



Charles Sheffield is a Ph.D. physicist who has been the first Vice President of the American Astronautical Society, Vice President of Special Projects for Earth Satellite Corporation, and an advisor to Congress on the space program. S\_i\_g\_h\_t\_o\_f\_P\_r\_o\_t\_e\_u\_s is his first novel.

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To quote the book cover: "In the 22nd century a combination of computer-augmented bio-feedback and chemotherapy techniques has given man the ability not only to heal himself, but to CHANGE himself--to alter his very shape at will. But Form Change has its darker aspects, ranging from unauthorized experimentation on human subjects to a threat to the very essence of humanity--a SIGHT OF PROTEUS."

The book is an SF detective story, with a style reminiscent of Asimov's robot detective stories (without robots). The central idea is an interesting one--if man was able to metamorphose into other biological forms, what would be (or should be) the limits? What would define a human being? How could this capability be effectively or frivolously used? What would be its effect on society, especially on a vastly overcrowded Earth that is teetering on the brink of social breakdown? And could external influences drive this metamorphosis to unexpected results?

Although the story is well written compared to some other scientist sf writers, the ideas are not as well developed as they could be (compared, say, to Forward), and the social conditions on 22nd Century Earth are only slightly developed (compared, say, to Brin's E\_a\_r\_t\_h). However, the basic idea is a fascinating one.

These days the means are more likely to involve nanotechnology, but the idea does not seem that far-fetched. After all, many other animals can change forms on their own, and others can grow back large parts of their bodies. Humans are known to go through other forms as developing embryos, and a small chemical stimulus can cause large changes and "foreign" animal structures to appear in developing organisms (see "Hen's Teeth and Horse's Toes" by Stephen Jay Gould). With a better understanding of developmental biology and the human genome, and with nanotechnology to assist, human form changes may be possible. In that case, what would you like to be,

and how much would you be giving up?

3. On Thursday, July 15, at 7PM, we will finally have a film festival I have wanted to have for four years. The best film festivals are those in which each film comments on the other so that the pairing is stronger than the sum of the two films. We showed E\_l\_e\_n\_i with Z. One is about how bad the Communists were for Greece; one is about how bad the anti-Communists were. We are going to have another of those fests on July 15. The films are both about the influence of teachers on students, but they see that influence in very different ways.

One Teacher's Influence

DEAD POETS SOCIETY (1989) dir. by Peter Weir

THE PRIME OF MISS JEAN BRODIE (1969) dir. by Ronald Neame

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D\_e\_a\_d\_P\_o\_e\_t\_s\_S\_o\_c\_i\_e\_t\_y stars Robin Williams and Robert Sean Leonard. While Williams is the nominal star as unconventional teacher John Keating, this is more the story of the boys at a posh prep school who are faced with the pressure to conform and be ordinary but effective bread-winners. Keating wants them to be more than that and comes to the school with his own message of "Seize the Day." Leonard plays a student with a yearning to play Shakespeare. (Note: He gets his wish in M\_u\_c\_h\_A\_d\_o\_a\_b\_o\_u\_t\_N\_o\_t\_h\_i\_n\_g.)

Another private school, this one in Edinburgh, is the setting for T\_h\_e\_P\_r\_i\_m\_e\_o\_f\_M\_i\_s\_s\_J\_e\_a\_n\_B\_r\_o\_d\_i\_e. Maggie Smith stars in the title role as a creative teacher also fighting the tide of her school to make mediocre students. But the issues are not quite so simple in this film as they are in D\_e\_a\_d\_P\_o\_e\_t\_s\_S\_o\_c\_i\_e\_t\_y. Jay Presson Allen's screenplay, based on the Muriel Spark novel, has a very different interpretation of the charismatic teacher. Robert Stephens, Pamela Franklin, and Gordon Jackson also star.

4. Charlie Harris sends in the following item:

U\_n\_t\_i\_l\_t\_h\_e\_E\_n\_d\_o\_f\_t\_h\_e\_W\_o\_r\_l\_d described as the "ultimate sci-fi road movie," will be shown as the second part of a double feature this

Sunday evening, July 11, in the refurbished State Theater, New Brunswick. The State Theater "is a 1,350-seat movie palace, which offers a stupendous sound system" and a big screen. It is located near the corner of George Street and Livingston Avenue in central New Brunswick, next to the George St. Playhouse.

From the Rutgers Film Co-op flier: "U\_n\_t\_i\_l\_t\_h\_e\_E\_n\_d\_o\_f\_t\_h\_e\_W\_o\_r\_l\_d takes viewers through 4 continents, 15 countries, and includes an incredible cast and soundtrack.... Starring William Hurt, Sam Neill, Jeanne Moreau, and Max Von Sydow. From the director of W\_i\_n\_g\_s\_o\_f\_D\_e\_s\_i\_r\_e [Wim Wenders]." 1991, 158 min.

U\_n\_t\_i\_l\_t\_h\_e\_E\_n\_d\_o\_f\_t\_h\_e\_W\_o\_r\_l\_d will be preceded at 7PM by Z\_e\_n\_t\_r\_o\_p\_a, an "internationally acclaimed... haunting thriller that takes viewers on a surreal journey into the past and future of Europe.... Strikingly photographed by Henning Bendsen, narrated by Max Von Sydow [he's everywhere!], and starring Barbara Sukowa, Jean-Marc Barr, and Eddie Constantine...." Directed by Lars von Trier, 1991, 107 min.

Admission is \$7 for the double feature, sponsored by the Rutgers Film Co-op. For further information: 908-932-8482.

In all honesty, I must note that although the State Theater screen is indeed big, I was disappointed by the lack of clarity in the sound and picture (not to mention the lack of freshness in the popcorn) for B\_l\_a\_d\_e\_R\_u\_n\_n\_e\_r last month. [-csh]

5. The "Electric Science Fiction" 1993 Hugo & Nebula Award Anthology is now available via network, modem and CD-ROM. Containing basically a\_l\_l the Hugo nominees (fiction, fan writing, and art) and a whole lot more, you can get it via FTP for as little as \$11.95. (Enhanced and CD-ROM versions cost more.) For further information, send email to net-sf@clarinet.com. [-ecl]

6. P\_u\_b\_l\_i\_s\_h\_e\_r\_s\_W\_e\_e\_k\_l\_y (April 5, 1993), in reviewing T\_h\_e\_I\_n\_n\_e\_r\_S\_i\_d\_e\_o\_f\_t\_h\_e\_W\_i\_n\_d:O\_r,T\_h\_e\_N\_o\_v\_e\_l\_o\_f\_H\_e\_r\_o\_a\_n\_d\_L\_e\_a\_n\_d\_e\_r, says: "Like his cleverly designed D\_i\_c\_t\_i\_o\_n\_a\_r\_y\_o\_f\_t\_h\_e\_K\_h\_a\_z\_a\_r\_s, which was printed in

both male and female versions, Serbian writer [Milorad] Pavic's lyrical and brooding new work is inventively structured. It consists of two surrealistic and remarkably beautiful stories: 'Hero,' begins, conventionally, at the front of the book, and 'Leander' begins when the book is turned over and opened at the "back" cover." Inventively structured? Ace Doubles did that forty years ago! [-ecl]

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A liberal is a man too broadminded to take his own  
side in a quarrel.

-- Robert Frost

## THE FIRM

A film review by Mark R. Leeper  
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Capsule review: A very good cast tells the story of a young lawyer who gets a job offer that seems too good to be true. Then he finds out the catch. T\_h\_e\_F\_i\_r\_m is long and complex, but polished and intriguing. Rating: high +1 (-4 to +4). (Extended spoiler follows review.)

When I was in the Galapagos I was on a boat of about a hundred people and I was reading the newly published H\_u\_n\_t\_f\_o\_r\_R\_e\_d\_O\_c\_t\_o\_b\_e\_r. I noticed that about four other people were reading the same novel at the same time. Out of a population of a hundred people that is a surprisingly high percentage of people reading the same novel. That sort of popularity rarely happens unless there is a film imminent. (I saw a lot of people reading J\_u\_r\_a\_s\_s\_i\_c\_P\_a\_r\_k just before the film came out, but that film had a lot of hype.) The only other book I remember seeing that so many people seemed to be reading at once was John Grisham's novel F\_i\_r\_m. Now nuclear-powered submarines and Cold War warfare is a subject with natural appeal, but the story of a yuppie lawyer and a law firm does not have the same trappings to entice people so I guessed it must be a pretty good thriller. Now T\_h\_e\_F\_i\_r\_m, like T\_h\_e\_H\_u\_n\_t\_f\_o\_r\_r\_e\_d\_O\_c\_t\_o\_b\_e\_r, has made it to the screen.

There is an old rule of business that a deal that sounds too good to be true probably is. That is what young lawyer Mitch McDeere (played by Tom Cruise) and his wife Abby (played by Jeanne Tripplehorn) discover when Mitch is choosing a firm for employment. One company in Memphis offers Mitch a package that sounds too sweet to turn down. His salary will be 20% higher than the next best offer, and he gets a beautiful home and a free Mercedes. The company just force-feeds Mitch one Perquisite after another. Bendini, Lambert, and Locke is just one big family, Mitch is told, but Abby balks when she sees how strongly the firm wants to run both Mitch's life and her own. And there have been some mysterious deaths of young lawyers at the new company. Then there are two mysterious strangers who are not with the firm but seem to know a little too much about the company and about Mitch. And, like the law firm, they too seem to have targeted Matich for something unknown to him. Mitch is a clever lawyer but he will need all his skill just to stay alive when he is caught between his own unscrupulous law firm and the government.

What made people want to read the book is the question, "What is r\_e\_a\_l\_l\_y going on?" The same question will probably intrigue movie audiences, but the answer is disappointingly prosaic. In the book the answer makes some sense, but there were major revisions in the

film and it does not make quite as much sense. (More on this in a heavy spoiler at the end of the review. Don't worry; I will flag it.)

This is a long film--more than two and a half hours long--and it feels like a long film, mostly because it is tightly packed with a lot happening throughout. But it is still a carefully crafted thriller. Much of the cost of the production had to be in the casting. This film has a powerhouse cast. Cruise is, of course, box-office gold and just recently played a lawyer in A\_F\_e\_w\_G\_o\_o\_d\_M\_e\_n. His skills are improving with time until he is a respectable actor now, though his range is limited. Tripplehorn also gets some chance to take part in the action and is adequate. But the two leads are not the most interesting casting. For members of the sinister law firm, David Rubin cast people who have generally played gentle, nice-guy roles, people of some integrity, the sort of actors who are chosen to do voice-overs for commercials. We have Gene Hackman, Hal Holbrook, and Wilford Brimley--people you naturally feel are friendly. It makes them seem all the more sinister when their real natures are covered with this air of pleasant control. Then you have the grungies, the people who have less gentility and who cannot get away with it when they break the law. Here we have Gary Busey and a character actor I have been pointing out for years, David Strathairn. And cast against type is Holly Hunter, playing a gum-chewing tartish secretary. Playing government agents are Ed Harris (who plays straight arrows occasionally with sinister sides, as he did in U\_n\_d\_e\_r\_F\_i\_r\_e), and Stephen Hill (who headed the IMF in the first season of M\_i\_s\_s\_i\_o\_n\_I\_m\_p\_o\_s\_s\_i\_b\_l\_e).

T\_h\_e\_F\_i\_r\_m is a thriller that does not cover tremendously new territory, nor does it have a lot of substance, but it is well made and exciting. And its thrills come from human interactions, not from explosions or martial arts or car chases. I give it a high +1 on the -4 to +4 scale.

SPOILER ON NEXT PAGE SPOILER ON NEXT PAGE SPOILER ON NEXT PAGE

## SPOILER SPOILER SPOILER

First, I cannot claim actually to have read the book. This comment is based on a three-hour abridgement on audio tape. But in the book, the reason the firm could make such generous offers was that it actually was the Mafia. They desperately needed the best lawyers they could get and were willing to spend whatever it took to get them. When Mitch decided to betray the firm, he was going head-to-head with the Mafia. It seems to me that the novel glosses over the question of how you can be a Mafia lawyer without realizing that your clients are all in the syndicate, but perhaps that is possible.

In the film, Bendini, Lambert, and Locke is not the Mafia, though it does work for them. This introduces a logical problem. There is nothing intrinsically against the law about being the legal counsel for the Mafia. In fact, the Constitution guarantees even the Mafia the right to legal counsel. So then what really is the nature of Bendini, Lambert, and Locke's villainy in the film? They try to control their staff's lives to the point of killing them when they want to leave. And they overbill by about 25% in the example we see. Both actions probably help the bottom line. And they probably do some illegal work for their clients. But none of this seems profitable enough to explain their very bizarre way of doing business. By making Bendini, Lambert, and Locke the villain rather than the Mafia, there is more that is left unexplained.





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WHAT'S LOVE GOT TO DO WITH IT  
A film review by Mark R. Leeper  
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Capsule review: This film biography of Tina Turner shows Tina abused by her ex-husband Ike and by her mother, but remaining a sweet and wonderful person. It is based on her own account in her autobiography. Fights that should not have occurred and if they did should have been private, take place in public and now people are paying to see them on the wide screen. The film will probably do well with Turner fans. Rating: low +1 on the -4 to +4 scale.

A number of critics considered R\_a\_g\_i\_n\_g\_B\_u\_l to be the best film of the 1980s. I cannot say I was all that keen on it. While I will accept that the acting and the style gave the film a feel of authenticity, the film really just gave me two hours to be around people I would cross a street to avoid. Perhaps even a highway. I got that same feeling of wanting to get away from the people in W\_h\_a\_t's\_L\_o\_v\_e\_G\_o\_t\_t\_o\_D\_o\_w\_i\_t\_h\_i\_t, without the feel of authenticity.

This is what I would call a "dirty linen" story, like M\_o\_m\_m\_i\_e\_D\_e\_a\_r\_e\_s\_t. Tina Turner (nee Anna Mae Bullock) got divorced and is now telling the world what terrible things her husband did and how she remained a sweet, loving mother to her children and all the while how terrible she felt. Not that I am doubting the accuracy. I am sure Ike Turner was this bad from Tina's point of view, and I am sure Tina was a good person from her own point of view. Still, she was not an unbiased observer and her character may be a bit too good to be true albeit a little too naive.

The story starts with young Anna Mae (played at this age by Rae'ven Kelly) being dragged by the ear out of a rural church's choir practice because she insists on jazzing up her singing beyond what passed in churches in those days. Apparently it would not be the last time she would be physically abused for not singing the way someone wanted her to sing. Anna Mae goes home only to see her mother leaving home and leaving her in the care of Anna Mae's grandmother. Flash forward to 1958 St. Louis and Anna Mae (now played by Angela Bassett) has come to the city to be with her mother. The rage with her sister is rhythm and blues singer Ike Turner (played by Laurence Fishburne) who, as part of his act, brings women in the audience up to the stage to sing with him. Ike hears Anna Mae sing this way, realizes she is a belter, and sweet-talks her first into joining his band--named Ike Turner and the Ike-ettes--and then into marrying him. As they work together, Ike realizes the power of Anna Mae's voice could be his ticket to success. He dumps the "Ike-ettes" from the group's name, redubs Anna Mae as Tina, and forms the Ike and Tina Turner Revue. The

operative wording is that he forms the group since Anna Mae is given little say. As they work, more and more of the brutal side of Ike comes out, until he is beating and even raping his wife. He insists on running both careers even though he is making mistakes and getting hooked on narcotics. Eventually through a conversion to Buddhism Tina gets the strength to fight back, then to leave Ike.

Angela Bassett does a good acting job as a person in Tina Turner's position, easily winning audience sympathy. The problem, of course, is that she does not really resemble Tina Turner and her speaking voice does not have the same almost-purring quality. She does lip-sync to Tina Turner's singing fairly well. But somehow her appearance keeps her from transforming into her character the way Denzel Washington transformed into Malcolm X on the screen. Laurence (a.k.a. Larry) Fishburne does a good job in a role that destroys his former nice-guy image. He also does his own singing.

I think I might have had more interest in this film had I been a Tina Turner fan. But for this one viewer the film rates a low +1 on the -4 to +4 scale. Fans can adjust accordingly.

