

called Lake Lefferts, but a pond is a pond. Nobody I have talked to has any idea who Lefferts is, assuming it is a who. I would like to know since whoever Lefferts is might be able to tell me why his lake merits a backwards name, being only a pond. Oh I should explain that if you are a lake, it is the height of status to have

a backwards name. I don't know how that started, but the middling lakes only get forwards names. You know Indian Lake, Rock Lake, Veronica Lake, that sort of thing. When you have made it as a lake and are really successful, you get to turn your name around... Lake Michigan, Lake Erie, Lake Victoria. Only lakes get status by having backwards names. Oceans know that they are great and do not take on such affectations. You don't find anyone having to say they are crossing Ocean Pacific. No, if you know you are a great ocean, like the Pacific does, you don't put on airs. And if you are only a pond, there is no point in putting on airs. You don't find Walden Pond changing its name to Pond Walden. Everybody knows it is just a pond. Walden could say that it is just trying to avoid frittering away its life in detail and that it is simplifying. But people would know it as a pond by seeing it. When you are only a pond, anatomy is destiny. It is Lakes that are the rising middle class of bodies of water and have to show their status by doing silly things like turning their names around. Oceans don't have to and ponds--most ponds--generally know there is no point. Except, of course, for Lake Lefferts which is really a pond also. It can call itself a lake, but we all know that if it walks like a pond and talks like a pond and is continually seen in the presence of other ponds, it probably is a pond. Well, in a manner of speaking, anyway. If indeed I am living on a ridge overlooking a lake, I must be seeing the pond--at least occasionally--and overlooking the lake. And that's the point of view of me, Leeper Mark.

2. TIMECOP (a film review by Mark R. Leeper):

Capsule review: Jean-Claude Van Damme is a policeman charged with stopping time travel related

crime. He is on the trail of a politician played by Ron Silver who travels back from 2004 to steal and to change history. This is a nice looking film, particularly in its 1920s sets, but what Van Damme does to the villains is about what the script does to logic. Rating: low +1 (-4 to +4)

It is 1863 and a shipment of gold for the Confederacy is stolen by a highwayman sporting a laser-guided machine gun. This is a time travel crime and that makes it particularly dangerous since even a small change to the past could completely change the future. That is why the government has created the Time Enforcement Commission or TEC. And one of its chief operatives is Max Walker (Jean-Claude Van Damme). The TEC is watched over by Senator McComb (Ron Silver). But McComb has been seduced by the power time travel gives and is hatching his own illegal plans to make himself President. Walker knows his chief enemy is the Senator who

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controls his agency. But his efforts are sabotaged by widespread corruption in the TEC going back to McComb. Complicating things, now he is saddled with an inexperienced partner, Fielding (played by Gloria Reuban), and he would rather be working alone. (Gee, what an original plot complication!) Walker must go back with Fielding to 1994, that pivotal year when i) the TEC was founded, ii) mysterious thugs killed Walker's wife (Mia Sara), and iii) McComb got control of a major high-TEC and high-tech corporation. That 1994 must have been a pretty exciting year to live!

Like a lot of current films the look of T_i_m_e_c_o_p seems to take precedence over the acting or plot. The film is directed by Peter Hyams who proved in films like O_u_t_l_a_n_d that he is much more into the look of science fiction than the thought behind it. In fact, he wears an unusual pairing of hats on this film. He is not just the director of the film, he is also the director of photography and some of the effects are effective. Hyams uses a nice effect of warping space to show people's arrival in a new time, though it looks related to the invisibility effect in P_r_e_d_a_t_o_r. The rocket sled that launches time travel is a bit melodramatic and the reason why this acceleration is needed is never explained, unless it is some sort of tribute to B_a_c_k_t_o_t_h_e_F_u_t_u_r_e. It does contribute to

the effect of a film that is generally fairly slickly mounted. Not all of the visuals are as good, however. One false move is the production design of the 2004 cars, which apparently have evolved to look almost like D_a_m_n_a_t_i_o_n_A_l_l_e_y armored vehicles by 2004. Certainly the look of cars is intended to change more in the next ten years than it did in the last ten.

Other script touches are about what one could expect. There was entirely too many fights for my taste, but after all, this is a Jean-Claude Van Damme movie. One could complain about the Bondisms--the wisecracks after violent fights--but it seems that they have become inseparable from action films. There is some reasonable wit in the film. There is a nice bit connected with a piece of advice that that McComb gives his younger self. But the nicest quip is the choice of end-title music.

As an actor Jean-Claude Van Damme has playing an expert Belgian kick-boxer down very well. I suppose that is better than him not being able to play an expert Belgian kick-boxer, but it still does not amount to breadth. For once he has co-stars who have previously been in films that do not feature fighting. Ron Silver is an actual actor in the non-exploitation film sense. He may not have a lot of real acting to do here other than to seem sinister, but he at least does his villain with dignified restraint. Gloria Reuben and Mia Sara are along as co-stars but neither of them have anything special to do in their roles. Mia Sara has been around in films at least since F_e_r_r_i_s_B_e_u_l_l_e_r's_D_a_y_O_f, Reuben is a relative newcomer, and each seems to do what the script requires and avoids walking into furniture, but neither shows any real flash.

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This is a film with too little science fictional thought and too much karate kicking. But parts are undeniably fun. I give it a low +1 on the -4 to +4 scale.

SPOILER SPOILER SPOILER SPOILER

Some of the concepts of T_i_m_e_c_o_p should be discussed in an evaluation of the film and I hope I don't come off like the film reviewer (I think from the New York Times) whose review of D_e_s_t_i_n_a_t_i_o_n_M_o_o_n said that it was absurd and that even the children

in the audience could tell the producers that in space rockets don't work because there is nothing to push against. Don't trust a film reviewer's knowledge, including mine.

Time enforcement is an old idea in science fiction harkening back at least to Jack Williamson's L_e_g_i_o_n_o_f_T_i_m_e and Poul Anderson's T_i_m_e_P_a_t_r_o_l. Generally a feature of time travel stories are time paradoxes, most of which hark from the paradox that a time traveler could go back in time and kill his parents before they bear him. Then he would never have existed, so there would have been nobody to kill his parents. Also often a feature of time travel stories are extra rules supposedly fall out of the physics of time travel. These may or may not bear close scrutiny. One that might make sense might be that an equal mass has to be sent in the opposite direction in time or that you are limited in the amount of magnetic metal that can go through time. Rules often make less sense. T_h_e_T_e_r_m_i_n_a_t_o_r assumed only living matter can be sent. No other physical phenomenon can detect living from non-living matter, but I would be willing to give them the benefit of the doubt if they just followed that rule. But, of course various parts of the human body like hair are not really living matter either. If only living matter went through time portals, a time traveler would arrive at best bald. T_h_e_T_e_r_m_i_n_a_t_o_r seemed to miss that detail and did not shave Michael Biehn.

T_i_m_e_c_o_p shows signs that the authors thought about h_a_v_i_n_g rules and paradoxes, but not much about the rules and paradoxes themselves. The special rules include this concept that "the same object cannot occupy the same place at the same time." I think that the principle is that different objects cannot do that. But what generally happens there is that they rebound off each other. Technically speaking, the same object ALWAYS occupies the same place at the same time. Actually the rule as applied in the film seems to be that is a time traveler comes in contact with his previous self the two annihilated each other. But you have very little matter in common with yourself of ten years ago. Nearly all (or is it actually all?) of the living matter in your body from ten years ago has been replaced. Even if that was not true and there was some point on the surface that had not changed, you would have to get those two points to come in contact. It would not suffice that your left hand from 1994 and your right shoulder from 2004

came in contact. This whole rule of annihilation is more a plot contrivance than having anything much to do with logic. It is like having vampires killed by sunlight.

Mike Richardson and Mark Verheiden don't actually seem to understand what makes time paradoxes work. In the film Fielding@2004 (if I may coin a notation) is killed in 1994. Back in 2004 there is no sign that Fielding lived that last decade from 1994 to 2004. That would be true if Fielding@1994 had been killed, but there seems not to make sense as a result of Fielding@2004 being killed. At the end of the film Walker has nullified his whole reason to have gone to 1994 and nobody remembers that he went. But he obviously is returning from some place. Where do people think he is returning from? And while I am asking questions, how do you carbon-date gold? And what does it even mean to carbon-date gold?

3. THE SHAWSHANK REDEMPTION (a film review by Mark R. Leeper):

Capsule review: This is a beautifully told and photographed story of a man who transforms an entire prison through his humanity. With acting and production values uniformly excellent, this film works on both the literal level and as an allegory. It could well make it to the status of being a classic like O_n_e_F_l_e_w_O_v_e_r_t_h_e_C_u_c_k_o_o's_N_e_s_t.
Rating: low +3 (-4 to +4)

I never read Stephen King's 1982 novella "Rita Hayworth and the Shawshank Redemption," part of his collection D_i_f_f_e_r_e_n_t_S_e_a_s_o_n_s. But it is difficult to believe that T_h_e_S_h_a_w_s_h_a_n_k_R_e_d_e_m_p_t_i_o_n could be very accurate to this non-horror King story. As much as I like King, it is difficult to believe he wrote a story as good as this film adaptation. The theme is the strength of humanity over brutality--much the same theme as S_c_h_i_n_d_l_e_r'_s_L_i_s_t--and Frank Darabont has crafted a film, writing and directing, that compares favorably with O_n_e_F_l_e_w_O_v_e_r_t_h_e_C_u_c_k_o_o's_N_e_s_t. There is a lot going on in T_h_e_S_h_a_w_s_h_a_n_k_R_e_d_e_m_p_t_i_o_n, and parts will remind viewers of such diverse films as B_i_l_l_y_B_u_d_d,O_f_M_i_c_e_a_n_d_M_e, and even D_e_a_d_P_o_e_t_s_S_o_c_i_e_t_y. The film is another parable, following on the heels of F_o_r_r_e_s_t_G_u_m_p. But where G_u_m_p was content to create a period feel and present a message of "Just be simple and let everything happen to you," S_h_a_w_s_h_a_n_k is a much better piece of storytelling and has just the opposite message, "Stand up and take control of your life. Get busy living or get busy dying." Forrest Gump would

last about one week in Shawshank Prison. Andy Dufresne, the focus of this story, is a survivor. And he is more.

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As the film opens Andy Dufresne (played by Tim Robbins) is about to murder his wife and her lover. On the witness stand he denies that he ever completed the crime. But if he didn't, somebody else did, and all the evidence points to Andy. The sentence is two consecutive life terms in Shawshank Penitentiary--not much of a life for a banker. The film follows Andy's life in prison. The first two years are just the hell that everyone expects prison to be. Worse. But a chance comment by the most brutal of the guards, Captain Hadley (Clancy Brown), gives Andy an idea of how with one stroke he can get on the good side of guards and prisoners alike. And among the prisoners he particularly want to be friends with Red, the prison scrounge. Red is useful to have as a friend, not only because he is a man of character whom the other prisoners respect, not only because he can get Andy what he needs to make his life a little easier, but also because he is the story narrator and it is never a bad idea in a film to be on the good side of the narrator. In the book Red was Irish, but here he is played with tremendous dignity by Morgan Freeman.

In the years that pass in Shawshank--and they do pass quickly even if the film has a leisurely pace--Andy finds ways to make himself indispensable to the sadistic, Bible-thumping Warden Norton (Bob Gunton) and the guards, always winning more concessions to make life better for the inmates. Through Red's and Andy's eyes we see the ironies of prison life. But there is much more to the story than that of a goody-goody in prison, and the plot has interesting complications. A surprisingly long segment of the film is devoted to one of the minor prisoners released to the outside world only to find adjustment a difficult proposition. But the investment of screen time for this subplot pays off later in the film.

This is a film with excellent production values almost without exception. Prison movies are an entire genre, I suppose, and in the hands of a less skilled photographer Shawshank could have come off as just dismal as any other prison film without any particular visual interest. But the director of photography was Roger Deakins

The year is 1962 and Major Hank Marshall (Tommy Lee Jones), a nuclear engineer, is advising the U.S. Army on nuclear testing. Meanwhile his wife Carly (Jessica Lange), a sexually precocious child in the body of an adult woman, is doing everything she can to embarrass him. She sees herself as a Marilyn Monroe type and flirts with reckless abandon. She is the main reason Hank has been reassigned from a pleasant posting in Hawaii to a disagreeable one on an ugly Army base in Alabama. Hank tries to keep a lid on the family problems in public and to keep the two daughters happy, but it is clear their mom needs more care and is more of a child than the children are. Hank has problems at home and with his work. Hank advocates nuclear underground testing when his commanders and the Atomic Energy Commission want to continue atmospheric testing. At first this seems an odd pairing of plots. One plot concerns a family disintegrating because of the wife's childish behavior and her husband's vain attempts to cover for her and to maintain an even keel. The other plot deals with national nuclear policy. And it is well into the film before the viewer has much of an idea where the story could possibly be going with two such diverse strands of plot. Eventually they will come together in a story about, of all things, character.

This was the last film directed by Tony Richardson, who is best known for his 1963 T_o_m_J_o_n_e_s and who died three years ago. It may well also be the last film we will see from the now long defunct Orion Pictures. It is easy to see why this film waited so long for a release given the intelligence of the scripting and the originality of the plot. B_l_u_e_S_k_y was also a little lucky in that like C_h_i_n_a_S_y_n_d_r_o_m_e and M_a_r_o_o_n_e, the subject matter happened to become considerably more topical after the film's completion than at the time the film was made.

Jessica Lange gets top billing, though her acting shows more than a little of her character in F_r_a_n_c_e_s. She is fleshy and sensual. But at the same time she is annoyingly like a spoiled child given to tantrums, not unlike the character's idol, Marilyn Monroe. Tommy Lee Jones gives his character just the right blend of military officiousness and occasional tenderness. Powers Boothe, always good, plays Hank's commanding officer who mixes into Hank's

personal life as well as his professional life.

Richardson shows a visual sense in some of his more interesting scene segues. He takes us from the paradise of a Hawaiian beach to a nuclear-devastated landscape. His recreation of the early 60s has just about the right look, particularly the army base with its rundown post-war housing. In short his final film is one of his best in years. Lange's and Jones's performances and the originality of the story give this one a low +2 on the -4 to +4 scale.

5. Montreal International Film Festival (a film festival review by *Evelyn C.* Leeper) (part 2 of 2):

_ T_ h_ e_ S_ e_ c_ r_ e_ t_ A_ d_ v_ e_ n_ t_ u_ r_ e_ s_ o_ f_ T_ o_ m
_ T_ h_ u_ m_ b, directed by Dave Borthwick,
Great Britain, 1:01:

This is a very difficult film to describe. It uses an animation technique I can't recall seeing before in which the "live action" actors are filmed in stop motion as well as the clay figures. (Or maybe they film the actors in the regular way, then remove some frames and duplicate others.) In any case this is fascinating from a visual standpoint, but definitely not for children (in spite of what the title might lead you to believe). Tom lives in a very dark world, full of disturbing images, swarms of strange insects, and unspeakable scientific experiments. It seems at times more like something out of Franz Kafka than a children's fairy tale book.

This is not for everyone's taste (though it played to an almost full house here), and given its length (or lack thereof), is unlikely to play in "normal" theaters anyway. Look for this at theaters which shown experimental film, film festivals, or perhaps science fiction conventions (which seem a perfect venue for it).
Rating: +2 (-4 to +4).

"The Biz," directed by Darren Walsh, Great Britain, 0:09:

Because TheSecretAdventuresof
TomThumb was so short for a
 feature, it was preceded by this short from the same production
 company (Bolexbrothers). It is about a film maker and his
 encounters at a party following his first film's premiere. Unless
 you find the idea of talking buttocks hilariously funny, you can
 give this a miss.

WhatHappenedWas..., directed by Tom Noonan, USA, 1:30:

Tom Noonan wrote, directed, and co-starred in this two-person,
 one-set film. It cost \$300,000 and was shot in just eleven days
 (proof that the spirit of Roger Corman is alive in the land). It
 then went on to win the Grand Jury and screen-writing prizes at the
 Sundance Film Festival.

Noonan and Karen Sillas play two co-workers at a law firm. What
 they discover when Sillas invites Noonan over for dinner one
 evening forms the basis of the film.

Noonan is not afraid to let the characters remain silent when that
 is called for, nor does he insist on obvious "twists" or pat
 resolutions. The title refers to the story within the story, the
 children's story Sillas's character is writing, and how you
 interpret the film may be based on how you interpret this story.

Though a dialogue, this film is reminiscent of some of Alan
 Bennett's monologue plays (more so than to MyDinnerwith
Andre,
 which might seem the obvious comparison), and is more likely to
 appeal to fans of theatrical plays than to the average movie-goer.
 Rating: +1 (-4 to +4).

Woodstock, directed by Michael Wadleigh, USA, 4:00:

This was being shown on a giant outdoor screen in the Place des
 Arts. Since we got there late, we ended up sitting a block away
 with our view partially blocked by a tree, and we could still feel
 our ribs vibrate from the sound. We stayed for five songs
 (including Joan Baez singing "Joe Hill"), but even twenty-five
 years ago, there was a lot of this music that I didn't like and I
 haven't much mellowed toward it since then. I can't really give
 any rating based on this abbreviated viewing. However, it's
 interesting to note some of the changes in the director's cut. For
 example, the original cut had no footage of Janis Joplin. Now
 director Wadleigh says Joplin is possibly the best blues singer in
 the last thirty years and has added footage of her to the new

version.

Mesmer, directed by Roger Spottiswoode, Great Britain/Canada/Germany, 1:42:

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Franz Anton Mesmer has been considered both a charlatan and a visionary. This film makes no definitive judgment, but seems to fall into the visionary camp, albeit perhaps a misguided visionary.

Played by Alan Rickman, Mesmer is a man who sees the practice of medicine in his day (the 18th Century) as barbaric, which of course it was. The cure for almost every ill was to bleed the patient. Mesmer takes a different approach. Calling on "animal magnetism," he attempts to use magnetic currents and forces to cure his patients. He achieves some notable successes, but many of the cures seem to be temporary and the patients relapse.

Unfortunately, much of Mesmer's philosophy regarding his treatments (the term "mesmerism" is never used) seems as bizarre today as it did to the established medical professionals then. It is left for the audience to see the seeds of hypnotism, the power of suggestion, holistic medicine, and the nature of psychosomatic illnesses in Mesmer's explanations of the pull of the moon and magnetic forces. Although Rickman is very good (I refuse to call his portrayal mesmerizing, though Lord knows someone will), and Amanda Ooms excellent as his patient Maria Theresa Paradies, some of the supporting characters are rather sketchily drawn. In the end it is perhaps the strangeness of Mesmer's philosophy which makes it difficult for screen-writer Dennis Potter to give us a character we can understand. Rating: +1 (-4 to +4).

"Intouchee" ("Untouched"), directed by Seyhan Cecilya Derin, Germany, 0:15

I have no idea why this was paired with Mesmer, except I suppose that both have to do with the medical profession. In this film (whose title would have been more accurate if more exactly translated from the original German title shown on the screen of

"Intakt," though it is listed in the program and on the poster as "Unberuhrt") we see Suna, a young Turkish woman living in Germany, packed off to a clinic to have her virginity restored so that she can be married as a virgin to a wealthy older man back in Turkey. She is not happy about this, but there she meets Hatrice, another Turkish woman, who is looking forward to her own marriage. Derin shows us two views of this situation, and in the end does not dictate that one is always right and the other always wrong. (I think there are some errors in the basic medical assumption about Suna's need for the clinic, however.) Rating: +1 (-4 to +4).

_ M _ e _ n _ L _ i _ e, directed by John Andrew Gallagher, USA, 1:27:

There didn't seem to be much point to this film. Jill is going out with Scott and believes he is faithful to her. He isn't. She finds out. That's about it.

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Of course, that wouldn't fill the 87 minutes this film takes, so screenwriter/director Gallagher fills in the time with what is fast becoming a cliché--a bunch of people giving their comments and opinions to the camera. (Is it Spike Lee or Woody Allen who started this trend? And speaking of similarities to Woody Allen films, almost everyone in this film is of European descent too--I think there was one black "comment character.")

There is actually a positively portrayed male character, and I thought many of the female characters were negatively portrayed, so I wouldn't claim this as completely one-sided as the title might lead you to believe, but it was certainly a pessimistic portrayal of relationships, and not really worth the time. Rating: 0 (-4 to +4).

_ T _ h _ e _ A _ d _ v _ o _ c _ a _ t _ e, directed by Leslie Megahey, Great Britain, 1:35:

The year is 1452. The place is Abbeville, France. To this small village comes Robert Courtois to serve as the advocate (the public defender). His first case is defending a man accused of killing his wife's lover. That goes pretty well. Then he defends a woman

accused of witchcraft; that case does not go so well. His third case is even more peculiar by own standards, and we begin to see that what at first seemed like isolated aberrations in the law are actually part of a larger insanity. Or as the priest says, "In a world where nothing is reasonable, nothing can be said to be truly mad."

Colin Firth as the advocate in this film (which I might describe as

"_ T_ h_ e_ _ R_ e_ t_ u_ r_ n_ o_ f_ M_ a_ r_ t_ i_ n_ G_ u_ e_ r_ r_ e Meets
_ T_ w_ e_ l_ v_ e_ A_ n_ g_ r_ y_ M_ e_ n") seems a bit out of his depth in a cast containing Nicol Williamson as the local seigneur, Ian Holm as the priest, Donald Pleasence as the local prosecutor, and Michael Gough as the magistrate. But then the character of the advocate finds himself a bit out of his depth as well.

It may seem odd to say that a mystery set in a period of superstition, prejudice, and the Inquisition in France has some very funny moments, but Megahey's script takes advantage of the weirdness going on all around, and the actors carry the humor off quite well. The supporting cast looks authentic to the era (perhaps more so than most of the principals), although not quite

to the level of the casting in _ T_ h_ e_ _ N_ a_ m_ e_ _ o_ f_ t_ h_ e_ _ R_ o_ s_ e. If
_ T_ h_ e
_ A_ d_ v_ o_ c_ a_ t_ e occasionally has the look of a made-for-television film, that may be in part due to the fact that the BBC was one of its financiers, and also to the fact that Megahey's background is in television and this is his first feature film.

This is a very entertaining film that is (so far as I can tell) historically accurate to its time period. (For example, all the

court cases are based on actual court cases of the time.) I recommend it highly. Rating: +3 (-4 to +4).

_ L_ H_ i_ s_ t_ o_ i_ r_ e_ d_ e_ Y_ u_ n_ n_ a_ n (_ T_ h_ e_ _ S_ t_ o_ r_ y
_ o_ f_ _ Y_ u_ n_ n_ a_ n), directed by Zhang
Nuanxin, China, 1:37:

During the Japanese occupation of Manchuria, the Japanese often brought their families over to Manchuria with them. At the end of the Sino-Japanese war (the Chinese aspect of World War II) most returned to Japan, but some found themselves left behind in China. Such was the fate of Jai-Teng Shuzi, a young woman who came to Japan when she was only fifteen. Rescued from suicide by a Chinese soldier, Xiasha, she eventually marries him and returns with him to the remote province of Yunnan. How she makes a life and a home there for the next thirty-five years forms the core of this movie.

It is quite a change to see a film from and about China that is not terribly depressing. Yes, Shuzi undergoes hardships, but she also has much happiness and satisfaction in her life. She isn't sold by her husband, beaten by her mother-in-law, tortured by the government, or subject to many of the trials that so many recent Chinese and Chinese-American films (e.g., *The Joy Luck Club*) have emphasized. This is perhaps all the more surprising in that this film is about a woman and directed by a woman, and commentary on the poor position of women in Chinese society seems to be almost a trademark of Chinese film these days. But *The Story of Yunnan* is filled with good people--not all perfect people, but not unthinking and uncaring people either.

In her press conference afterwards, Zhang emphasized that this film was not about war, but about a woman's life, and how what's best is not money or material objects, but love and family life. She said that while this was an accurate portrayal of village life of the time period, villages are much more modern today. Interestingly, in order to appeal to the Taiwanese market, the lead actress (Lu Xiuling) is not Japanese, but Taiwanese.

Although there is less government support for films in China than previously, there is apparently still the same amount of control, and Zhang had to make some compromises, such as spending very little time on the Cultural Revolution and showing hardly any of the love scenes, and this in spite of the fact that the film was financed out of Hong Kong. (I suppose I'm a bit surprised that the government didn't seem to object to showing a large family as a good thing.) Zhang said there was equality between the sexes in the film industry in China, and that there were probably twenty to thirty women directors, but I don't think their pictures get as wide a distribution as some of the men directors' films do.

The scenery is, of course, gorgeous, and the music by Lin Wai Zhe quite appropriate to the feel of the movie. See this movie if it comes your way. Rating: +2 (-4 to +4)

"Cri de la terre" ("Cry of Earth"), directed by Arvo Blechstein, Germany, 0:08:

This short (titled "Schrei der erde" in German) was a wordless story of a woman hoeing her field, eating her lunch, and listening to a rainstorm. If there was a point to it, I missed it. (The publicity flyer said it was about "man's alienation from nature and at the same time, a homage to the French painter Jean-Francois Millet.") Blechstein, who spoke before the film, said this was from the same company that produced the Oscar-winning "Blackrider," but that this probably wouldn't win one. He's probably right. As for why it ran with T_h_e_S_t_o_r_y_o_f_Y_u_n_n_a, it could be that being wordless, it was suitable for both Anglophones and Francophones, or it could be that both films had something to do with farming, or it could be totally random. Rating: 0 (-4 to +4).

C_y_b_e_r_t_e_e_n_s_i_n_L_o_v_e, directed by Brett Dowler, Canada, 1:33:

Shot on video, this definitely has the look of a student film, though technically the filmmakers were not students, but were working under the auspices of British Columbia Film and the National Film Board of Canada (Pacific Center). The acting of some of the supporting cast is mediocre to bad (although Carole Henshall is perfect as Kid Cutter). The computer animation is fairly basic for today. The staging of some of the action sequences is pretty lame. Even the basic plot is unimaginative: girl escapes from state-run orphanage, finds love with street-smart computer wiz, and gets involved in adventures and danger in cyberspace. But the script by John Dowler shows great imagination and creativity in its use of "futurespeak." For example, a rhetorical question becomes an "answer-free question" and Su doesn't try to find her family, she tries to "family-find."

The film does have a lot of rough edges, but the dialogue helps you past a lot of that, with its poetry and flow. Rating: +1 (-4 to +4).

"Cinema of Today" (short films in English):

"Tall Stories," directed by Mark Sehler, Australia, 0:08:

A fairly lightweight animated film with two parallel narrations, one of a child talking about his rather average life, and other of

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that child as an adult describing a much more favorable childhood. Good use of multiple animation styles, but otherwise just average. Rating: 0 (-4 to +4).

"Ignotus," directed by Covadonga Icaza, Spain, 0:15:

Two punks get lost and find themselves in a remote village in Spain, where they are mistaken for saints. It may sound humorous, but it is really quite dark in tone. Rating: +1 (-4 to +4).

"Death in Venice, CA," directed by David Ebersole, USA, 0:30:

Since I haven't read the Thomas Mann from which the title comes, I can't comment on any similarities or differences. This was well-acted but otherwise uninvolved. Rating: 0 (-4 to +4).

"The Train," directed by Mike Mathis, USA, 0:25:

When one brother is caught between two train cars in a railyard accident, the two brothers are forced to come to terms with the situation. Mark thought this was the best thing he had seen this year; I found it good but not that good. Rating: +2 (-4 to +4).

"Tick... Tick... Tick...," directed by John Luessenhop, USA, 0:33:

This is supposed to be a suspenseful little piece, but telegraphed too much of what was going on to succeed at it. The device of having two people alone with a ticking bomb is lessened by cutting away from them to other scenes. Rating: 0 (-4 to +4).

"Erotic Cinema":

"The Insatiable Mrs. Kirsch," directed by Ken Russell, Great Britain, 0:28:

This is more normal than most of Russell's films, with some erotic scenes and also some funny ones. A man fantasizes about a mysterious woman at a sea resort. Rating: +1 (-4 to +4).

"Vroom Vroom Vrooom!," directed by Melvin Van Peebles, USA, 0:28:

A man gets two wishes from an old woman whose life he has saved. This is a fairly good fantasy story, which might have worked nicely with a little more horror, but is also fine the way it is. Rating:

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+1 (-4 to +4).

"Touch Me," directed by Paul Cox, Australia, 0:28:

Very artistic, but with no plot to speak of. Rating: 0 (-4 to +4).

T h e R e v e n g e o f I t z i k
F i n k e l s t e i n, directed by Enrique Rottenberg,
Israel, 1:23:

Itzik Finkelstein is a failure at forty and just when he is about to kill himself, help (of a sort) arrives. It's not a deal with the devil, but rather a deal with a monk from a secret order dedicated to chaos and destruction. "The Earth is a mess," Anselmo de Medici (the monk) says. "Lies and stupidity everywhere." And the only way to save the Earth is to find destroy it. So he offers Finkelstein a chance for him to get revenge on whichever person ruined his life.

A lot of the jokes in this are old, but it's still funny, certainly as funny as a lot of American comedies. Though made in Israel,

there is no real Jewish content to the film. Nevertheless, I expect that if this plays at all in the United States, it will be in cities with large Jewish populations. It would appeal, I suspect mostly to older audiences (meaning thirty and up), and is a pleasant enough way to pass the time. Rating: +1 (-4 to +4).

T o t a l B a l a l a i k a S h o w, directed by Aki Kaurismaki, Finland, 0:56:

One newspaper complained about the choice of this as one of the free outdoor shows of the festival because they felt it was nothing but an extended music video, and not even Canadian. Of course, the same could be said of W o o d s t o c k, but wasn't--at least not by that writer. In any case, we actually paid to be this indoors because 1) the free showing was opposite T h e A d v o c a t e, and 2) rain was predicted for the day of the free showing. While the theater wasn't full, it still had quite a respectable crowd for something that had just been shown for free.

On June 12, 1993, the largest stage ever erected in Finland was set up in Senate Square (hey, we were just there!) for a joint concert of the Leningrad Cowboys and the Alexandrov Red Army Chorus and Dance Ensemble. T h e T o t a l B a l a l a i k a S h o w is the concert film made there by noted Finnish director Aki Kaurismaki (who first introduced the Leningrad Cowboys to the world in L e n i n g r a d C o w o y s G o A m e r i c a).

Songs included "Finlandia," "Together We Stand," "Volga Boatmen," "Happy Together," an absolutely wonderful rendition of "Delilah,"

"Knockin' on Heaven's Door," "Oh, Field," "Kalinka," "Gimme All Your Lovin'" (with strains of the "Internationale" and the "Hallelujah Chorus" added as background), "Sweet Home Alabama," "Dark Eyes," and "Those Were the Days."

I have to say that during "Happy Together" I found myself comparing and contrasting this concert with "The Three Tenors." It was an

even stronger feeling when the Russian soloist held the note in "Kalinka" for what seemed like at least a minute. I also got a real feeling for the fact that the Cold War is over if the Red Army Chorus is singing Western rock music, especially when they sang the lines from Bob Dylan's "Knockin' on Heaven's Door": "Put my guns in the cold black ground; I can't shoot them any more."

One can only hope.

Rating: +2 (-4 to +4).

_ C _ a _ r _ l -- _ M _ y _ C _ h _ i _ l _ d _ h _ o _ o _ d _ S _ y _ m _ p _ h _ o _ n _ y, directed by Eric Clausen, Denmark, 2:05:

We had originally planned to see only one film today, but then decided to pick a couple more to fill in the day. Our first choice was a split choice: Mark wanted to see _ F _ e _ d _ e _ r _ a _ l _ H _ i _ l _ l and I wanted to see _ F _ r _ e _ s _ a _ y _ C _ h _ o _ c _ o _ l _ a _ t _ e. Unfortunately, both were sold out, so we decided on the spur of the moment to see _ C _ a _ r _ l -- _ M _ y _ C _ h _ i _ l _ d _ h _ o _ o _ d _ S _ y _ m _ p _ h _ o _ n _ y instead.

This is the story of the early life of Carl Nielsen, probably Denmark's most famous classical composer. The film starts in 1871 when Carl is still a young child first being introduced to music, then shows him as a slightly older boy, then joining the army to play in the regimental band, and finally leaving the army to spend all his time composing.

The main problem with this film is that Nielsen's life seems to be neither particularly harsh nor particularly wonderful. In spite of their poverty his family seems to live fairly comfortably. There is illness, injury, and death, but it seems to be taken as totally ordinary, without any major angst over it. There are lots of scenes of beautiful scenery, and kindly, quirky villagers. When Carl goes into the army you figure, "Oh, now we'll see how brutalizing the army is," but, no, that's an easy and comfortable life for him as well. Even his disappointments in love don't seem to affect him very much.

It's a very pretty picture, and I suppose sheds some light on Nielsen's music, but cannot compare to other film biographies of composers such as _ A _ m _ a _ d _ e _ u _ s or _ M _ a _ h _ l _ e _ r. Rating: +1 (-4 to +4).

_ D_ a_ d_ d_ y, _ C_ o_ m_ e_ t_ o_ t_ h_ e_ F_ a_ i_ r, directed by Nitza Gonen, Israel, 1:16:

One of the problems of reviewing a film about the Shoah (Holocaust) is that the subject gives the film some element of "untouchability"--it is very difficult to say anything negative about it unless it is almost intentionally offensive. But there are some many mis-steps and misjudgments in the making of this made-for-television documentary that I simply cannot recommend it.

From the very beginning, or even before it in some sense, I think there were problems. This is a documentary of a man returning to Poland, where his parents were murdered in the Holocaust. With him travel his son and his daughter, and the film (it's actually videotape, but "film" has become generic) concentrates more on the son than on the father. It is true that during the trip, the relationship between the son and the father undergoes a transformation, but how could they know this would happen at the beginning of the shooting? At time the camera angles and other effects seem too studied, more suitable for a narrative film than a documentary. One almost gets the impression that the entire project was the idea of the son, who just happens to be in show business, and is more designed to promote his career than to focus on his father. Rating: 0 (-4 to +4).

_ K_ i_ l_ l_ e_ r, directed by Mark Malone, USA, 1:33:

This film with its cast of five relies on writing and acting rather than on special effects or action sequences for its appeal (although it does have a couple of steamy sex scenes). Anthony LaPaglia plays a hitman whose assignment is to kill a woman (played by Mimi Rogers) who seems strangely accepting of the fact. Complicating the job is LaPaglia's assistant, who bungled his last job and is looking for a way to redeem himself.

This is, as I indicated, more a character study than anything else, and the actors do a convincing job of portraying their characters. Rating: +1 (-4 to +4).

_ E_ l_ A_ m_ a_ n_ t_ e_ d_ e_ l_ a_ s_ P_ e_ l_ i_ c_ u_ l_ a_ s
_ M_ u_ d_ a_ s, directed by Pablo Torre,
Argentina, 1:32:

I had hoped for more from this film, but it was somewhat of a disappointment. (It is, of course, possible that after seeing eighteen other films, including three earlier today, I was not in

as receptive a mood as I might have been.) This story of an aging silent film star has strong echoes of S_u_n_s_e_t_B_o_u_l_e_v_a_r_d, and also the same films of the opening of T_h_e_J_a_z_z_S_i_n_g_e_r that we saw near the beginning of the festival in J_a_c_k_W_a_r_n_e_r, t_h_e_L_a_s_t_M_o_g_u_l. Interestingly, in the Warner documentary, they represented the

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start of something; here they represent the end. This film sounds a bit like C_i_n_e_m_a_P_a_r_a_d_i_s_o: a young boy meets a silent film star who talks about the early days of the movies. But this is a dark film, with far more menace and unsettling atmosphere than C_i_n_e_m_a_P_a_r_a_d_i_s_o.

One of the mis-steps the film makes is in its use of music. The boy's mother gets a job playing the piano in the film star's funeral home. But she plays Schubert's "Trio for Piano, Violin, and Violincello," and when she does, the sounds of a violin and a violincello mysteriously appear from nowhere, and it is clear that the piano music that is being played is not sufficient to stand on its own. On the other hand there is good use of old film clips, as well as newly created black-and-white footage purporting to be of the film star (as played by Alfredo Alcon) in the Hollywood of the 1920s. (The "fake" footage is not as good an imitation of what the real old footage looks like as that used in the television series "Young Indiana Jones," but then Torre probably had neither the money nor the facilities that Spielberg did.)

For its somewhat nostalgic look at Hollywood in the era of the silent film, this is worth seeing, but probably only for fans of that era. Rating: +1 (-4 to +4).

And of course, even though we did see nineteen films in a week, there were several more that sounded interesting that we didn't get to (several of which played only during the second week after we were gone). These included:

K_a_b_l_o_o_n_a_k, directed by Claude Massot, Canada/France, 1:45:

This was the official opening film of the film festival and tells the story of Nanook, who in 1922 was the "star" of Robert Flaherty's N_a_n_o_o_k_o_f_t_h_e_N_o_r_t_h. Later when people went back to see him again, they discovered he had died the following winter during a seal hunt. (Today, of course, they would have signed him to a multi-picture deal and flown him all over the world for press conferences.)

P_r_i_n_c_e_s_s_C_a_r_a_b_o_o, directed by Michael Austin, USA, 1:37:

A mysterious young woman appears in an English village in 1817, and the villagers decide she is a Javanese princess. We went to a press conference with Austin (who also authored the script) at which some of the questioners gave away a fair amount of the film, leading one of the film's promoters to ask the press not to reveal too much in their articles or reviews. So I won't, except to say

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this is based on a true story written up in E_n_g_l_i_s_h
E_c_c_e_n_t_r_i_c_s, stars Phoebe Cates and Kevin Kline, and cost under \$10 million.

S_e_x,_D_r_u_g_s,_a_n_d_D_e_m_o_c_r_a_c_y, directed by Jonathan Blank, USA, 1:27:

This documentary look at how the Netherlands treats sex and drugs in terms of laws and attitudes. Blank is quoted in the daily magazine distributed at the festival as saying that it was the Commissioner of Police in Amsterdam who explained to him the provisions made for the handicapped in the city's brothels. "The Dutch were all really proud of them," Blank said. Apparently marijuana is illegal (to make the Americans happy), but no one pays any attention to the law, and abortions are illegal but the government pays for them. Blank finds the attitudes of many Americans very strange. For example, the anti-pornography lobbyists have claim pornography affects the viewer, yet they have probably seen more pornography than anyone else and claim to be

unaffected.

J_e_a_n_n_e_L_a_P_u_c_e_l_l_e_I(L_e_s
B_a_t_a_i_l_l_e_s) and J_e_a_n_n_e_L_a_P_u_c_e_l_l_e_I_I
(L_e_s
P_r_i_s_o_n_s), directed by Jacques Rivette, France, 2:40 and 2:56:

Even if these hadn't been sold out before we had a chance to get tickets, the fact that they were in French and un-subtitled would have made us give these a miss here, but a six-hour epic about Joan of Arc is something in which I would definitely be interested if it were subtitled in English (or even dubbed, though dubbing a six-hour movie is probably prohibitively expensive). The two parts will probably make the rounds separately in most areas, since I suspect they are each self-contained stories.

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