the problems of thawing people out, as it seems to be to every problem these days, and so on. It's not completely predictable, but it's not full of a lot of surprises either.

While this will undoubtedly be of interest to someone who already have an interest in cryogenics, I can't say that it did much for me. [-ecl]

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#### 6. HOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS (a film review by Mark R. Leeper):

Capsule: W. D. Richter's screenplay is a study of family relationships. Some result in conflict; others have a nurturing effect. Jodie Foster's second directorial effort starts well and continues nearly as good for most of its length, but in the end it turns into a feel-good film that does not take enough chances. Rating: high +1 (-4 to +4).

Most romantic comedies are about strong, emotionally secure people finding each other. A WHILE YOU WERE SLEEPING or a PLAY IT AGAIN SAM may be about someone superficially shy, but you will rarely see a character have serious problems holding his/her life together. Divorcee Claudia Larson (played by Holly Hunter) is to that point. She has lost a job she loved and her sixteen-year-old daughter has confided that this Thanksgiving weekend she is ready to have sex with her boy friend. Claudia is also catching cold and though she hates planes she has to fly from Chicago home to Baltimore. Claudia has lost control of her life just when she has to go through the annual trial of Thanksgiving dinner with her eccentric family. Holly Hunter usually plays self-assured women and her

performance makes the freshly written and acted early part of the film the high point. However, as the film starts focusing on more characters and as Claudia finds her way back to peace of mind, the film loses its creative bite. Instead it finds its way to the easy route of a well-worn romantic comedy.

The Larson family is a study in contrasts and odd personalities. Mother Adele (Anne Bancroft) is cold and needling and tries to be always in control. Father Henry (Charles Durning) is a late-in-life romantic finding odd moments to dance with his wife and play the organ, but has lost the capacity to be serious. Brother Tommy (Robert Downey, Jr.) is a consummate but often obnoxious clown. His pranks are amusing for a short time, then start to grate on the characters and the audience. Tommy is gay and has brought a bemused friend (Dylan McDermott) to the party. Sister Joanne (Cynthia Stevenson) is an upwardly mobile yuppie striving for a starchy respectability. Aunt Gladys (a skeletal Geraldine Chaplin) is getting a little strange in several ways at once. They will come together, clown around with each other, get on each other's nerves, and make some painful admissions to each other. The contact will strengthen some relationships and show up weaknesses in others.

Jodie Foster's LITTLE MAN TATE was a heavy-handed and misplaced argument against the fostering of intellect in children. HOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS's study in relationships works considerably better while that study is really what it wants to be. It falters only toward the end trying to force a happy ending. Even the chaotic Thanksgiving dinner, the showpiece of the film, manages to show more humanity than farce. Richter's script, based on a short story by Chris Radant, goes a little overboard in some of its characterizations, especially those of Tommy and Adele, and the dialogue is interesting, but not always believable. Nor is it really believable that this family lets so much hang out at a family get-together.

This is a film that has a lot going for it, but loses points on trying too hard to have too easy a finish. I give it a high +1 on the -4 to +4 scale. [-mrl]

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## 7. GOLDENEYE (a film review by Mark R. Leeper):

Capsule: Yet another super-criminal has a nefarious plot that James Bond has to thwart. This was really a test episode to see if the series should continue now that almost everyone who made the original series what it was is gone. Unfortunately, Bond is already an

anachronism and this film makes matters worse than they need to be. Rating: 0 (-4 to +4)  
[This review contains discussions of film flaws that are minor spoilers.]

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As James Bond films go, GOLDENEYE is some distance from the bottom of the pack, but more importantly it is also a long way from the top. As an attempt to jumpstart the stalled series with an almost entirely new crew of talent on both sides of the lens, it is a failure. Without Richard Maibaum's view of who Bond is, without the tension of a John Barry score, with an almost entirely new cast including a new actor in the role of Bond, GOLDENEYE comes off like an imitation of a Bond film. And there is no shortage of imitations. CLEAR AND PRESENT DANGER is a better spy thriller and has more of a feel of authenticity than any of the Bond films certainly including GOLDENEYE. It doesn't help that the film is trying to have as much sex and violence as ever while paying lip-service to feminism and an anti-violence philosophy. The new distaff head of staff puts Bond down as a sexist, misogynist dinosaur and the woman that he saves puts him and the villain down as a "boys with toys" and criticizes their violence. Bond just takes it as if to say of course it is correct. If even the script says there is nothing to admire about Bond, why should the audience feel any different?

The film's biggest thrill is the gunsight-iris opening that is like a trademark seal. That says that what follows is a GENUINE JAMES BOND FILM. And it may be just from habit, but the beginning of a new Bond film is still an exciting moment. Unfortunately the thrill is not sustained. Replaying scenes of Bond winning in a casino against a villain and then identifying himself as "Bond ... James Bond," and recreating scenes from previous films

are obviously trying too hard to move Brosnan into the role. The famous Bond wit has never been so strained, with Bond making comments after a near-death in one close call in a helicopter about "the things we do for frequent flier mileage." And wearing thin is the usual convention that the villains kill people right and left, but cannot bloody their hands by putting a bullet between Bond's temples. Instead they time and again leave Bond in shaky death traps from which he escapes.

And in spite of the new post-Cold-War setting, the basic plot is not so different from those done in the 1970s. In fact, it

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probably would have worked better then. In *GOLDENEYE* the former Soviets have a weapon that nullifies computers. The weapon is stolen by an unknown super-criminal with plans to use it on a major city. Bond (played for the first time by Pierce Brosnan) has to stop the criminal, but first he has to determine who it is that he has to stop. (It is not a tough guess for the audience.)

The film starts in flashback from nine years earlier with a Pyrrhic victory for 007. Bond destroys a Soviet nerve gas factory, but in doing it loses personal friend 006 (Sean Bean). Now back in the present the death of 006 hangs over Bond and the events of the film. After the pre-credit action sequence, the first part of the film deals with the theft of the Goldeneye device. This is a long sequence that involves little participation from Bond. It does, however, introduce Bond to a new assassin, Xenia Onatopp (Femke Janssen) who gets a sexual charge from danger and murder and who mixes love and death by crushing men between her legs during love-making. Bond is dispatched to St. Petersburg to investigate the destruction of the base that might have controlled the Goldeneye device.

So how is Pierce Brosnan as the fifth James Bond of the United Artists series? In a word, disappointing. He is a Bond in the tradition of Roger Moore, which is just what the series does not need. I will conclude this review with some comments about casting the Bond role. Femke Janssen is not entirely believable as an assassin, but she plays so offbeat and enigmatic a character that she makes herself the center of attention in all her scenes. She

certainly is one of the better Bond villains. Gottfried John is, like Brosnan and Sean Bean, a TV veteran having had the most interesting role on the abortive series "Space Rangers." Here he does not have enough to do, but he is a good actor. Joe Don Baker is a bad choice for a CIA agent having played a memorable villain in THE LIVING DAYLIGHTS. There are some serious problems with the script, but none worse than in the pre-credit sequence. That sequence is usually a throw-away but here it sets up the whole story. Also, it involves two very impressive stunts. The problem is that one of the stunts requires that the sequence take place at a very large dam; the other requires that it take place high in mountains where you do not generally find huge dams. And when you see the mountain base from above there is no dam in sight. It seems unlikely that the villains' dish could be built particularly where it is without attracting a great deal of attention. And it does not take much knowledge of history to know that this particular local government is very edgy about what can be seen from overhead surveillance. Nor could the antenna be hidden where it is without damaging it, nor could it be brought out of hiding and so quickly not show the signs of where it was hidden.

I would complain that the Internet address that is mentioned in the film does not follow the correct naming convention, but it is just

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nice to see computer nerds as important figures in a James Bond film. But not even a computer nerd types on a standard keyboard one-handed while he fidgets with the other hand.

There is just too much that is too silly about GOLDENEYE and too many mistakes in the making. It is not as actively stupid as some Bond films have been, but it is well below average in intelligence for the already not too cerebral series. I give it a 0 on the -4 to +4 scale.

Just so the reader can know what my values are in Bond films I would rate the Bond film best to worse as:

1. FROM RUSSIA WITH LOVE
2. ON HER MAJESTY'S SECRET SERVICE
3. THUNDERBALL
4. DR. NO

5. LICENSE TO KILL
6. GOLDFINGER
7. FOR YOUR EYES ONLY
8. YOU ONLY LIVE TWICE
9. THE LIVING DAYLIGHTS
10. THE SPY WHO LOVED ME
11. OCTOPUSSY
12. GOLDENEYE
13. DIAMONDS ARE FOREVER
14. THE MAN WITH THE GOLDEN GUN
15. A VIEW TO A KILL
16. MOONRAKER
17. LIVE AND LET DIE

A comment about the casting of Bond: As close as Sean Connery is identified with the role, the actor who best embodies the character as created by Fleming is Timothy Dalton. Brosnan and Moore are too smooth. James Bond is at heart a thug for the Secret Service. He needs a sharp, hard, flinty edge. He can dress up in evening clothes and appear charming but he never turns off the animal instincts just below the surface. Only Dalton brought out that aspect of his character. If Dalton is not going to take the role any more, perhaps they have the right actor in this film in the wrong role. Sean Bean did a very impressive job in the two Richard Sharpe stories that have been shown in this country. He did a good job as 006 and should be at least considered as 007, if it doesn't take too much time from the Sharpe series, which frankly is better than the Bond series. And they could do a lot worse than to bring in Brian Cox, also from the Sharpe series, to play M. [-mrl]

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8. THE AMERICAN PRESIDENT (a film review by Mark R. Leeper):

Capsule: This is a film that sneaks up on you. The romance is cute and well written, but it is not actually the main thrust. The real subject is politics, mudslinging and deal-making. It

is about a fictional President, but the issues it raises are relevant and timely. It is an enjoyable film, but also more than just a light entertainment. Rating: +2 (-4 to +4)

Just in case you did not notice this film was "Capra-esque," scriptwriter Aaron Sorkin works the term into the dialogue. But even if he had not, there would have been inevitable comparisons to Frank Capra's techniques of pulling the viewer in with one story and then introducing a much more relevant plotline. And this film is in a class with MR. SMITH GOES TO WASHINGTON WASHINGTON and MEET JOHN DOE. THE AMERICAN PRESIDENT is a bright, witty romantic comedy with really good dialogue, but at the same time it is a statement about politics, and about politicians, some who are idealists and some who are opportunists. This is a film that purrs and a film that has claws--not big ones, but claws nonetheless.

President Andrew Shepherd (played by Michael Douglas) is an idealist and a Democrat with a high approval rating from the American public. Shepherd is a widower with a teenage daughter. He gets along tolerably well with Republicans and with the environmental lobby, treading a path somewhere in between. When he overhears a new environmental lobbyist, Sydney Ellen Wade (Annette Bening), making insulting comments about him he is intrigued by her and invites the flustered woman to be his date for a state dinner. Eventually they are seeing more of each other in spite of warnings from his staff that dating a woman will hurt his approval rating. It soon becomes clear that they are right, as an opponent, Senator Bob Rumson (Richard Dreyfuss) who is adept at political hardball, begins mounting a smear campaign suggesting that Wade is a flag-burner and that she is using sex to sway the President's opinions. The President's interest in Wade is exaggerated into an all-out attack on family values. The President's sagging approval rating forces some hard decisions.

Sorkin's dialogue with Rob Reiner's direction is witty, sharp, and a lot of fun. While the entire course of the President's relationship with Wade is easily predictable, there are some very funny situations built around what would happen if a modern President did decide to date. Reiner's film has the undeniable charm in portraying the President trying to do what seem like simple tasks like ordering flowers and dating. There is a charm in seeing a lobbyist awed and flustered by the attentions of the President. And for a while the film rides on all that charm. But the film does a lot more than that. The film is something of an education in how modern politics works. We see something of the complex deals and strategies which anyone in high political office

must contend.

The cast is a bit overpowered with familiar faces in almost every reasonable role. Martin Sheen, Michael J. Fox, and David Paymer are advisors to the President. I was pleased to see Anna Deavere Smith in an important role as the President's press secretary. Smith proved herself to be a first rank character actor with an incredible acting range in her one-woman show "Fires in the Mirror," filmed for PBS. Other familiar faces include Samantha Mathis, John Mahoney, and Nina Siemaszko. Marc Shaiman's score is dignified and sounds Presidential. The photography looks convincingly like it was filmed in the White House, no doubt due in large part to contributions by Industrial Light and Magic.

Like many of the films of Frank Capra, THE AMERICAN PRESIDENT can be seen as a light entertainment and at the same time a somewhat deeper look at the problems in American politics. To balance both as adroitly as it does, I rate it a +2 on the -4 to +4 scale. [-mrl]

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My pessimism extends to the point of even suspecting  
the the sincerity of other pessimists.

--Jean Rostand

