



One of the small mental games I play is to take some famous quote that most people know and most people who know it believe it and ask myself do I really believe it. Do I have anything that should

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be added to it? For example I have published as a quote in this notice that those who remember the past are condemned to be misled by it. In fact I find that very much true. People believe they are reliving a past and often miss the fact that history really rarely repeats itself. Any historical analogy is a flawed one for that reason. You can get a feel for the principles of history by studying the past, and that is valuable, but you can never really understand the present by making analogies with the past. There will always be differences that spoil any such analogy.

Oliver Sachs talking on PBS quoted the famous Rousseau lament on freedom, itself, I think, a comment on Milton's quote. Both are restated above. First let me get out of the way the requisite political correctness. I am sure that these two dumb doozles were thinking of all people, but made the paternalistic error of referring to all people as "man."

But I guess the first question we must ask is how free is someone being born? Well, in the actual process, you are about as far from freedom as you are ever going to get in life. You are being pushed down a tiny narrow passage about like forty layers of spandex coming down to a tube as big around as your arm into a world very unlike any you have known. This is not real freedom in any sense I recognize.

And then what sort of freedom do you know? You probably cannot move off of your back. As soon as you can open your eyes you see you are on a bed surrounded by bars. During the day you are in a boring flat place also surrounded by bars. Oh, the bars a\_r\_e for your own good, at least that is what your government says. Your government is generally one or two mobile trees who stand around you and make funny, incomprehensible sounds. They have it all over you physically and so you make them your personal deities for the time being. You probably do not get any real freedom for years, a

very long time to you. If you ever get this level of restriction again, you call it tyranny. Being a baby is the antithesis of freedom.

We like to say that people are born free, lions are born free, even plants are born free, I guess. But the simple fact is that it is generally human adults who make this claim. Generally speaking, the very young don't get a vote on that interpretation. We decide for the young that they are free, as governments always claim their people are. Now, I am not saying that all this is necessarily a bad thing, kids given their freedom would be a danger to themselves and to others. I am only suggesting that we ought to give some thought to the statement that man (uh ... or woman) is born free and is everywhere in chains. It sounds good but does not bear close scrutiny. Or perhaps as Milton would have it, I don't know aught.

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2. THE BREATH OF SUSPENSION by Alexander Jablov (Arkham House, ISBN 0-87054-167-6, 1994, 318pp, US\$20.95) (a book review by Evelyn C. Leeper):

Major publishers, I am told, don't like to bring out single-author collections. They don't sell well enough in most cases to satisfy whatever profitability formula the publishers use. What single-author collections one does see from major publishers are usually from only the biggest authors--multi-Hugo- and Nebula-winners who have the clout (and draw) to convince the publishers that an occasional collection is part of the package if they want the novels as well.

All this is by way of explanation as to why science fiction fans should be thankful that there exist smaller publishers such as Mark Zeising, NESFA Press, and Arkham House who bring out single-author collections which may not be wildly successful, but serve to make available the otherwise unavailable short fiction of noted authors. Zeising has produced a Pat Cadigan collection, NESFA has done Cordwainer Smith, and Arkham House has done Nancy Kress's second

collection. (Kress's first, T\_r\_i\_n\_i\_t\_y\_a\_n\_d\_O\_t\_h\_e\_r\_S\_t\_o\_r\_i\_e\_s, was from Bluejay Books, a smaller publisher who, alas, went under--perhaps validating the major publishers' concerns.)

And now Arkham House has come out with T\_h\_e\_B\_r\_e\_a\_t\_h\_o\_f\_S\_u\_s\_p\_e\_n\_s\_i\_o\_n, a collection of ten stories by Alexander Jablovkov. All the stories have previously appeared in I\_s\_a\_a\_c\_A\_s\_i\_m\_o\_v's\_S\_c\_i\_e\_n\_c\_e\_F\_i\_c\_t\_i\_o\_n\_M\_a\_g\_a\_z\_i\_n\_e, but if anyone without their own collection of magazines has ever tried to find a six-year-old issue of a science fiction magazine they will understand why I describe such stories as unavailable.

The jacket blurb makes comparisons between Jablovkov's work and the stories of the "Golden Age," but this is deceptive. Some of the concepts may have also been used in the Golden Age, but the execution is far distant from the straightforward Campbellian prose that the term "Golden Age" evokes for me. Jablovkov is far more of a stylist, a far more sophisticated author in some sense, than those earlier writers were. (Many of those earlier writers are still writing now, and they are also often more sophisticated than they were then.)

"The Breath of Suspension," for example, is somewhat reminiscent of A\_C\_a\_n\_t\_i\_c\_l\_e\_f\_o\_r\_L\_e\_i\_b\_o\_w\_i\_t\_z, but told in a non-linear fashion requiring more attention from the reader. Several other stories also jump around in time. "Many Mansions" has parallels to Poul Anderson's "Time Patrol" series, but also deals with the marketing of religion. "The Ring of Memory" is almost a cross between a "Time Patrol" story and a "Twilight Zone" episode, with the scope

of the former and the personal touch of the latter. "A Deeper Sea," with its intelligent cetaceans, was probably expanded into Jablovkov's novel of the same name, but stands perfectly well on its own here, and again has the non-linear narrative that Jablovkov seems to like.

Some stories, of course, flow from start to finish in the normal chain of events. "Deathbinder" is a horror story of the sort that the "Twilight Zone" might have done, but not quite in this way. "Above Ancient Seas" is about colonizing other worlds and seems to

draw from Ray Bradbury's "Mars" stories. "Living Will" deals in part with the question of computer storage of personalities; "The Death Artist" is about memory and memories. "At the Cross-Time Jaunters' Ball" is a parallel worlds story; "Beneath the Shadow of Her Smile" is definitely alternate history, but the alternate history aspect is secondary to Jablokov's examination of war and what drives us to it.

Arkham House, like many other small-press publishers, takes pride in the book as object as well as a conveyer of text. So the collection is illustrated by J. K. Potter, who uses a photo-montage technique to achieve striking, and often disturbing, effects. And the books feels like something physically well-made. (I admit this may be even more subjective than my opinions of the stories.)

Do I recommend this book? I tend to shy away from recommending hardcover books, since rare is the science fiction reader who isn't working with a budget. But most libraries won't get this (mine will, because apparently the acquisitions person loves science fiction--she also buys Zeising books), and the chance of it being reprinted in paperback are slim indeed. If you've liked Jablokov's novels (C\_a\_r\_v\_e\_t\_h\_e\_S\_k\_y, A\_D\_e\_e\_p\_e\_r\_S\_e\_a, and N\_i\_m\_b\_u\_s) and haven't had a chance to read these stories before, or want to read them again (the stories bear reading more than once, one measure of quality writing), then this book is worth the price.

(If your bookstore doesn't carry this and can't order it, you can order it directly from Arkham House Publishers, P. O. Box 546, Sauk City WI 53583.)

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3. MINERVA WAKES by Holly Lisle (Baen, ISBN 0-671-72202-6, January 1994, 273pp, US\$4.99) (a book review by Evelyn C. Leeper):

The blurbs described this as taking place "in an alternate universe," but it is not an alternate history. The alternate universe is one filled with satyrs, dragons, and other mythical creatures. And what does Lisle do with this universe? Alas, not much.

Minerva and Darryl Kiakio have three children and a failing marriage. Then the bad guys kidnap the children and Minerva and Darryl have to rescue them by working together, finding their inner talents, following their dreams, and satisfying several other self-improvement cliches. I mean, really, the whole book reads like "Ten Steps to a More Fulfilling Life." Fiction can teach us lessons, but a bit of subtlety is desirable.

And if that weren't enough, the story is full of contrivances. For example, when Minerva goes through to the other universe, neither her clothes nor her eyeglasses pass through. But since it's been established that she's blind without her glasses, she is able to grope through the leaves on the ground and find her glasses--though none of her clothes. (And when she does get clothes, they are clearly described on page 62--and look nothing like what Clyde Caldwell has painted on the cover.)

It's conceivable that this book is targeted at young mothers who read fantasy, a category I miss on all three counts. The blurb reads, "Three rules govern life. Never give up on your dreams. Always stand up for what's right. And n\_e\_v\_e\_r mess with the mommy." Inside, this is rendered as "Never screw with the mommy," so maybe the outside was toned down so mommies could leave the book lying around the house. All I know is that it didn't do anything for me.

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#### 4. TRUE LIES (a film review by Mark R. Leeper):

Capsule review: This is a mindless situation comedy crossed with an even more mindless action film aimed at an undemanding audience. Some of the gags work, more often the improbabilities make one yearn for the comparative logic, maturity, and subtlety of even T\_h\_e\_M\_a\_n\_f\_r\_o\_m\_U.\_N.\_C.\_L.\_E. Rating: high -1 (-4 to +4). Spoiler section following the review discusses about some improbabilities.

Back when I was in second grade I had fantasies of leading a double life as a seven-year-old and as a secret crime-fighter. Boy, it would really surprise my teacher when she found out who I was when my alter-ego rescued her from certain death at the hands of evil-doers! Today I compliment myself by saying my fantasies were more intelligent than T\_r\_u\_e\_L\_i\_e\_s. But deep in my heart I have to be honest. I know the my childhood fantasies were childish on only on a par with the new Schwarzenegger film.

Harry Tasker (Arnold Schwarzenegger) is a James Bond style spy (undoubtedly because he is so inconspicuous, particularly among Austrian body-builders.) He spends his days having shoot-outs with

terrorists and discretely engaging in wild chases all over Washington DC. His wife Helen (Jamie Lee Curtis) never seems to notice the cuts, scrapes, bruises, and occasional gunshot wounds he must be getting. She thinks he is a boring computer salesman. His daughter Dana (Eliza Dushku) thinks the old man is pretty dull stuff too. Boy, are they in for some surprises when they find out who he really is! Meanwhile there are terrorists called the Crimson Jihad, headed by Aziz (Art Malik) and assisted by Juno (Tia Carrere) who plan to hold up the United States to nuclear blackmail. And boy, are they in for some surprises too! Boy, what a whiz-bang plot!

Somewhere there was the seed here for what might have been a good comedy--in fact, it is loosely based on a French farce called L\_a T\_o\_t\_a\_l\_e. But like Schwarzenegger himself, the film was over-powered by an excess of excess and just has too many scenes that require the audience to turn down its thought processes and go along for the ride. I found my mind did not have a setting low enough for some of the shenanigans. On a spy film credibility scale from Matt Helm to George Smiley, this one weighs in on the dumb side of Maxwell Smart. The spy story is just the most rudimentary "get captured by baddies and fight your way out" plot.

And just being stupid might be forgivable, but this film is also mean-spirited and sadistic. The film asks us to believe that when Helen knows Harry's secrets she will love him more. In fact, Harry has revealed himself to be a vicious sadist toward both his wife and an acquaintance of hers in ways that also abuse his position as a spy. Harry is just not a very likable person. And frankly at times this is just not a very likable film. When it is at its best it is at the mediocrity level of C\_o\_m\_m\_a\_n\_d\_o--the sort of film where entire ammo dumps can be fired at the hero and he never gets a scratch. But when it also takes a light-hearted view of its hero terrorizing his wife and others, T\_r\_u\_e\_L\_i\_e\_s can get unintentionally ugly.

This is not to say there are not a few funny moments in the film and a few nice stunts. Production design is by Peter Lamont who worked on fourteen different James Bond films and this film borrows more than a few little touches from Bond films. Our first view of

Tasker, taking off a wet-suit to reveal neatly pressed evening clothes, is a touch lifted directly from GOLDFINGER. Much of the Bond wit is present here. But Schwarzenegger is nowhere near the actor that Connery or Dalton is. Curtis can act a little, but does not get a chance in this film that reduces her to the status of "dumb broad" and "victim."

This is a film with impressive effects work, the usual jaw-dropping stunt work, and some fairly witty scenes. At 141 minutes it can fit that in and still have room for a lot of very childish storytelling. The trailer for the film give away free just about

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everything worthwhile that this film has to offer. It certainly seems to be pleasing some people, including some I respect, but I can give it no better a high -1 on the -4 to +4 scale.

SPOILER SPOILER SPOILER SPOILER

Last May there was a national scandal about someone on the President's staff using a helicopter for a quick trip to a golf course. In T\_r\_u\_e\_L\_i\_e\_s Harry, without authorization, calls assault forces to intimidate people he doesn't like and to demolish personal property. He borrows high-security facilities to play a vicious practical joke on his wife. I have to believe that the use of these interrogation rooms would be closely monitored and that this sort of irresponsibility would end his career right then. The situation then continues with that ridiculous scene in the hotel room. Helen does not recognize that the silhouette looks like her husband of fifteen years. It is a little hard to mistake that Schwarzenegger torso. Meanwhile Harry has guessed in advance exactly what words his wife would say and with what timing and has it recorded on a little tape recorder with such perfect fidelity that Helen cannot tell it isn't the man in front of her speaking.

For a heroic character to be of any interest he has to in some way be vulnerable. How exciting is it really to see crooks shooting at Superman? Harry Tasker goes through the whole film and his worst injury is getting socked by Helen. Helen wipes out a dozen terrorists by accidentally dropping a machine gun down a flight of about twelve stairs. In the time it takes to fall three or four



waves of terrorists arrive at the stairs, are mowed down and have time to fall down. Helen also makes it through the film uninjured. Even the worst of the Bond films do not resort to contrivances this absurd.

Admittedly some of this is intended as parody but it is hard to mix scenes of mental torture with light parody and make it work. This is just not a film that works.

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#### 5. GO FISH (a film review by Mark R. Leeper):

Capsule review: This halting and spotty first production for director Rose Troche is the story of two very dissimilar lesbians who finally fall in love after much effort by friends. The portrait of a lesbian subculture is not always flattering and often not even very interesting, but there are moments of clever wit. Rating: 0 (-4 to +4).

\_ G \_ o \_ F \_ i \_ s \_ h is the long, slow story of the meeting, slow romance, and eventually getting together of two lesbians. One is the attractive and energetic Max (played by Guinevere Turner); the other is the more introspective and almost masculine Ely (V. S. Brodie). They seem mismatched in looks, in tastes, and in temperaments. But their friends are determined to bring them together.

Along the way we get a look at their lives and the lives of their circle of friends in the lesbian sub-culture. Superficially the women in this small circle are witty and affable, in some ways like the men in \_ L \_ o \_ n \_ g \_ t \_ i \_ m \_ e \_ C \_ o \_ m \_ p \_ a \_ n \_ i \_ o \_ n. But as time wears on they appear to have less and less in their lives beyond tracking who in their group is sleeping with whom. The lesbians are shown to be aimless and self-absorbed and fixated on the sex-lives of themselves and their friends. Just occasionally there is an on-target piece of

sly if self-deprecating wit, like a minutes-long conversation on what is just the perfect anatomical euphemism to replace "honey-pot." This neuron-numbing conversation is both exasperating and funny, much like some of the writing in T\_h\_i\_s\_I\_s\_S\_p\_i\_n\_a\_l\_T\_a\_p or F\_e\_a\_r\_o\_f\_a\_B\_l\_a\_c\_k\_H\_a\_t. Another pointed sequence shows the women who daily had been the objects of bigotry bringing the same bigotry to bear on one of their numbers who had experimented with bisexuality. With similar intolerance, Max's first reaction to Ely is insulting rejection simply because Ely is unattractive.

Perhaps part of the inspiration for this film was S\_h\_e's\_G\_o\_t\_t\_a\_H\_a\_v\_e\_I\_t, though Rose Troche simply does not move the plot along and does not engage the viewer nearly as well as Spike Lee does. This is a first film for director Troche who co-produced, co-authored with actress Turner. In many ways the unevenness of the production betrays Troche's inexperience. The cinematography is crude and in black and white to save costs. Acting is very often at the high-school play level. The film is salted with odd visual images, apparently symbolic but usually obscure or perhaps meaningless. A device that is perhaps over-used to give us the thought of the characters is to have them lie on the floor head-to-head and discuss their innermost thoughts. It is a crude device, albeit occasionally useful to the script. In Spike Lee's first film he had characters talking directly to the camera as if being interviewed and he used it for much the same purpose.

Early in the film, one of the characters complains about "touchy-feely, soft-focus, sisters-of-the-woodlands" sort of lesbian films and this is clearly intended to be an alternative. Whether it is intended to be as self-critical of the urban lesbian subculture is questionable. But even at its short length much of this film drags and is in need of a tuning. I rate this on a 0 on the -4 to +4 scale.

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I respect faith, but doubt is what gets you an education.  
-- Wilson Mizner