

MT VOID 10/26/18 -- Vol. 37, No. 17, Whole Number 2038

Mt. Holz Science Fiction Society
10/26/18 -- Vol. 37, No. 17, Whole Number 2038

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

November 8: FRANKENSTEIN and BRIDE OF FRANKENSTEIN (films) and
 FRANKENSTEIN by Mary Shelley (novel), Middletown Public
 Library, 5:30 PM
 November 15: HOW TO CHANGE YOUR MIND by Michael Pollan;
 also "Oceanic" and "Reasons to Be Cheerful" by Greg Egan,
 Old Bridge Public Library, 7:00 PM
<http://www.gregegan.net/OCEANIC/Complete/Oceanic.html>
<https://tinyurl.com/void-cheerful>
 December 13: THE THING FROM ANOTHER WORLD (film) and "Who Goes
 There?" by John W. Campbell, Jr. (short story), Middletown
 Public Library, 5:30 PM
 December 20: TBD, Old Bridge Public Library, 7:00 PM
 January 24, 2019: THREE-BODY PROBLEM by Cixin Liu
 March 28, 2019: WE by Yevgeny Zamyatin (1920)
 May 23, 2019: DIASPORA by Greg Egan
 July 25, 2019: THE STRANGE CASE OF DR. JEKYLL AND MR. HYDE
 by Robert Louis Stevenson (1886)
 September 26, 2019: TBD from Europe/Latin America/Africa/Canada
 November 28, 2019: THE SLEEPER WAKES by H. G. Wells (1910)
 January 23, 2020: TBD from Europe/Latin America/Africa/Canada
 March 26, 2020: TBD by Edgar Rice Burroughs
 May 28, 2020: TBD from Europe/Latin America/Africa/Canada
 July 23, 2020: TBD by Jules Verne
 September 24, 2020: TBD from Europe/Latin America/Africa/Canada
 November 19, 2020: Rudyard Kipling:
 "A Matter of Fact" (1892)
 "The Ship That Found Herself" (1895)
 ".007" (1897)
 "Wireless" (1902)
 "With the Night Mail [Aerial Board of Control 1]" (1905)
 "As Easy as A.B.C. [Aerial Board of Control 2]" (1912)
 "In the Same Boat" (1911)

Northern New Jersey events are listed at:

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

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

(All times are listed in the Eastern Time Zone)

Well, when you read this Halloween and October will be nearly over. And Turner is headed back to more serious films, but perhaps no less fun. One favorite is the film **ROBIN AND MARIAN** (1976).

They say that all good things must come to an end sooner or later. In this film we return to the man who had been the callow young defender of the poor, Robin Hood. This is the story of Robin Hood's last adventure. Robin spent his early life defending King Richard's throne from the ravages of evil King John. Now late in his life Robin is realizing that Richard was no better a king than King John would have been. Returning to Sherwood Forest he sees what time has done to his men and to Marian. And once again he has to fight the Sheriff of Nottingham. Time has not done a lot to tame the Sheriff of Nottingham, played by Robert Shaw. Sean Connery plays Robin Hood, Audrey Hepburn is Maid Marian, and Richard Harris is Richard the (not so) Lionheart.

As the film opens King Richard has heard a ridiculous urban legend (if one can apply that term to something in the Middle Ages) that a worthless old castle actually hides a giant nugget of gold. Richard tells the still faithful Robin to kill the old man who lives in the castle and to fetch the gold. Robin cannot fetch what does not exist. Soon the old man and the king are both dead and Robin and Little John are headed back to Sherwood to see if they can find Robin's old heartthrob Maid Marian. What follows is a blustery adventure combined with a serious look at the implications of aging. Not an easy pairing. [Friday, November 23, 6:00 PM]

In **AMERICA AMERICA** (1963) Elia Kazan tells the story of how his uncle Stavros travelled mostly on foot across Turkey in order to fulfill his greatest wish, to migrate to America. Much of the trip involved presented very hard problems and more than a few dangers. He seems to have lived most of his life in that one seemingly endless journey. His family had scraped together what small valuables they had to pay for his dream. Some of his adventures are comic some are tragic. The film is full of Old World Turkish charm, which is precisely what Stavros wants to leave behind. **AMERICA AMERICA** is a big, big film. It is big in time at 168 minutes long. It is a big story. It is about how the dedication of a young man to his ambition changes the history of his family. It is about the cost of that dream. It is an especially important film at a time when the country he was so desperately seeking is questioning its own attitude toward immigrants. [Sunday, November 18, 10:00 PM]

What is the best film of the month? I have to go with **AMERICA AMERICA**. [-mrl]

SOLIS (film review by Mark R. Leeper):

CAPSULE: Talk about your bad mornings after. Asteroid miner Troy Holloway wakes up one day and finds his living quarters are almost too hot to be used. And it is getting hotter. It seems he has survived an accident of some kind, but worse is to come. Much worse. He is actually in an escape capsule, but one he cannot control and he is drifting directly into the sun. He will burn or broil unless he can find a way to turn the path of his flight. His only connection to his people is Control, a voice he talks to on a bad radio connection. The film is really in need of better sound editing. Directed by: Carl Strathie; Written by: Carl Strathie. Rating: +1 (-4 to +4) or 6/10

The viewer (who might better be called "the listener") can follow along with the story only by listening to the voices of Troy Holloway (played by Steven Ogg) and Commander Roberts (never seen but who represents Control) and seeing what Troy does with (or against) Control's orders. Their conversation tells you about the two people and about what is happening in the pod. Take away their communications and all that is left is a large pile of special effects. But taking away the conversation is exactly what the sound mixer does. You hear Troy say something indistinct and Roberts says something muddled and then you see some sort of fiery images as a special effect. I suspect that much of the audience will be left with a lot of special effects and with not much of a coherent story. I cannot speak for the whole audience, but I was one of those left with special effects for much of the film. The special effects are generally simple and inexpensive, but they get the job done sufficiently. This film is a throwback to the days when not much effects work was needed. To get the full effect of the visuals, this film shows a lot of scenes washed in red. Red is the primary color through most of the film. There appeared to me to be one problem. There should have been more solar flares and prominences.

The film has little pieces of homage to films not very old yet. This film shows only one person ever on screen, much like the claustrophobic film **LOCKE**. The film might be even better compared with **GRAVITY** with its one person trying to save his life. The treating of the problem as a scientific question is not unlike what we saw in **THE MARTIAN**.

Mr. Ogg does seem to have one thing in common with the old steel-jawed heroes of science fiction film heroes of the past.

Neither seems to break a sweat. The film would probably be much better if the sound mixer made the dialog easier to understand. I rate SOLIS a +1 on the -4 to +4 scale or 6/10.

Release date: will be reaching theaters and VOD on October 26, 2018.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt6134274/reference>

What others are saying: <https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/solis/>

[-mrl]

MURDERS IN THE ZOO (1933) (film retrospective by Mark R. Leeper):

CAPSULE: A world-famous wild animal trapper travels all over the planet to find animals for his zoo. What the world does not know about him is that he is insanely jealous of his wife and plans horrific deaths for those who might want her. When he is afraid that his wife has cheated on him he murders the people he suspects and lets the zoo animals take care of the remains. The Paramount film stars will-be horror actor Lionel Atwill. Directed by ex-silent director and actor A. Edward Sutherland; Written by: Seton I. Miller, Philip Wylie. Rating: +1 (-4 to +4) or 6/10

Paramount is known for its 1932 horror production ISLAND OF LOST SOULS, one of the greatest early sound horror films. It took place against a jungle-like background. What is not so well remembered is that the following year they made another grisly horror film with another tropical setting. Lionel Atwill plays the great wild animal collector and zoologist Dr, Eric Gorman, who collects more wild and dangerous animals than his zoo can safely handle. He is world-famous for his successful safaris. What is less known about him is that he is a psychotic who is jealous of any man who could possibly steal his wife's attentions.

In the early 1930s Universal was making effective horror films like FRANKENSTEIN, DRACULA, and THE MUMMY, but the audience would know they were looking at a normal human and a thick covering of makeup. Paramount was showing real dangerous animals in the hopes that would make them seem more effective that they were real and threatening animals that did not require hours in the makeup chair. Gorman's favorite murder weapon is the deadly black mamba snake.

As the film opens Gorman is having vengeance on another man whom he caught kissing his wife. Gorman sews together the lips of the man in the style of a shrunken head. Then Gorman is preparing to return to the United States carrying on his shoulder a huge chip.

MURDERS AT THE ZOO is a fairly typical murder story, but for the fact that the devices used to kill are animals that really exist. It is a short B-movie only 63 minutes. What is more far too much of this short film is spent with the zoo's new publicity agent, played by comedian Charlie Ruggles. Ruggles could be a funny comedian at the right time and place. He was most definitely not in the right time and place. While people are being brutally killed in shocking scenes Ruggles is holding up the plot while he clowns around. He manages to take shocking plot twists and make them simply irritating. And though Ruggles does nothing to move the plot along, he receives top-most billing.

Director A. Edward Sutherland was a director and actor in the silent days. That may account for the long, silent stretches in the film. Still, the horror and the comedy do not work well together. I give MURDERES IN THE ZOO a +1 on the -4 to +4 scale or 6/10.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0024360/reference>

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

[-mrl]

Profanity (letters of comment by Gary Labowitz, Lee Beaumont, and Rincewind):

In response to [Mark's comments on profanity](#) in the 10/19/18 issue of the MT VOID, Gary Labowitz writes:

On the use of profanity: I was at a science fiction meeting a number of years back (maybe 35 - 40) where we had a speaker who was discussing profanity in use in a new book she had written. I don't remember the author's name, but it was a woman who came down to Philly from Boston or New York. My memory fails me on the details.

However, her comments included her thesis that sometimes one simply must use "bad wordies" when it is necessary to make clear and forceful what was being described. Her example was a line from her new book where she was describing a building

at an old, respected university. She didn't want the common "ivy covered, old but well kept" kind of description but she wanted to give the feeling that it was old, had a continuity about it, but was alive with all the foibles of life. Her sentence included the phrase "...with generations of birds, f**king under the eaves." Very evocative. Her point, at that time was that she didn't want to use other terms she had tried, like "reproducing under the eaves," or "procreating under the eaves," and some others as being too clinical or dull. She insisted that the term "f**king" hit the mark and she decided it just HAD to be used. It seemed that all agreed, especially her publisher.

Being a cantankerous citizen, I thought about this quickly and suggested another answer. I offered up that I thought a good substitute would have been "...with generations of birds, getting laid under the eaves." This wasn't taken with much disapproval from the crowd. Oh well, I thought it was nicer. And look where her approach (and lots of others) has gotten us. [-gl]

Lee Beaumont writes:

I believe we are most expressive when we use swear words simply as vocabulary words. As with any vocabulary word, it becomes boring and unexpressive to overuse any particular word. Also, we restrict our range of expression when we artificially omit words from our vocabulary. Too often people use swear words in an attempt to shock, gain attention, or demonstrate their autonomy. When a swear word is chosen for its shock value, nuances of expression are lost. Describing him as my F**ing boss rather than as my tyrannical ignorant boss overlooks an opportunity to be precise. Choosing prissy euphemisms when a well-know swear word would be authentic is also annoying. [-lrb]

Mark responds:

But a curse word is not a vocabulary word. Vocabulary words are of limited range. I don't think there are many words whose definition is more than a page in the Oxford English Dictionary. On the other hand a swear word can be used to apply to an unbounded set of meanings. Anybody can use it to apply to just about any definition including contradictory definitions. And because its usage is so loose it means really nothing. A word that can mean anything means nothing. [-mrl]

Rincewind writes:

The general attitude on cursing reminds me of a line in the film BUTTERFLIES ARE FREE; the heroine has brought her director to the apartment of the blind folk singer she has started a relationship with. The singer's mother, an award winning author of books with a blind protagonist based on her son is listening as the director describes the play the girl is going to be in:

"The curtain comes up and Stephane is naked, writhing on her back, dying of a drug overdose!"

MOTHER: "And you expect people to pay to watch this?"

DIRECTOR: "Mrs. Douglas, this is life!"

MOTHER: "So is diarrhea, but I don't consider it entertainment!"

[-rw]

Gender Pronouns (letter of comment by Gary Labowitz):

In response to [Evelyn's comments on gender pronouns](#) in the "Murderbot" series in the 10/19/18 issue of the MT VOID, Gary writes:

The question of sex-reference has bothered me for a long time. While in college I wrote essays on the use of male pronouns when the sex of an entity is unknown. I was taught, by the male dominated, historical educational system, that you use "him" or "her" when known and "him" when unknown or mixed. Hmmm. Along comes "women's lib" objecting to it always being male. (I refer to sex here, because the determination is based on ones DNA and not the social desires one wants to be treated as. That would be gender.) Of course, if you use gender, it becomes ambiguous at times who exactly is being spoken about. I still find it rasping in my mind to refer to a male (sex) as "her" (gender). I always argued that the use of the grammatical term "him" was not referring to a male in the sense of "a person with a penis." But it becomes confusing to me to say "Alice got on his motorcycle and left," because, well, was it a man or a woman according to the DNA?

I have dealt with a number of transgendered, transgenering, crossdressers, sex impersonators, etc. for quite a while, counseling them at meetings and in the theater. I even edited a journal for a mixed gender social group for about two years when I was actively counseling. (Mostly nice persons, with the usual mix of pains in the groin types. See, I'm not sexist; it doesn't always have to be "... in the ass," by which most people mean "arse,." or "bum."

Anyway, I have seen many attempts to get out of this mess, which currently stands with dictionaries (which are descriptive rather than proscriptive) now using the plural "their" to replace "his or her." Example: "Will any student knowing the answer please raise their hand." I always picture a classroom with a big sponge hand in the back that belongs to the class as a whole and one of the students raises it. That would be their hand.

Another suggestion I read seemed okay to me. It was to drop the "th" or "h" from personal pronouns without referring to the gender. Thus, instead of "his, her, and their" you use "is, er, and eir." It's almost the way we speak. "Give 'em the business. Give 'er a poke. Give im a punch." When you say it, it's about right. "A student should raise eir hand." That keeps it singular and gender non-specific.(It make one sound Irish!) It could be written "A student should raise 'eir hand."

Simple? Certainly easier to switch to than metric (which we will do Any Day Now.)

Nice issue. Now I must go out and find me a Murderbot book. Sounds intriguing! [-gf]

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

PRIDE AND PROMETHEUS by John Kessel (ISBN 978-1-4814-8147-2) is a (non-humorous) mash-up of Jane Austen's PRIDE AND PREJUDICE and Mary Shelley's FRANKENSTEIN. He does this by having Mary Bennet (the most "scholarly" and least written about of the Bennet sisters) meet Victor Frankenstein and become involved in his conflict with the Creature. I put "scholarly" in quotes because Austen portrays her as someone who thinks she is more intelligent and profound than she is. In PRIDE AND PROMETHEUS, which takes place several years later, Mary recognizes this failing in herself, and also that even recognizing it, she cannot completely overcome it.

Kessel has an understanding of both PRIDE AND PREJUDICE and FRANKENSTEIN. In fact, he has a more perceptive view of Austen's characters than Austen did. Austen crafted each character to be a certain type, but the interactions, and the reactions of others, were not as well thought through. As described from Mary's point of view:

"Elizabeth's place in the family relative to Mary's--and her other sisters'--was evident to all. She was the stable center of their emotional whirlwinds. Their father's favorite, she had his quick wit and sardonic view of society, but she also possessed a heart that could be moved. Unlike Kitty and Lydia, Lizzy had never been unkind to Mary, but at some point Mary had realized that Lizzy spent their time together stifling her annoyance at Mary's hopeless pomposity, her inability to get beyond her copybook morality, and her vanity at thinking herself wise.

"Mary envied Lizzy's adroitness. Lizzy could say unexpected things and, though she might offend some people, always came out all right, whereas Mary, saying things in no way offensive, drew sidelong glances. Lizzy had despised Darcy and then she had married him, and yet no one in the family thought her a poor judge of character. Mary had admired Mr. Collins and then come to despise him, yet she got no credit for an increase of sense."

Kessel also has some thoughts on aspects of Shelley's "philosophy" as expressed, or rather, not expressed or even considered. For example, regarding creating a wife for the Creature without regard to *her* feelings is something Kessel also addresses. He (in the character of Mary Bennet) observes that the female Creature was created for the male (Adam) without asking her what she thought about it, and Adam names her "Eve" rather than her choosing her own name. However, Mary "rationalizes" this by observing that in English society of the early 19th century, women were often given to men in marriage without much regard for their feelings in the matter.

Kessel has captured both PRIDE AND PREJUDICE and FRANKENSTEIN, while adding a modern sensibility to the characters and plot. I strongly recommend PRIDE AND PROMETHEUS. [-ecl]

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Quote of the Week:

Never fight an inanimate object.
--P. J. O'Rourke

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