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Mt. Holz Science Fiction Society
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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.

Historical Dictionary of Science Fiction (pointer from Denise Moy):

Denise Moy points out the following of interest:

<https://sfdictionary.com/>

The Better Films I Saw in 2020 (film comments by Mark R. Leeper):

(Almost) every year the film industry makes a load of high-profile movies, many of them films of quality. Some are not so hot. I will see many and write reviews of some. I take the best films I have seen and write short reviews and then write a list of mini-reviews of those I consider are the ten best. That is the usual (unimaginative) routine. This year the circumstances are quite different, as I am sure the reader is aware. I have seen far fewer films and of those I have seen few belong on top ten lists. Some may have been really good, but not all were "top-ten-worthy." Here in my opinion are among the best I saw.

A CALL TO SPY: (no review written) Rating: low +3 (-4 to +4)

THE PAINTED BIRD: Based on the Jerzy Kosinski novel, this film shows a boy traveling across Eastern Europe in shortly before World War II and seeing the cruelty of the peasants for one another. Filmed in black and white in a naturalistic style, it has long, slow, contemplative stretches. The title comes from a form of entertainment of the peasants: they paint a bird with bright colors and release it back into its flock, where the other birds peck it to death. Rating: low +3 (-4 to +4)

PROMISING YOUNG WOMAN: In this thriller, a 20-something woman looks to find revenge on acquaintances (and others) from her past for incident years before. At times the music overpowers the dialogue, but the twists and turns will keep you involved. Released 12/25/20. Rating: low +3 (-4 to +4)

RESISTANCE: This biopic about a little-known period in Marcel Marceau's life concentrates on moral decisions such as weighing the importance of saving Jews versus killing Nazis. It has nice art design for a low-budget film, as well as some striking camerawork. Jesse Eisenberg (as Marceau) and Clemence Poesy (of IN BRUGES) give outstanding performances. Rating: low +3 (-4 to +4)

TOTALLY UNDER CONTROL: This documentary takes a comprehensive and convincing look at COVID-19 from its scientific underpinnings to its political ramifications. Controversies are covered in detail, and there is a strong political dimension in the narrative. I will not say whether I agree or disagree (but somebody sure said something right). It did not waste time but came to the point and explained it. Rating: low +3 (-4 to +4)

AN ACCIDENTAL STUDIO--HANDMADE FILMS (2019 film seen in 2020): (no review written) While George Harrison was performing for the Beatles he was also managing a movie film studio, Handmade Films. This is the story of Handmade Films. Rating: high +2 (-4 to +4)

ALL IN: THE FIGHT FOR DEMOCRACY: This film is a documentary looking at vote suppression in the last century. Your attitude toward its arguments may vary. Rating: high +2 (-4 to +4)

APOCALYPSE '45: This documentary looks like it uses colorized newsreel footage, but it is actually restored color footage. (There probably was some overlap between this film and the television series "World War II in Color".) It is a look from the beginning of the Pacific War to the end. Among other things, the film examines the motives of the people dropping bombs on civilians: are the victims evil because of what their government was doing or had them do? The largest segment of the film is saved for Okinawa, although Hiroshima was also covered at length. Rating: high +2 (-4 to +4)

DA 5 BLOODS: This Spike Lee action and adventure film of four Vietnam vets returning to Vietnam in a sort of "Treasure Island" story seems to drag on a long time for a two-and-a-half hour film. It does have many clever film allusions. Overall, a large-scale production with gritty views of Vietnam people and countryside. Rating: high +2 (-4 to +4)

DAVID ATTENBOROUGH--A LIFE ON OUR PLANET: Sir David Attenborough is 94 years old and has been traveling--and exploring--for 66 years. This "witness statement" (his term) has a lot of beautiful and familiar nature photography--familiar because it uses archival footage from his films from those 66 years. Attenborough fits his whole career into this framework, tracing the disappearance of wilderness (and species) over that time. It has essentially a very downbeat message; even his suggestions at the end fail to provide much uplift. Rating: high +2 (-4 to +4)

DESERT ONE: This tells of the major event of the Carter presidency, the Iran hostage crisis. The film uses comic-book style illustrations to recount the events. It has a fairly standard documentary style, but at times the incidents are genuinely moving. Rating: high +2 (-4 to +4)

FORD VS. FERRARI (2019--seen in 2020): This is a surprisingly engaging story of the competition of a designer from each car company. American car designer Carroll Shelby and driver Ken Miles compete in a race that will be determined at Le Mans. Rating: high +2 (-4 to +4). **HILLBILLY ELEGY:** Directed by Ron Howard, this is based on the best-selling novel of the same name. It keeps the viewer guessing about where the story is going, in part because it is not told in chronological order. Glenn Close plays the matriarch of the family and completely disappears in the role. The theme is summed up by one of her epigrams: "Family's the only thing that means a good goddam." Rating: high +2 (-4 to +4)

NEWS OF THE WORLD: Tom Hanks is working his way through all the filmgenres, and this is his first Western (playing a cowboy in the "Toy Story" series doesn't count). One thing noted immediately is that the clothing wardrobe is very different from what one usually sees in Westerns. We see the chaos of a Southern (Texan) town getting "civilized," but without the usual saloon fights. Hanks as a traveling news reader serving those who have no time to read the news, or are illiterate, is an occupation rarely or never seen in Western films. (It is reminiscent of that of lector in Cuban cigar factories.) The stories are less the major world or national events, but more human interest or entertainment stories of the sort in David Mamet's "The Water Machine". Hanks's character finds ten-year-old Johanna (played by Helena Zengel), who had been kidnapped by Kiowas six years earlier. After the Kiowas were killed, she is on her own and Hanks agrees to take her to her German relatives several hundred miles away. There are echoes of **THE SEARCHERS**, **TRUE GRIT**, **OUTLAW JOSEY WALES**, and even **MATEWAN** in this film, which is not necessarily a bad thing. (Note: Texas was re-admitted to the Union in March 1870, so this must take place in January or February.) Rating: high +2 (-4 to +4)

THE TRIAL OF THE CHICAGO 7: The title tells it all and it is in narrative form. Rating: high +2 (-4 to +4)

[-mrl]

THE ELEVENTH GATE by Nancy Kress (copyright 2020, Blackstone Publishing, 13 hours, ASIN: B082WLXVKV, narrated by Braden Wright) (audio book review by Joe Karpierz):

Nancy Kress has been busy, with two books out in 2020, starting with novella "Sea Change" from Tachyon Publications and then **THE ELEVENTH GATE** from Baen Books and Blackstone Publishing. **THE ELEVENTH GATE** is a different book from "Sea Change", being a space opera full of all the things one expects from a space opera, while "Sea Change" was grounded on Earth. Still, both books bear the unmistakable mark of being books by Nancy Kress, as we'll see shortly.

Humanity has spread to the stars via ten gates that provide access to eight habitable worlds. Eager to leave the home planet behind, as it has been destroyed by war and ecological disasters, the colonists and their descendants form three distinct political and economic factions: the Perego Corporation is as it sounds, run by an autocratic CEO named Sloan; the Landry Libertarian Alliance, and Polyglot, which most resembles earth with its individual nations and economies and no one ruling body.

That's the background. The story really begins when Tara Landry, granddaughter of the head of the LLA (for short), discovers an eleventh gate. Tara hatches a plan to bring peace to the Eight Worlds, but instead ends up starting a war between LLA and the Perego Corporation. Complicating matters is one Philip Anderson, a physicist and philosopher--there's a combination I'm not sure we see all that often any more--whom Tara is infatuated with and who doesn't return the feelings. He's interested in a higher level of

consciousness, one that no one has reached before. Anderson's disappearance after he passes through the Eleventh Gate and lands on the planet behind it drives Tara to the brink. What happens to Anderson is the land of spoilers; suffice it to say that he plays a large part of the story ahead.

Both Landry and Perego have family problems within the power structures of their respective worlds. Rachel Landry, leader of the LLA, not only has to deal with Tara, but her granddaughter Jane who is hell bent on bringing the war to an end with a biological weapon that could wipe out most of civilization, while Sloan has to deal with his own daughter who is taking the corporation right out from underneath him with some policies that are very unlike the ones Sloan believes in.

Maybe policies isn't the right word. Maybe philosophies is a better word. All three factions believe in their own way of thinking more than anything else, with no room for compromise. The Landries and the Peregoys are constantly critical of the other, wondering how "those people" could survive in the world they do. And while Sloan does eventually try to change his way of thinking, his daughter Sofia goes on with the way things have always been.

This novel has all the classic things you'd expect in a Kress novel: family politics, biological science--in this case the bio warfare that is being waged by Jane Landry, and how it all affects humanity. There are space battles, peace conferences, and politics, all the things you'd expect in a space opera. Yes, there are aliens, and they play a very subtle but powerful role in the story, and they're not there for very long--blink and you miss them. All in all, *THE ELEVENTH GATE* is a very solid and enjoyable effort from Kress, and one that I believe is worthy of your time.

Braden Wright is like a good umpire in a major league baseball game. You don't notice that he's there until he does something wrong. And that's good enough. Wright does nothing to make his narration stand out, nor does he do anything jarring to take the listener out of the story. He does the job he was brought in to do, and he does it well enough. [-jak]

THE VIGIL, M. C. ESCHER: JOURNEY TO INFINITY, THE OPPENHEIMER ALTERNATIVE, THE GREAT GATSBY, and the MT VOID (letter of comment by Guy Lillian III):

In response to the MT VOID in general and [various specific reviews](#) in the 02/26/21 issue of the MT VOID and earlier in particular, Guy Lillian writes in ZINE DUMP #51:

Every week MT VOID pops up in one's e-mail inbox, indefatigable, with sharp essays on ... well, you name it. This issue, films, with a mention of an unfamiliar flick I now must see, *THE VIGIL*. In an earlier number, a film about Escher; in yes another [sic]. Lest one think that reading is given short shrift here, another previous issue praises *THE OPPENHEIMER ALTERNATIVE* by Robert Sawyer, which I bet ends up on the Hugo ballot. Evelyn even comments on *THE GREAT GATSBY*, whose presence on the Hugo lists is questionable. Good fun. [-gl]

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

My reading of *WHAT TO THINK ABOUT MACHINES THAT THINK* edited by John Brockman (Harper Perennial, ISBN 978-0-06-242565-2) is proceeding. My latest comment is on "Manipulators and Manipulanda" by Josh Bongard, who writes, "We counsel one another not to 'look back' in anger because, based on our bias to walk in the direction of our forward-facing eyes, past events tend to literally be behind us." Well, if by "we" he means English-speakers, then he is correct, but if by "we" he means humans, he is wrong: many languages posit that the future is in back of us, because it is that which we cannot see, while the past lies in front of us, because we can see it.

STATION ELEVEN by Emily St. John Mandel (Vintage, ISBN 978-0-804-17244-8) is about a plague, a very contagious and deadly form of flu. It's reminiscent of *EARTH ABIDES* and other plague novels in that the main characters all seem to avoid dealing with the actual mass dying and the millions of corpses that would be around. The TV series *WORLD AFTER PEOPLE* does this by just hand-waving the disappearance of all the people, but generally books at least try to justify it. In some, the characters are hiking up in the back-country, in others they fall ill and are unconscious for several days, but don't die. Here the main character manages to stockpile food and water and just stays in his brother's apartment for enough time for the dying to end--which is not very long, given how fast the virus acts. There is a traveling theatrical/musical company, and the usual cliché of the town taken over by a cult, but thankfully no zombies. :-)

This is either just what you want to read now, or just what you want to avoid. I've been reading true accounts of plagues; fictional ones are actually a bit of a relief. Ultimately you have to decide.

It's evidence I am getting deep in Jorge Luis Borges criticism when I am reading a book tracing the parallels between Borges's writings and Sufi philosophy. But that is what *JORGE LUIS BORGES: SOURCES AND ILLUMINATION* by Professor Giovanna de Garayalde (Octagon Books, ISBN 0-900-860-61-8) is. One problem is that many of the commonalities are common in other philosophies as well: time is relative, multi-level narratives can be used to convey ideas, what appears to be bad luck may turn out to be good luck (see my comment about Sven and Olaf in *TITANIC* in the MT VOID a couple of weeks ago), and so on. Another problem is that unless you are already familiar with Sufi literature, many of the references will be obscure or unintelligible. (The reverse is also true--unfamiliarity with Borges's writings would be problematic--but I'm assuming that most readers of this book would be familiar with them.) All things considered, this is a book with a limited target audience. [-ecl]

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Quote of the Week:

A good place to meet a man is at the dry cleaner.
These men usually have jobs and bathe.
--Rita Rudner

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