

Don't Sell 'Em Short

The Urth list — 26 messages, 14 voices, 12 Apr 2007

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/4813>

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Jack Redelfs — 12 Apr 2007, 15:09

In pondering the difficulties of filming a Wolfe novel, and there are many, I think it is a mistake for us to sell screenwriters and film directors short. Although films and plays are different from novels, they are still stories, at their heart, and a good storyteller can adapt a good story out of ANY source material, just like John the Baptist raising Sons of Abraham out of the stones.

The best screenwriters and directors are just as capable and intelligent as Gene Wolfe. I have no doubt that, given a chance, any artful and crafty filmmaker could do Gene justice.

Recursive Loop — 12 Apr 2007, 15:16 · in reply to Jack Redelfs

Greetings:

"In pondering the difficulties of filming a Wolfe novel, and there are many, I think it is a mistake for us to sell screenwriters and film directors short."

Welllllll...let's see...

The film verison of "I, Robot" (took the title, but used a story somebody else wrote, slapped in some Asimov characters, shake well and bleah)

The film version of "Starship Troopers" (where the director proudly stated he had not read the book and was not going to read the book)

A remake of "The Day the Earth Stood Still" (pending, but what do you want to bet it is going to stink)

A remake of "Psycho" (why? why? why?)

A remake of "The Haunting" (why? why? why?)

...and many more...

Every now and again Hellywood gets it right. But my personal scorecard is heavily weighted on the other side of things.

FPK3

don doggett — 12 Apr 2007, 18:29 · in reply to Recursive Loop

--- Recursive Loop <recursive_loop at yahoo.com> wrote:

Greetings:

"In pondering the difficulties of filming a Wolfe novel, and there are many, I think it is a mistake for us to sell screenwriters and film directors short."

Welllllll...let's see...

The film version of "Starship Troopers" (where the director proudly stated he had not read the book and was not going to read the book)

Ahh, Starship Troopers. I hated that book so much that it colored my view of the rest of Heinlein's work. (Friday is the only novel I truly enjoyed. Heinlein's portrayal of California in that is still spot on.) The movie, on the other hand, is a hilarious f*%@% you to the action movie obsessed public, as well as a great satire of Gulf War One. The truly scary thing about it is that it applies to Gulf War Two just as well. It's the most expensive american fascist propaganda movie ever made, and for my money the best science fiction movie of the last 25 years, Blade Runner (which is also a far less than faithful adaptation) included. All my moderately humble opinion, of course.

Don

Recursive Loop — 12 Apr 2007, 18:32 · in reply to don doggett

Greetings:

"All my moderately humble opinion, of course."

Of course!

:)

FPK3

don doggett — 12 Apr 2007, 19:42 · in reply to Recursive Loop

And a tip of the hat to you, good sir!

I just want to add that the best way to appreciate the full and nasty irony of the movie is to see it in a packed theater where nearly all of the moviegoers cheer insanely everytime something gets blown up or mutilated. It's a movie that proves its message immediately in such a setting.

Don

--- Recursive Loop <recursive_loop at yahoo.com> wrote:
Greetings:

"All my moderately humble opinion, of course."

Of course!

:)

FPK3

James Wynn — 12 Apr 2007, 21:06 · in reply to don doggett

"Starship Troopers"...is...
for my money the best science fiction
movie of the last 25 years, Blade Runner (which is
also a far less than faithful adaptation) included.
All my moderately humble opinion, of course.

[Silently judging Don's for his taste in scifi movies]

While ST was not especially faithful to the book IIRC it did successfully capture the "tone" and "angle" of the book. The book was one of those scifi stories (there were a lot of these in the 50s) that were really just the author's memoir of military life with some sociopolitical commentary thrown in. In every case, those stories could more easily have been written in contemporary times.

Hmmm...I don't really see GWI in ST, but I could definitely see how it could be seen as propaganda for the GWOT. I wish Hollywood would make more war propaganda of the caliber of "Battleground" and "Invasion of the Body Snatchers". Some of the best war and scifi movies of the 40s and 50s were propaganda. I wouldn't put Starship Troopers in that category, however.

(Best propaganda film I've seen in a long while is "Pan's Labyrinth".)

Chris — 12 Apr 2007, 21:10 · in reply to Jack Redelfs

The issue isn't their intelligence. It is simply a difficulty in adapting to the media.

For one thing, consider how often the written form of a typical Gene Wolfe story has an important part to play in its interpretation. Are we for example to take Severian's account as a strict and literal depiction of what happened? If not, how do we express that uncertainty on film? Perhaps there will be a way, but it won't be exactly the same as what's employed in the book, and may tend to convey a different sense than the original. Also, we have a psychological tendency to view what happens in a movie as a literal depiction even if devices are employed to remind us that's not the case; this gets in the way of a Wolfe story.

On a more commonplace level, there is the general problem of trying to compress a long story line into the space of 2 hours. I don't care how much of a genius a filmmaker is, that's always going to be a source of dissatisfaction when you adapt a book to film.

In pondering the difficulties of filming a Wolfe novel, and there are many, I think it is a mistake for us to sell screenwriters and film directors short. Although films and plays are different from novels, they are still stories, at their heart, and a good storyteller can adapt a good

story out of ANY source material, just like John the Baptist raising Sons of Abraham out of the stones.

The best screenwriters and directors are just as capable and intelligent as Gene Wolfe. I have no doubt that, given a chance, any artful and crafty filmmaker could do Gene justice.

Chris — 12 Apr 2007, 21:19 · in reply to don doggett

--- Recursive Loop <recursive_loop at yahoo.com> wrote:

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Don

I have a hard time fitting this to GW I as well.

Also... I have trouble attributing a great deal of subtlety to the person who, if I recall correctly, brought the film "Showgirls" into the world. Yes, some direct satirical element remains, but I highly doubt that any meta-level critique of action movie audiences is going on.

brunians at brunians.org — 12 Apr 2007, 21:54 · in reply to James Wynn

While [Starship Troopers] was not especially faithful to the book IIRC it did successfully capture the "tone" and "angle" of the book. The book was one of those scifi stories (there were a lot of these in the 50s) that were really just the author's memoir of military life with some sociopolitical commentary thrown in.

Ah yes, a naval officer's memoir of his life in the infantry.

What's really interesting about Heinlein - way more than his writing - is the influence he has had upon the modern (US) military, which is profound. There was a series of talks about this at the 2002 WorldCon.

I've not seen the movie. I think that Heinlein generally is overrated, but I value the book reasonably well. Of course I was an infantryman and I mostly agree with Bob's political ideas.

.

James Crossley — 12 Apr 2007, 22:02 · in reply to Chris

On 4/12/07 2:19 PM, "Chris" <rasputin_ at hotmail.com> wrote:

--- Recursive Loop <recursive_loop at yahoo.com> wrote:

Greetings:

"In pondering the difficulties of filming a Wolfe novel, and there are many, I think it is a mistake for us to sell screenwriters and film directors short."

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You're right about "Showgirls," but I have to disagree with you about "Starship Troopers." Whether it's a subtle film or not, it's definitely a conscious commentary on the action movie as propaganda. I think the point could be proved by going scene by scene through the movie, but I won't be inflicting that on anyone here.

James

don doggett — 12 Apr 2007, 22:26 · in reply to James Crossley

On 4/12/07 2:19 PM, "Chris" <rasputin_ at hotmail.com> wrote:

Also... I have trouble attributing a great deal of subtlety to the person who, if I recall correctly, brought the film "Showgirls" into the world.

I never claimed subtlety. It's actually more like a punch to the head. It's a comedy where the joke's on the audience, really.

--- James Crossley <ishmael at drizzle.com> wrote:
You're right about "Showgirls," but I have to disagree with you about "Starship Troopers." Whether it's a subtle film or not, it's definitely a conscious commentary on the action movie as propaganda.

And anytime this movie is brought up on any list, this sort of thing comes up. Just scroll through the amazon reviews of the movie. I'm in the minority but definitely not on the fringe in my opinion.

Transentient — 12 Apr 2007, 22:29 · in reply to brunians at brunians.org

On Apr 12, 2007, at 5:54 PM, brunians at brunians.org wrote:

While [Starship Troopers] was not especially faithful to the book IIRC it did successfully capture the "tone" and "angle" of the book. The book was one of those scifi stories (there were a lot of these in the 50s) that were really just the author's memoir of military life with some sociopolitical commentary thrown in.

Ah yes, a naval officer's memoir of his life in the infantry.

What's really interesting about Heinlein - way more than his writing - is the influence he has had upon the modern (US) military, which is profound. There was a series of talks about this at the 2002 WorldCon.

I've not seen the movie. I think that Heinlein generally is overrated, but I value the book reasonably well. Of course I was an infantryman and I mostly agree with Bob's political ideas.

There is a petition on the internets somewhere to have a US aircraft carrier named after him, I think.

Transentient — 12 Apr 2007, 22:32 · in reply to Recursive Loop

On Apr 12, 2007, at 11:16 AM, Recursive Loop wrote:

Welllllll...let's see...

The film version of "Starship Troopers" (where the director proudly stated he had not read the book and was not going to read the book)

This is interesting to me since I just read the wikipedia article on "Aliens," which states that James Cameron made everybody who was going to play a Colonial Marine read _Starship Troopers._

don doggett — 12 Apr 2007, 22:33 · in reply to James Wynn

--- James Wynn <crushtv at gmail.com> wrote:
[Silently judging Don's for his taste in scifi movies]

I love Krull, too. So take my opinion for what it's worth. ;)

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 13 Apr 2007, 00:05 · in reply to James Wynn

On 4/12/07, James Wynn <crushtv at gmail.com> wrote:
While ST was not especially faithful to the book IIRC it did successfully capture the "tone" and "angle" of the book. The book was one of those scifi stories (there were a lot of these in the 50s) that were really just the author's memoir of military life with some sociopolitical commentary thrown in.

No and no and no.

It was plot-wise fairly faithful to about half of ST. But it utterly betrayed the tone and angle of the book; the book is deeply libertarian (though some people miss that), while the movie was more or less facistic in tone.

And ST couldn't be farther from Heinlein's military experience and still be a military adventure story/bildungsroman: he was a Navy officer who never saw wartime service (because he was invalided out after contracting TB), not an enlisted soldier.

In every case, those stories could more easily have been written in contemporary times.

Since the two most significant (to RAH) points of the story were (a) to depict a military-based libertarian society, and (b) to argue the necessity of "military virtues" for species survival, I don't think so.

(Best propaganda film I've seen in a long while is "Pan's Labyrinth".)

Better than "Fahrenheit 9/11" and "An Inconvenient Truth"?

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes, writer, trainer, bon vivant

<http://www.livejournal.com/users/sturgeonslawyer>

<http://www.danehyoakes.com>

Soon, where Toon Town once stood will be a string of gas stations, inexpensive motels, restaurants that serve rapidly prepared food. Tire salons, automobile dealerships and wonderful, wonderful billboards reaching as far as the eye can see. My God, it'll be beautiful.

brunians at brunians.org — 13 Apr 2007, 00:58 · in reply to Transient

There is a petition on the internets somewhere to have a US aircraft carrier named after [Heinlein], I think.

I'd sign it.

.

Nathan Spears — 13 Apr 2007, 01:40 · follows brunians at brunians.org

It was plot-wise fairly faithful to about half of ST. But it utterly betrayed the tone and angle of the book; the book is deeply libertarian (though some people miss that), while the movie was more or less facistic in tone.

I'm not sure whether the film was intended as a satire or not - but that's certainly the only way it can be enjoyed.

Witness dialogue like the following:

Rico: "You're some sort of big, fat, smart-bug, aren't you?"

Who, even in Hollywood, could have green-lit that bit of cheese into a big budget movie without knowing exactly how campy it was? Although as a joke on the audience, it gets very tiresome if no one else in the room is laughing.

(Best propaganda film I've seen in a long while is "Pan's Labyrinth".)

Better than "Fahrenheit 9/11" and "An Inconvenient Truth"?

When the Levees Broke is good, more relevant than Pan's.

don doggett — 13 Apr 2007, 02:01 · in reply to Nathan Spears

--- Nathan Spears <spearofsolomon at yahoo.com> wrote:

Witness dialogue like the following:

Rico: "You're some sort of big, fat, smart-bug, aren't you?"

What can I say? That's actually one of my favorite lines in the movie. That, and Nazi Doogie Howser reading the brain bug's mind and saying "He's afraid!" Love it or hate it, everything in the movie is done the way it is on purpose.

Who, even in Hollywood, could have green-lit that bit of cheese into a big budget movie without knowing exactly how campy it was? Although as a joke on the audience, it gets very tiresome if no one else in the room is laughing.

I'm often my own best company when I watch Starship Troopers. Fortunately, when I first saw it I was with a like minded friend.

David DiGiacomo — 13 Apr 2007, 02:10 · follows don doggett

I've been sitting on my hands trying not to join this off-topic-athon, but this comment on Starship Troopers finally pushed me over the edge:

I'm not sure whether the film was intended as a satire or not - but that's certainly the only way it can be enjoyed.

Here is what Verhoeven has to say about it:

<http://suicidegirls.com/interviews/Paul+Verhoeven/>

"I always thought the movie was badly understood. There was an article in The Washington Post when it came out that was not written by a movie critic. One of the editors wrote it saying that this was a neo-Nazi movie and I was promoting Fascism. That same article was published in all the European newspapers. When I went to do the publicity tour in Europe, everybody was already looking through that lens. The Washington Post is not a reliable newspaper anyway but they said the film was written by a neo-Nazi or a Fascist and directed by one. I strongly disagree with that. I saw it as a critique of American society. It is done in an ironic way but not pushing it very hard, which I hate because then it becomes dogmatic and becomes something else other than filmmaking. It was more that the novel by Robert Heinlein is very militaristic and has a tendency to be pro-Fascist a bit. We took a lot of cues out of American society at that time, which was [President Bill] Clinton, not realizing that a couple years later this whole situation would be much more acute and now you can put the film as a blueprint over Iraq or Afghanistan. But of course, I didn't know of bin Laden at that time."

Transentient — 13 Apr 2007, 02:28 · in reply to don doggett

On Apr 12, 2007, at 10:01 PM, don doggett wrote:

--- Nathan Spears <spearofsolomon at yahoo.com> wrote:

Witness dialogue like the following:

Rico: "You're some sort of big, fat, smart-bug, aren't you?"

What can I say? That's actually one of my favorite lines in the movie. That, and Nazi Doogie Howser reading the brain bug's mind and saying "He's afraid!" Love it or hate it, everything in the movie is done the way it is on purpose.

I particularly liked the scene when Dina Meyer's character gets it. It is not often you get a scene like that in a movie that is so perfectly, masterfully overdone.

Adam Thornton — 13 Apr 2007, 02:31 · in reply to don doggett

On Apr 12, 2007, at 9:01 PM, don doggett wrote:

--- Nathan Spears <spearofsolomon at yahoo.com> wrote:

Rico: "You're some sort of big, fat, smart-bug, aren't you?"

What can I say? That's actually one of my favorite lines in the movie. That, and Nazi Doogie Howser

ITYM "Il Duce Hauser". HTH! HAND!

Adam

Andy Robertson — 13 Apr 2007, 11:03 · in reply to Transient

Transient writes:

I particularly liked the scene when Dina Meyer's character gets it.
It is not often you get a scene like that in a movie that is so
perfectly, masterfully overdone.

I agree. It's a remarkably good movie, and a skillful deconstruction of the book.

However . . .

I wonder if any one has recorded Wolfe's reaction to the original novel STARSHIP TROOPERS???

While I don't ****like**** it as a reading experience, I think Wolfe might have been sympathetic with its ideological thrust.

The whole definition of civilians-as-those-who-risk-their-lives-to-defend-the-polis is straight from classical Greek culture and is the foundation of Western civilisation.

- hartshorn

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Jesper Svedberg — 13 Apr 2007, 11:21 · in reply to Andy Robertson

Andy Robertson skrev:

I wonder if any one has recorded Wolfe's reaction to the original novel
STARSHIP TROOPERS???

While I don't ****like**** it as a reading experience, I think Wolfe might have
been sympathetic with its ideological thrust.

"The Blue Mouse" comes off as being fairly close ideologically to Starship Troopers, doesn't it?

// Jesper

Andy Robertson — 13 Apr 2007, 11:31 · in reply to Jesper Svedberg

Jesper Svedberg writes:

"The Blue Mouse" comes off as being fairly close ideologically to
Starship Troopers, doesn't it?

I had clean forgotten that story, it does

<http://www.thenightland.co.uk>

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James Wynn — 13 Apr 2007, 17:39 · in reply to Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

(Best propaganda film I've seen in a long while is "Pan's Labyrinth".)

Better than "Fahrenheit 9/11" and "An Inconvenient Truth"?

The best propaganda a) does not require that the audience know anything about or *even have an interest in* the subject they are being propagandized on, and (most important) b) cannot be factually rebutted.

When I say it can't be factually rebutted I mean that it is not possible because it doesn't operate on a linear "true-false" level. If you agree with Moore or Gore, then their movies are useful red meat to get you pumped up. If you don't you are only going to be offended whenever you note a factual error or inconsistency.

But "Pan's Labyrinth", which never claims to represent real people, is far more effective at convincing the emotions and attitudes of the audience. All this is esoteric for Americans, but the Spanish are currently in a true culture war about how to define the players during that period.

I think "Pan's Labyrinth" is for Spain what "Birth of a Nation" was for the U.S. in the early 1900s.

Chris — 13 Apr 2007, 22:25 · in reply to don doggett

My personal favorite:

"Rico, I'm gonna die."

"No, you're not gonna die!"

"It's OK, because I got to have you."

For some reason I'm the only person in the theater who laughed out loud at that exchange.

--- Nathan Spears <spearofsolomon at yahoo.com> wrote:

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I'm often my own best company when I watch Starship Troopers. Fortunately, when I first saw it I was with a like minded friend.

Need Mail bonding?

Go to the Yahoo! Mail Q&A for great tips from Yahoo! Answers users.

<http://answers.yahoo.com/dir/?link=list&sid=396546091>
