

MT VOID 02/26/21 -- Vol. 39, No. 35, Whole Number 2160



Mt. Holz Science Fiction Society
02/26/21 -- Vol. 39, No. 35, Whole Number 2160

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An index with links to the issues of the MT VOID since 1986 is at
http://leepers.us/mtvoid/back_issues.htm.

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

At the risk of stating the obvious, now that all the meetings are Zoomed, you don't have to be in Old Bridge or Middletown or even New Jersey to participate. So if we are discussing one of your favorites, contact me at for Zoom information. Both the Old Bridge and Middletown groups have (temporarily, we hope) switched to Zoom meetings. For Middletown meetings, participants need to watch the film on their own ahead of time as well as reading the book.

February 4, 2021 (MTPL), 7:30PM: THE PRESTIGE (2006) & novel
by Christopher Priest

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MHijGNSQ6TI>
rental: <https://www.amazon.com/gp/video/detail/B003QS67F0/>
<https://tinyurl.com/Priest-The-Prestige-1995>

March 4, 2021 (MTPL), 7:30PM: ENEMY MINE (1979) & novella
by Barry B. Longyear

rental: <https://www.amazon.com/Enemy-Mine-Dennis-Quaid/dp/B000I9U9ZE/>
https://archive.org/stream/Asimovs_v03n09_1979-09/Asimovs_v03n09_1979-09_djvu.txt
reprinted in: REEL FUTURES, THE REEL STUFF

March 25, 2021 (OBPL), 7:00PM: THE MINISTRY FOR THE FUTURE
by Kim Stanley Robinson

April 1, 2021 (MTPL), 7:00PM: A WRINKLE IN TIME (2018) & novel
by Madeleine L'Engle

rental: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sd7UG8-Wwe4>
rental: <https://www.vudu.com/content/movies/details/A-Wrinkle-in-Time/911864>
<https://www.bookscool.com/en/A-Wrinkle-in-Time/1>

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

Martin Gardner once wrote a book about what he called the "Aha!"- experience." That is the instant in problem solving when all the pieces of the puzzle fit together and everything makes sense. MISSION IMPOSSIBLE was an entire TV series designed to create "Aha!" experiences. In each episode the main characters knew exactly what they were doing, but until the end the viewer was

confused. Then at the end everything fit together.

Don't look for that sort of scripting in the current Tom Cruise "Mission Impossible" series or at least look for it in the current "Ocean's 11" series, which seems to leave the viewer guessing until the end of the story.

The Coen Brothers' BLOOD SIMPLE is sort of the dual of TV's MISSION IMPOSSIBLE. It is a film about the "Huh?" experience. Through most of the convoluted plot, it is the viewer who knows what is going on and the characters keep finding out that they only *thought* they knew what was happening. With the exception of the moments when the plot twists, it is really easy to keep track of what is happening. Yet, like RASHOMON, each character has a different understanding of who is doing what to whom. The plot can just be described as slow chaos punctuated with moments of delicious confusion from the characters.

This is a film of very high production values which looks as if it was printed on cheap film stock. Somehow the film stock gives it a gritty feel of authenticity that a slick production would lack. There are some incredible camera shots in this film and it is amazing that they do not feel contrived. It is like reading Victor Hugo: the first time you read a paragraph, you are amazed at how well-written it is, and only secondarily you realize that it really did advance the plot. Scenes in this film are amazing in the same way.

One scene toward the end of the film is particularly haunting. We are in a dark room and someone is shooting holes in the wall from a well-lit room. The effect is one of columns of light sprouting out of a dark wall. The scene fits naturally into the plot, but still is an unforgettable image. The effect was used again in SILVERADO.

In some way I still do not understand, the cameraman is unobtrusively able to make the viewer notice props that will be important later. A prop will become important in the plot and the viewer finds himself thinking, "Yes, I noticed that prop five minutes ago, but it was in a corner of the screen and I thought noticing it was my idea."

[BLOOD SIMPLE, March 20, 12 M]

[-mrl]

THE VIGIL (film review by Mark R. Leeper and Evelyn C. Leeper):

THE VIGIL is a horror film in a Jewish Hasidic setting. The "vigil" of the title is not the sitting shiva after a Jewish funeral, but sitting with the body before the funeral, as tradition demands the body never be left alone. THE VIGIL seems to crank up the supernatural aspect of the "shomer", tying it specifically to protecting the body from demons.

There are some interesting touches. For example, the main character is attending an ex-Hasidic support group, and there are many Jewish references in the set design, which is rich rather than spare.

The film's style seems inspired by Darren Aronofsky and (less likely) Guy Maddin. But the story is still basically a ghost story, and while it is atmospheric and effective, it does not go much further than other horror films.

One problem is that the subtitles for the Yiddish dialogue are in fairly small print. Another is the loud and strident score and sound design.

Released 02/26/21. Rating: low 0 (-4 to +4)

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt10793644/reference>

What others are saying: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/the_vigil_2019

[-mrl]

Westerns (letter of comment by Peter Rubinstein):

In response to [various comments on Westerns](#) in the 02/19/21 issue of the MT VOID, Peter Rubinstein writes:

With respect to "Westerns" in space, how about FIREFLY and SERENITY? And for that matter, wasn't "Star Trek" originally pitched as "Wagon Train to the Stars"? [-pr]

THE OPPENHEIMER ALTERNATIVE and THE MAKING OF THE ATOMIC BOMB (letter of comment by Jim Susky):

In response to Joe Karpierz's review of THE OPPENHEIMER ALTERNATIVE in the 02/19/21 issue of the MT VOID, Jim Susky writes:

Big thanks to Joe Karpierz, who reviewed THE OPPENHEIMER ALTERNATIVE by Robert J. Sawyer in last week's MT VOID.

Like Joe, I "didn't know much about (Los Alamos, the University of Chicago, (and) the Manhattan Project."

Further: "(OPPENHEIMER) reads like a who's who of physics."

An excellent companion to this novel would be Richard Rhoades' *THE MAKING OF THE ATOMIC BOMB* which has one advantage in that one is not obligated to read it from beginning to end--or even in toto.

Another advantage--*MAKING* has an index.

Yet another--Rhoades' door-stopper starts in the 1920's in the middle of the revolution that formed modern physics. It describes in considerable detail the discovery of many radioactive elements, their half-lives, and the chemical determination of their atomic numbers. It therefore "drops names" like a madman--including that of Dr. Einstein, who used his fame to trigger the Manhattan Project.

I'm off now--to order a copy of *OPPENHEIMER*. [-js]

REALITY IS NOT WHAT IT SEEMS and EINSTEIN AND THE QUANTUM (letter of comment by Jim Susky):

In response to [Gregory Frederick's review of REALITY IS NOT WHAT IT SEEMS](#) in the 02/19/21 issue of the MT VOID, Jim Susky writes:

Now that I'm on a roll:

Mr. Frederick's review of *REALITY IS NOT WHAT IT SEEMS: THE JOURNEY TO QUANTUM GRAVITY* reminds me of one of the best review/histories of modern physics in my experience: *EINSTEIN AND THE QUANTUM: THE QUEST OF THE VALIANT SWABIAN* by Dr. A. Douglas Stone

Unlike many, there is "math" in this book, but no more than algebra.

This book makes a good case to show that Dr. Einstein was indeed the "first quantum mechanic"--that his contributions extended far beyond his famous one--and that "God does not play dice" only scratches the surface of his QM work.

What causes me to want a re-read is that *SWABIAN* gives a taste of how utterly strange the sub-atomic realm is. We BSEE's think of the electron as free-charge in metallic conductors--which is to say we have no clue about the electron's actual nature and behavior.

"Weird and Wonderful" does not begin to describe the electron.

Who needs "string theory"? [-js]

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

I know you're probably all bored to death seeing me write about *THE MARTIAN* by Andy Weir (ISBN 978-0-553-41802-6), but in this case I will be talking about the major differences between the novel and the movie. Some I can see the necessity for, but others seem just arbitrary.

One of the arbitrary ones is that in the film the storm takes place on Sol 18 rather than Sol 6. Another is that he asks Lewis rather than Martinez to check on his parents.

Other changes are more understandable. A feature-length film cannot have the detail of a novel, so some events have to be deleted. Watney never seems to lose contact with Earth once he gets Pathfinder working. (Admittedly, we do not see or hear of much communication after Watney starts on his journey.) A lot of detail of his journey are omitted, e.g., how he navigates, or how he designed the "rover train". For that matter, his "rover train" is very different from the book--the roof hole is in the (front/only) cab, and the trailer is just a flatbed. The Johanssen-Beck relationship is barely shown. Most notably, Watney doesn't drive into a sandstorm and he doesn't roll the rover.

The airlock explosion is quite different. First, the airlock is much larger in the film than in the book. In the book, the airlock is the size of a phone booth. In the film, the airlock is large enough to hold the entire crew with room to spare. As a result, Watney has plenty of room to move almost everything out of the HAB to make the farm, and to easily bring in the soil. Oh, and he has a full size shovel rather than just a sample trowel. After the farm dies, Watney empties the hab of the dirt rather than leave it there (obviously easier with a huge airlock, but still ...), and uses what appears to be plastic sheeting to cover the airlock hole rather than hab canvas.

The airlock explosion is less critical in the film: he is able to tape up his helmet fairly easily, has no breaches in the rest of the suit, doesn't need to roll the airlock, and does not have only a very brief time to get a new helmet and suit.

In the book, he is clear that he uses only his own "manure" for the farm, so catching diseases from it is not possible--he already has all those microbes. In the film, he brings all the night soil in, including that of the other astronauts, but that has been freeze-dried, so there is no possibility of contamination.

The hab in the movie is far more luxurious, with more substantial beds, paper manuals, etc. But he claims nothing is flammable--are the manuals flame-retardant? It turns out that even in our own time, NASA has developed a paper from stone that will not burn.

I am still annoyed that Mindy Park is not Korean and Vincent Kapoor is not Indian. I am also annoyed that someone else tells Mindy to check the photos of the base, rather than having her discover it on her own.

And while I'm nitpicking, the second lecture of the Great Courses' "Birth of the Modern Mind" describes Aristotelian scholasticism. One aspect is the appeal to the past, as in, "If we have believed this for centuries, we would have found any flaws by now, so it must be true." But then Professor Alan Charles Kors says that we still do this and that it makes sense. His first example is asking what would happen if a teacher of freshman geometry presented Euclid's five axioms and some student said, "Wait a minute--how do we know those are true?" Well, we would say the student was Riemann or Lobachevsky and was about to discover non-Euclidean geometry. The other examples (Kepler's laws of planetary motion or Newton's laws of thermodynamics) may be a bit more secure, but they also said that about Newtonian physics until Einstein came [-ecl]

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Quote of the Week:

It is easier to fight for one's principles than
to live up to them.

-- Alfred Adler

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