

KAGEMUSHA (1980)

We begin with a documentary on Kurosawa made at the time he was making KAGEMUSHA. It includes a retrospective of his films. It will be followed by the film KAGEMUSHA:

THE MT VOID

Page 2

Nippon is in the throes of civil war. Two armies vie for control of the land. Leading one army is Takeda Shingen; the other army is led by Oda Nobunaga and the young Tokugawa Ieyasu. (For those who read S_h_o_g_u_n, the shogun was called Toranaga, but was the grown-up Ieyasu.) The war is going in favor of Shingen, so respected by his troops that just the sight of him overseeing the battle inspires his troops to victory. For additional safety, Shingen has an exact double, a thief saved from the gallows. Then Shingen is killed and the double finds himself in command of the most powerful army in Japan--but only so long as he can fool people into thinking he is Shingen. Among other awards, KAGEMUSHA won the Golden Palm at Cannes and was nominated for Best Foreign-Language Film.

2. EQUAL RITES and THE LIGHT FANTASTIC by Terry Pratchett are available in the LZ Science Fiction Club Library. [-ecl]

3. The Science Fiction Writers of America (SFWA) has launched a campaign to collect paperback novels to be sent to our soldiers deployed in Saudi Arabia. Any novels of nearly any genre are acceptable with the exception of romance novels.

As many of you know, we currently have over 160,000 military personnel deployed in Saudi Arabia. There is a distinct lack of entertainment and ways to pass the time. Your books will be sent to various units and passed from person to person, giving much-needed relief and a morale boost for our soldiers, Marines, airmen, and sailors.

Now is your chance to show your support for our military men and women in Saudi Arabia. Collection points have been established as follows:

- HO 2L-420 (Alan Gopin)
- HR 1A-113 (Steve Harclerode)
- LZ 1A-208 (Steve Goldsmith)

MH 2F-213 (Lorraine Lapsley)
MH 2F-131 (Counseling Office)
MT 3D-441 (Mark Leeper)

If you're not in any of those locations, you can send *small* quantities (less than six) via inter-office mail to me (Mark Leeper) at MT 3D-441; call me at 957-5619 if you have bulk quantities to donate or want to volunteer your office as a collection point for your location. If anyone wants to volunteer to help collect, pack, and/or ship these books, contact me. (The Veterans' Club has offered to pack and ship books collected in South Jersey, but many of their members have been mobilized, so they would welcome any help you could give. [Above composed by ecl, but I have the space to do the collecting due to the recent defection of my officemate to an organization in Holmdel-- mrl]

Mark Leeper
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...mtgzx!leeper

AUTHOR'S CHOICE MONTHLY 8: James Morrow
Pulphouse, 1990, \$4.95.
A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper
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Pulphouse Publishing is issuing a series of "Author's Choice" books--stories selected by the author rather than by an editor. This slim volume contains seven of Morrow's short stories, including one never before published ("Bible Stories for Adults, No. 20: The Tower"). The other six are "The Assemblage of Kristin," "Bible Stories for Adults, No. 17: The Deluge," "The Eye That Never Blinks," "The Confessions of Ebenezer Scrooge," "Bible Stories for Adults, No. 31: The Covenant," and "Spelling God with the Wrong Blocks"; there is also an introduction by Morrow.

What the stories have in common (besides being selected by Morrow) is that they are all religious in nature (some might say irreligious). Of course, this is true of much of Morrow's writing, and certainly of his latest novel, O_n_l_y_B_e_g_o_t_t_e_n_D_a_u_g_h_t_e_r. Still, the trend is not so obvious until one sees the pieces collected in one volume. Morrow may

question the traditional religions, and certainly his "Bible Stories for Adults" do that, but his works also display a more deeply religious tone than do many whose religion is more conventional.

This is not to say there aren't logical problems in some of the stories. In "Bible Stories for Adults, No. 31: The Covenant," Morrow postulates an alternate world in which Moses couldn't get a replacement set of tablets for the ones he smashed on the golden calf, so the world proceeded with the Ten Commandments. Morrow then sets up a scenario where the tablets are reconstructed by one computer, but another computer claims that these commandments will be mis-interpreted to lead to, well, our world. For example, "Thou shalt not kill" will be interpreted to first say, "Thou shalt not kill unnecessarily" and so on until it eventually leads to a weapons race, to which the first asks "What are weapons?" Morrow overlooks that many civilizations who had never heard of the Ten Commandments seem to have had weapons (and weapons races). (And also that the original Hebrew of the commandment is better translated "murder" than "kill," which means the "unnecessarily" is already there.)

But perhaps in the context of these stories this is an unreasonable quibble. And the story I picked is the one with the largest holes in it. Though he plans some day to produce an entire book of "Bible Stories for Adults," don't wait--buy this now. (For those of you interested in the physical look and feel of a book as well as it's contents, I recommend Pulphouse books; they have a wonderful parchment-like cover and cream-colored pages which are a joy to hold as well as to read. And the cost is the same as your usual cheap paperback. Your local bookstore almost definitely won't carry this, and there is no ISBN, so you can order direct from Pulphouse Publishing, P. O. Box 1227, Eugene OR 97440.)

THE SECRET ASCENSION by Michael Bishop
Tor, 1989 (c1987), ISBN 0-812-53157-4, \$4.50
A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper
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This book is actually titled T_h_e_S_e_c_r_e_t_A_s_c_e_n_s_i_o_n_o_r,_P_h_i_l_i_p_K._D_i_c_k_I_s_D_e_a_d,_A_l_a_s. And it is a tribute to Dick in more ways than one. In the world of T_h_e_S_e_c_r_e_t_A_s_c_e_n_s_i_o_n (which is, to state it up front, an

alternate world), Dick has achieved a far greater fame than he did in our world. Yet he has also become known as a subversive author in this world of totalitarian government. We never find out just where things changed, but it was nothing obvious. There are many minor changes (instead of Ted Turner, this world has Tod Turner, for example) that indicate that something happened much further back than the major changes would indicate.

But in addition to using Dick as a character, T_h_e_S_e_c_r_e_t_A_s_c_e_n_s_i_o_n also uses Dick's technique of playing with reality and levels of reality and of asking "What is reality?" The result is unusual, and not quite describable. The best I can do is to say I recommend this novel even if you're not a Philip K. Dick fan (if you are, this recommendation is probably superfluous anyway).

METROPOLITAN

A film review by Mark R. Leeper

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Capsule review: An outsider gets involved with the tinder of the vanities, a clique of young, chic, semi-intellectuals who talk like the A_t_l_a_n_t_i_c_M_o_n_t_h_l_y but whose lives are just as mis-managed as anyone else's.

Walt Stillman's dialogue is the main reason to see

M_e_t_r_o_p_o_l_i_t_a_n. Rating: +1.

There is a separate sort of film I think you would have to call "the dialogue film." It is a concept parallel to that of "the special

effects film." A dialogue film is built around and shows off its dialogue the way a special effects film is built around and shows off

its visual effects. While films one would classify as dialogue films have been more common in Europe than in the United States, obvious

American dialogue films include R_e_t_u_r_n_o_f_t_h_e_S_e_c_a_u_c_u_s_S_e_v_e_n, T_h_e_B_i_g_C_h_i_l_l, and especially M_y_D_i_n_n_e_r_w_i_t_h_A_n_d_r_e. M_e_t_r_o_p_o_l_i_t_a_n has

marginally

more plot than the former three films, but it probably still qualifies.

In M_e_t_r_o_p_o_l_i_t_a_n, Tom Townsend (played by Edward Clements) gets politely kidnapped to a debutante party populated by young, wealthy,

sophisticated intellectuals and pseudo-intellectuals. They call

themselves the SFRP (Sally Fowler Rat Pack) and representatives of the

UHB (Urban Haute Bourgeoisie). Tom's background is not quite so h_a_u_t_e

as the others but he can talk the talk and with a little help from the

others he can walk the walk, in a second-hand tuxedo. But it is talking

the talk that is the main thing and while on an intellectual level Tom

has objections to this young tinder of the vanities--Tom believes

himself to be a Fourier socialist--he nonetheless finds himself

repeatedly drawn to their company.

The plot of M_e_t_r_o_p_o_l_i_t_a_n is only very slight as one of the quieter members of the rat pack, a literature fan named Audrey Rouget (played by

Carolyn Farina), takes a liking to Tom, though Tom is still in love with

former girlfriend Serena Slocum (Elizabeth Thompson). But this film's

fine point is not so much the plot as its view of this young aristocracy

and the often funny and always engrossing dialogue. Writing credit for

the dialogue (as well as most of the rest of the credit) goes to

writer/director/producer Walt Stillman who, according to V_a_r_i_e_t_y sold

his Manhattan apartment to help finance the film. He probably will not

get rich making films like M_e_t_r_o_p_o_l_i_t_a_n, but he should be able to get

another apartment. I rate this a +1 on the -4 to +4 scale.

POSTCARDS FROM THE EDGE
A film review by Mark R. Leeper
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Capsule review: Petulant, semi-autobiographical comedy written by Carrie Fisher about her relationship with her mother and the world in general. There are a couple of nice dramatic scenes but not enough to salvage this self-pitying story. Rating: high 0.

Life can be tough. It really is not very easy growing up in Hollywood with no father and a famous movie star mother who wants to run your life. Then there are all sorts of Hollywood types of people and probably none of them are looking out for your best interests or treat you as gently as you think they should. That is the sad premise of P_o_s_t_c_a_r_d_s_f_r_o_m_t_h_e_E_d_g_e, with a screenplay by Carrie Fisher based on her semi-autobiographical novel of the same name.

Suzanne Vale (played by Meryl Streep) is a second-rate actress who can get roles in only third-rate films. She seems invariably to play women of action committed to some cause, but she herself is committed to nothing. She consoles herself with cocaine, which makes her even harder to work with. Then she takes the drugs a bit too far and ends up in the custody of her singer-actress mother, Doris Mann (played by Shirley MacLaine), a show business legend but just as dependent on alcohol and drugs as her daughter. This all would be pretty bleak if not for Vale's quick wit, which at times is undeniably funny, and P_o_s_t_c_a_r_d_s' laconic view of the nothing-is-as-it-seems world of Hollywood filmmaking. The sarcastic wordplay among two and occasionally three generations of women from one family is perhaps the only thing preventing P_o_s_t_c_a_r_d_s from being a complete melodrama like M_o_m_m_y_D_e_a_r_e_s_t.

It is a real pity that Fisher and Debbie Reynolds did not play the characters who were essentially themselves. It would have added some authenticity to the roles. Fisher would have been more believable as an actress cast in the sort of film in which looks are the most important thing and acting talent is optional. Streep would not have been cast in such a film, regardless of her talent, because she does not have the

looks that women in these films have. On the other hand, had Fisher and Reynolds starred, P_o_s_t_c_a_r_d_s would have been criticized for where it does fictionalize. Some courage points should be awarded to both Streep and MacLaine for being willing to appear without make-up--each in one scene. Streep without make-up looks just very plain; how MacLaine looks without make-up is something of a shock and probably is going to be remembered. The scene, however, is essential to the film and gives it the only moments where it really says something of real interest. MacLaine's make-up is symbolic of all the sham and pretense of the Hollywood system, but it cannot be stripped away without stripping away the dignity. Much of the value of the film is dependent on MacLaine being willing to play this scene.

With the exception of one or two small powerful moments, P_o_s_t_c_a_r_d_s f_r_o_m_t_h_e_E_d_g_e is mostly a thin comedy-drama. I rate it a high 0 on the -4 to +4 scale.