

Dragos Ruu



by Dragos Ruu

Parents would hate cyberpunk if they noticed their kids reading it. Drugs, rock and roll, technology run amok, a pop sub-culture unbridled... it's a God fearing parent's worst nightmare.

Luckily for the sanity and world view of these protectors of morality, most people haven't heard of the term 'cyberpunk'. "Cyberpunk? What is that? A bunch of robots with mohawks? The Sex Pistols with sequencers?"

Cyberpunk is a relatively new phenomenon in science fiction. A daring clique of authors are combining the stylistic weirdness of New Wave authors like Michael Moorcock and Brian Aldiss

with the hardline scientific extrapolation and political savvy of the classic SF authors like Asimov, Clarke, and Niven.

It is tough to describe what cyberpunk is. Most definitions are merely examples: Blade Runner, Mad Max, William Gibson's works, a few Harlan Ellison stories, Max Headroom... Cyberpunk isn't huge, empire star-fleets plying the hyper-waves and bold 'real' men saving strong-willed, voluptuous princesses. It is a departure from traditional SF.

While almost impossible to rigidly define, cyberpunk stories often see common themes. Stories are usually set with a chaotic world as the background. Technology and information are the biggest currencies. Custom drugs are rampant, and drug use is no longer bound by our current Victorian ethics. Bio-technical implants enhance mere humans, and artificial intelligences guide the huge corporations that have supplanted governments.

It is a bleak setting, and one that often mirrors our rapidly changing and aggressive real world. Gone is the careless technophilia of earlier days, with science

carefully enshrined in 'ivory towers' and research labs. In a cyberpunk milieu, technology is exploding, and its biggest advantage is to get an 'edge' out on the street.

Cyberpunk author Bruce Serling said it best when he wrote, "for [our generation], the techniques of classic 'hard-SF' — extrapolation, technological literacy — are not just literary tools, but an aid to daily life." Cyberpunk is an expression of our capitalistic information explosion to its logical extreme.

Drugs, rock and roll, technology run amok...

The cyberpunk literary trend also illuminates something else about our real-life world. Whereas classic science fiction dealt with external verities — crises endangering worlds, empires and emperors with the power of gods — cyberpunk discards attempts to comprehend the 'big picture'. Cyberpunk stories often focus on individuals. Single persons whose chief concern is a day to day

existence; and whose world is far too complex and incomprehensible for them to fathom or control.

So in the final analysis, cyberpunk fits into classic science fiction — it's about the impact of science and technology. It is just that these days, the outcome of this impact is a lot less clear than in the grandiose plans of scientists of the sixties and seventies. Regardless of what sales brochures for SDI and Cray computers say, nobody really knows where all this breakneck technological discovery is going.

But still, what exactly is cyberpunk? Let's give this one more shot: Cyberpunk is Shakespeare as a computer hacker, doped up on mescaline and speed, with rock video editing, and Duran Duran teaming up with the Butthole Surfers to do the soundtrack. Or something like that...

Hotel is a heartbreak to watch

Heartbreak Hotel ★ Famous Players West Mall

review by Jeff Cowley

If Walt Disney had ever decided to make a movie about Elvis Presley it would probably resemble *Heartbreak Hotel*, a rock and roll fairy tale about love, friendship and... Kidnapping Elvis?

Set in small town America in 1972, *Heartbreak Hotel* is about a young, rebellious rock and roller named Johnny Wolfe. Johnny is an angry teenager with family problems that seem to be straight from an Elvis single: his father abandoned him, his boozing mother doesn't understand him, he has been forbidden to see the girl of his dreams, and his band has been cut from the high school talent show.

Frustrated by small town attitudes and his crumbling family life, Johnny decides there is only one man who can turn things around for him: Not that accosting your favorite celebrity is impossible. Writer-director Chris Columbus would have us believe that all you need is hope, luck and a pint of ether.

Hearing that the King is playing in the Big City, Johnny rounds up the guys, borrows the car, and draws up a plan to kidnap Elvis which includes having the neighborhood pizza lady, who bears an incredible resemblance to the King's dead mother seduce him.

Sitting through *Heartbreak Hotel* is much like watching a remake of *Kid Creole* or *Love Me Tender* or any one of the 30-odd original low budget Elvis flicks. Whenever the boredom gets out of hand someone gets into a fist fight or breaks into a sing-along dance routine.

The biggest problem with the movie — if you haven't already guessed — is its overall sense of reality. Things just sort of happen on their own. Plots and subplots skip around like a scratchy record. For instance, at one point, Elvis, who has just come out of an ether coma, is angry about staying with a seventeen year old punk with family problems. The next moment he is convinced he has lost his music, his identity and his fans. If the tricky jumps in the story-line don't make you wince, the saccharine-coated characters will.

By the end, the soundtrack is the only thing that can be taken seriously. The hard driving mix of Elvis classics and early seventies hits provide just enough toe-tapping entertainment to keep you from running out of the movie laughing. However, music alone does not a show make, as the real Elvis knew. *Heartbreak Hotel* may be a harmless, hokey fantasy, but in the end it leaves you vacant.

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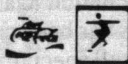
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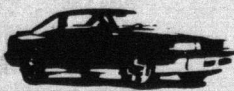
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