

Their super-science helped them to enforce a very fascist form of government, certainly a very repressive one. That has certainly been a staple theme of bad science fiction. We see future societies with horribly repressive governments that track every move of their unhappy populace.

THE MT VOID

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Then I think about China, a real country with a government that is being repressive, and what is the government's biggest enemy? Technology. I think we have all heard about the battle of the fax machines in which China tried to keep news of what was going on from leaking out. But the rate at which information came and went from China can better be described as a gush or even a flood. I recently heard about how some rich American--Armand Hammer, maybe--was making a gift of photocopy machines to countries under Soviet domination. They are really Trojan horses. Once it took a whole organization, all too easy to trace, to publish political pamphlets. Now you need one copy and a few minutes at a photocopy machine.

And then there is g_l_a_s_n_o_s_t, the new policy of openness in the Soviet Union. The move to the new policy has many interpretations, but not the least common one is that they have already let too much technology in to stop information flow. So they might as well claim it is their own idea.

The technology that has been used to repress people has on the whole been very basic stuff. I cannot believe there is a single country in the world that does not have the know-how to invent for itself devices like the electric cattle prod. But the countries with the most advanced technology are also the ones with the greatest personal freedom. You ask Mikhail Gorbachev if that is just a coincidence. Technology does bring problems with it. But they are very strongly polarized toward too much freedom--freedom to pollute, freedom to spy, freedom to choose to watch bad television--not toward repression of ideas.

2. THE SEVENTH OMNI BOOK OF SF (edited by Ellen Datlow) has been donated to the Lincroft Science Fiction Club library by Dean Kaflowitz.

Mark Leeper
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A pedestal is as much as prison as any small space.
-Gloria Steinem

Not NIGHTFLYERS or NIGHTFALL!
MILLENNIUM
A Movie Review by Dale Skran
WARNING: SPOILERS
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There exist few examples of strong SF stories made into excellent films. Three recent botches come to mind -- D_u_n_e (Frank Herbert), N_i_g_h_t_f_l_y_e_r_s (George R. R. Martin), and N_i_g_h_t_f_a_l_l (Isaac Asimov) - - all based on stories of the highest caliber, and all seriously flawed on screen. Now comes M_i_l_l_e_n_n_i_u_m, based on the John Varley story "Air Raid" (Hugo nominated, I believe). This is the only major SF movie I can remember where the script was written by the original author without being re-written by several hacks. And it is a major film, unlike N_i_g_h_t_f_l_y_e_r_s and N_i_g_h_t_f_a_l_l, both of which starred mostly unknowns running around cardboard sets. Kris Kristofferson plays an air safety investigator who slowly comes to realize that there is something very odd about a plane crash. Cheryl Ladd plays an assault team leader from a distant, terrible future that is slowly dying. To save humanity, Ladd and her associates steal people from the past who are about to die in plane crashes away to a new life in a distant future, one far beyond their own polluted world.

As a time travel story, M_i_l_l_e_n_n_i_u_m builds on the background provided by the simpler T_e_r_m_i_n_a_t_o_r and B_a_c_k_t_o_t_h_e_F_u_t_u_r_e, providing the audience an introduction to temporal censorship and time paradoxes. Cheryl Ladd is surprisingly convincing as the woman from a dying world, and Kris is believable as well. The "stewardesses from hell" scenes as Louise and her team infiltrate a doomed 60's era jetliner was the highpoint of the film for me.

I have several complaints, however. At one point, Louise Baltimore (Cheryl Ladd) turns to one of her assault team and explains in true Gernsbackian Lectures the concept of time censorship. Louise's "personal robot" is simply a man in a tin woodsman suit. The technology of Louise's future world seems more like that that of 100 years in the future than 1000 years in the future, but this could be explained by a nuclear war or other disaster.

While driving to the movie I expressed a hope that the plot and script would be solid even if the FX were not the best. While driving away, I did an about face and claimed that the movie would be substantially improved if an extra million or so had been put into the robot and the final scenes, which looked too much like the destruction of every citadel of evil I've ever seen on film. A final problem was the literary sounding voice-over at the end of the film - it might be a great story ending, but a movie needs a visual ending.

Overall, M_i_l_l_e_n_n_i_u_m is a strong SF film, an original SF film, and a film that deserves but will probably not get a wide audience. It is a complex story told from various temporal points of view that seemed to leave the audience I was with somewhat baffled. I'd rate it a +2, and with another million or two in FX and the re-shooting of a couple of scenes, it could easily have been a +3 film.

MILLENNIUM

A film review by Mark R. Leeper

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Capsule review: This adaptation of John Varley's short story "Air Raid" is downbeat and surprisingly cliched. This is a minor film with a 1960s matinee sort of feel, in spite of a little interesting time paradox plotting. Rating: low 0.

M_i_l_l_e_n_n_i_u_m is one of those film projects that seem to take forever to come to fruition; then the fruit turns out to be a lemon. I happen to like some lemons but they are not to everybody's taste. Years ago, there were rumors that somebody was going to base a film either on John Varley's novel M_i_l_l_e_n_n_i_u_m or the short story the novel was expanded from, "Air Raid." Well, it came out finally based on the latter but named for the former. Varley himself is credited with the screenwriting, though it should be noted that screen credit is dubious. As far as I know Varley has no experience screenwriting and the script is really very different from the short story. And rather than the accomplished and creative story-telling of a popular science fiction, M_i_l_l_e_n_n_i_u_m has more the feel of mediocre matinee science fiction films of the 1960s and in particular Ib Melchior's T_h_e_T_i_m_e_T_r_a_v_e_l_e_r_s.

[Minor spoilers follow, but no worse than were in the coming attraction.] This downbeat science fiction film starts with a spectacular collision of two airliners and the resulting crash. Enjoy the special effect. It is the only one in the film both ambitious and convincing. Bill Smith is the bland name of the even blander Federal agent sent to investigate the crash. Smith is played by a bland Kris Kristofferson. Smith runs into the chain-smoking Louise Baltimore (played by Cheryl Ladd). Baltimore is not exactly what she seems to be. Instead she is a visitor from a thousand years in the far future where she wears a punk hairdo distressingly like what you are already starting to see in New York City. Baltimore is on a mission involving air disasters. Just what she is doing is part of the mystery.

The script for M_i_l_l_e_n_n_i_u_m needs some clarification. There is an apparently unintentional ambiguity in the story-telling. The script clearly tries to clarify which interpretation is correct, but does so inconclusively and unclearly. With the exception of a few half-hearted humorous moments, the writing is all very downbeat and at the same time hokey. The film's vision of the future is as hopeless as it is hopelessly unconvincing. The film returns to 1960s science fiction film conventions such as having a convenient scientist along to explain the idea of the film. Then there is an attempted love interest between two stars as animated as a Ken and Barbie doll and whose love is just about as interesting to the audience. Some of the time paradox play does work; some comes off as really stupid. In short, M_i_l_l_e_n_n_i_u_m is easily better than some other adaptations of real science fiction stories--films such as N_i_g_h_t_f_a_l_l and N_i_g_h_t_f_l_y_e_r_s--but it is far from being a winner. I rate it a low 0 on the -4 to +4 scale.

Cable in September
Film comment by Mark R. Leeper
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T_h_e_G_r_a_p_e_s_o_f_W_r_a_t_h (1940) (American Movies Classics, Cinemax)
H_e_l'l's_A_n_g_e_l_s (1930) (American Movies Classics)
T_h_e_M_a_n_c_h_u_r_i_a_n_C_a_n_d_i_d_a_t_e (1962) (Cinemax)
O_u_t_l_a_w_J_o_s_e_y_W_a_l_e_s (1976) (Cinemax)
T_h_e_7_t_h_V_o_y_a_g_e_o_f_S_i_n_b_a_d (1957) (HBO)
T_h_e_S_t_o_n_e_B_o_y (1984) (HBO)

A couple of months ago I promised to keep an eye out for what was particularly good that was coming up on cable. Last month there were only two films to recommend; September looks a little better.

I guess I would feel guilty if I did not recommend John Ford's G_r_a_p_e_s_o_f_W_r_a_t_h. My personal belief is that it does not live up to its reputation. That does not mean I do not think it is a darn good film. I would not be listing it here if I did not think it was good, just not as good as it is made out to be.

American Movie Classics is re-running H_e_l'l's_A_n_g_e_l_s as I had hoped they would. No, it isn't about motorcycles. It is a 1930 film about World War I biplane air fighting. The story is very hokey and the distinction of bringing Jean Harlow to the screen for the first time is minor. The air battle scenes, however, leave T_o_p_G_u_n in the dust. And these scenes were shot in the air, full-size, with real pilots. And the pilots must have been pretty desperate. At least two of the stunts are real jaw-droppers! Fast-scan the story if you want to, but the two air battles are worth the price of admission.

Unavailable for years, T_h_e_M_a_n_c_h_u_r_i_a_n_C_a_n_d_i_d_a_t_e is t_h_e great political thriller, supremely well-plotted, more topical today than when it was released. The less you know about the plot ahead of time, the better.

I would contend that O_u_t_l_a_w_J_o_s_e_y_W_a_l_e_s is Clint Eastwood's best film. It is the story of a Confederate soldier on the run in the days following the Civil War. There is the usual Eastwood action, but there is also an interesting collection of well-drawn characters and a very good feel for the period. Most fans remember Chief Dan George as being very good in the film, but there are lots of smaller parts that are also very well acted. I like the last scene very much.

K_i_n_g_K_o_n_g impressed a lot of people but for nearly a quarter of a century nobody even tried to come close to matching the scope of its fantasy with Willis O'Brien's special effects on film. In 1958 the King's reign was finally challenged. O'Brien's apprentice Ray Harryhausen did an Arabian Nights story in full Arabian Nights spectacle. T_h_e_7_t_h_V_o_y_a_g_e_o_f_S_i_n_b_a_d reawakened filmmakers and audiences

to what could be done on film. As with K_ i_ n_ g_ K_ o_ n_ g the story is decent but the special effects and the musical score (in this case by Bernard Herrmann) really steal the show.

Acting, however, is the virtue that makes T_ h_ e_ S_ t_ o_ n_ e_ B_ o_ y so good. A farmboy who accidentally kills his older brother finds barriers between himself and the rest of his family. Jason Presson is very good and, as usual, Robert Duvall is excellent.

You can average a really good film every five days in September.

Opera
Comments by Mark R. Leeper
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I must tell you about Operacon, my brush with New York City arts. It had its roots several years ago when I let on to an out-of-town friend, a fellow movie fan, that I liked opera. "You like opera?" "Sure, some of the most beautiful music I know is in opera." Then my friend saw the film A m a d e u s and was intrigued. Now this upstart listens to all sorts of weird operas and has the effrontery to tell me that this Mozart guy is a better composer than the great Giacomo Puccini. Now do not get me wrong (I would usually say "Don't get me wrong," but one does not use contractions when discussing opera). Do not get me wrong. I like Mozart very much, but he has a tendency to be a little dry and ethereal, almost like he accused composers before him of being. His music does have a modicum--"modicum" is a very nice word to use when discussing opera--more emotion than his predecessors. Had Mozart lived long enough he might have become the Shakespeare and George Lucas of opera the way the divine Puccini is. But this is, of course, digression.

Anyway, we noticed that in one weekend the New York City Opera was going to do two fantasy operas: Boito's M e f i s t o f e l e and Mozart's D o n G i o v a n n i. So we invited our friend for the weekend. Now I thought it was good enough just having a friend over. Not so to my dear wife

Evelyn. She dubbed the weekend "Operacon" so it would sound more like a science fiction convention. Is that not demented? Never mind it is one person visiting and we are just going to New York, She even has a program printed up. It has exciting days like:

Sunday, Aug. 20

10:00 Shuttle Leaves

1:00 _ D _ o _ n _ G _ i _ o _ v _ a _ n _ n _ i

6:00 Dinner/Shuttle Returns

"Shuttle" is apparently our car. I do not think it has occurred to Evelyn that a shuttle must be licensed by the state and the driver needs a chauffeur's license. No, this is all in fun. Did you not have fun just reading the program above?

So anyway the day of Operacon arrives. Our friend is visiting. And Evelyn starts dressing for the opera. Now picture if you will a smart young couple dressing for the opera. Pretty fancy, right? Tell that to Evelyn. I bet you did not picture the wife wearing an African necklace with two-inch carved wooden toy animals strung together. I know I did not picture such a necklace. I had to see Evelyn actually wearing it. Ever try to tell a grown woman why she should not wear a toy necklace to the opera? "NO!" I explained, and that was that. Of course in return I had to make a concession. That is only fair. For just this weekend our car is a "shuttle."

Opera

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So we drove our "shuttle" to New York and parked it under the Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts. Am I the only person who sees anything strange in that name? Here you have a center for the performing arts named for a president whose only remembered connection to the arts was one disastrous evening at the theater. In the elevated circles of the arts in New York City somebody has a pretty macabre sense of humor.

Anyway, so we parked our car. I commented to Evelyn that the people who ran the garage were mostly arts center dancers who never made it. You call that "ballet parking." (Get it? Like "valet parking." "Ballet parking!" ... Okay. Well, Evelyn did not think it was funny either. I tell you, I get no appreciation.)

I think we can skip the part about going to bookstores and eating

in a Japanese restaurant as being not particularly related to the arts-
-unless you consider making sushi an art. Actually, I do. And if you
use plenty of wasabi it even becomes one of the lively arts.

In any case, we were considering paying \$6.50 for a tour of Lincoln
Center. That is a dollar more than we paid to see _ T_ h_ e_ A_ b_ y_ s_ s. And that
is just to see where the art is performed. If you want to see an actual
performance it costs a lot more. I decided when we actually sit down to
see the opera, Evelyn could look around and that way we would save the
\$6.50.

I should say something about the two operas we saw over Operacon.

Boito's _ M_ e_ f_ i_ s_ t_ o_ f_ e_ l_ e could well be subtitled _ F_ a_ u_ s_ t_ H_ a_ s
_ H_ i_ s_ C_ a_ k_ e_ a_ n_ d_ E_ a_ t_ s
_ I_ t_ T_ o_ o. It is sort of like the story of Job told backwards. The Devil
makes a bet with God that he can tempt Faust. The Devil gets Faust to
sell him his soul. Faust seduces Margherita, attends a Witches'
Sabbath, finds out that because of him Margherita has made a complete
cock-up of her life, and finally sleeps with Helen of Troy. Finally
Faust is an old dying man and the Devil gets ready to take him and Faust
repents and ends up going to heaven anyway. The Devil is a destroyed
man. Well, what did he expect? With a loophole like that left open to
Faust, the Devil should never have gotten into a stupid bet like that in
the first place. And if this was supposed to have some sort of moral
message for the audience, forget it. I have always thought this whole
idea that you could repent at the last minute and escape punishment was
a dangerous idea to put into people's heads. When the opera was first
performed it was five hours long. Just to tell that story. The
audience burned the seats. Boito cut it down to three hours and now it
is a classic.

Mozart's _ D_ o_ n_ G_ i_ o_ v_ a_ n_ n_ i could well be subtitled _ D_ o_ n
_ J_ u_ a_ n_ H_ a_ s_ H_ i_ s_ C_ a_ k_ e
_ B_ u_ t_ D_ i_ d_ N_ o_ t_ l_ e_ a_ r_ n_ f_ r_ o_ m_ F_ a_ u_ s_ t. It is the
same sort of story. Most
people seem to think opera is some sort of elevated art form. Actually,
it is pretty much just music, sex, and violence. It would play really
well on cable with a better pace and much worse music. Mozart tells
much the same sort of story with Don Juan as Boito told with Faust. Don

Juan goes around seducing everything in a skirt and making more enemies than the eventual victim in an Agatha Christie. Except, being a Mozart opera, it also has people exchanging clothes and fooling other people. Mozart really got off on the idea that by wearing someone else's clothes you could pretend to be someone else and get sex that way, stupid little snot that Mozart was. Anyway, once Don Juan has made a lot of enemies, he refuses to repent at the last minute. So he goes to Hell. Again we find out that it does not matter how you lead most of your life; it is the last three minutes that count. Somehow I think it is Don Juan who showed more character by taking his medicine, but somehow I do not think that was the idea we were supposed to get from these two operas.

It should be noted of _ D _ o _ n _ G _ i _ o _ v _ a _ n _ n _ i that George Bernard Shaw, in his "Don Juan in Hell" subsection of _ M _ a _ n _ a _ n _ d _ S _ u _ p _ e _ r _ m _ a _ n, tied up a lot of loose ends that nobody else realized were in _ D _ o _ n _ G _ i _ o _ v _ a _ n _ n _ i. Shaw did not set his play to music, infusing it instead with great wit and intelligence that the opera lacks.

On the whole, I would break the opera-going experience into five distinct phases:

Phase 1: _ B _ e _ f _ o _ r _ e _ t _ h _ e _ e _ v _ e _ n _ t: Anticipation. "Boy, this is really going to be great; I'm looking forward to this."

Phase 2: _ B _ e _ g _ i _ n _ n _ i _ n _ g _ t _ h _ e _ e _ v _ e _ n _ t: Excitement. "This is really good."

I cannot wait to get to the good parts."

Phase 3: _ A _ s _ t _ h _ e _ e _ v _ e _ n _ t _ g _ o _ e _ s _ o _ n: Realization. "Well, this is actually kind of boring and silly. Now that I think about it, it has always been boring and silly. I had forgotten that."

Phase 4: _ A _ s _ t _ h _ e _ e _ v _ e _ n _ t _ e _ n _ d _ s: Relief. "Well, that is over with. I am glad to have that behind me."

Phase 5: _ A _ f _ t _ e _ r _ t _ h _ e _ e _ v _ e _ n _ t: Amnesia. "That was actually pretty good. I would probably like to do that again. Soon."

Does that sound familiar? Right. It is the same five phases that you go through with sex. Except with opera it takes three and a half hours instead of three and a half minutes. That may account for operas popularity. (I'm not talking about Puccini, of course, whose popularity speaks for itself.)

Cyberpunk and Reality
Comments by Evelyn C. Leeper
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These are the reality of cyberpunk. While authors were writing about "data cowboys" and "ice," students in Berkeley and around the world were using their own cyberpunk techniques. The first is (was?) the FAX number for the Tong-Ji University in Shanghai. It came from one of several lists of hundreds of FAX numbers posted by people around the world, suggesting that everyone with access to a FAX machine outside of China send in copies of newspaper accounts with pictures of what was happening in Beijing. The second was the phone number of the "informer" hotline in Beijing, posted by someone at the University of California at San Diego with the suggestion that this and other such "informer" lines be jammed by bogus calls. The third is a section of a PostScript (tm) print file which represents pictures of the June 4 massacre from someone at the University of Pittsburgh, who suggested printing them and mailing them to China.

The FAX technique was been so effective that U. S. News & World Report had an entire story about it. The jamming technique of informing on false names did in fact making it difficult for informers to turn in real dissidents. The two combined were tying up the lines to China and President Bush couldn't get through to make a phone call to China at all, and in fact, the "FAXers" were complaining that the "jammers" are making it difficult for the FAX calls to get through. Finally the Chinese government had to assign police to watch every FAX machine in China. Needless to say, this handicapped their efforts to round up students.

The revolution in Iran ten years ago was described as a "revolution by cassette player." This has being described as a "revolution by FAX machine." The ultimate outcome of all this is as yet undetermined. But it is becoming increasingly difficult to block the flow of information.

True, you can do what King Jigme Singhe Wangchuk, the emperor of Bhutan, did: he signed an executive proclamation ordering all residents of Bhutan to remove from their homes all electronic instruments "capable of projecting on a screen of any kind visual information of any nature alien to the Bhutanese culture and civilization." From the wording of proclamation, one gets the impression it does not cover videocassette players in offices or other "non-residences," which makes control somewhat easier--but not by much. It doesn't take much of a science fiction or cyberpunk background to start coming up with ways around this one also.