

version of H. G. Wells' THE TIME MACHINE. Curiously enough, it features an early performance by Rod Taylor who would become the best-known time traveler in cinema a few years later in George Pal's THE TIME MACHINE. A contemporary man is boosted into the future where the descendants of us have evolved splitting into troglodytes and effetes.

The year is 1957 and a manned trip to Mars is engulfed in a mysterious field that looks like fire superimposed over the ship on the film. The ship's crew blacks out, and when they come to, they discover they had traveled at a higher speed than their meters could register. Having crash-landed while unconscious, they at first assume they are on Mars. Earth gravity, oxygen in the air, and trees somehow do not tip them off where they are. All too slowly they realize the primitive planet on which they have landed is Earth after a nuclear war. Civilization has split into two groups. There are the feeble intellectuals who live below ground and the mutated troglodytes who live above ground. The radiation has also made them deformed, typically Cyclopes, for no reason ever made clear. The intellectuals are in the process of dying out due to some sort of genetic simplicity that afflicts only the men. In a tasteful way, bearing in mind that this really is mostly a film for a younger audience, the script implies that the astronauts are to be used for breeding purposes. This is an idea that was "borrowed" by Harlan Ellison in A Boy and His Dog. I wouldn't mention it, but Ellison tended to point out when ideas are borrowed from him, except he does it in a courtroom.

What follows is some fairly uninspired intrigue involving a murder. The real killer is one of the men from this society who is jealous of the attention the women pay to the humans from the 20th century. He is dispensed with in a predictable way and the only effect he had was to use up some screen time without advancing the real plot. Eventually the astronauts are able to re-colonize the surface through the magic of re-inventing the bazooka. The film seems to imply that a bazooka is a very simple weapon. In fact, it is a portable rocket launcher and you don't have to be a rocket scientist to realize that to build a bazooka from scratch you probably need a rocket scientist.

Much of the acting is on the serial level. In spite of the fact that this was a wide-screen production and was intended to have a really nice look, the product as clearly aimed at a younger audience and the acting was no better than would be expected for a children's film. The writing has its share of fluffs also. Lines in the film include looking at Mars, seeing green and saying "if it is grass, there is no reason why there couldn't be life on Mars." Later, looking at the new planet, they repeat the error by walking through obvious vegetation and saying "forest, brush, no sign of life." Ideas of Einstein they attribute to another scientist, but do say he was a successor of Einstein.

The director lavished care on the widescreen photography, but still the look of the film is a bit tacky at times. The costumes of the future males are lame jackets and silly looking head-caps. The women's costumes were designed by Vargas who for years did cheesecake paintings for Playboy magazine. The costumes look like they would have been sexy on paper but just don't work out when implemented in cloth. Much the same can be said of the spiders (though when I saw them as a kid they were pretty frightening). The score by Leith Stevens (who had done Destination Moon, When Worlds Collide, and War of the Worlds) is mediocre. Stevens had done those for Paramount, but here he was working for Warner Brothers.

The plot is heavily rooted in Einstein's Twin Paradox and while the mysterious acceleration is never explained, it would have resulted in an application of the "Twin Paradox" much as was shown. In fact, this is the film I think of when I picture in my mind the Twin Paradox. Unfortunately, I am more likely to picture unrealistic looking giant spiders.

Regarded as a children's film this one isn't bad. It just does not stand up to adult viewing. I rate it low +1 on the -4 to +4 scale.

Turner Classic Movies is running WORLD WITHOUT END on December 3, 11:30 AM. [-mrl]

Another Weird Animal Story (comments by Evelyn C. Leeper):

Scientists have discovered that platypuses are bio-fluorescent and glow green under ultraviolet light:

<https://www.sciencenews.org/article/platypus-glow-blue-green-ultraviolet-light-fluorescent-fur>

[This makes the platypus only the second green mammal \(albeit on a technicality\). The other is the sloth, which is green because of algae which grows in its fur, so I suppose that's a technicality too. \[-ecl\]](#)

Not ANother Weird Animal Story (comments by Evelyn C. Leeper):

The headline says it all: "Utah helicopter crew discovers mysterious metal monolith deep in the desert".

<https://www.cnn.com/style/article/utah-monolith-art-trnd/>

NETWORK EFFECT by Martha Wells (copyright 2020, Recorded Books, ASIN: B084QBWBSV, Length: 12 hrs and 48 mins, narrator Kevin R. Free) (audiobook review by Joe Karpierz):

As a fan of science fiction, unless you've been living under a rock, you've at least heard of the wildly successful "Murderbot Diaries" by Martha Wells. The first four entries were novellas: "All Systems Red", "Artificial Condition", "Rogue Protocol", and "Exit Strategy", with "Artificial Condition" winning the Hugo for Best Novella in 2018. There is no doubt that these were good stories, and the Hugo Award was well deserved.

However, as the series continued on I began to feel that things were going on a bit too long. In my review of "Exit Strategy", I wrote:

"But it should stop here. What I fear is going to happen is that Wells will continue to write 'Murderbot' stories until people get tired of

them. There is no beginning, middle, and end to the 'Murderbot' story. Well, there was, but now it keeps going. People want to know what happened to the Murderbot after "Exit Strategy". People *always* want to know what happens to their favorite characters once a story is done, and they clamor for more. More is not always better. Eventually the great stuff becomes good stuff becomes mediocre stuff becomes bad or uninteresting stuff (see Orson Scott Card's 'Ender' series--and yes, I have an 'Ender' book on my stack waiting to be read and reviewed--and the 'Dune' series (and I have three of those waiting to be read)).

"Stop now, so our memories of the Murderbot will be fond ones."

And, I was right. Well, at least in my opinion. Murderbot and a bunch of folks are captured and taken *somewhere*. It really doesn't matter where that somewhere is. The point is that the story is a basic search and rescue tale, with an old friend being involved. It turns out that the crew of said old friend's ship-- and if you're a fan of the series you can guess who that old friend is--needed rescuing, as did the old friend. The story is that of the rescuing and returning things back to normal.

I didn't give too much of the plot away in part because the plot itself isn't really that new. I know that there are folks out there that will say that there aren't very many, if any, new plots anyway. Fair enough. But, quite frankly, I was bored. There was nothing new or interesting here. This was just another "Murderbot" adventure, much like every week we tune into a new "Doctor Who" adventure. It may or may not be interesting, but it's a good story with at least one familiar character that we know really well, and we're comfortable with it and more or less happy unless it's a real dud.

So, this isn't a real dud. It's a nice, well-written story. It's got a couple of favorite characters who act the way we'd expect them to act. Murderbot is still addicted to bad video, for example. That's a comfortable thing for us to know and read--or, in my case, listen to. Murderbot is, well, Murderbot. It has the same aversion to human contact, the same addiction to bad videos, the same feelings about humans that it has in the past. In short, it's just another "Murderbot" story. It doesn't break any new ground. And maybe it doesn't have to. Maybe that's the point. Maybe "Murderbot" stories are comfort food, and everyone knows we need comfort food (and yes, I will say it) in these unprecedented times. And maybe that's okay. Maybe that's the point. But it's just not enough for me.

I should be clear, though. It's well-written. It's a decent story. But there's nothing new, nothing interesting. It's comfort food. And if you're looking for comfort food, by all means, here it is. If you're looking for something more out of Murderbot, this isn't it.

Narrator Kevin R. Free's style isn't very dynamic. It's serviceable, and gets the job done. I feel as if Free is a drone, well, droning on. I would not go out of my way to listen to other novels narrated by Free.

I know there's at least one more "Murderbot" novel coming out. As a completist, and as someone who has come this far, I'm sure I'll read it. Sadly, I'm not expecting much. [-jak]

Leigh Brackett (letter of comment by Kip Williams):

In response to [Evelyn's comments on Leigh Brackett and THE LONG GOODBYE](#) in the 11/20/20 issue of the MT VOID, Kip Williams writes:

[Evelyn wrote,] "And for this we may have to blame Leigh Brackett, who wrote the screenplay." [-ecl]

Oh, yes. I hate to 'blame' her for things, because she was a lovely GoH at one of the 70s Denver cons I went to (MileHi or Penulti), where they screened another movie she co-wrote with Jules Furthman and William Faulkner, THE BIG SLEEP, and she announced that she'd be writing the screenplay for the sequel to STAR WARS.

She authored the line "[F]ear makes stupid people do wicked things," which has been so useful to me in recent years.

But damn, yeah. She was doing what she was asked for, which was a certain take on Marlowe, and I respect her all over the place, but what a horrid mess.

Elliot Gould, by the way, went a long way to redeeming himself (not in general, but specifically in regard to Marlowe and Chandler) with some fairly solid audiobooks of the novels and longer stories. I went in prepared to sneer at it, and all I can say is I didn't sneer. I've only heard a couple of them, but will keep an ear out for others. [-kw]

STARGIRL (letters of comment by Paul Dormer, Kevin R, and Tim Merrigan):

In response to [Dale Skran's comments on STARGIRL](#) in the 06/19/20 issue of the MT VOID, Kip Williams writes:

By some accident, I just saw this post again in my message archives. Since this was first posted, STARGIRL has turned up on Amazon Prime in the UK and I watched the entire series, which was fun.

For the record, Pat is Courtney's step-father not foster father, having married Courtney's mum, and I thought Luke Wilson brought just the right tone to the role.

However, the opening episode, where blonde cute Californian girl moves to a new town, falls foul of a cheerleader, and is guided by an older man into learning she is a superhero, did seem a bit of a Buffy rip-off to me. [-pd]

Kevin R responds:

The "staff chose her" bit was not in the STARS AND S.T.R.I.P.E. comic. Courtney was using the "Cosmic Converter Belt" she found in Pat Dugan's stuff. It was an adaptation of Ted Knight's "Cosmic Rod" from the second run of ALL-STAR COMICS and dates to the Jan- Feb 1977 issue. #64.* Wally Wood art, which is why it looks so much like the Dynabelt "Len Brown" wore with the Thunder Agents, as DYNAMO. Sly Pemberton used it as the SSK, and he later adventured as Skyman, but he was never "Starman." Courtney got the staff from Jack when he retired. TV always changes stuff, and some of this was treated differently from the comics on "Smallville" in seasons past.

<https://www.comics.org/issue/30619/cover/4/>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sylvester_Pemberton

<https://www.comics.org/issue/20274/cover/4/>

[-kr]

Tim Merrigan replies:

In my experience, the canon of both the Marvel and DC universes is extremely fluid, not only over time but simultaneously between titles using the same characters, e.g. Batman and Detective Comics, where there was no overlap between stories and details of the background. [-tm]

Kevin responds:

Canon wasn't from either of those companies. Woody self-published it!

<https://www.comics.org/issue/22428/cover/4/>

Sure, but after Stan and Jack got the kids hooked on continued stories, DC followed suit, and the revivals of ALL-STAR were done by ex-Marvel writers such as Gerry Conway and Roy Thomas. Roy wrote entire story arcs to rationalize tiny bits of contradictory back-story, inspiring one fan to introduce the term "retroactive continuity," as reported on the letters page of ALL-STAR SQUADRON #18.

<https://www.comics.org/issue/37087/>

<https://www.merriam-webster.com/words-at-play/retcon-history-and-meaning>

"Qualified immunity = vertual impunity."

.... and innteresting orrthoggraffy. [-kr]

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

I have commented at length on Edward Gibbon's THE HISTORY OF THE DECLINE AND FALL OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE, but I was recently listening to John Sutherland talk about Gibbon in the Teaching Company (Great Courses) course on "Classics of British Literature" and he quoted from Gibbon's MEMOIRS OF MY LIFE AND WRITINGS: "After a sleepless night, I trod, with a lofty step, the ruins of the Forum; each memorable spot where Romulus stood, or Tully spoke, or Caesar fell, was at once present to my eye; and several days of intoxication were lost or enjoyed before I could descend to a cool and minute investigation."

Even assuming one grants Gibbon literary license to presume Romulus to be a real person who stood where the legends claimed, Gibbon was completely off the mark on Caesar. While the Senate building was in the Forum (and its ruins still are), when Caesar was killed, the Senate was meeting in the curia in Pompey's Theater, located in Rome's Largo di Torre Argentina archaeological area. This was because the old Senate house was being replaced by a new one, ironically by Caesar and to be called the Curia Julia. Augustus finished this new Senate house, which seems to be where Gibbon places Caesar's death.

Gibbon also is a bit weak on Chinese history, writing, "... the posterity of Confucius having maintained, above two thousand and two hundred years, their peaceful honours and perpetual succession." There were nine dynasties in that time, and it was not always peaceful.

Gibbon would probably not think much of writing workshops: he did not believe in having his friends read his manuscripts, and he also thought his time spent at university was the most worthless time he ever spent.

On a technical level, Gibbon defends his grouping events by nations rather than chronologically. (In fact, I don't think he ever includes any dates at all.) But he did bow to public opinion and put his footnotes at the bottom of each page, rather than grouped at the end of each volume. [-ecl]

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Quote of the Week:

Man is a dog's idea of what God should be.
--Holbrook Jackson

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