

the street to ask them what they would do if they won the lottery. Now we are not talking about winning a few dollars, beer money; this is the kind of payoff that comes only about every six months or so. You know one of those OH WOW! sort of payoffs that we all know go mostly to Uncle Sammy, but we would like to think that just

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this one time we won someone would forget to tell the IRS. The sort of thing where you actually end up with the cash. What would you do if you suddenly had that kind of money? The guy they would pick would get all wistful looking and say something like he would get himself a box seat season's ticket for every sport from football to curling. Then he would go to all the games and afterwards he would have a stretch limousine pick him up and whisk him to someplace like Windows on the World--the fanciest restaurant in town anyway. He would have a bar in the back of the limousine and have a little drink on the way. At the restaurant he would order the fanciest wine from the cellar. (Gee, I never thought of that. When you have a restaurant like Windows on the World with a commanding view of the city, what do you do for a wine cellar? I mean it's a 30-minute commute just to get to the ground floor. I guess they must phone orders to the cellar and have the wines sent up via pneumatic tube. Probably makes it all the more dramatic when the wine is opened.) Anyway the guy will order the most expensive dish on the menu, eat half, leave the vegetables, have a dessert that is covered with something very alcoholic which he would generously share with a flame. Let it flame enough so that everybody in the restaurant could "oooo" when it is brought out, but blow out the flame before too much of the alcohol is gone. Eat half of the dessert. Back to the limousine for another good night drink as he is whisked back home. And the next day it would start all over. The female version of the story is usually much the same, but it involves breakfast in bed and a shopping trip to the most expensive clothing stores the area offers.

This sort of ad always made me feel a little better about the world. Who cares if dreams like this are never attained? Maybe not everyone can win the lottery but most people who got that much money would just pour it into the ground. The American dream has become to use up money in the most inefficient and mindless, senseless ways that can be imagined. So maybe not everybody in New

York can win the lottery. If the people they interview on the street are any indication the world is very little worse off for the fact they don't win. Still the American dream is to make so much that you don't *have* to worry about the way you spend it. And as time goes by we see more and more people who are really poor and more and more stretch limousines. [-mrl]

3. THE MEMORY CATHEDRAL by Jack Dann (Bantam, ISBN 0-553-09637-0, 1995, 486pp, US\$22.95) (a book review by Evelyn C. Leeper)

This seems to have been the "Year of da Vinci," with not one but two alternate history novels about the artist and inventor. One of these is Paul J. McAuley's PASQUALE'S ANGEL, the other is Jack Dann's MEMORY CATHEDRAL.

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I call them alternate histories, but Dann's at least is written more as a secret history--not what might have happened but didn't, but what might have happened that we didn't hear about. In this case, it's about what might have happened during Leonardo's trip east. Frankly, I am of the opinion that it would be unlikely that the events described here happened without any record, but that is a dispute over classification, not over the book itself.

And the book itself is very good. Dann has done the research, and the life and politics of 15th Century Florence and the eastern Mediterranean come to life in his telling. He does take a few liberties (changing Machiavelli's age, and introducing Christopher Columbus into the scene), but these are minor changes which serve the literary purpose without being false to the *sense* of historical truth. (George MacDonald Fraser explains this idea at greater length in his book THE HOLLYWOOD HISTORY OF THE WORLD.)

Even with all his research, though, at least one error has crept in. On page 342, Dann describes a camel as getting up by raising first its front part, then its back. Having ridden a camel, I can assure you that camels raise their back part first. (The first thing they tell you is to lean *back* when the camel gets up, or

you'll fall off.)

But considering the level of detail that Dann has created, this is a truly minor point. Dann does a good job of describing the jockeying for power in the eastern Mediterranean as well as giving the reader a window into Leonardo mind through the use of "the memory cathedral" he has built. This book was not marketed as science fiction, so you will probably have to seek it out in the mainstream fiction section of your bookstore. Do so, by all means--it's well worth the search. [-ecl]

4. PASQUALE'S ANGEL by Paul J. McAuley (AvoNova, ISBN 0-688-14154-4, 1995, 384pp, US\$22) (a book review by Evelyn C. Leeper):

This is the second "alternate Leonardo" I read in quick succession (Jack Dann's MEMORY CATHEDRAL being the first, though this actually predates the Dann by about a year). In this, however, Leonardo is not one of the major characters on-stage. He does appear but mostly he is talked about as the "Great Engineer" in the tower. So far as I can determine, he got that way because Savonarola's revolution of 1498 succeeded and Leonardo turned from concentrating on art to concentrating on invention. The result is a Florence well into the Industrial Age in Leonardo's lifetime.

Let me start out by saying that I enjoyed this book and that I recommend it. I want to say that up front, because my comments

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might lead you to think I had a negative opinion of PASQUALE'S ANGEL, and that's not true.

One of my complaints has to do with the premise: I doubt the Industrial Revolution could have proceeded this fast this early. In twenty years, Florence seems to have gotten to the technological level we achieved around 1900--considerably more than twenty years after the Industrial Revolution started.

Another problem is that PASQUALE'S ANGEL starts with a "locked-

room" (or rather "locked-tower") mystery whose solution, alas, should be obvious to most of the readers who would be attracted to this book.

Given that McAuley wanted a murder mystery, I wish he had designed one less derivative. He does a good job of describing his characters and making them come alive. (Of course, most of his characters *were* alive, at least in some form.) His use of the politics and conspiracies of the time is the most interesting aspect of the novel, and more emphasis on that, with less on detailing more technical advances than seem likely or are necessary, would have made me happier. But as they say, your mileage may vary, and even with my reservations, I still strongly recommend PASQUALE'S ANGEL. [-ecl]

5. CITY HALL (a film review by Mark R. Leeper):

Capsule: As a mayor's assistant investigates a crime with political implications, we get an inside look at the workings of a political machine in New York City. The mystery itself may be the weakest link in the film, with the setting and style being the real show. CITY HALL has an adult, intelligent script that is both current and harkens back to 1950s expose' films. Rating: low +2 (-4 to +4)

CITY HALL brings to mind hard-edged 1950s urban expose's like ON THE WATERFRONT and THE EDGE OF THE CITY. And Jerry Goldsmith has underscored the similarities by giving the film a big, brash, jazzy score in the style of Leonard Bernstein. That score may be the best thing about the CITY HALL and sets the tone for everything that is to come. At heart CITY HALL is a mystery, but the mystery is not what makes the film work. It is the glue that holds the film together, but this is really a picture of modern politics in New York City or any multi-ethnic metropolis. Certainly the mystery keeps the story moving forward--sometimes not as fast as would be wished, but it does keep it moving. But the active

ingredient is the setting of the story, giving us an inside look at a political machine, how it maintains power, how it relates to a multitude of different ethnic groups, and how politics influences the decisions made. And this is a film that is not dumbed down for the audience. The dialogue may at times be a little hard to follow, but it has a ring of realism and keeps the audience on its toes.

New York City Mayor John Pappas (played by Al Pacino) has his hands full with the fallout from a street shoot-out. A policeman and the nephew of a notorious crime lord killed each other and took with them an innocent six-year-old black boy. The Mayor sends his assistant, Kevin Calhoun (John Cusack) to keep a lid on things and also to investigate just what happened and why. Young-looking but perceptive, Calhoun traces the causes of the incident to organized crime, to a local political boss, and to a mysterious judge. The investigation goes deep and, not surprisingly, turns up more than what the mayor's office wants found.

It is not a good sign when there are four names on the screenplay, but it may not be so bad if they are four good writers. In this case included are Nicholas Pileggi of GOODFELLAS and CASINO. We also have among the four dark stylist Paul Schrader. The cast is similarly power-house, but perhaps not such a good investment. An over-rated Al Pacino gets the top billing that John Cusack deserved and plays the same feisty character he always plays, overpowering too many lines. His delivery damages the effect of the film's centerpiece, a sermon from the mayor on the death of a young boy. Cusack still seems a little young for his role, but it may be just that people are getting into politics earlier. Bridget Fonda brings her quirky smile to an under-written role that seems like an afterthought. To no surprise the most memorable and natural acting is from Danny Aiello as a cagey and adept neighborhood councilman who positions himself as everybody's friend.

Harold Becker, director of police films like THE ONION FIELD, THE BLACK MARBLE, and SEA OF LOVE, gives the CITY HALL a nice texture and feel of immediacy. Rate this one a low +2 on the -4 to +4 scale. [-mrl]

6. ANTONIA'S LINE (a film review by Mark R. Leeper):

Capsule: This is a film with a lot going for it but which is still hard to like because at core it is so hypocritical, both in its story and the way the distribution has been handled. This is a sweeping film about four generations of women on a communal farm overcoming

obstacles put in their path by sexist men.
Rating: 0 (-4 to +4). Some spoilers in the review.

According to VARIETY, when ANTONIA'S LINE was premiered at Cannes, "only women buyers and press were allowed into the first screening. Even the film's male producers were excluded from the good-humored solidarity screening." (Please don't confuse this policy with sexism. This is, of course, a blow for equality of the sexes and should in no way be seen as justifying anyone else's policy of discrimination by sex.) Indeed, ANTONIA'S LINE is a sometimes good-natured, often very angry story looking at four generations of women running a sort of communal farm in what is probably Holland or Belgium. As the film opens Antonia (Willeke Van Ammelrooy) is an old woman who is still apparently healthy but knows that this is her final day alive. In flashback she remembers the preceding forty or fifty years. The story picks up after World War II when Antonia returns to this unnamed village, the site of her youth. With her she brings with her teenage daughter Danielle (Els Dottermans). Together they start to run a farm. Sebastian, the farmer who runs a neighboring farm expects he will acquire the two ladies in a manner not unlike the way he acquires cattle. In fact, like cattle is how he and his sons treat his own homely daughter Deedee (Marina De Graaf), showing her off in the local pub by holding up her breasts to accentuate them. But when Deedee's own brother rapes her, it is the Antonia's farm that acquires Deedee. And so begins the communal farm that takes on all comers willing to work. The farm is, of course successful and never has any agricultural problems. The only problems we see come from Sebastian's sons. But that is only to be expected because men will be men. Just made that way, I guess. Not that all men in the village are bad by any means, but when there is trouble it is generally caused by a man. One is given the impression that if there were no men around everything would just go swimmingly.

Danielle decides to have a daughter and has a friend arrange a one-night stand with a hunk in a local town. (Please don't confuse this with the way men use women as sex objects! This is just an example of what an unfeeling society forces a woman to do if she wants to have a man's child but then never see the man again.) The

product of this union and enlightened child-rearing techniques is a child who is both a brilliant mathematician and a composer of music. There are more problems (including another rape) to come. But through it all tolerance and enlightened thinking are more than a match for any problem that arises. Before we are done there are four generations of women on the successful farm.

The makeup design by Jan Sewell is terrific. Antonia ages forty or fifty years in the course of the film and yet one never doubts that she is the age she is playing at the moment. The same goes for other women in the film. I would be very curious to the actual age

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of the various actresses. I suspect they must be young because it is easier to make a young person look old than an old person look young. The acting must be good because it takes more than makeup to make these people look the right age. The casting is also very good with people who look like people you might find in such a town.

This is a film that I tried very hard to like but there is just too much sanctimony here. This is a film with strong virtues, but at heart there is also a lot of sexism here. It is really hard to respect a film that condemns sexism on one hand while practicing it on the other. I guess on balance I would give it a 0 on the -4 to +4 scale. [-mrl]

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The amount of doublespeak a politician speaks is in direct proportion to the amount of PAC funds he receives.

-- William Lutz

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