

testimonials for all sorts of different products. Why they thought someone who made jokes well would be a person of taste I have no idea, but I a m available. Anyway, he was asked to do a testimonial for a piano company. Rogers's musical education had already proceeded to the point that he knew some of the keys were black and

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others, for some unexplainable reason, were white. (Come to think of it, why is that? And did they used to make the black keys out of ivory also?) But Rogers did not feel right about giving a testimonial for a product he had never used, so he sent them his testimonial saying theirs was the "best piano [he] had ever leaned on."

I have a profound respect for people finding unplanned uses for everyday objects. This is an unsolicited testimonial for what I think is a really useful reference book--if you know how to use it, that is. The source is a television and movie guide. Leonard Maltin edits one; Steven Scheuer edits another. Either book is more useful than the World Almanac in a lot of ways you might not think. Somewhere I read about somebody who thought that the ultimate reference book was the Sears & Roebuck catalog. If he wanted to know how to spell "genuine," he would look up saddles and there it would have the phrase "genuine leather saddles." I use Maltin and Scheuer the same way. Evelyn asked me how to spell "Solzhenitsyn." No problem: I just flip to the entry for O_n_e_D_a_y_i_n_t_h_e_L_i_f_e_o_f_I_v_a_n_D_e_n_i_s_o_v_i_c_h (1971) and there is a description including Solzhenitsyn's name. What year was the Cuban missile crisis? Well, b_o_t_h_D_r._N_o and T_h_e_M_a_n_c_h_u_r_i_a_n_C_a_n_d_i_d_a_t_e were in the theaters as the crisis was taking place. Just look either up. What is French for "Chinese"? Look up L_a_C_h_i_n... and find "L_a_C_h_i_n_o_i_s_e (1967)." It is just an amazing collection of knowledge and wisdom in one book.

2. Borders Book Shop in East Brunswick NJ is having their monthly science fiction discussion tonight (Friday, July 23) from 8-9 PM; the topic is Robert A. Heinlein's S_T_r_a_n_g_e_r_i_n_a_S_t_r_a_n_g_e_L_a_n_d. (They have a science fiction discussion every fourth Friday and a horror discussion every fourth Monday; times vary. I forgot to ask what the Monday book was, but their number is 908-238-7000. This Monday's discussion is 7:30-8:30 PM.) [-ecl]

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"My country right or wrong" is like saying "My mother
drunk or sober."

-- G. K. Chesterton

SO I MARRIED AN AXE MURDERER
A film review by Mark R. Leeper
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Capsule review: Unlucky in love, Michael Myers plays a man who finally finds the perfect woman, only to start finding clues that she may have murdered three husbands. The comedy is uneven but often amusing; the mystery elements need a lot of work. Rating: high 0 (-4 to +4). (Mystery elements discussed in a heavy spoiler at the end of the review.)

Charlie Mackenzie (played by Michael Myers) has been unlucky in love. Each of his former loves has had something seriously wrong with her, as he recounts to his policeman friend and as he sets to jazz poems as part of a very obnoxious coffee house act. It could be that each had been involved on the mossy side of the law or it could all be in Charlie's mind. Or a third very real possibility is that Charlie's personality drives people to desperate acts. Then

Charlie meets Harriet (played by Nancy Travis) and they are just perfect for each other. This might be the one for Charlie. The only problem is that Harriet's background is surprisingly like that of "Mrs. X"--the designation the tabloids have given to an unknown woman who has apparently murdered three husbands. One piece of evidence after another links Harriet to the three murders. Is Harriet the infamous Mrs. X?

S_o_I_M_a_r_r_i_e_d_a_n_A_x_e_M_u_r_d_e_r_e_r is a comedy/mystery, with the accent on comedy. And I mean that 100% of the accent is on comedy. The mystery writing is an insult to mystery films. It is just a framework on which to hang the comedy. (Strongly-worded spoiler section to follow.) Perhaps this is more a skit than an actual film. While I was not fond of Myers in W_a_y_n_e'_s_W_o_r_l_d, there is some humor here that works. Alan Arkin is on hand as a police captain, the boss of Charlie's best friend, and a running gag involving him is original and funny. Robbie Fox's screenplay tries to go for some bad-taste humor that on the whole falls flat. Mostly it is aimed at the audience who thinks that crotch injuries are hilarious and not over-used. The scenes of Charlie's home life with his eccentric Scottish father (also played by Myers) fail to generate much interest value or feel of authenticity.

S_o_I_M_a_r_r_i_e_d_a_n_A_x_e_M_u_r_d_e_r_e_r is a comedy/mystery with some edge on the comedy, but the mystery elements are just not very keen. I rate it a high 0 on the -4 to +4 scale.

****HEAVY SPOILER** **HEAVY SPOILER** **HEAVY SPOILER** **HEAVY SPOILER****

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****HEAVY SPOILER** **HEAVY SPOILER** **HEAVY SPOILER** **HEAVY SPOILER****

S_o_I_M_a_r_r_i_e_d_a_n_A_x_e_M_u_r_d_e_r_e_r is the worst mystery film I have seen since H_a_u_n_t_e_d_H_o_n_e_y_m_o_o_n. Historically there have been few mystery films written this poorly that did not have Bela Lugosi in a red herring role. First, there is a rule in mysteries that you look for the person who is completely unnecessary to the plot, particularly if that person is played by someone well-known. In this film, one person stands out in neon lights as a familiar actor who seems to have nothing to do up to the finale. If that character

is not played by Lugosi, you can bet that you have the murderer.

Second, there is no sign that the writers gave any thought at all to their own story. There is a strong implication at the end that because somebody else was the actual killer, Harriet is now happy and free. Harriet may not have been the killer but she certainly has been an accessory to these murders, concealing them from the law. And having concealed the first murder, she is legally responsible for the two that followed. It is absurd to see Harriet grinning in a coffee house at the end: this is a woman who is going to spend most of the rest of her life behind bars. And I may not be in the spirit of the film, but I think it's a good thing.

WEEKEND AT BERNIE'S 2
A film review by Mark R. Leeper
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Capsule review: This continuation of W_e_e_k_e_n_d_a_t_B_e_r_n_i_e'_s has its moments but they are generally too far between. We have ad nauseum corpse abuse and a little bit of physical comedy from Terry Kiser as Bernie. "Weekend" is probably accurate. I expect by the first Monday it will be out of theaters and headed for cable. Rating: 0 (-4 to +4).

For me W_e_e_k_e_n_d_a_t_B_e_r_n_i_e'_s was precisely the right film at the right time since I usually find it difficult to sleep on an airplane. What I saw--a total of about ten or fifteen minutes--seemed like mis-fire humor. A lot of it was the same joke--abuse of a dead body--ad nauseum. When I saw that the sequel was being made I said, "They'd have to pay me to go see that." Then a friend who gets paid by the distributor to count audiences asked Evelyn and me to cover for her. That fulfilled the condition. This time I stayed awake, and while I cannot say I thought it was a genuinely good film, it would be about average for cable fare (which is pretty much my definition of a zero rating--+1 is average for a theatrical release).

Robert Klane once again wrote and directed. Terry Kiser again played the corpse. I suspect in the first film Kiser had little opportunity to do much in the line of physical comedy. This time around, however, Bernie has been subjected to a voodoo ceremony that went wrong and he gets to return as a zombie whenever music with a strong beat is playing. His almost animated body is probably the best thing about this film. Certainly inferior is the acting of Andrew McCarthy and Jonathan Silverman as the two cretins who are stuffing the body into suitcases, dragging it down stairs, banging its head around, and in general having the scene stolen from them by a mostly inanimate object. It seems they have grabbed the corpse and are trying to use it to get their paws on Bernie's ill-gotten gains. All the while they are chased by company detective Hummel (played by Barry Bostwick).

What can I say that is good about this film? A few of the gags work, though many of the jokes that were not funny in the first film are trying again and failing again in the second. The opening credit sequence managed to tell enough of the plot of the first film so that I did not feel lost in the sequel. Moving the story to the Virgin Islands ties in with the voodoo plot and adds some nice scenery. This film is a time-waster but it managed to keep me out of trouble for an hour and a half (and awake this time). I would rate it a 0, as I said before, on the -4 to +4 scale.

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THE BLACK CASTLE

Berkley, 1979, 0-425-04198-0, \$2.25.

THE SILVER SKULL

Charles Scribner's Sons, July 1979, ISBN 0-684-16141-9, \$8.95.

CITIZEN VAMPIRE

Charles Scribner's Sons, May 1981, ISBN 0-684-16827-8, \$9.95.

YELLOW FOG

Tor, 1988 (1986c), ISBN 0-812-51675-3, \$3.95.

NO BLOOD SPILLED

Tor, February 1991, ISBN 0-812-50932-3, \$3.95.

A series review by Mark R. Leeper

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In Stephen Sondheim's play S_w_e_e_n_e_y_T_o_d_d, the young sailor tells Sweeney that he has sailed the world and seen wonders. Sweeney replies, "I have seen the world, beheld its wonders. But the cruelty of man is as wondrous as Peru." That is a sentiment with which the vampire Don Sebastian could well agree. There are few series that I follow, but Les Daniels's delightfully nihilistic chronicles of the vampire Don Sebastian has its rewards. Don Sebastian is a hero of sorts, but only by contrast. He is not like Chelsea Quinn Yarbro's handsome stranger, St. Germaine, who carries dirt from his native land in the heels of his shoes and is able to mask signs that he is a vampire. Don Sebastian is a vampire in the traditional sense. He just manages to be at those places in history where the cruelty is so bad that the presence of a vampire is almost

redundant.

We first meet Don Sebastian during the Spanish Inquisition in T_h_e_B_l_a_c_k_C_a_s_t_l_e. Next he is present at the conquest of Mexico in T_h_e_S_i_l_v_e_r_S_k_u_l_l. The Reign of terror following the French Revolution is the setting of C_i_t_i_z_e_n_V_a_m_p_i_r_e. I have yet to read Y_e_l_l_o_w_F_o_g, set in the comparatively benign London Fog of 1835, but Don Sebastian is in India with Thugs, ghouls, suttee, and the callousness of the British Raj in N_o_B_l_o_o_d_S_p_i_l_l_e_d.

Don Sebastian is the ultimate anti-hero. Unlike the handsome St. Germaine, Don Sebastian is a real vampire. To terrify his brother in T_h_e_B_l_a_c_k_C_a_s_t_l_e, he rolls his eyes into his head and blows smoke out the holes. This is not someone you pleasantly invite to tea. But in his own way Don Sebastian is a moralist and a humanitarian. He accepts his own nature as vampire, but clearly feels the world is bad enough having vampires in it--why make it worse with cruelty? Generally where he goes he tries to do at least sufficient good to counterbalance the evil that inflicting a vampire on the neighborhood causes. This makes Don Sebastian a complex and deeply troubled individual, torn between instinctive impulses for evil (or certainly for selfishness) and higher impulses to do what he can to prevent the evil around him. And he is fully aware of the

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basic hypocrisy in that position.

The background is always as much of interest in a Don Sebastian novel as the foreground. Remember the old curse, "May you live in interesting times"? Daniels takes the time to research periods that are relative peaks of human callousness and barbarity. He explores these times with the same wonder that Sweeney Todd had. He will work into the plot as much historical ghoulishness as possible (in the case of N_o_B_l_o_o_d_S_p_i_l_l_e_d, literally). But for the sort of person who enjoys the sepulchral tomes of Sweeney Todd or has a fascination to visit the London Dungeon or the torture chambers in the Prison Gate in the Hague, these novels are short, effective, and rewarding.

