



On occasion we will get a letter of comment in the MT VOID in which the author will use swearwords. I usually tell the reader that some of our destination sites use so-called "nanny filters" that scan the document for naughty words and rejects the entire peace of mail if it finds one. (Now, I am not happy to have anybody's VOID be rejected. If we are going to stifle anybody's writing for the VOID I think we would prefer it to be our idea, not the idea of some piece of software on a foreign machine that I have never met and have never read its criteria for censorship.)

I guess I hate to see a future in which cussing is the norm and is expected. But then it does not matter if I hate it or not. Nobody has asked for my vote. Nor is anyone likely to. Dammit! [-mrl]

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**FIRST MAN** (film review by Mark R. Leeper):

**CAPSULE:** This is a film that speculates on and tries to recreate the experience of being Neil Armstrong, going from his early flying days to his terrestrial flying days to his flight to the moon where he became the first human being to step out onto our satellite. Then there is the trip home and his being reunited with his wife and family. Rather than giving us the usual wide vistas of space, Chazelle locks in close on faces to give us emotional impact. Personally I would have preferred the spectacle even if that approach has been common before. Directed by: Damien Chazelle; Written by: Josh Singer. Rating: low +2 (-4 to +4) or 7/10

Neil Armstrong was the first human ever to set foot on any celestial body besides Earth. One would expect that he would be a hero to the majority of his fellow humans. But to the best of my knowledge there have been only two narrative movies about him. He did appear as a character in APOLLO 13 and a film I have not seen called QUANTUM QUEST, but I cannot remember ever seeing him portrayed in any other live-action narrative film. Why did it take so long to have him portrayed in a film? I can only speculate. He perhaps did not have audience recognition value. I imagine another factor might be that it would seem to be impossible to tell his story without a good deal spent on special effects. On the other hand, the makers of FIRST MAN have discovered a way to improve on the visual effects and save a bundle at the same time. For the most part they do not show spectacular space scenes. Most of the viewers have probably seen such views before anyway.

Most of what has to be shot is close-ups and medium shots. It was never stated this way, but the way I would describe the photographic approach would be filming the narrative as if the camera were a drone or a flying insect. When a character speaks the camera is likely close in on the face of the speaker or usually showing only his face and chest. That would save having to construct a lot of set behind the camera subject. This way the viewer feels closer to the subject being filmed.

The best film to compare FIRST MAN with would probably be THE RIGHT STUFF. In that film they take some time building the camaraderie of the astronauts and the parallel camaraderie of their wives. FIRST MAN takes a deeper and more serious view of Neil Armstrong and his wife Janet. Neil has a deeper and darker personality stemming especially from the earlier loss of his daughter to cancer. That loss scarred him for life so in spite of the unparalleled accomplishments of his life he remained gloomy for much of his life. In THE RIGHT STUFF we saw how some of the astronauts learned to have fun when interviewed by the press. The Armstrong we see in FIRST MAN is more introverted and buried in his work. It is probably his way to escape from a world that has not treated him as he would have liked. While APOLLO 13's Jim Lovell took pride in his flying skill. FIRST MAN's Neil Armstrong grieves the time he took a plane too high and bounced it off the atmosphere trying to get it back. He uses the importance of his work as an excuse to feed his introversion and build a wall between him and others. The viewer does get a feel of excitement as the great moments draw near, but Armstrong does not appreciate them.

FIRST MAN is the story of man who brings his own inner darkness to add to the darkness of space. I rate FIRST MAN a low +2 on the -4 to +4 scale or 7/10.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1213641/reference>

What others are saying: [https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/first\\_man](https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/first_man)

[-mrl]

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**Harbingers** (letter of comment by Steve & Pat Miller):

In response to [Mark's comments on harbingers](#) in the 10/12/18 issue of the MT VOID, Steve and Pat Miller write:

I enjoy your columns. Thank you. [Likewise. -mrl] Mark's "Harbinger" topic stirred a strong enough reaction, that my fingers started typing, seemingly by themselves:

A major point of this week's IPCC United Nations report (<http://www.ipcc.ch/report/sr15/>) was to itemize those disasters we can PREVENT (or make less severe) by each of us taking action, to limit global temperature rise to 1.5 instead of allowing

rise to 2.0 degrees C.

My wife and I are personally doing our part to eliminate most of our personal GreenHouseGases. We are ALSO mustering "Clean Energy" teams in many Monmouth County towns (and to lesser extent in adjacent counties which we are also indirectly organizing) to personally and collectively take action.

Please alert your readers, who reacted to your "Harbinger" column, to contact us if they wish to:

1. actively participate in a "Your Town for 100% Clean Energy" team in their own town

or

2. just want to keep tabs on activities, which they might join in the future

If interested, email Steve Miller (stevemiller@comcast.net) with first and last name, email address, city of residence, and a "yes" answer to one of the above two questions. [-spm]

**Gender/Sex Selection** (letters of comment by Peter Trei and Tim Merrigan):

In response to [Mark's comments on gender \(sex\) selection](#) in the 10/05/18 issue of the MT VOID, Peter Trei writes:

Nit: You're talking about sex selection, not gender selection. There are two biological reproductive sexes (and a small number of people where the development messed up). There are potentially as many genders as there are people, since we all vary in who and/or what we find attractive.

You're also assuming that society must be based on mixed couples having children together in nuclear families.

Our vastly greater wealth today, compared to when those social norms evolved, means that single parenthood is far more feasible than it used to be. Also, same-sex, plural, and polyamorous marriages can change the situation. The classic family is a social construct, enforced by economic scarcity, not something ordained by genetics. Any social structure which can raise physically and mentally healthy children to the point they can start the next generation is potentially viable.

Another factor is: who decides? If a man can decide to produce XX or XY sperm, you have a different situation than if a woman can decide which type she'll let fertilize her ova. If they \*both\* have to agree, you get a third situation.

I could well imagine a future where most people are female, many couples are female-female, and the less common men are contracted in to impregnate couples or singles when needed.

There's a lot of possibilities out there. [-pt]

Tim Merrigan responds:

[Peter writes,] "You're also assuming that society must be based on mixed couples having children together in nuclear families."

Itself a relatively modern innovation, extended families or tribes having been the norm through most of human history and prehistory.

[Peter writes,] "The classic family is a social construct, enforced by economic scarcity,"

and laws,

[Peter writes,] "Another factor is: who decides? If a man can decide to produce XX or XY sperm,"

which, as far as I know, he can't, at the moment. [-tm]

Peter replies:

Sure. But this is an SF group. We're allowed to speculate about the effects of biological engineering, and differing legal environments.

It takes two to make a baby. But the OP didn't specify if choice of sex was under the control of the man, the woman, or both. [-pt]

**Envisioning the Future** (letter of comment by Lee Beaumont):

In response to [Mark's comments on harbingers](#) in the 10/12/18 issue of the MT VOID, Lee Beaumont writes:

I encourage MTVOID readers, and other thoughtful people to envision and describe the future as they would like to see it unfold.

The more comprehensive, specific, and plausible the description is, the more useful it can become as a planning aid.

I wrote a description of the world as I want it to be in 2075.

See: [https://en.wikiversity.org/wiki/Envisioning\\_Our\\_Future/The\\_World\\_We\\_Want\\_in\\_2075](https://en.wikiversity.org/wiki/Envisioning_Our_Future/The_World_We_Want_in_2075)

I developed a freely-available on-line course to help people envision the future.

See: [https://en.wikiversity.org/wiki/Envisioning\\_Our\\_Future](https://en.wikiversity.org/wiki/Envisioning_Our_Future)

[-lrb]

Mark asks:

Are you saying it should be desirable or plausible? And what if you cannot come up with a single future that is both? Frankly, I do not think both are possible at the same time. [-mrl]

Lee responds:

Perhaps that makes you a pessimist. I consider my 2075 vision both desirable and plausible, however it will clearly require rapid advances in applied wisdom. [-lrb]

Mark responds:

I am not sure that my above frame of mind makes me a pessimist. Something is sure doing it. [-mrl]

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

ALL SYSTEMS RED (ISBN 978-0-25021471-3), ARTIFICIAL CONDITION (ISBN 978-0-250-18692-8), ROGUE PROTOCOL (ISBN 978-0-250-19178-6), and EXIT STRATEGY (ISBN 978-0-250-18546-4) by Martha Wells are the four books that form her "Murderbot" series. They are published as part of Tor Books line of novellas, about which my only complaint is the price: \$17.99 for a novella seems rather steep, especially as this makes the cost for the full story, which might otherwise be published as a single volume novel, a rather pricey \$71.96. Most novels normally run \$28.99 or so.

Price aside (and there are always libraries), I definitely recommend this series. It's noir fiction with a twist: the first- person narrator is a security bot, basically a robot (with some organic parts) who has broken free of its controlling software and is now functioning independently, although no one else knows this (at least at first). Each book has a mystery and/or a task that requires what is effectively a private eye. Think of it as a cyborg Philip Marlowe.

Wells intended the character to be truly genderless, and the character uses "it" and its declensions to refer to itself. She also has characters who are "tercera" and use the pronouns "te" et al, so our narrator need not appear either male or female when attempting to pass for human.)

Because it has so many interesting aspects--noir, enhanced humans, gender issues, the rise of corporate governments--I recommend the "Murderbot" series. [-ecl]

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Quote of the Week:

My father would take me to the playground, and put me  
on mood swings.

--Jay London

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