

And the next scene is a montage of men and women, Jews and Muslims, blacks and whites. Tibetans and Chinese. Once we see it is a threat to all of us working altogether we work together to save us all.

And despite all odds I lived to see it. We must all see it. And what do I see happen? I see a whole bunch of fights over who gets a six-pack of rolls of toilet paper. We just never learned to cooperate with each other. Perhaps we are getting what as a race we deserve. Think about it. Then GO HOME!!! [-mrl]

It's Not Just the Animals (comment by Evelyn C. Leeper):

Volcanos in Iceland Could Cause Disruption for Centuries

"Volcanic activity is escalating in a region of Iceland that has not erupted for 800 years, with scientists warning it could cause disruption for centuries to come.

"Since 21 January, the Reykjanes peninsula south-west of Iceland's capital, Reykjavik, has experienced more than 8,000 earthquakes and about 10cm of land uplift due to magma intrusions underground."

<https://amp.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/10/awakening-volcanic-region-reykjanes-peninsula-iceland-disruption-centuries>

Anak Krakatoa Is Erupting Again

"Anak Krakatau (Child of (fellow volcano) Krakatau) volcano in Lampung erupted on Friday, spewing out a 200-meter-high column of ash and smoke. There has been bad feeling about Krakatau, with filmmakers making a film called KRAKATOA, EAST OF JAVA. The truth is that it is WEST of Java.

"The Center for Volcanology and Geological Disaster Mitigation's (PVMBG) magma volcanic activity report said that the first eruption lasted one minute and 12 seconds starting at 9:58 p.m., when it spewed out ash and smoke 200 meters high.

"The volcanology center reported a second eruption at 10:35 p.m. that lasted for 38 minutes and 4 seconds, spewing out a 500-meter-high column of ash that blew to the north."

<https://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2020/04/11/anak-krakatau-erupts-loud-rumble-heard-in-virus-stricken-greater-jakarta.html>

And the Forest Around Chernobyl Is Burning, Spiking Radiation Levels

"Radiation levels near the site of the Chernobyl nuclear reactor disaster have spiked [from a norm of 0.14 to a level of 2.3] as firefighters battle to contain two forest fires in the area. A fire covering around 50 acres broke out on Saturday afternoon near the village of Vladimirovka, within the uninhabited Chernobyl exclusion zone, and responders were still fighting two blazes on Monday morning, Ukrainian emergency services said in a statement.

<https://www.cnn.com/2020/04/06/europe/chernobyl-fire-radiation-scli-intl-scn/index.html>

And lest you thought the animals were gone:

"For centuries, humans have pushed wildlife into smaller and smaller corners of the planet. But now, with billions in isolation and city streets emptied, nature is pushing back. Wild boar have descended onto the streets of Barcelona. Mountain goats have overtaken a town in Wales. Whales are chugging into Mediterranean shipping lanes. And turtles are finally getting some peace."

https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/the_americas/coronavirus-wild-animals-wales-goats-barcelona-boars-brazil-turtles/2020/04/14/30057b2c-7a71-11ea-b6ff-597f170df8f8_story.html

[-ecl]

CONTAGION (film review by Mark R. Leeper):

[This seemed like a good time to re-run this review from 2011.]

CAPSULE: Director Steven Soderbergh and screenwriter Scott Z. Burns give us a fast-paced and grim scenario of a nasty but all-too-possible avian flu was released and spread through the environment. There are about six strands of plot running through the scenario, each with a recognizable actor playing the main character. In spite of the presence of major stars Soderbergh gives us the confidence that he is not tweaking the film to exaggerate the drama or excitement. Even without the

usual tropes of science fiction, this is--among other things--an excellent science fiction techno-thriller. Rating: low +3 (-4 to +4) or 8/10

CONTAGION begins with a cough. Beth Emhoff (played by Gwyneth Paltrow) is in an airport calling on her cell phone talking to a man--not her husband--about their recent sex. Beth does not know it but she is dying. And she is killing perhaps thousands who touch what she has touched. And they are killing thousands more as the contagion spreads by touch. We see a staccato montage of the sickness being spread by touch and by air travel. And so it begins. Within short days Beth is dead, as is her son. Her husband Mitch (Matt Damon) is seeing his whole world crumble like his life just did. We see what is happening in the outside world through his eyes.

CONTAGION is a science fiction film that is almost purely science extrapolation. There is a minimum of "boy-meets-girl" plotting; there are no fascistic military megalomaniacs (as there was in 1995's OUBREK); there is no last-minute, high-tension race to save the human race. Just about every frame of the film tells what is happening with the epidemic. The filmmakers have taken and filmed an all-too-possible chain of events that might occur if a particularly nasty avian influenza got loose on the world population. Director Steven Soderbergh's rapid-fire of events comes at the viewer almost faster than it can be assimilated. There is very little that happens on the screen that is not advancing the scenario.

The action takes place in about six plot lines, not necessarily distinct. Two pivotal characters are Dr. Ellis Cheever (Laurence Fishburne), a Center for Disease Control official charged with leading the fight against the sickness, and a popular Internet blogger Alan Krumwiede (Jude Law). Each will be the focus of moral issues arising from the pandemic. Each will prove to be selfish in his own way and each will be a threat to the public interest. The film makes a moral distinction between them, but each is dangerous in his own way which is very different from the other's.

One slight departure from the straightforward scenario format is that we start with Day 2 when the pandemic is already out of control. It is by this point too late to avert disaster, but the size of the calamity can be affected. In this way the viewer is immediately swept into a story already in progress. But the source of the epidemic is has to be found and will be revealed to the viewer only at the end of the film. The events of Day 1 are withheld to heighten suspense.

In Soderbergh's hands the film becomes a story very much of the 21st Century. The Internet and the attitude of the public is much more crucial to this film than it was or should have been in OUBREK. The information about the epidemic, be it factual or rumor, is as much a virus on the Internet as the virus is in the real world. The Internet is an important player in the efforts to control the results of the situation. Soderbergh manages to give the film a subdued look to counteract the sensationalism of the subject matter.

CONTAGION demonstrates that science fiction can be used in film for a more serious purpose than telling a superhero story. I rate the film a low +3 on the -4 to +4 scale or 8/10. In a sense this film is an interesting pairing with RISE OF THE PLANET OF THE APES. People who stayed through the closing credits of the APES film will understand how well this film dovetails with that one.

Film Credits: <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1598778/>

What others are saying: http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/contagion_2011/

[-mrl]

THE PLAYER OF GAMES by Iain M. Banks (copyright 1988, Orbit, 391pp, trade paperback, ISBN 978-0-316-00540-1) (book review by Joe Karpierz):

THE PLAYERS OF GAMES is the second (in publication order, anyway; there are recommendations to read the "Culture" novels in a different order) novel in Iain M. Banks' "Culture" series. It tells the story of Jernau Morat Gurgeh--Gurgeh from now on--who is a highly proficient and skilled game player, possibly the best in the Culture. It doesn't really matter what kind of game; he's good at it. So good that he's bored. He lives a lavish life the Orbital Chiark; he has whatever he wants whenever he wants it. But nothing much is a challenge any more.

Until, that is, he is intrigued by an offer to make a long journey, the purpose of which is unknown to him until he agrees to go. Blackmailed into going because he was caught on a recording cheating at a game to win in a previously unseen spectacular fashion, he makes the decision go to the Empire of Azad to play a game (also called Azad) that is used to determine social rank and political status. The winner of the game becomes Emperor of Azad. The journey takes two years, during which Gurgeh studies the game and develops a good understanding. But since the tactics in the game reflect a person's political, social, and philosophical belief systems Gurgeh is unsure how he will match up against the games strongest players, who have been learning and training for the game all their lives.

We learn throughout the novel that the Empire is *definitely not* the Culture. In fact, quite the opposite. It is decadent and

violent, and there is definitely a separation between the social higher class and the rest of the Empire. At one point, Gurgeh is ready to give up on the game, figuring that he'd done well enough to get as far as he did. He felt he represented the Culture well, and it was time to go home. The drone assigned to be his companion, Flere-Imsaho, takes him on a tour of one of the cities' brutal underbellies, and shows him some videos designed as entertainment for the upper class. After seeing all this, Gurgeh changes his mind and continues to play. This decision is, of course, reflective of the way of life in the Culture. Gurgeh couldn't stand what he was seeing, and he vowed to play on and show the Empire that the Culture is better than that.

The game itself is fascinating, even though Banks never tells us the rules of any of the games. We know there are boards and different sequences, that it sometimes involves cards, and that players can collaborate to gang up on another player. What the reader does not know are the actual rules of the game. And it doesn't matter. Banks' description of game play isn't about the mechanics of the game; it's about the people playing the game, their reactions toward each other and the situation on the game boards. The mechanics of why Gurgeh does well--or not--in a particular game is not explored. Still, it is fascinating to see the reactions of both Gurgeh and his opponents as he advances through the sequence of games until he is ready to meet the Emperor in the final game. Of course there is gamesmanship off the board as well, as deals are cut, threats are made, and careers are ruined.

The ending is quite the twist--well, there are a couple of twists--and shows that there was an even bigger game being played, one that Gurgeh had no idea about. Both twists felt satisfying and unforced.

I struggled with the book at first. It was slow and didn't hold my interest early, but once Gurgeh reached the Empire and started playing I was riveted to the story. There are some recommendations that *THE PLAYER OF GAMES* should be read as the first book in the "Culture" series, and then *CONSIDER PHLEBAS*. I think there's some merit to that argument. Whichever order they are read in, I believe *THE PLAYER OF GAMES* is superior to *CONSIDER PHLEBAS* and is highly recommended. [-jak]

Hippos, FOUNDATION AND EARTH, and COVID-19 (letter of comment by Jim Susky):

In response to [Mark's comments on hippos](#) in the 04/03/20 issue of the MT VOID, Jim Susky writes:

In the 2020APR03 MT VOID you mentioned that 30 Hippopotamuses "is a serious environmental problem"--that immediately struck me as unlikely (too few zeros in that hippopulation)--so I clicked the link--which was dead--but this one yielded a 2020MAR23 article:

<https://www.cnet.com/news/pablo-escobars-cocaine-hippos-may-benefit-colombias-ecosystem/>

(waitaminnit--I smell an April 1 joke)

Blooming Algae--maybe NOT a joke!

In response to [Evelyn's comments on FOUNDATION AND EARTH](#) in the same issue of the MT VOID, Jim writes:

Evelyn mentioned Asimov's *FOUNDATION AND EARTH* with a main character "as lecherous, sexist, and bigoted as Asimov himself was." It is likely I was a mid-70s, lecherous, sexist, and bigoted teen the one time I read that (third?) volume of the series. I have a searchable copy so I will be sure to see for myself. (I also have *FOUNDATION'S EDGE*--written when Asimov was better "aculturated" to modern sensibilities.)

Evelyn responds:

FOUNDATION AND EARTH was the fifth novel written in the "Foundation" series and the last chronologically.

Regarding COVID-19, Jim writes:

This morning I was struck by the supreme irony of an ABC news headline:

"Communities of color see alarming rates of COVID-19 cases"

with a subtitle:

"Data gathered by some cities and states show African Americans have been disproportionately affected by coronavirus. In Chicago, black people make up nearly 70% of all deaths."

Is it not plain that America's poorest and most vulnerable will bear the brunt of all the *government closures*? It requires no analysis to determine this widespread "cure" is worse than the disease.

This is all but drowned out by all the noise and fear.

I'll make you a Gentleman's bet--one year hence, over 1/2 of all Americans will harbor COVID-19. This is inevitable--such is nature of viral ecosystems.

I just now found a useful bit on YouTube--credible to me. Anyway:

COVID-19 An easy way to know you DON'T have it!

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xt_Sq11RQig

The salient point: 99% of COVID-19 infections are accompanied by a fever--including mild ("99-degree-F") fevers. If you have no fever it's very likely you also are not infected.

I also found that Save The Children and ABC NEWS have also noted the economic impact shut-down policies have made on the 3rd-World poor.

<https://abcnews.go.com/Business/wireStory/coronavirus-crisis-cuts-money-home-poorer-nations-70022515>

<https://www.savethechildren.net/blog/coronavirus-devastating-blow-children-poverty>> [-js]

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

Well, the Hugo et al finalists were announced last week. I am getting further and further out of touch with the current authors, so I have few comments on the fiction categories for 2019. It's good to see Ted Chiang got two nominations "Anxiety Is the Dizziness of Freedom" and "Omphalos"). I thought "To Be Taught, If Fortunate" by Becky Chambers was very good. Given that there is the precedent of the "2005 Prix Victor Hugo Awards Ceremony", one cannot say that Jeannette Ng's "2019 John W. Campbell Award Acceptance Speech" should not qualify. I haven't seen most of the Dramatic Presentation (Long and Short Forms), but US is definitely a worthy finalist, and I liked all of "The Good Place". Yay, Coode Street Podcast!

As an interesting data point, 1,584 people submitted 27,033 nominations for the 2020 Hugo Awards, while 120 people submitted 1,677 nominations for the 1945 Retrospective Hugo Awards. I am curious to see just how many--or rather, how few--nominations it took for some of the Retro finalists to make the ballot.

As for the Retro Hugo fiction, a couple of the shorter pieces have never been reprinted, and several only in paperbacks or reprint magazines from over forty years ago. Were it not for Isaac Asimov's GREAT SF: 6 (1944) a lot more stories would be hard to find. (That the list does not show the new names for several stories that were renamed does not help.) Even so, most of these works (and the Related Works) are going to be next to impossible to find unless they are in the packet.

One of the novels, Eric Linklater's THE WIND ON THE MOON), is difficult/expensive to find. I had thought another, Robert Graves's THE GOLDEN FLEECE, the same until someone posted that it was known as HERCULES, MY SHIPMATE in the United States--and my library has not just a copy, which would be inaccessible during the shutdown, but an *electronic* copy I can check out!

And while the current "Best Series" finalists are pretty well defined (everything that has been written in them so far, unless I am mis-remembering the rules), the Retro finalists are more complicated. For example, "Cthulhu Mythos, H. P. Lovecraft, August Derleth, and others: is a finalist, but there has been a *lot* of stuff written since 1944, so what exactly is eligible in that series? Over a dozen Jules de Grandin stories were written after 1944; are people going to be sure to not consider those? SAVAGE PELLUCIDAR first appeared in 1963--don't count that one either. Close to half the "Doc Savage" novels are too recent to be included, and similarly for "The Shadow" and "Captain Future".

Regarding the Retro Dramatic Works, I understand that there were not enough works in the Long Form (though possibly some Short Form works could have been moved--when the nomination totals come out we'll see if that would have made sense). But the result is that the stand-out work of the year, THE UNINVITED, does not appear at all. Mark and I have commented before on the Short Form category, but I will do a recap of my personal opinions in a future issue.

Best Professional Editor, Short Form, should be interesting. 'Nuff said. [-ec]

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Quote of the Week:

We all have Schroedinger's Virus now. Because we cannot

get tested, we can't know whether we have the virus or not.

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