

escape it. It is all you hear on the radio. [Uh, darn it. Evelyn's radio station was playing Christmas carols. I tried four other stations and they were all playing Christmas music. Okay, I will turn off the radio and write in silence.] You go to a movie and where we have the big "Merry Christmas" or "Season's Greetings"

THE MT VOID

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with the Christmas scene before movies they would have slogans pushing their party line on the screen. I was thinking about it when I went to a restaurant this weekend and was put right under a speaker playing music. I just thought about how depressing it would have been if the whole time it was playing some sort of political anthems instead of Christmas music. You turn on the radio or television there and you'd get repetitious re-tellings of stories of the Revolution instead of 37 different versions of Dickens's C_h_r_i_s_t_m_a_s_C_a_r_o_l and repeats of I_t'_s_a_W_o_n_d_e_r_f_u_l_L_i_f_e.

Then there is the news. The news bureaus follow the party line also knowing that part of what they are telling with a straight face is lies. After that how can you believe anything they say. [I am reminded of the news program I saw this morning with a man claiming to be the real Santa Claus. And the news reports every Christmas Eve that radar has picked up Santa on his sleigh flying south, but of course that is a different matter.]

It must be depressing to see houses trying to outdo each other with red flags and red banners the way we put up Christmas decorations. And everybody would be all-fired convinced that their anxiousness to push the party line was "the right thing to do." I think we can all be glad that we do not live under a constant barrage like that. I know November and December are plenty for me!

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Those who are not shocked when they first come across quantum theory, cannot possibly have understood it.

--Neils Bohr

BLAZE

A film review by Mark R. Leeper
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Capsule review: Not as well-hyped as other films this holiday season, B_l_a_z_e is still a front-runner for plaudits with a solid performance by Lolita Davidovitch managing to steal the show from Paul Newman. Rating: high +2.

For a while the most interesting films of the year were released during the summer. These days the period with the best films is the winter holiday season so they are fresh in people's minds for Oscar nominations. Released with very little fanfare, B_l_a_z_e is certainly a contender. B_l_a_z_e manages to be a serious film and at the same time delightful, not an easy feat. History records that Governor Earl Long of Louisiana, brother to empire-builder Huey Long, was himself a crafty politician and an eccentric character. Earl risked his career to continue a long-standing affair with a notorious stripper, Blaze Starr. B_l_a_z_e is the story of Blaze Starr's career, Earl and Blaze's

relationship, and Louisiana politics.

The story starts with Blaze (played by Lolita Davidovitch) leaving the Appalachian hill country and going to New Orleans to find work. She is tricked into becoming a stripper, but once she gets used to it she becomes a major New Orleans attraction. Once she meets the Governor (played by Paul Newman) they start spending time together. At some point unclear this stops being social climbing on Blaze's part and becomes a deeply felt, mutually supportive love. The wilder and crazier Earl gets, the more loyalty Blaze is able to muster. At first Earl is enough of a politician to support the rights of blacks and sell it as racism to a constituency that will buy only racism. When he can no longer fool the racists he continues to support equality, knowing it may be political suicide. His political enemies retaliate by using his undeniable eccentricities against him in the press. Blaze does not always understand Earl, but she unfailingly knows what Earl needs.

With an actor of Paul Newman's stature acts as eccentrically as Earl Long, a virtual unknown of a co-star runs the risk of going totally unnoticed. That was now what happened at all. If anything, Davidovitch walked away with the film. A Yugoslav by birth and a naturalized Canadian, she is convincing as a touch but gentle woman from Appalacia with an ability to hold audience attention that goes beyond her physical attraction. Davidovitch had small parts in A_d_v_e_n_t_u_r_e_s_i_n_B_a_b_y_s_i_t_t_i_n_g and T_h_e_B_i_g_T_o_w_n, but is unlikely to get any more small parts.

Ron Shelton previously directed B_u_l_l_D_u_r_h_a_m with good characterization but not such a good story. His B_l_a_z_e has a better story and gets a rating of a high +2 on the -4 and +4 scale.

THE WAR OF THE ROSES
A film review by Mark R. Leeper
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Capsule review: The story of a marriage dissolving in hatred is given a bittersweet treatment by Danny DeVito directing the now-popular team of Michael Douglas and Kathleen Turner. This is a good idea for a film but

it is not well handled. Rating : +1.

T_h_e_W_a_r_o_f_t_h_e_R_o_s_e_s is the story of the marriage of Oliver and Barbara Rose. It tells how they met, fell in love, married, and raised a family. But the primary focus of the film is on how the marriage foundered and on the bitter battle between the two as the marriage dissolves and becomes a contest of wills during the divorce. The film gives new meaning to the term "idiot plot" (the plot that works only because the main characters are idiots). In this case, the point of the film--repeated over and over by the Roses's lawyer, who is telling the story--is that the Roses a_r_e being idiots. They are willing to give up everything they have to be "one-up" on the other. They are empty people with an empty marriage who are finally given a cause to live for, which turns out to be destroying each other.

The team of Michael Douglas, Kathleen Turner, and Danny DeVito, popular since R_o_m_a_n_c_i_n_g_t_h_e_S_t_o_n_e, here turn out another comedy. But the humor is only a very thin veneer over what is at heart a very black and bleak story verging on a parable of the Middle East or Northern Ireland.

Perhaps because the story is told mostly from Oliver's point of view, he is the more sympathetic of the two principal characters. Barbara acts and Oliver reacts when the marriage begins breaking up. Barbara attacks and Oliver counter-attacks. The film builds to one final evening when Oliver becomes angry enough that both are attacking at the same time.

T_h_e_W_a_r_o_f_t_h_e_R_o_s_e_s is just at an awkward level of style. It could have worked better if it were light, such as N_e_i_g_h_b_o_r_s, or heavier as a serious straight drama. As it is it seems like a comic replug of an old made-for-television movie, T_h_e_W_a_r_B_e_t_w_e_e_n_t_h_e_T_a_t_e_s. Making jokes about this sort of self-destructive behavior is too much like making jokes about leukemia. There is the germ of a good idea here, but it is improperly handled. My rating is a +1 on the -4 to +4 scale.

STEEL MAGNOLIAS
A film review by Mark R. Leeper
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Capsule review: Six women go through folly, friendship, and tragedy together. If the basic formula is familiar, at least the writing by Robert Harling--based on his own stage play--is usually crisp and often genuinely funny. Rating: low +2.

S_t_e_e_l_M_a_g_n_o_l_i_a_s is about as formulaic a "women's film" as any film I can imagine. You have a set of two or more women whom you get to know very well through relatively mundane circumstances. You get a feel for what they do in life's more ordinary moments. The tragedy (usually medical) strikes and having known them already you feel for their tragedy. Suddenly any old antagonisms seem small. But they are stronger for having known each other and the remainder of their numbers will abide and endure. That's B_e_a_c_h_e_s, that's T_e_r_m_s_o_f_E_n_d_e_a_r_m_e_n_t, that's lots of other films, and that's S_t_e_e_l_M_a_g_n_o_l_i_a_s. All that makes one of these films good or bad is whether the viewer is really brought into the characters during the normal, mundane part and is that part enjoyable. In S_t_e_e_l_M_a_g_n_o_l_i_a_s the mundane part is quite good. As it so often is, it's not silly or cute or whimsical. It is genuinely funny. And as such it leaves most of the other films of its formula behind.

S_t_e_e_l_M_a_g_n_o_l_i_a_s is the story of six women from a small town in Louisiana. The women are played by Sally Field, Shirley MacLaine, Dolly Parton, Daryl Hannah, Olympia Dukakis, and Julia Roberts. Much of the story takes place in a beauty parlor--as did all of the play the film was based on. But the film greatly benefits from the opportunity to get out of the beauty parlor and see the world. There are really three pairs of women: a mother and daughter, the beauty parlor owner and her assistant, and two older women who are often at odds with each other.

As is almost the requirement for this sort of film, there is a soft and sentimental film score by George Delerue. Nobody plays these soft and sensitive strings like Delerue. Also reasonably good, but obviously of secondary interest, are the men, played by Tom Skerritt, Sam Shepard, and a few others. Also this film boasts (?) a view of the most revolting cake ever baked.

S_t_e_e_l_M_a_g_n_o_l_i_a_s obviously has a good cast and is diverting and enjoyable. I rate it a low +2 on the -4 to +4 scale.

SHERLOCK HOLMES AND THE THISTLE OF SCOTLAND by L. B. Greenwood
Simon & Schuster, 1989, ISBN 0-671-65916-2, \$17.95.
A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper
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Greenwood is the author of two previous Holmesian novels: S_h_e_r_l_o_c_k
H_o_l_m_e_s_a_n_d_t_h_e_C_a_s_e_o_f_t_h_e_R_a_l_e_i_g_h_L_e_g_a_c_y (1986) and
S_h_e_r_l_o_c_k_H_o_l_m_e_s_a_n_d
t_h_e_C_a_s_e_o_f_S_a_b_i_n_a_H_a_l_l (1988). The former relied too heavily on
Elizabethan court intrigue (at least as far as I was concerned); the
latter was based more firmly in Victorian times but set in the
countryside rather than London. Even so, both were enjoyable because
Greenwood is a good author who knows her characters and doesn't have
them suddenly lapsing into American slang or some such. Now Greenwood
has returned Holmes and Watson to London in S_h_e_r_l_o_c_k_H_o_l_m_e_s_a_n_d_t_h_e
T_h_i_s_t_l_e_o_f_S_c_o_t_l_a_n_d, and a welcome return it is. My one "criticism" is
that I figured out fairly early on how the crime was done, and this is
unusual. This is unusual in part because I don't consider mysteries
puzzles to be solved before the author announces the solution, but
intricate machines to be gradually revealed by the author. Then again,
maybe this was just a lucky guess on my part. Certainly knowing this
did not diminish my enjoyment of the book.

Greenwood seems to have taken over as the "regular" writer of
Holmes pastiches, and Holmes's fans could do a lot worse. Look for her
next book (I hope there is one), and catch up on her first three while
you're waiting.

