

Since it has no electrons, Administratium is inert. However, it can be detected chemically as it impedes every reaction it comes into contact with. According to the discoverers, a minute amount of Administratium caused one reaction to take four days to complete,

THE MT VOID

Page 2

when it would normally occur in less than one second.

Administratium has a normal half life of approximately 2 years, at which time it does not actually decay, but instead, undergoes a reorganization in which assistant neutrons, vice neutrons, and assistant vice neutrons exchange places. Some studies have shown that the atomic weight actually increases after each reorganization.

Research at other laboratories indicates that Administratium occurs naturally in the atmosphere. It tends to concentrate at certain points, such as government agencies, large corporations, universities, and telecommunications companies, and can actually be found in the newest, best maintained buildings. WINDOW OR WINDOWLESS OFFICES EQUALLY APPEAR SUSCEPTIBLE TO INFESTATION.

Scientists point out that Administratium is known to be toxic at any level of concentration and can easily destroy any productive reactions where it is allowed to accumulate. Attempts are being made to determine how Administratium can be controlled to prevent irreversible damage, but results to date are not promising.

(Reprinted, with slight modifications, from the Yale University Chemistry Department's newsletter, BUNSEN BURNER).

Mark Leeper
MT 3D-441 908-957-5619
...mtgzy!leeper

Oh, the tangled web we weave

When first we practice to deceive.
So if deception doth attract us,
We must have a lot of practice.
-- Mark R. Leeper

JFK

A film review by Mark R. Leeper
Copyright 1991 Mark R. Leeper

Capsule review: This is Oliver Stone's biography and defense of New Orleans D.A. Jim Garrison attempting to discredit the official explanation of the Kennedy assassination. While not always convincing in its ambitious conclusions, it will cause people to question the Warren Report.
Rating: low +2 (-4 to +4) (Minor spoilers in review)

It is difficult to evaluate a propaganda film--that is, a film intended to convince the viewer of a particular political point of view. How strongly do you weight your agreement with the political message? How strongly do you weigh whether the filmmaker played fairly and honestly? How strongly do you consider whether the film was convincing or not? How important are traditional values such as plot and technique? Is Leni Riefenstahl's T_r_i_u_m_p_h_o_f_t_h_e_W_i_l_l_a a good film because of the beautiful filmic technique or a bad film

because it deified Adolf Hitler? How good were Einsenstein's
_B_a_t_t_l_e_s_h_i_p_P_o_t_e_m_k_i_n and _A_l_e_x_a_n_d_e_r_N_e_v_s_k_y? How good was _Z or
_M_a_t_e_w_a_n
or _R_o_g_e_r_a_n_d_M_e? What about _M_r._S_m_i_t_h_G_o_e_s_t_o_W_a_s_h_i_n_g_t_o_n or _A_l_l
_t_h_e
_P_r_e_s_i_d_e_n_t's_M_e_n? I take the amoral--hopefully not immoral--view
that what is important are traditional film values plus whether the
film makes a good argument. I divorce myself from my own political
viewpoint. Nor will I strongly consider if the filmmaker is being
fair unless it hurts the argument being made. I would claim _T_r_i_u_m_p_h
_o_f_t_h_e_W_i_l_l is much better propaganda than television's _M._A._S._H. in
spite of the fact I agree much more with _M._A._S._H.'s politics.

That stated, I can now begin to discuss Oliver Stone's _J_F_K. Is
it a good film from the traditional viewpoint? It does hold the
viewer's attention and it does have some good performances, and some
wooden ones also. Overall it is an enjoyable film. Is it
convincing? That depends on what you think it is trying to convince
you of. If it is trying to convince the viewer that the Warren
Commission's official explanation of what happened is wrong, it
succeeds beautifully. It is difficult to believe that earl Warren
himself could see this film and not question his own commission's
findings. On the other hand, the film darkly implies that this
might have been a huge governmental conspiracy--essentially a coup
d'etat--with the express goal of precipitating a war in Vietnam.
For this conclusion the evidence is sketchy at best. Jim Garrison
and Oliver Stone essentially show tens of thousands of people who
had a motive to murder Kennedy and a few people who might have been
involved with pulling the triggers. There is not much connection in
between. That is where the film falls down.

JFK

December 22, 1991

Page 2

_J_F_K is structured as Kevin Costner, in the role of Jim
Garrison, presenting the Warren Commission's findings and knocking
holes in them. This is followed by a speech on the implications to
American democracy of the government's cover-up and these pieces are
preceded by a docudrama prologue that tells how Garrison got
involved and what he discovered in his investigations. Of course,
we see this prologue first, but the real heart of the film is the
rebuttal.

The prologue does not really have much of a plot any more than A l l t h e P r e s i d e n t ' s M e n did. Instead, we just follow step by step the investigation. Other than the obvious dramatic impact of the puzzle getting solved, there is a minor melodramatic sub-plot of Garrison alienating his family and his staff over his monomaniacal approach. This sub-plot is superficially added and resolved just as superficially. The detail of the investigation is well told, though its impact depends a great deal on the viewer's interest in revelations about the assassination. Stone makes a safe bet that most of the public, and certainly most who would come to see the film, have a great deal of interest in the Kennedy assassination. The chase after information is at least as interesting as the similar chase in A l l t h e P r e s i d e n t ' s M e n.

Kevin Costner brings a good deal of his Elliot Ness portrayal to his Jim Garrison. Sissy Spacek plays Mrs. Garrison exactly the way she played the Southern housewife in T h e L o n g W a l k H o m e. Joe Pesci is good playing one more and different breed of low-life. Edward Asner is notable as a gruff, bullet-shaped, bigoted conspirator. There are quite a few notables in the cast, perhaps to make a political point. Jim Garrison himself is along as Earl Warren.

As with many docudramas, J F K may not play exactly fair. It mixes together newsreel footage, fake newsreel footage, dramatization of events that happened, dramatization of events that may have happened, dramatization of events that did not happen but that improve the story, even mental images and supposed memories. This is, of course, a questionable strategy, but with a little thought the viewer knows what is being shown. It does shed some question on some of the assertions made.

This is a film that will change some minds and provoke argument. 73% of Americans believe there was a conspiracy and that percentage is likely to go up with this film. I give it a low +2 on the -4 to +4 scale.

FOR THE BOYS

A film review by Mark R. Leeper

Copyright 1991 Mark R. Leeper

Capsule review: James Caan and Bette Midler as a USO touring comedy team. For forty-nine years they are America's sweethearts on-stage and constantly battling off-stage. This is mostly because he has the values of his time and she has the values of our time. Sobby, sentimental, and melodramatic. Rating: high -1 (-4 to +4).

Bette Midler originally built her career on being outrageous and running counter to the culture. These days she seems more interested in making soft sentimental films such as B_e_a_c_h_e_s and her current F_o_r_t_h_e_B_o_y_s--what at one time were called "women's pictures." In a sense, that is just like Dixie Leonard, the character she plays in F_o_r_t_h_e_B_o_y_s. As we see Dixie over a forty-nine-year interval, she is at first outrageous as an entertainer, then slowly the world catches up and Dixie has been co-opted into the mainstream. In fact, from World War II to the present Dixie never fails to have and stand up for the values of a woman of the late 1980s.

Dixie is half of the musical comedy team of Eddie Sparks and Dixie Leonard. Sparks and Leonard are an amalgam of several real-life people, most notably Bob Hope with his penchant for USO tours and becoming a symbol of support for America's military policy. There is also something of Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz in them as they are considered to be "America's Sweethearts." There is a problem with this, however. Dixie is quick-witted and sharp-tongued. In the 1950s the ideal of womanhood presented by the media was domestic and not all that bright. (Right now the only notable pre-1960s exception that comes to mind is Myrna Loy as Nora Charles.) Eddie Sparks (played by James Caan) always represents the values of the mainstream of his time, whatever time that is. Not too unexpectedly, the two are in constant conflict with hot war when they are off-stage and cold war when they are on-stage. Sparks, however, is outclassed by this woman with a much quicker mind for gags and who is happy to mix dirty jokes into her patter.

Structured somewhat like S_a_m_e_T_i_m_e,N_e_x_t_Y_e_a_r, this film shows us Eddie and Dixie only at Christmas time, usually during a war and on a USO tour. We do see them during the Red scare, with Eddie naturally enough bowing to sponsor pressure to rid the staff of a "controversial" writer and Dixie, just as naturally, standing up for right and truth. Eddie always acts from cowardice or self-interest; Dixie never fails to stand up for some ideal or other. And just to

be sure the audience sides with Dixie--as if the deck were not badly

For the Boys

December 25, 1991

Page 2

enough stacked as it is--Dixie has a likable, outgoing manner and Eddie is given by Caan all the personality of a starched white shirt.

The script of F_o_r_t_h_e_B_o_y_s leaves no emotional button unpushed. The great tragedies in Dixie's life are telegraphed for in advance. Most of the story is told as a flashback to an all-style-no-substance network career man who is so inspired by Dixie's nobility that he is reformed on the spot. And if you cannot figure out the conclusion of the film in the first few minutes, you really are not trying. Dixie's attitudes are not the only anachronisms. In December of 1942 Dixie makes a pun on "Peenemunde." Even military intelligence probably did not know about Peenemunde's importance for another eight months. (It is a German island that was the development and launch site for the V-1 and V-2.)

In some respects the film is not so bad. It functions very nicely as a core sample of popular music from 1942 to the present. Music from each of the settings punctuates the film. Special note should be made of the makeup. Both Caan and Midler age before our eyes and the transitions are smooth and believable. The makeup artist pulled no punches and Midler does not age well. My first reaction on seeing the makeup-aged Midler was not that it did not look right; it was, "My gosh, look how old she's gotten!" It is rare one can get that natural reaction from ageing makeup.

But music and makeup do not save this film from being an overlong and self-congratulatory swipe at the values of the past by the present. I rate this film a high -1 on the -4 to +4 scale.

BUGSY

A film review by Mark R. Leeper

Copyright 1991 Mark R. Leeper

Capsule review: Barry Levinson has a real touch for putting myth on film. This is the story of the West Coast career of Ben "Bugsy" Siegel. It is glossy with an expensive look, but like most gangster films it gets many of its facts wrong. Rating: high +1 (-4 to +4). (Spoiler section follows review to set the record straight.)

Barry Levinson is a director who concentrates on putting myth onto film. Most commonly he mythologizes about his roots in Baltimore. He tells stories about his family and friends when he was growing up. Perhaps his best myth to date is the fantasy-sports story T_h_e_N_a_t_u_r_a_l. In G_o_o_d_M_o_r_n_i_n_g, V_i_e_t_n_a_m his mythical hero was the irreverent disk jockey who bucks the system. Perhaps it is not surprising that he would eventually turn to making films about one of America's two great mythical figures, the cowboy and the gangster. However, while cowboy films are on the skids, gangster films are on the upswing, so he picked a well-known gangster, Benjamin "Bugsy" Siegel. (In fact, this film ties in with M_o_b_s_t_e_r_s

earlier this year in which Siegel was one of the four title characters. Also, Siegel is assumed by many to have been the real murderer of Bo Greenberg. B i l l y B a t h g a t e begins showing Dutch Schultz committing the crime. Lucky Luciano has been a character in all three films; the three gangster films are all intertwined.) Levinson chose to tell the story of the ten years from 1937 to 1947, when Siegel was a major crime figure on the West Coast.

When B u g s y opens, Siegel (played by Warren Beatty) is being sent to Los Angeles on a twelve-day errand. Siegel is anxious to get together with boyhood friend George Raft (played by Joe Mantegna). Siegel is flush with easy money and decides to stay in California and buy himself the California lifestyle. He does this quite literally. Being told that a house belonged to famous opera singer Lawrence Tibbet, it takes Siegel less than five minutes to more or less force his way in and buy the house from Tibbet. Two things capture Bugsy's imagination. One is a minor actress, Virginia Hill (played by Annette Bening), and the other is a patch of barren desert where gambling is legal--it is called Las Vegas. Siegel decides to master each.

Beatty plays Siegel as a man of mercurial temperament. One moment he can be charming, the next he can be in a murderous rage. Many of his ideas are totally off the wall. He discovers that one of his lovers is married to a personal friend of Mussolini. He decides he wants to parlay this into a plot to murder Mussolini

Bugsy

December 21, 1991

Page 2

because he does not like what Mussolini stands for. On the other hand, his plan for a casino and landing strip at Las Vegas was visionary.

This is very much Beatty's show. Bening's Virginia Hill is very much like Bening's character in T h e G r i f t e r s. Harvey Keitel and Joe Mantegna--both good actors--get seen without much opportunity to act. On the other hand, Elliot Gould, usually not such a fine actor, takes a small part as a forlorn gangster and nearly steals the whole film. Remarkably, even a great actor like Ben Kingsley (as Meyer Lansky) comes off wooden and uninteresting compared to Gould.

This film has been getting a lot of attention, probably in no small part due to the look of the set direction and the photography. The film is not afraid to show a steamy love scene as just two shadows on a screen. The photography catches the neon nights of Los Angeles's center or the foggy nights of its suburbs. The film has a well-done if somewhat subdued score from Ennio Morricone. Several of his themes are reminiscent of his U n t o u c h a b l e s score. Levinson's direction, however, does not sustain the mood. There is, for example, a rather silly scene of Siegel trying to run a birthday party for his young daughter while having a meeting with the syndicate in his living room. It only serves to damage the atmosphere.

Overall, in spite of several good reports, I have to say that B u g s y is just a stylish gangster film that generally tells a true story, though some of its facts are wrong. I rate it a +1 on the -4 to +4 scale.

****SPOILER****

It is clear that somebody somewhere along the line really did some research on Siegel. The story as we see it is basically correct, though there are numerous factual errors. The major flaw is in how Virginia Hill is portrayed. She is supposed to be an actress. In fact, she was an Alabama girl who came to Chicago to be a cooch dancer for the 1934 World's Fair. After that her occupation seemed to be mistress. She was handed around by several well-known gangsters including Frank Nitti, Frank Costello, and of course, Joey Adonis and Bugsy Siegel, with whom she finally settled down. The newspapers labeled her "the Queen of the Mob." She wasn't the queen, but she did run errands for the syndicate. No reference I can find indicates she ever was an actress. I know that the New York Times never listed her in the credits of a film, since her name does not appear in their directory.

Siegel did not have a plot to kill Mussolini. He did travel to Italy to try to sell Il Duce an experimental explosive which turned out not to work. He had to return Mussolini's investment of

It is an underworld legend that he took a dislike to them and started hatching a plot to murder them. (I found this story in two different references--honest!)

Harry "Big Greenie" Greenberg did not go to Los Angeles to ask Siegel's help. He went for a place to hide out. The syndicate found out Big Greenie was in California and asked Bugsy to arrange his death. Not content just to arrange, Siegel took two other men and killed Greenie himself. They shot him as he was returning home one day.

The idea of Bugsy staying in California was that of the syndicate, not Bugsy himself on a twelve-day trip. The story of buying the Tibbet house was fun, but probably untrue, since Bugsy only rented the house.

The Flamingo did not open on Christmas Day 1946, but the day after. The turnout was poor, but there were people coming and gambling. Further, Bugsy was not killed for several months and by then the casino was starting to show a profit. Virginia Hill was probably not bright enough to hide her embezzling from Siegel. And even if she was, she was depositing the money by shuttling frequently to Europe and personally making the deposits. It seems unthinkable that Bugsy would not have known and, in fact, planned the operation. Virginia was in Europe, not at the Flamingo, June 20, 1947, when Bugsy was shot. Bugsy was not alone, however; a friend with whom he had dinner was present. The film implies that Hill committed suicide in Austria as a result of Siegel's death. Actually, it was nineteen years, several lovers, and a husband later.

THE OTHER SINBAD by Craig Shaw Gardner
Ace, 1991, ISBN 0-441-76720-6, \$4.50.
A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper
Copyright 1991 Evelyn C. Leeper

Craig Shaw Gardner is known as the author of humorous fantasy. This is perhaps not an entirely new sub-genre (Thorne Smith was writing it before most of today's readers were born), but it seems to have recently acquired a large number of contributors--besides Gardner, we have Douglas Adams, Piers Anthony (though his Xanth series seems to have ended a few years ago), Esther Friesner, Tim Holt, Terry Pratchett, Gardner's books seem to come in threes: the Ebenezum Trilogy, the Ballad of Wuntvor Trilogy, the Cineverse Trilogy. So it isn't surprising that at the end of this book is an announcement for _ A _ B _ a _ d _ D _ a _ y _ f _ o _ r _ A _ l _ i _ B _ a _ b _ a .

As far as this book goes, it's relatively self-contained, though it does assume some knowledge of the Sinbad story on the part of the reader. The "other Sinbad" of the title is Sinbad the Porter, who is often confused with the famous Sinbad, Sinbad the Sailor. When he finally meets his more famous counterpart, it turns out to be a good thing, because a demon sent to take Sinbad the Sailor doesn't know which Sinbad to take and so can take neither. But fairly soon I found myself wishing he had taken Sinbad the Sailor--a pompous, irresponsible bore. It's possible you will find this humorous, but I didn't. And the retellings and re-occurrences of his first seven voyages didn't do anything for me either. I can't help feeling my time would have been better spent reading the Burton translation of the original _ T _ h _ o _ u _ s _ a _ n _ d _ O _ n _ e _ N _ i _ g _ h _ t _ s .

