

MT VOID 06/30/17 --- Vol. 35, No. 53, Whole Number 1969



Mt. Holz Science Fiction Society
06/30/17 --- Vol. 35, No. 53, Whole Number 1969

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Things We Share (comments by Mark R. Leeper):

Evelyn, who is annotating Moby Dick (don't ask), said her next project would be remembrance of things past. I have the same project. In fact, I have a problem with remembrance of things present. [-mrl]

Free Libraries Shaped Like TARDISES (comments by Evelyn C. Leeper):

An article in Open Culture reports, "Free Libraries Shaped Like Doctor Who's Time-Travelling TARDIS Pop Up in Detroit, Saskatoon, Macon & Other Cities":

<https://tinyurl.com/void-little-free-library>

I guess that would be very handy, because you could fit a lot more books in it than its exterior size would indicate. [-ecl]

Science Fiction (and Other) Discussion Groups, Films, Lectures, etc. (NJ):

- Note that this has been revised since the last schedule!
- July 13: LIMITLESS (2011) & "Limitless" ("The Dark Fields")
by Alan Glynn, ,
Middletown (NJ) Public Library, 5:30PM
 - July 14: THE SHAWSHANK REDEMPTION (1994), Middletown (NJ) Public
Library, 12N
 - July 27: THE MAN WHO FOLDED HIMSELF by David Gerrold, Old Bridge
(NJ) Public Library, 7PM
 - August 10: THE MARTIAN (2015) & THE MARTIAN by Andy Weir,

Middletown (NJ) Public Library, 5:30PM
 August 11: HAROLD AND MAUDE (1971), Middletown (NJ) Public Library,
 12N
 September 8: ETERNAL SUNSHINE OF THE SPOTLESS MIND (2004),
 Middletown (NJ) Public Library, 12N
 September 14: QUATERMASS AND THE PIT (1967) & "Aficionado"
 by David Brin,
 Middletown (NJ) Public Library, 5:30PM
 September 28: THE INVISIBLE LIBRARY by Genevieve Cogman, Old Bridge
 (NJ) Public Library, 7PM
 October 12: SOLARIS (1972) & SOLARIS by Stanislaw Lem,
 Middletown (NJ) Public Library, 5:30PM
 October 13: THE EXORCIST (1973), Middletown (NJ) Public Library, 12N
 November 9: CAT PEOPLE (1942) & "The Bagheeta" by Val Lewton
 (available in Marvin Kaye's WEIRD TALES and Peter Haining's
 VAMPIRE OMNIBUS), Middletown (NJ) Public Library, 5:30PM
 November 10: CACHE' (2005), Middletown (NJ) Public Library, 12N
 November 16: THE FOREVER WAR by Joe Haldeman, Old Bridge (NJ)
 Public Library, 7PM
 December 8: IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE (1946) or JOYEUX NOEL (2005),
 Middletown (NJ) Public Library, 12N
 January 25, 2018: OLD MAN'S WAR by John Scalzi, Old Bridge (NJ)
 Public Library, 7PM

Northern New Jersey events are listed at:

<http://www.sfsnnj.com/news.html>

My Picks for Turner Classic Movies for July (comments by Mark R. Leeper):

Well, we are heading into the hot days of summer. It is not a bad time to spend an evening or two watching a late sunset with one eye and to watch a classic movie with the other eye. Put on a fan or an air conditioner and get into a movie. Well, the month has 1-2/3 of my favorite science fiction films. What happened to the missing third? I will explain that below. Each film starts with a deceptively simple discovery, but the results get bigger and bigger until it will alter our conception of humanity as a species. They may well be the two most intelligent science fiction films of the 20th century. One is about a discovery that would change the nature of the human race and one is about a discovery that may already have changed it.

FIVE MILLION YEARS TO EARTH (1968) is perhaps known better under the original British title, QUATERMASS AND THE PIT. While digging a tunnel for a new underground (subway) extension in London, workmen find humanoid fossils that appear to be five million years old. In the same plot of land they find an un-exploded German V- weapon of WWII. The odd thing is that they had to both have arrived at the same time. Investigating the two finds is Bernard Quatermass of the British Rocket Group. Before Quatermass is done, he will have found explanations for psychic powers, race prejudice, ghosts, Satanism, why different cultures seem to develop similar mythology, and much more in one neat little surprise package ready to explode. The film is clever and totally engrossing. (When our science fiction club in college showed it, the projectionist was complaining he had expected to study for his French exam while the film was playing. But once the film had started he could not take his eyes off the screen.)

This is the third film (and most people consider it the best film) in Nigel Kneale's four-film series about Professor Quatermass. Each film is about some form of alien invasion. The film perennially shows up on people's lists of their top ten science fiction films. [Saturday, July 15, 6:00PM]

BRAINSTORM (1983) started as a very good science fiction film that had terrible luck and went bad. This is the film that Natalie Wood died while making. She had a terrible fear of water and apparently accidentally drowned. I doubt the film was being shot in chronological order but just about at the two-thirds point this intelligent, interesting film left its intelligence behind it as well as having Natalie Wood go absent. Obviously some compromises had to be made to get as much as possible on the screen. But the film has a change in style and not for the better.

A high-tech company is working on a new entertainment device. The idea is to physically record a brain's sensory experience while bobsledding or going down a water slide. Once it is recorded it can be played back into the users' brains and they can have the same sensory experience.

The viewer slowly recognizes this little entertainment device will have huge potential to change humanity. The film's portrayal of the research community is about as accurate as any film I have ever seen. This is a film that could have dozens of sequels as we see the ramifications of what is essentially electronic telepathy. Also starring are Christopher Walken and Louise Fletcher. [Thursday, July 20, 6:00PM]

Alfred Hitchcock's FOREIGN CORRESPONDENT (1940) is not really one of his better-remembered films in spite of the fact that it has many sequences that are unforgettable. One odd touch is that through most of the film the characters never

mention who the enemy agents are. They are never called "German" or "Nazi" until near the end of the film. As long as Germany was not at war with Britain the dialog was discrete and did not say anything that would screw up distribution in Germany. Then when the shooting was nearly complete WWII started and Hitchcock worked in one line to confirm that the bad guys were the same bad guys that Britain was fighting. There is probably as much suspense in this film as there is in later Hitchcock films such as NORTH BY NORTHWEST. Hitchcock imaginatively films a chase shot from overhead letting umbrellas hide and reveal the goings on. A German assassin is played by about the last actor you would expect. And the highpoint is a plane crash shot from the pilot's cabin. This film was still about fifteen years before Hitchcock would hit his stride in Technicolor. But this is a film too often neglected by the fans and the critics. [Wednesday July 12, 10:30 PM]

But for Hitchcock fans that is not the only Hitchcock film. Not by a long shot.

I won't list a best single film of the month of July. Instead, I will point out Alfred Hitchcock's entire oeuvre, which seems to be showing on TCM. I am not sure every single film he directed will be shown. They will be presented every Wednesday and Friday from 8 PM to about 5:30 the following morning.

[-mrl]

A QUIET PASSION (film review by Mark R. Leeper):

CAPSULE: Writer/director Terence Davies gives us a biography of Emily Dickinson. The film is A QUIET PASSION. It has too much quiet and not enough passion. The poet led a dry and stilted life and that really comes through in this dry and stilted drama. That may not be Davies' fault. Emily Dickinson is just not the most promising screen subject. Through most of her life she shut out the world and did not come alive. And it was optimistic to think she would come alive on the screen. Rating: low +1 (-4 to +4) or 5/10

Emily Dickinson wrote very good poetry, but its virtues do not translate well to the screen. Even the title suggests that the passion is so quiet you might miss it. This is a biographical film about Emily Dickinson, the Amherst, Massachusetts, poet who retreated to living in an attic and who then led an ascetic life writing poems and growing old. This subject does not seem as if it would make for cinema with much cinematic appeal. And indeed the film is not all that different from what it might have been expected to be. Emily has a bit more spirit than expected, but rather than compensating for an unexciting figure of literature, Terence Davies, who wrote and directed, slows down the entire film to a pacing that Emily might have preferred. At times the film slows to a minimal pace as the camera sits on a silent character or pans slowly around the room. The music is mostly songs of the period. (Emily lived from 1830 to 1886.) More often the mood is created by having Cynthia Nixon, who plays the adult Emily, read a poem or two in voice-over. The relation between the plot and the chosen poem is not always obvious. Cinematography by Florian Hoffmeister is subtle and does not call attention to itself, but it is one of the better features of the film.

As a youth Emily (young she is played by Emma Bell, as an adult by Cynthia Nixon) seems to have had some inner fire. Later events will test her liberal viewpoint. As the film opens Emily is a schoolgirl who finds that teachers, graduation speakers, and even relatives seem to constantly lecture Emily on religion. One gets the impression that in this society everyone preaches to everyone else. Emily has the backbone to stand up to the efforts and though she does seem to have some belief in God, she is not going to let others tell her what to think. Davies' dialog is quick to define a character, but it is spoken like the diction in a live play. There is a pause between sentences so the listener can catch up.

When Emily does exhibit some wit the viewer is left wondering where it came from. Everybody seems to stand in line to judge Emily. And Emily seems to forever be fighting convention, but she leads such a stilted life she makes convention seem like the better alternative.

Emily Dickinson may have been a great poet, but this is not such a great film. I rate A QUIET PASSION a low +1 on the -4 to +4 scale or 5/10. It will be on VOD, DVD and Blu-ray beginning July 11, 2017.

Film Credits: <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt2392830/combined>

What others are saying: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/a_quiet_passion

[-mrl]

Minions (letter of comment by Charles S. Harris):

In response to [Mark's comments on minions of evil](#) in the 06/23/17 issue of the MT VOID, Charles Harris writes:

[Mark wrote,] "I guess when all you are is a superhero, everything looks like a minion of evil."

Even when all you are is a stamp collector (or a Disney animation fan):

<http://tinyurl.com/ycjgp9nn>

[-csh]

Mark responds:

These are minions of commercialization. [-mrl]

AN ECONOMIST GETS LUNCH (letter of comment by Jim Susky):

In response to [Evelyn's comments on AN ECONOMIST GETS LUNCH](#) in the 07/13/12 (!) issue of the MT VOID, Jim Susky writes:

Back in MT Void Vol. 31, No. 2, Whole Number 1710, Evelyn reviewed a book I may go get:

AN ECONOMIST GETS LUNCH: NEW RULES FOR EVERYDAY FOODIES by Tyler Cowen

She wrote this, which begs a reminiscence:

As for why most American food is--or at least was--fairly mediocre, Cowen's theory is that the causes are primarily:

- the bars to immigration between 1920 and 1968
- Prohibition (which closed a lot of high-quality restaurants)
- World War II (women working in war jobs needed convenience more than high-quality, and the high-quality meat was reserved for the military anyway)
- television (we want to prepare and eat quickly so we can watch television)
- spoiled children (our children want bland, simple, sweet foods, so we give them to them, while in other countries, children eat what the parents decide to serve them)

About thirty years ago the editor and principal writer of THE ABSOLUTE SOUND (a high-end audio journal) wrote, in response to a letter recommending some future content:

"My readers don't know what they want until I give it to them"

I believe the best creatives follow something like this principle, at least in that they create what they themselves would want to read/hear/view (eat, see below).

I can honestly vouch for the idea that parenting is very creative as well, the goal of which is to rear the children that parents want. So far we have succeeded, in that my progeny were, as children, fully capable of and willing to converse engagingly with adults. Not only that they are now fully capable of intellectually entertaining me as young adults.

(And the "arguments" are the best.)

Anyway, it is hardly news that parental "advice" has been readily available to Americans since well before Benjamin Spock. Can't say much about Dr. Spock but I have noticed various corrupt parenting theories uncritically repeated over recent decades, mostly in newspapers and magazines--so corrupt, that the best one can say is that practicing them amounts to an abdication of parental duties and a relinquishing of parental prerogatives.

WHAT CHILDREN "WANT TO EAT"

All this is too serious, so I'll come back to the idea of what children "want to eat". My daughter was not yet one year old when a 1995 or '96 Slate article passed through my b#!!\$#!t filter. The premise was that any child will Learn to Eat anything that you feed her at least ten times. This was duly passed on to the missus, who would have prepared foods that Mom and Dad liked to eat, anyway.

(Perhaps it helped that we are none too fond of "kid food" -- mac- n-cheese, hot-dogs, frozen-pizza's, grilled-cheese sandwiches, and the like.)

I don't recall if we ever got "food requests" from our offspring-- if we did, Mom greeted them with benign neglect.

One December evening after work I got a "field report" from Grandma. That day at Preschool, they celebrated Kwanzaa by serving "African foods" for lunch. This was greeted by various child's objections to their apparent novelty. Grandma reported

that our mixed-doubles team just tucked in and ate.

Fast forward to a "sleepover" by a ten-year-old neighbor boy, who, unprecedented in my experience, walked away hungry from our dinner table!

(And I still laugh up my sleeve at the memory.)

So I guess we live in another country where "children eat what the parents decide to serve them".

Now off to find that book (thanks to Evelyn)! [-js]

BEFORE THE DAWN (letter of comment by Jim Susky):

In response to [Dale Skran's review of BEFORE THE DAWN](#) in the 01/03/14 (!) issue of the MT VOID, Jim Susky writes:

Calling to Dale's review of Nicholas Wade's Before the Dawn I offer the following:

Continuing work on the Human Genome has pushed back the most-likely date for the Y-chromosomal Adam (the single man who is our male common ancestor).

In 2004 Wade reported that the "Y-chromosomal most recent common ancestor" was about 50,000 BC. Now the date is 200,000-300,000 BC. See here for a somewhat penetrable treatment:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Y-chromosomal_Adam

Related--Dawkins has updated his earlier work, which starts with Homo Sapiens, but goes much farther back:

THE ANCESTOR'S TALE: A PILGRIMAGE TO THE DAWN OF EVOLUTION

<https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0544859936>

Finally, a GoodReads friend made note of:

THE GENE: AN INTIMATE HISTORY

<https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/1476733503>

On first impression both are worthy of at least a dip or two--though I recommend starting with the Dawkins at the beginning.

THE GENE has, somewhere in middle, a short (3-4 page) treatment of genetics as pertaining to race--one that should satisfy those who think the race is a only a "social-construct" as well as scientists, who know that the genetic record shows the race is much more than that (and me, who regards race as a common-sense way to classify folks--with no need whatever to use race as a means to exclude and/or mistreat anyone). [-dls]

This Week's Reading (book comments by Evelyn C. Leeper):

Last week I covered the Hugo novella finalists; this week I'll do the novelette and short stories.

Best Novelette

"Alien Stripper Boned From Behind by the T-Rex" by Stix Hiscock (self-published): This was one of the finalists that got on the ballot by a concerted effort by the Rabid Puppies. I cannot say I was sorry to find it was unavailable free.

"The Art of Space Travel" by Nina Allan (Tor.com, July 2016): This is more a story about dreams for one's future than a science fiction story. Even the inclusion of a couple of Mars missions as catalysts and focal points does not make it science fiction.

"The Jewel and Her Lapidary" by Fran Wilde (Tor.com publishing, May 2016): Only an excerpt of this was available free on-line, and apparently the entire novelette is being marketed as a stand-alone book: 96 pages for \$10.99. (It is \$2.99 as an e-book, which seems more in line for a work of under 17,500 words.)

"The Tomato Thief" by Ursula Vernon (Apex Magazine, January 2016): There frequently seems to be a trend in Hugo-finalist stories in a given year. This year, two of the short story finalists are set in the American Southwest. This is in the "shape-shifter" tradition of that region; "You'll Surely Drown Here If You Stay" (see below) takes a different direction. To me, this

eems to have more of a sense of place than the other.

"Touring with the Alien" by Carolyn Ives Gilman (Clarkesworld Magazine, April 2016): This seems to hearken back to classic science fiction without seeming outdated. The discussion about the relationship between intelligence and consciousness is of course part of the larger discussion currently going on in society in general about the relationship between intelligence and self-awareness, or intelligence and a sense of past and future, or intelligence and any number of other concepts that people seem to want to either conflate with intelligence, or say are required for a being to be intelligent. Definitely a thought-provoking story (and in my opinion, an interesting companion piece vis-a-vis alien intelligence with Ted Chiang's "Story of Your Life").

"You'll Surely Drown Here If You Stay" by Alyssa Wong (Uncanny Magazine, May 2016): This is the other "American Southwest" story, and it is basically a zombie story. It is good, but it did not seem to "flow" from its setting the way "The Tomato Thief" did.

My ranking: "Touring with the Alien", "The Tomato Thief", "You'll Surely Drown Here If You Stay", no award, "The Art of Space Travel" Not ranked: "Alien Stripper Boned From Behind by the T-Rex", "The Jewel and Her Lapidary"

Best Short Story

"The City Born Great" by N. K. Jemisin (Tor.com, September 2016): In my opinion, this carries the metaphor of a city as a living being a bit too far, but your mileage may vary. Clearly, this is part of the new(-ish) trend toward more literary science fiction (fantasy?); it would never have appeared in the classic science fiction digests. Well, *possibly* THE MAGAZINE OF FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION, but even that seems iffy.

"A Fist of Permutations in Lightning and Wildflowers", by Alyssa Wong (Tor.com, March 2016)+: It may be time to admit that science fiction has passed me by. I mean, I understood the general plot (serial apocalypses), but the writing style just left me confused and uninterested.

"Our Talons Can Crush Galaxies" by Brooke Bolander (Uncanny Magazine, November 2016): Okay, a short story doesn't give you much room to develop a story, but surely one could develop more than this, which is little more than "boy kills girl, girl takes revenge", although "girl" is not entirely accurate).

"Seasons of Glass and Iron" by Amal El-Mohtar (The Starlit Wood: New Fairy Tales, Saga Press): This is yet another re-imagining of the various tropes of fairy tales--a bit didactic, but then fairy tales have traditionally come with morals or messages of some sort, so I suppose this one should also.

"That Game We Played During the War" by Carrie Vaughn (Tor.com, March 2016): How do you play a game like chess which requires analyzing and planning, with a telepathic alien? Vaughn has an idea and the implications of it are intriguing.

"An Unimaginable Light" by John C. Wright (God, Robot, Castalia House): Another "Rapid Puppies" choice, and unavailable without payment.

My ranking: "The City Born Great", "That Game We Played During the War", no award, "Seasons of Glass and Iron", "A Fist of Permutations in Lightning and Wildflowers", "Our Talons Can Crush Galaxies" Not read: "An Unimaginable Light"

[-ecl]

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Quote of the Week:
[writing to a magazine that had published his obituary]
I've just read that I am dead. Don't forget to delete me
from your list of subscribers.
--Rudyard Kipling

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