



Ginger Kerrick, when asked what she does for a living, replies that she is a flight director at NASA. When the other person looks confused, she adds, "You know, the guy with the vest and the buzz cut?"

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#### **Alternate Universes** (comments by Mark R. Leeper):

In science fiction these days you hear a lot about an idea that is fascinating but sadly totally untestable. You have the two universes split off over some small event and each universe goes its separate way. You really want to see the two universes and pick the one that is not headed for disaster. Now politically we can choose. For example, at one branch point we get two universes, one in which we just had the worst hurricane ever; in the other we used to have bigger hurricanes. At another branch point, Mexico is going to pay for the border wall; in a parallel universe it will be the US tax payer who will pick up the tab. In one Trump is negotiating with Democrats over deporting the "dreamers" and in one he is not. Trump will decide what universe we will be picking. Trump is there deciding which universe will be ours. [-mrl]

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#### **My Picks for Turner Classic Movies for October** (comments by Mark R. Leeper):

This is the month that Turner Classic Movies does its annual Halloween tribute to the horror film. When I was growing up the film critic for my local newspaper automatically gave a low rating to any science fiction or horror film. This sort of film was just not considered respectable by the local newspaper. Similarly, the public schools had much the same prejudice and just told parents that they were trying to teach good taste and fantasy was "comic book stuff." Over the years that sort of attitude has gone out of style luckily. These days some schools will even assign science fiction and fantasy books. It would not have surprised me if I had found a similar sort of snobbery at TCM. But the late Robert Osborne loved film and was no more or less enthusiastic about the fantasy genre than I was. And every October a major theme of TCM is the fantasy genre film. There it is, each October they have really terrific lines-up (line-ups?) of Halloween-spirited films. There are Universal horror films. Hammer films, independent horror films, foreign language horror, and more.

But it is not easy for me to find uncommon films among them. This column is all about what can I recommend that the reader may not have seen before. This month my column calls the readers' attention to classic Japanese horror of from the mid-Fifties to the mid-Sixties. I find even horror fans have rarely seen old Japanese classics. So that is my theme for this month's column.

These are very nicely made films though not seen much these days. I think the general wisdom is that viewers do not want to suffer with subtitles. (Admittedly at one time these films were badly subtitled. I think one other reason is that the films are highly textured films that require a degree of patience that many viewers lack these days. The films do not jump right into horror. The idea may be that it takes time for the evils to fester. These films may be considered an acquired taste but they are crafted works of art. These five Japanese horror films (in order of release) will show in October.

##### UGETSU (1953)

A potter lives by making dishes and making a profit selling to passing soldiers. But when he tries to make too much of a profit things go bad for him. He meets a ghost princess who seems to have an unnatural interest in him. [Monday, October 30, 4:15 AM]

##### TOKAIDO YOTSUYA KAIKAN (1959)

This is one of thirty different screen adaptations of "The Ghost Story of Yutsuya." It is a complex story of adultery, betrayal, revenge, and madness. And a ghost exacts some supernatural vengeance. [Monday, October 9, 4:00 AM]

##### JIGOKU (1960)

A young man (who does not strike one as particularly evil) falls in with bad friends. The film takes a turn about half way in when the character is sentenced to Hell--literally. The film then turns surreal as we see the tortures of Hell, almost like a new Dante's Inferno. It is a very imaginative film. It is a mix of surrealism and sadism, which is probably why JIGOKU is rarely seen in our country. [Monday, October 9, 2:00 AM]

##### ONIBABA (1964)

A woman and her mother-in-law were abandoned when the woman's husband went off to fight in the civil war. On the point of starvation, the two abandoned women murder passing samurai and steal their possessions. One object stolen is a mask, which they wear when robbing samurai. It turns out the mask is owned by supernatural forces. [Monday, October 30, 2:15 AM]

##### KWAIDAN (1965)

Lafcadio Hearn collected Japanese legends and ghost stories and wrote them down (not unlike the Grimm Brothers in Eastern Europe). This film is an anthology of four of his stories. Color photography was unavailable prior to this time. KWATDAN makes up for lost time by bursting from the screen with glorious, oversaturated bright color. The stories have ghosts, snow maidens, and Hoichi, who plays the biwa and had his ears stolen by demons. This is a horror film and an art house film.

[Monday, October 23, 3:45 AM]

What is the best film of the month? It is hard to say. It may not be the most likable but the most respectable is probably KWAIDAN. [-mrl]

**THE 13TH FRIDAY** (film review by Mark R. Leeper):

**CAPSULE:** A strange mechanical device proves to be a calendar of supernatural events and a gateway to a parallel world of pain and horror. In a plot of ideas not entirely fresh there are few surprises in this story and just about nothing unfamiliar in the first half of the film. Justin Price writes and directs without much new to engage the viewer. The title is misleading because it implies that when they borrow from another film they do something creative with their borrowings. That is not generally the case. Rating: +0 (-4 to +4) or 4/10

THE 13TH FRIDAY (gee, that title reminds me of another film) begins, "Somewhere in Texas is a house said to be so haunted that a church was built on the property and the family that lived in the house was never found." I have seen only one screen and immediately I am wondering what the quote can all mean. Do people who build churches try to build them on really evil plots of land? Do evil places attract churches? Luckily for the church builder, the family was never found even for things like paying taxes on their lot. Is the fact it is Texas make it scarier?

As the film opens the camera shows us spooky buildings and the voice of a young girl tells us the legend of the house in the story, but it is hard to make out what she is saying. And there is something odd about self-claiming to be a legend.

The camera goes to a scene of a teenage girl tied by the wrists to a flight of stairs. Her mother comes along and informs her daughter, "You belong to Him now." She then burns the screaming daughter with flammable liquid.

Cut to some time later. A group of young people are having a party at an evil old house like the one in THE EVIL DEAD. They go inside and there are evil toys like a doll that turns its head to reveal another face on the back of her head, just like on of the characters in THE NIGHTMARE BEFORE CHRISTMAS. One of the teens finds an antique puzzle ball reminiscent of the cube in HELLRAISER, particularly because each is a gateway to a parallel universe.

This house, we were told, is a legend for evil happenings, but they are happening right now for one girl who got separated from the pack. She is now being held by a demon that lifts her unconscious body like the girl in THE EXORCIST. The possessed girl's eyeballs go white like hardboiled eggs. We have seen this too in who knows how many films. There is also a Biblical prophecy angle on the plot. Over and over we see bits from other films recombined.

Do you get the point? This is not a script that borrows from other films. It takes ideas from other films and forces them into place. The plot, when director Justin Price gets to it is about a local girl searching for lost people who have disappeared into a K-mart decorated cave that is supposed to be a parallel universe. Late in the film some tension is built. By then much of the audience may not care. though there may be some special interest in a Biblical Prophecy framework introduced into the plot.

The film combines makeup and digital effects but the digital effects are not well handled and the effects seem to be in the same layer as the actors. The makeup effects are a combination of prosthetic and simple greasepaint. The script demonstrates that Justin Price (who wrote the script) is familiar with post-1970 horror films, but he adds little to the field. I could almost accept this film as a pastiche of 1970s horror films.

The actors deliver their lines, but bring little unexpected to their roles and writer/director Price brings nothing innovative to the plot. I rate THE 13TH FRIDAY a 0 on the -4 to +4 scale or 4/10.

The film has been in release since early in the year and will be on digital in October.

Film Credits: <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt5994894/combined>

[-mrl]

**Mathematics and Taxes** (letter of comment by Peter Rubinstein):

In response to [Mark's comments on mathematics and taxes](#) in the 09/22/17 issue of the MT VOID, Pete Rubinstein writes:

[Mark wrote,] "Mathematics is serious stuff. It allows you to have a feel for where a satellite is in space. You measure the amount you have to pay the government in taxes this year.

I don't know how your taxes work, but mine are determined by what is essentially dead reckoning. The tax code ensures that it works that way. I use mathematics to determine for how long I will go to jail if the IRS decides I reckoned differently than

they did. [-pr]

Mark responds:

I assume that dead reckoning calculations require mathematics. [-mrl]

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**ARTEMIS** (letter of comment by Kevin R):

In response to [Joe Karpierz's review of ARTEMIS](#) in the 09/22/17 issue of the MT VOID, Kevin R writes:

"Jazz sounds like a Holly Jones brought up on the 'wrong side of the mass driver.' :)" [-kr]

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**Infinity** (letters of comment by Keith F. Lynch, Radovan Garabik, and Tim Merrigan):

In response to [Mark's comments on infinity](#) in the 09/22/17 issue of the MT VOID, Keith Lynch writes:

Mark R. Leeper writes, "How many millimeters is it to the star Polaris?"

It's about 400 light years, a light year is about  $10^{16}$  meters, and a meter is  $10^3$  millimeters, so about  $4 \times 10^{21}$ . I could walk there in a few eons.

But consider traveling, not to Polaris, but to the edge of the known universe, then moving over a millimeter and traveling to the opposite edge, then moving over a millimeter and traveling back to the first edge, etc., until you've visited every cubic millimeter in the universe. (For this to work we have to ignore the expansion of the universe, of course.) Do this, not at walking speed, but at the speed at which the slowest stalactite grows.

The remarkable thing is how easy it is to accidentally write a computer program that would take enormously longer than that to complete. And as computers have gotten more powerful, the slowness of the slowest possible program has only increased. That's because adding one bit of memory causes a factor-of-two slowdown, and a lot more bits have been added than the number of times computer clock speeds have doubled.

Mark continues, "No, let's get really big. How many millimeters is it to the farthest star ever observed? Multiply that by the largest integer anybody has ever conceived of until just a second ago. (You see we are conceiving of a larger number right now.)"

That's not valid unless you had some specific number in mind. And if you did, chances are someone else had long since thought of a much larger one. See, for instance, "hyperoperation."

Similarly, "the smallest number that's too large to be specified by the number of bits in this sentence" isn't meaningful.

Mark goes on, "Well, no, it really is well below average for positive integers that > are out there. Think how big infinity must be. It is really huge. Now I think that kind of size deserves some respect."

It's true that whatever positive integer you think of, most positive integers are much larger than that. But infinity is not a number. If you never die, you will experience an Nth birthday for every positive integer N, but you will never experience an infinitieth birthday. (If you did, what birthday would you have experienced the previous year?) As a practical matter, you'll eventually lose track of N, since the data storage capacity of the accessible universe is finite. (This is known as the "year bignum problem.")

My favorite illustration of how large numbers can get is the Kempner series. It's easily proven that the harmonic series (the sum of the reciprocals of the positive integers) diverges, i.e. it gets large without limit. But it does so very slowly. If you want the sum to reach 100, you need to add up more than  $10^{43}$  terms.

A Kempner series is a harmonic series from which all numbers containing any particular substring are excluded. For instance the sum of the reciprocals of the positive integers which don't contain your ten-digit phone number. It's guaranteed to converge.

The DVD of, say, THE MARTIAN, is just a big binary integer. Exclude all integers which have that bit string in their binary digit sequence, and the sum of the reciprocals of the remaining integers will converge.

At first this seems very counterintuitive. It must be very unlikely for an integer to just happen to contain that movie. Right? Actually, the vast majority of integers contain it, as the vast majority of integers are very very large. If that movie contains G bits, then any number with more than  $2^{(G+1)}$  bits is more likely to contain it than not. And most numbers have far more bits

than that.

And for every copy of the movie in the integer, the integer will probably also contain about  $G$  copies of the movie with one bit wrong, about  $G^2/2$  copies of the movie with two bits wrong, about  $G^3/6$  copies of the movie with three bits wrong, etc. Similarly with all other movies of about the same size.

Mark says, "Then again, I use to look at my father's old camera. You used to twist the lens to set how far away the object you were photographing was. There was a scale around the lens with distances marked. I do not remember the shortest distance you could set the lens for, but I do remember the greatest distance you could set the camera for. It was infinity. This scale only went about a third the way around the lens and it went up to \*infinity\*!!! You could actually set this camera to take pictures of objects out as far as infinity."

As I'm sure you know, that just meant the rays of light were parallel. In practice, nobody ever took pictures of objects as far away as infinity, as no objects are that far away, and if they were, the light couldn't have reached here from them yet, and if it had, it would have been much too dim to photograph.

Mark adds, "And this scale went only about a third the way around the lens. Sadly the camera maker designed the lens so that the scale only went about that third. The camera range only went to infinity and stopped there. (Only to infinity? That's an \*ONLY???\*.) I wanted to "fix" the camera so that it went to infinity and beyond. But even so I could not interest my father in the project. Can you imagine that? He didn't care to take pictures of what was out there beyond infinity.

As I'm sure you know, that would just mean the rays of light were converging rather than diverging. The numbers make more sense if you use diopters (inverse meters) rather than meters.

As a rule of thumb, an object is at visual infinity if the diameter of the lens is less than the resolution of the object. The moon is at visual infinity to a meter-wide lens unless you hope to resolve objects less than a meter wide on the moon. There are spy satellites from which the Earth hundreds of miles below is not at visual infinity.

Speaking of reciprocals, have you ever noticed that there are more points inside the unit circle than outside it? For every point outside the circle with distance  $D > 1$  from the center, there's a corresponding point inside it at distance  $1/D$  from the center. And there's one extra point in the circle, the center itself, which doesn't correspond to any point outside the circle.

There are lots of paradoxes involving infinity. Banach-Tarski is one of my favorite. But paradoxes involving finite numbers are much more interesting. [-kfl]

Mark responds:

Too far to walk. I would at least see if I could grab the shuttle.

I am not sure where you are going with the space-filling-walk argument--if there is no place you are not going in the universe. I suppose you could go everywhere if you are following a space-filling curve which in this case would be an outer space filling curve.

"Hyperoperation" is a new one on me. I will read what Wikipedia says about it.

The birthday paradox is much like the bird paradox where the bird eats the oldest seed. Every seed gets eaten eventually. My memory may be failing, but wasn't it true that infinity is not an ordinal number, but it is a cardinal number? You can use it to measure the size of sets, but not count up to it?

I assume you realize much of what I wrote about the camera was in jest. [-mrl]

And Radovan Garabik responds:

Keith Lynch writes, "It's true that whatever positive integer you think of, most positive integers are much larger than that. But infinity is not a number. If you never die, you will experience an  $N$ th birthday for every positive integer  $N$ , but you will never experience an infinitieth birthday. (If you did, what birthday would you have experienced the previous year?)"

If we operate on 1st order Peano axioms, then there is an answer: if you denote your infinitieth birthday as  $N$ th, then the previous year you celebrated  $(N-1)$ th birthday.  $N$  (as well as  $N-1$ ) could be infinite, or just very large, but you could not tell which, since their size will be waaaaay bigger than anything you can compute and you've lost track a long time ago anyway.

Of course, going from your  $(3^{3^3})$ th birthday to your (infinite  $N$ )th birthday might take a long time.

Alternately, if your [birthdays] are not discrete, you infinitieth birthday could be the limit of your mindstate as  $t \rightarrow$  infinity, assuming there is a limit. Arriving there would be a problem, though (but much lesser problem than the first kind of

infinities).

Keith goes on, "As a practical matter, you'll eventually lose track of N, since the data storage capacity of the accessible universe is finite. (This is known as the 'year bignum problem.')

Assuming the growth of your mind is bounded.

Keith writes, "There are lots of paradoxes involving infinity. Banach-Tarski is one of my favorite. But paradoxes involving finite numbers are much more interesting."

Are there any paradoxes involving finite numbers? (not just counter-intuitive theorems). Even Banach-Tarski could reflect just an inadequate axiomatic system - you can give up the choice and accept the measures instead :- ) [-rg]

Tim Merrigan writes:

I don't know what color will be on top, but it will appear to be brown or gray, depending on whether the infinitely thin layers act as pigments or light gels, respectively. [-tm]

[There is much more in the thread in rec.arts.sf.fandom at <https://tinyurl.com/void-rasff-infinity> but it is too interleaved for me to include here. -ecl]

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

QUEEN VICTORIA'S BOOK OF SPELLS edited by Ellen Datlow and Terri Windling (ISBN 978-0-765-33227-1) is steampunk, but with fantasy instead of technology. "Victorian fantasy" or "gaslamp fantasy" does not quite describe it, because it differs from fantasy \*written in\* the Victorian era in being very much infused with 21st century sensibilities. I have always liked the anthologies edited by Datlow and Windling, particularly their "Year's Best Horror and Fantasy" volumes, and they do not disappoint with this one, even though this is composed of works specifically written for this volume rather than collected from other sources.

MY FRIEND MR CAMPION by Margaret Allingham (ISBN 978-1-848-58025-1) is a collection of mysteries centered around amateur sleuth Albert Campion. (In keeping with British usage, the "Mr" in the title has no period after it; the British rule is that abbreviations are followed by a period only if they form an initial segment of the word. Hence, "Hon." and "Rev.", but "Dr" and "Mr".) There is nothing very amazing or startling about these--they are just cozy comfort reads, which is not necessarily a bad thing. Allingham wrote twenty-one Campion novels and enough short stories to fill four collections. [-ecl]

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Quote of the Week:

The first thing which I can record concerning myself is,  
that I was born. These are wonderful words. This life,  
to which neither time nor eternity can bring diminution--  
this everlasting living soul, began. My mind loses  
itself in these depths.

--Groucho Marx

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