

MT VOID 10/23/20 -- Vol. 39, No. 17, Whole Number 2142



Mt. Holz Science Fiction Society
10/23/20 -- Vol. 39, No. 17, Whole Number 2142

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FROM HELL IT CAME (1957) (film retrospective by Mark R. Leeper):

The New York Times, which likes to give one-line reviews for movies scheduled for TV has a quick phrase for this film: "FROM HELL IT CAME? BACK SEND IT." Well, I can certainly see where they are coming from. In truth this is not a very good film. Actually, in truth I should use stronger language. The idea of a tribal folklore monster coming to life would not be a bad one. But that is about the only thing that is good about this often genuinely incompetent film. There was a strong temptation to say this is not really a science fiction film at all but a horror film with some science fiction elements.

As I assume most of my readers know in the 1930s up into the 1970s it was common practice for movie theaters, particularly drive-in theaters, to have double or more features, offering the public two or more films for the price of one. Too frequently the second feature was of minimal budget. That sounds like a bad thing, but the second film often was made with more creativity than the main feature attraction. The filmmakers were less likely to depend on large profits and they would take chances trying to find a concept that might intrigue a filmgoer who stumbled on the poster. Instead of something only semi-unimaginative like a giant ant or a giant spider or some other giant arthropod or crustacean, you might get a giant evil, angry tree stump. The latter was featured in FROM HELL IT CAME. Sadly the strange idea of a walking tree was the best part of the movie.

The concept of FROM HELL IT CAME is that if a man has been treated with sufficient injustice, in this life he could come back not as an avenging ghost but as a Tabonga. What is a Tabonga, you ask? It is a walking (and avenging) spirit wrapped in a tree trunk." Do you want to see what an angry tree stump looks like? Well, it sort of looks like a cross between an angry Orthodox rabbi and a cinnamon sticky bun. See if your heart can take it. This is not a very good film, but it has its moments of fun and the idea is weird enough to make up for the film's numerous deficiencies.

The story deals with Kimo, the son of a recently murdered chief of a tribe on a South Pacific atoll near where a nuclear test took place. Kimo is accused of the crime and found guilty through the treachery of his wife. The real murderer is the new

chief of the tribe. But Kimo has been friendly to the visiting American scientists investigating the effects of radiation, and Kimo's friendship has bred suspicion. Kimo's punishment is to have a dagger driven through his heart and to be buried in the ground standing up in a box of tree logs. Kimo's last words are a threat to be stronger in death than his accusers are in life.

After the execution, the plot action slows down as the scientists tell each other things they should already know about the background of the story. Subtle how the script works! But true to Kimo's curse his vengeful spirit does come back. Out of his grave grows a stump with a face. The native tribe has a legend that vengeful spirits can inhabit trees and come to life. The resulting monster is called a vengeful spirit or Tabonga. When the scientists investigate they find the stump has a heartbeat like a human. The scientists find the heartbeat failing and give the tree an experimental drug to strengthen the heartbeat. The Tabonga comes to life as a rubbery-looking version of Kimo with a knife in its trunk and an angry face. Finally in the last twenty minutes of the film the Tabonga goes on a rampage killing Kimo's enemies.

While none of the acting rises above high school play quality, some lines by bit actors are notably terrible. Tod Andrews is the only really familiar actor. He was best known in the late Fifties as TV's Gray Ghost, based on the Southern Civil War hero John Mosby. The Una'Connor Irritation Award goes to Linda Watkins as Mrs. Kilgore who talks incessantly in a horrible Australian accent.

At some point this film had some potential because it did have a really different monster, the Tabonga created by Paul Blaisdel. However, the monster looks like a tree from The Wizard of Oz or a McDonald's ad. It looks entirely too stiff in the upper parts and rubbery around the arms and legs. The angry face on it just looks silly. Where we hear words in the native language it does not sound like a South Pacific dialect. The whole telling of the backplot in details dropped in conversation that is contrived.

The pacing keeps anything of plot interest until the last twenty minutes. Most the script is a holding action to just awkwardly delay any action to transform the two minutes of story-into a seventy-minute film. The film has enough problems without its long dull stretches for people to tell each other what has happened. Just to prove there is always someone who does not get the memo, the tree monster is called a Tabonga in the film but in the trailer it was called a "baronga." The fact that the trailer producer decided the coining of a different generic name for the monster is "a baranga". [-mrl]

Turner Classic Movies is running this on October 29, 5:15 PM. (If this isn't enough tropical horror for you, it will be followed by DEATH CURSE OF TARTU at 6:30PM.) [-ecl]

THE LAST EMPEROX by **John Scalzi** (copyright 2020, Tor Books, 308pp, ASIN: B07QPGW9FS, ISBN: 0765389169, Audible Studios, ASIN: B084RNDS97, 8 hours and 7 minutes, narrated by Wil Wheaton) (audio book review by Joe Karpierz):

John Scalzi is nothing if not dependable and consistent. You know what you're going to get with a Scalzi novel. Fast paced writing, interesting characters, well thought out worlds, and a very satisfying story. THE LAST EMPEROX, the final book in the Interdependency trilogy, is no exception.

The apocalypse is coming. Well, not yet, anyway, but soonish. The Interdependency, a galactic spanning empire held together by the Flow, a not-well-understood method of traveling between systems. The Flow is also Scalzi's way of getting around the FTL drive problem. We know that the Flow is going to collapse, eventually isolating all the systems in the Interdependency. As a reminder, it is called the Interdependency for a reason. Systems can't support themselves, and they all depend on each other via the Flow stream. It is up to Emperox Grayland II--otherwise known as Cardenia Wu-Patrick--and her lover, Flow physicist Lord Marce Claremont, to figure out a way to save the people of the Interdependency.

But of course it's never that easy, is it?

The huge cast of scheming, conniving characters from the first two books, THE COLLAPSING EMPIRE and THE CONSUMING FIRE, are back to make life difficult and interesting for Grayland. Grayland made a lot of enemies at the end of book two, exposing the member of a rebellion and sending them to prison. Nadashe Nohamapetan continues to orchestrate assassination attempts in an effort to get Grayland off the throne and get herself seated there. She's not the only one, of course, and as it becomes obvious that there are as many people that want her dead as want her alive, she needs to come up with that plan to save the people of the empire. What's different about her plan, as opposed to the plans of the opposing nobles, is that she wants to save everyone, and they want to save themselves.

Claremont is a brilliant scientist, and he is working to find a way to save the people of the Empire. He is making headway, but not much--it's slow going. It turns out that he's working with at least one hand tied behind his back, and it is only after the restraint is removed that he can come up with something that will save the entire Interdependency. Not all at once and not immediately, but it can happen.

The other character that I want to mention here, and one that became a fan favorite, is the vulgar, foul-mouth Lady (and we

all use the term loosely) Kiva Lagos, who is not even the head of her own house but has somehow been put in charge of the House Nohamapetan financial assets (which believe me, comes in handy here) as well as being assigned to the Emperor's Executive Council. To say that she has more than a few enemies is an understatement.

So, in 308 pages (or 8 hours and 7 minutes, which is the way I consumed the novel), Scalzi manages to summarize what has gone before, continue the palace intrigue, deliver a terrific story, and give the reader a satisfying ending while managing to throw a few surprises in for good measure. And while Scalzi has tied up this story very nicely, there are threads out there that he has left dangling that he could write additional novels in the Interdependency universe, although if he does only time will tell.

As he did with the first two books in the series, Wil Wheaton narrates with his usual enthusiasm for the story and the characters. I can hear Scalzi's voice in Wheaton's narration, and there's no one I'd rather have reading Kiva's lines--Wheaton does it so well that it's hard to remember that everyone hated him as Wesley Crusher all those years ago. Beverly would not be happy hearing what is coming out of his mouth. Well, Kiva's mouth, anyway. [-jak]

GALILEO AND THE SCIENCE DENIERS by Mario Livio (book review by Gregory Frederick):

This is a history of science book about Galileo and the beginnings of modern science based on mathematics, observation and experimentation to investigate the World and the Solar System. But also it covers the difficulty that Galileo had to deal with when the Catholic Church tried to censor him. Using a much-improved telescope created by Galileo himself, he observed the Moon, the phases of Venus and the four large moons of Jupiter which orbited Jupiter. After viewing these objects he was convinced that Copernicus was correct in that the Sun was at the center of our Solar System and that the Earth and other planets orbited around the Sun. Until Copernicus most thought that the Earth was at the center of our Solar System and everything orbited around it. Galileo printed his books in Italian instead of Latin so that everyone could read them. Galileo was able to deduce that objects fall with the same gravitational acceleration by using inclined planes and rolling balls down those planes. This way he could slow down the motion and time the movement. Newton used Galileo's ideas and went even farther to create Newtonian physics. Galileo thought that science and religion can co-exist as long as the conclusions of science concerning physical reality are accepted without any intervention of religious beliefs trying to denounce those provable facts. The author went on to state that science today also faces push back from those who deny the scientific facts of climate change and evolution for example. So, though this book is about what happened in the 1600's it is still relevant today. [-gf]

SEVEN OF INFINITIES (letter of comment by Arthur Kaletzky):

In response to [Joe Karpierz's review of SEVEN OF INFINITIES](#) in the 10/16/20 issue of the MT VOID, Arthur Kaletzky writes:

It isn't at all hard to imagine sentient spacecraft having sex with humans: it was pretty commonplace in Iain M. Banks's Culture.

They just make an avatar of the appropriate species and, if applicable, sex and/or gender.

Continent class General Systems Vehicle Gegenbeispiel*, originally of the Culture but now loosely affiliated to the Ah-Forget-It Tendency, by its avatar Arthur Kaletzky (assumed Culture identity: "Sun-Earther Artur Ester dam Bol'shayanikitskaya19") *the translation from Marain into English, Counterexample, doesn't sound nearly as good as the one into German. [-ak]

Musical Accompaniment to Silent Films (letters of comment by Paul Dormer and Gary McGath):

In response to [Evelyn's comments on the musical accompaniment to silent films](#) in the 10/16/20 issue of the MT VOID, Paul Dormer writes:

The problems with the organ at Noreascon Two were reported in the Souvenir book, I recall. (My first visit to the US.)

I went to a showing of AELITA at the Barbican Centre in London about twenty years ago. Live piano accompaniment. Unfortunately, a couple of times the film jammed and melted. The pianist stopped playing until the projectionist fixed the problem.

I recall it was part of a double bill with THINGS TO COME. [-pd]

Gary McGath adds:

I wasn't there [Noreascon Two] but later heard that a Leslie Fish concert was scheduled in a room next to where Kiley was practicing for the movie. The soundproofing was somewhere between inadequate and nonexistent.

Kiley's name was very well known in Boston, thanks to constant mentions on Red Sox broadcasts. [-gmg]

Paul replies:

I hadn't discovered baseball in 1980, although a friend I was travelling with took a shine to it and became a Red Sox fan. There were three of us sharing a motel room somewhere in New England and the Sox were playing the Angels in California so the game was going on late at night. And we were all jetlagged still. Two of us wanted to sleep but Tim wanted to know how the game would end. And believe me, if you've been watching cricket all your life, baseball at first seems very boring. They'd been playing an hour and only scored one run. Some crickets could have scored a century in that time. (The record is still Gary Sobers scoring 36 off of six deliveries.)

I probably had not even heard of Fenway Park in 1980. Last night I stayed up to see the end of the Ray-Astros game. [-pd]

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

[When I discussed offensive attitudes last week, and talked about Arthur Conan Doyle, I didn't mention the most egregious: his treatment of the Mormons in A STUDY IN SCARLET.]

On the Coode Street Podcast, they are doing short conversations with authors, and one question they ask is what comfort reading they are doing during this time of pandemic. So I thought I might give you some idea of my mindset with my comfort reading over the last several months. There are books I am re-reading and (usually) not reviewing.

- Agatha Christie, THE COMPLETE SHORT STORIES OF MISS MARPLE and POIROT'S EARLY CASES, CURTAIN
- Connie Willis, DOOMSDAY BOOK
- J. R. R. Tolkien, THE LORD OF THE RINGS
- James Hilton, LOST HORIZON
- Raymond Chandler, THE LITTLE SISTER
- P. G. Wodehouse, THE WORLD OF JEEVES
- Jose Saramago, THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO JESUS CHRIST
- Olaf Stapledon, LAST AND FIRST MEN
- Christopher Priest, THE GRADUAL
- W. Somerset Maugham, THE TREMBLING OF A LEAF
- China Miéville, THE CITY & THE CITY

Currently on my queue in this category are Jose Saramago's CAIN, Christopher Priest's THE ISLANDERS, and more short stories by W. Somerset Maugham. [-ecl]

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Quote of the Week:

The fundamental laws necessary for the mathematical treatment of a large part of physics and the whole of chemistry are thus completely known, and the difficulty lies only in the fact that application of these laws leads to equations that are too complex to be solved.

--Paul Dirac

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