



This is the most complete and accurate dramatic version of any version. In fairness I should add that it is, perhaps, a little slow and deliberate. There are no car chases. This is a very liberal interpretation. It has been shown in both half-hour and full-hour installments on American television, but never complete.

THE MT VOID

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In 214 minutes you will see the whole story from before the birth until the death of King Arthur.

2. The following further information on endorphins was provided by Karen Morrissey:

So you want endorphins? Try phenylalanine. Phenylalanine is an essential amino acid -- one that is not manufactured by the human body, so it must be gotten from food. Among other things, phenylalanine (and its artificial cousin DL-phenylalanine) slows the uptake of endorphins; it makes them hang around longer, acting as an anti-depressant and a pain-killer.

Interestingly, this is one of the two amino acids that make up aspartame, the sweetener (trade names NutraSweet, Equal). This would make psychoactive products using this sweetener. I wonder if anyone has studied the effects of these products on those suffering chronic pain or depression, or on those who are chronically boring. (Then again, it may be part of the Illuminati conspiracy.)

It's downright scary what you don't learn about food items unless you search out the information yourself: many spices (e.g., sage, nutmeg) are toxic in easily ingested quantities; some spices (e.g., nutmeg) are hallucinogens, or otherwise psychoactive. Before you go home to try nutmeg, be warned: nutmeg is quite lethal in hallucinogenic quantities -- one has to consume 1-2 nuts and 2 nuts is at least an LD-5 dose (5% likelihood of death).

Hmmm... Think of the book possibilities:

"Poisons in your Spice Rack!"

"Deadly Herbs"

"The Nutmeg Cookbook"

"Getting High on Food"

[-kam]

Mark Leeper  
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...mtgzx!leeper

There is no perfect knowledge which can be entitled ours, that is innate; none but what has been obtained from experience, or derived in some way from our senses; all knowledge, at all events, is examined by these, approved by them, and finally presents itself to us firmly grounded upon some pre-existing knowledge which we possessed; because without memory there is no experience, which is nothing else than reiterated memory; in like manner memory cannot exist without endurance of the things perceived, and the thing perceived cannot remain wher it has never been.

-- William Harvey (1578-1657)

## THE ABYSS

A film review by Mark R. Leeper  
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Capsule review: A science fiction and adventure film that just misses a +4 rating. Alistair-MacLean-type action combines with 2\_0\_0\_1-type vision to make a whale of a film that blows B\_a\_t\_m\_a\_n right out of the water. Rating: high +3. If only it had more interesting science fiction ideas.

[Note: T\_h\_e\_A\_b\_y\_s\_s is a fairly long film at 140 minutes. Enough happens that it would be impossible to say much about the film without revealing a surprise or two. I will try to keep my comments general enough to avoid marring the enjoyment, at least for some one who has seen other reviews--still, I wouldn't want to read what follows before seeing the film.]

T\_h\_e\_A\_b\_y\_s\_s has two kinds of scenes: exciting scenes where suspense is building and exciting scenes where there is slam-bang action. And

they must have about equal screen time. As such, it may well out-Lucas the "Star Wars" films. In style most of the film resembles less fantasy films than films in the Alistair MacLean tradition. In fact, embedded in this long film is really a normal-length MacLeanesque adventure that would not even be science fiction. Not that MacLean adventures are not somewhat far-fetched themselves. And like a MacLean film T\_h\_e\_A\_b\_y\_s\_s is not above throwing in the occasional far-fetched coincidence to keep the story going. But the pacing and adventure-plotting are reminiscent of a film such as T\_h\_e\_G\_u\_n\_s\_o\_f\_N\_a\_v\_a\_r\_o\_n\_e or I\_c\_e\_S\_t\_a\_t\_i\_o\_n\_Z\_e\_b\_r\_a. The action is not even delayed for opening credits; the film starts under a single opening title and we cut directly to the action. The U. S. S. Montana, a nuclear submarine, has picked up something unusual on sonar: a very fast-moving craft. They see it accelerate to over 130 knots before the sub is physically grasped by something. They are freed, but not in time to avoid piling into the edge of the Cayman Trench. A team of civilian divers from a nearby oil driller is brought in by the Navy to try to rescue any survivors. The chief diver is Bud Brigman (played by Ed Harris), a strong-willed commander in the process of divorcing the designer of the drilling facility, Lindsey Brigman (played by Mary Elizabeth Mastrantonio). The antagonistic couple, a team of four Navy SEALs, and the divers go to the site of the downed sub. But there is something else there, an apparent intelligence--perhaps alien, perhaps indigenous--that is watching the mission with marked curiosity.

The script of T\_h\_e\_A\_b\_y\_s\_s shows definite James Cameron touches. Cameron's films usually feature strong, intelligent, self-reliant women and never more so than in T\_h\_e\_A\_b\_y\_s\_s with its character of Lindsey Brigman. The dialog is crisp, but also very humanizing. As usual, Cameron's heroes are common, blue-collar types.

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One of the virtues of a good science fiction film can be to make technology comprehensible. T\_h\_e\_A\_b\_y\_s\_s uses state-of-the-art technology--such as recently developed breathable fluid that will allow exploration of greater depths. It also required new technology to be developed simply to allow the film to be made. In this category are diving masks designed to let the camera see who is behind the mask, but which coincidentally also allow a much wider field of vision for the divers than previously available.

Like B\_a\_t\_m\_a\_n, this film also had a large budget and was kept very

much under wraps until its release. B\_a\_t\_m\_a\_n turned out to be a film that was visually fascinating, but which short-changed the story elements.

T\_h\_e\_A\_b\_y\_s\_s is rumored to have a pricetag of \$43 million and, unlike in B\_a\_t\_m\_a\_n, there are no big-name stars to soak up large pieces of the budget--or rather there is one, but it is the Atlantic Ocean, and shooting underwater made the film much more complex to produce.

As with any major film that has been kept under wraps, T\_h\_e\_A\_b\_y\_s\_s has generated a certain amount of rumor. One rumor on the positive side is that Hugo-winning science fiction author Orson Scott Card participated strongly in the scripting. He supposedly was on the set to ask the actors, "Ignoring the script, what would you do in this plot situation?" The next morning the revised script would have the character doing just what the actor wanted. And Card would add his own science fiction influence so that it is at least claimed that T\_h\_e\_A\_b\_y\_s\_s ranks with T\_h\_i\_n\_g\_s\_t\_o\_C\_o\_m\_e and 2\_0\_0\_1 for the degree of participation of a science fiction author in determining plot. A second and more negative rumor is that the life form was much better explained in the pre-release (and in Card's novelization) but that the film was cut by 25 minutes, down to 140, to make it more marketable. In the cut the real logic of what is happening was considered to be the dispensable portion. (This is strongly rumored to be what happened to the film H\_i\_g\_h\_l\_a\_n\_d\_e\_r, also from Twentieth Century Fox.) Cameron denies that any logic was cut from the film and says instead that where Card's book varies, it is purely Card's invention.

But even as it stands, T\_h\_e\_A\_b\_y\_s\_s is one of the best science fiction film ever made. This remains true in spite of a rather superficial treatment of the some of the science fiction elements. It is very much a 2\_0\_0\_1 with all the slowish parts replaced by a good fast-paced adventure film. It is entertaining, educational, and exciting, and has compelling (albeit manipulative at times) drama. All it lacks is a sufficiently engaging concept. Perhaps that was left on the cutting room floor, perhaps not. I would give it a high +3 on the -4 to +4 scale. It could not do much better than that.

WAITING FOR THE GALACTIC BUS by Parke Godwin  
Bantam Spectra, 1989 (1988c), ISBN 0-553-28066-X, \$3.95.  
A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper  
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W\_a\_i\_t\_i\_n\_g\_f\_o\_r\_t\_h\_e\_G\_a\_l\_a\_c\_t\_i\_c\_B\_u\_s seems to owe a slight debt to H\_i\_t\_c\_h\_h\_i\_k\_e\_r's\_G\_u\_i\_d\_e\_t\_o\_t\_h\_e\_G\_a\_l\_a\_x\_y, though not as much as the back cover blurb implies (the blurb doesn't mention it explicitly, mind you). Two stranded aliens, Barion and Coyul, "uplift" prehistoric primates and then have to deal with Roy Stride, the neo-Nazi product of several million years of evolution. If Stride's planned marriage to Charity Stovall goes through, their child will destroy the human race. So the two of them are taken on a roller-coaster-tour of hell, with the assistance of Judas Iscariot, John Wilkes Booth, and Florence Bird, a bit of London crumpet.

Tours through hell are becoming a bit of a sub-genre themselves. Dante started it all. Yes, there were visits to Hades by various people in Greek and Roman mythology, but I think it's safe to say that the Western literary tradition of "hell tours" began with Dante's D\_i\_v\_i\_n\_e\_C\_o\_m\_e\_d\_y. (It's interesting to note that while Dante also wrote of tours through Purgatory and Heaven, few people find those as interesting. Fewer still have written pastiches of them.) Larry Niven and Jerry Pournelle did an updated "Inferno" many years ago, and there have been various other attempts since then. (The "Heroes in Hell" series doesn't count here, of course, since everyone in them is dead and no one is taking a tour.) Godwin adds a more off-beat humor than most, with touches such as the man of Charity's dreams talking like a television commercial, because that's how Charity's dreams were shaped. Yet under the humor there are some important points, and if his position on television evangelists and fundamentalism (of any religion) is a bit unsubtle, he makes up for it with the rest of the book. I would describe W\_a\_i\_t\_i\_n\_g\_f\_o\_r\_t\_h\_e\_G\_a\_l\_a\_c\_t\_i\_c\_B\_u\_s as Hobanesque (as in Russell Hoban--see my review of Hoban's latest book, T\_h\_e\_M\_e\_d\_u\_s\_a\_F\_r\_e\_q\_u\_e\_n\_c\_y), but that's not very informative for most people. So let me just say straight out that I highly recommend W\_a\_i\_t\_i\_n\_g\_f\_o\_r\_t\_h\_e\_G\_a\_l\_a\_c\_t\_i\_c\_B\_u\_s.

A Trio of Books  
Book reviews by Evelyn C. Leeper  
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Every once in a while I end up with a few books on my review stack about which I want to say something (or feel I should say something), but don't have enough to warrant a separate review. Such as now....

I would like to recommend Russell Hoban's M\_e\_d\_u\_s\_a\_F\_r\_e\_q\_u\_e\_n\_c\_y (Picador, 1987, ISBN 0-330-30194-2, L3.95), a fable of a second-rate author's meeting with the head of Orpheus (well, "second-rate" may be overstating it--he writes for "Classic Comics," the cultural arm of a pornography house). Unfortunately, this 1987 novel does not seem to have been published in the United States. If you see the British edition, though, buy it. While not Hoban's best--that honor being held by R\_i\_d\_d\_l\_e\_y\_W\_a\_l\_k\_e\_r or P\_i\_l\_g\_e\_r\_m\_a\_n--it provides a new insight into art and artists.

When I reviewed Kevin Randle and Robert Cornett's R\_e\_m\_e\_m\_b\_e\_r\_G\_e\_t\_t\_y\_s\_b\_u\_r\_g! I said that the characters were not well developed and perhaps the authors assumed readers would have gotten all their information about the characters from the first book. Well, I just found (and read) R\_e\_m\_e\_m\_b\_e\_r\_t\_h\_e\_A\_l\_a\_m\_o! (Charter, 1986 [1980c], 0-441-71325-4, \$3.50). The characters are still flat and uninteresting. As with the sequel, R\_e\_m\_e\_m\_b\_e\_r\_t\_h\_e\_A\_l\_a\_m\_o! seems to be aimed at those who like war stories packaged as science fiction, consisting mostly of long detailed descriptions of troop deployments and battles.

James Morrow's T\_h\_i\_s\_I\_s\_t\_h\_e\_W\_a\_y\_t\_h\_e\_W\_o\_r\_l\_d\_E\_n\_d\_s (Ace, 1989 [1988c], ISBN 0-441-80711-9, \$3.95), came highly recommended. But I found this story of the survivors of a nuclear war placed on trial by the now never-to-be-realized population of the future a bit too preachy and propagandistic for my tastes.

## COMMANDO AND HIS LOST SCIENCE FICTION FAN

Comments by Mark Leeper

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I have never really considered myself to be a really strong science fiction fan. I have liked science fiction more than most people, but I am really not all that well read. Recently, however, I have been thinking over what distinction I do have and have come up with one way that I am pretty much unique. I know of very few people who were already science fiction fans at the age of five. Even Forrest J. Ackerman claims not to have really become a science fiction fan until he was ten. I figure that I have something of a head start on him, of sorts.

It was from Saturday morning TV that I came under the influence of science fiction, and at that time it was really coming under the

influence of C o m m a n d o C o d y , S k y

M a r s h a l l o f t h e U n i v e r s e. This show was the TV adaptation of Republic's serials about the same character. C o d y

was every bit as seductive an influence for me as S t a r T r e k was for so many others. It was an entirely unfair influence on a young and susceptible mind.



Cody's chief gimmick and claim to fame was that he had build for himself a flying suit. It was kind of a natural gimmick to put into a serial. Republic had worked out the special effect -- such as it was -- years earlier when they had made their serial Captain Marvel. It was a simple enough special effect. You film your star taking a running jump, end the shot just before the character starts to fall, then cut to a shot of a rather stiff-looking wooden model being pulled along on an invisible wire. That is how Captain Marvel flew. Except in those days they did not have the editing of the film just right so you actually saw Captain Marvel start to fall in the last frames of the shot. This is, of course, much the same effect that Columbia borrowed when they filmed Superman.

Of course Captain Marvel and Superman flew more or less by magic. One was given his powers by a wizard, one came by them being born an alien. The problem with those explanations of the flying power is that you want a hero you can identify with. I think that even at the age of five I knew that in West Virginia -- I lived in West Virginia at the time -- there were not a whole lot of wizards around who could give me the power to fly. And supreme realist that I was, I knew I'd already muffed being an alien from the Planet Krypton. As a rule of thumb, if you do not know you are Superman, you're not. Super heroes make really useless role models.

I think the entertainment masters at Republic knew that something different was needed for kids to think "that could be me." Well the obvious thing to do was have technology come to the rescue. Technology

has always been magic for the common man. Republic decided that their character would fly by means kids would think they had some chance of achieving themselves, something logic and rational. They were going to strap jet engines to their hero's back. That was not really a new idea. Legend has it that a Chinese Emperor tied rockets to his throne in the hopes of flying. It wasn't a pretty sight. Later some publicity hound was stupid enough to strap rockets to his back as a means of speed skating for the benefit of newsreel cameras. He succeeded in knocking himself over and setting himself on fire -- you have probably seen the old newsreel footage.

Well, Republic apparently had to find a way of convincing audiences that these were rockets that were strapped to Cody's back. But, very logically, they did not want to have them burn like real rockets. The result was less than satisfying. They sort of blew out a puff of smoke and they put on the soundtrack a weird electronic tonality that sounds nothing at all like a rocket. Actually, they did not even blow out the puff of smoke from the rockets on Cody's back, it seemed to be mostly coming from some place off screen. The prop man attached these rockets to a leather jacket by a harness and then, as their one vague concession to aerodynamics, they gave Cody a bullet-shaped helmet.

As a kid that seemed pretty reasonable and something I could do. Of course, personal flying suits or something vaguely similar did come along some years later--James Bond uses the real thing in the prologue to T\_h\_u\_n\_d\_e\_r\_b\_a\_l\_l--but they were considerably more limited than Cody's backpack. Cody used to open up a hatch on one spaceship, fly out, land on another spaceship in mid-slight, just open the hatch and step inside. It doesn't sound like much now, but to a five-year-old that's great stuff. The whole idea of these lumbering, slow-moving spaceships that you can fly from one to another was pretty great stuff.

Serial spaceships were all about the size of a large truck. I didn't know it at the time, but the spaceships on C\_o\_m\_m\_a\_n\_d\_o\_C\_o\_d\_y were sort of a modernized version of the old F\_l\_a\_s\_h\_G\_o\_r\_d\_o\_n spaceships. They didn't take off straight up; they sort of scraped their bellies along the ground until they got airborne via some lift principle as yet undiscovered by science. Figuring from what we see of the inside and the outside, the fuel tanks and engines apparently fit into about the last three or four feet of the rocket, the rest is passenger area.

Again, my adult mind notices something about the take-off of the rocket ship that I never noticed as a kid. You never see the nose of the rocket at the time it takes off. You see the smoke shoot out the back (though it could be coming out of a pipe from off-screen because you do not actually see the rockets) and the rocket starts to move. It is plain to see that something off-screen was pulling the rocket, probably a truck with a chain to the nose of the sky marshall's craft. Still it was a pretty impressive effect when I saw it. Certainly the rocket engines sound a lot batter than the rockets did in Universal's F\_l\_a\_s\_h\_G\_o\_r\_d\_o\_n and B\_u\_c\_k\_R\_o\_g\_e\_r\_s serials. The nose of the rocket is painted with

flamboyant rally stripes. And, dammit, when I see the scenes of the rocket in flight I still get a thrill. That's the real science fiction, and anything that doesn't have rockets like that is just a pretentious imitator.

The interior of these babies were about the most fantastic that could be done on a lunch-money budget. The seats are clearly old office chairs that have been fitted with seatbelts and from which the castors have been removed. The walls have obvious piping hanging from them and old radios -- WWII vintage -- hang on the sides of the ship. What looks like a Van De Graf generator is stuck on the control panel. There are modernistic looking overhead lights, but a window could have been as useful. In the serials there was no such thing as the inky-blackness of space. Between the planets there was nothing but blue sky and fleecy clouds.

For a \_ s \_ k \_ y \_ m \_ a \_ r \_ s \_ h \_ a \_ l \_ l \_ o \_ f \_ t \_ h \_ e \_ u \_ n \_ i \_ v \_ e \_ r \_ s \_ e ,  
Cody did not get around very much, even with the nifty rocket ship. His beat was almost exclusively on Planet Earth with occasional field trips to the moon. That was, of course, the enemy's territory where Retik, Ruler of the Moon, had a fantastic, futuristic city. The outside of the city looked like something out of ancient Greece, but if you lived to get inside, you saw something very different. The rooms themselves were filled with plastic tubes, condenser plates, retorts of bubbling chemicals, electrical Jacob's ladders, fantastic calibrated instruments of no apparent purpose, and big round windows. Outside the city limits, most of the moon looks like Arizona. That was fairly typical, in fact. It was generally thought in 40's serials that alien planets and moons all looked a lot like Arizona. In \_ B \_ u \_ c \_ k \_ R \_ o \_ g \_ e \_ r \_ s life on Saturn was seen to look a lot a Chinese community in Arizona.

Retik, himself, not coming from so alien a planet but only from the moon, did not have to look so incredibly alien that he had to be played by a Chinese actor. He looked human (in serials that usually meant "American") but he wore flowing robes and a chain-mail wimple. His civilization seemed to be made up entirely of men -- in spite of the commonly held belief that moon civilizations would be entirely made up of women as in the film \_ C \_ a \_ t \_ W \_ o \_ m \_ e \_ n \_ o \_ f \_ t \_ h \_ e \_ M \_ o \_ o \_ n . Retik's weaponry was a sight to behold. He had these terrific tanks that were stream-lined and had fins. The guns were fitted right into the frame so that aiming really required steering the tank. It didn't matter. I don't think I ever saw the guns fire. The tanks looked suspiciously like a wooden frame fitted over jeeps, but who really cares? Of course it was only for use defending the moon itself. On Earth Retik would use a strategy that would consist of sabotaging trains and robbing banks. It was pretty tough to see how these actions fit into his overall plan, particularly because they always failed, but who can say how a really alien mind reasons? It is clear that it would be pretty tough to convince authorities that they were facing \_ b \_ a \_ n \_ k \_ r \_ o \_ b \_ b \_ e \_ r \_ s \_ f \_ r \_ o \_ m \_ o \_ u \_ t \_ e \_ r

\_ s \_ p \_ a \_ c \_ e .

Commando Cody

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Well, that is it. \_ C \_ o \_ m \_ m \_ a \_ n \_ d \_ o \_ C \_ o \_ d \_ y \_ , \_ S \_ k \_ y \_ -  
\_ m \_ a \_ r \_ s \_ h \_ a \_ l \_ o \_ f \_ t \_ h \_ e \_ U \_ n \_ i \_ v \_ e \_ r \_ s \_ e is what  
made me a science fiction fan and a retrospective on the TV show has  
long been overdue. This is particularly true when I realize that most  
people seem to know Cody's name through the rock group \_ C \_ o \_ m \_ m \_ a \_ n \_ d \_ o \_ C \_ o \_ d \_ y  
\_ a \_ n \_ d  
\_ H \_ i \_ s \_ L \_ o \_ s \_ t \_ P \_ l \_ a \_ n \_ e \_ t \_ A \_ i \_ r \_ m \_ e \_ n. (Of course this is an error in  
itself. \_ L \_ o \_ s \_ t  
\_ P \_ l \_ a \_ n \_ e \_ t \_ A \_ i \_ r \_ m \_ e \_ n was the feature film version of the serial \_ K \_ i \_ n \_ g  
\_ o \_ f \_ t \_ h \_ e  
\_ R \_ o \_ c \_ k \_ e \_ t \_ M \_ e \_ n which did have the flight suit, but not Cody himself. Its  
hero was Jeff King, who lent his name to make the serial title more  
impressive.) While I cannot remember the show in detail, I have re-  
watched \_ R \_ o \_ c \_ k \_ e \_ t \_ M \_ e \_ n \_ o \_ f \_ t \_ h \_ e \_ M \_ o \_ o \_ n, the serial that the TV  
show was based  
on. It squares with my memories of the space ships and rocket suits.  
It may not sound like it was all that great as a piece of science  
fiction, but it sure made a fan of me. Let's see what kind of fans  
cyberpunk recruits.

