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Mt. Holz Science Fiction Society
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http://leepers.us/mtvoid/back_issues.htm.

Old Bridge Discussion Group Change:

The date of the next meeting (to discuss PROJECT HAIL MARY by Andy Weir) has been made one day earlier, Wednesday, July 21.

Because currently no group is allowed to meet in any of the rooms, the library has suggested that we can use one of the larger tables instead. So we will assume an indoor meeting at one of the tables between the fiction and the non-fiction (the section where the new SF is). [-ecl]

AIRPLANE! (film retrospective by Mark R. Leeper):

Back in 1976 Paramount made a clever satire on high-budget disaster films. The film was THE BIG BUS and dealt with the maiden voyage of the world's first nuclear-powered super-bus. This film (which incidentally should not be confused with its highly re-edited TV version) took all the cliches of films like AIRPORT and packed them together, giving each a satiric twist, much as AIRPLANE! would do. It is a shame that the film did not get more publicity than it did. Now Paramount seems to have learned their lesson. They have made a similar film called AIRPLANE! and this film they are giving a big publicity campaign. If they have learned their lesson, it seems like it was in time. If THE BIG BUS deserved the publicity, AIRPLANE! deserves it even more. Whatever was good about THE BIG BUS is at most little worse and usually better in AIRPLANE!

After seeing AIRPLANE! I can imagine that the script-writers went over the script for months trying to find new places to stick gags or new ways to turn scenes upside-down (sometimes literally). The publicity says that the film averages a joke every seven seconds.

Unfortunately, so much is happening on the screen that the audience often has their attention distracted away from the funniest thing that is going on, and audience laughter drowns out some of the gags in the dialogue. I would estimate that I saw a joke about every twelve seconds, on the average, and only about half of them struck me as funny. Still, one funny gag every 24 seconds is nothing to sneeze at.

To be honest, there is nothing in the film that is all that hysterically funny (well, maybe a few things). But the writer/directors depend on a sheer barrage of humor to break down the viewers' resistance. And the strategy works flawlessly. They used the same strategy in their previous film *KENTUCKY FRIED MOVIE*, a movie of dubious taste but nearly as funny as *AIRPLANE!* The absurdities of *AIRPLANE!* come thick and fast from brawling girl scouts, to a story so sad that people hearing it keep committing suicide, to the co-pilot (played by Kareem Abdul-Jabbar) being recognized as Kareem and having to defend his basketball strategy. At least a dozen films are satirized in the course of *AIRPLANE!*, including some clever gags at the expense of *JAWS*, *SATURDAY NIGHT FEVER*, and *FROM HERE TO ETERNITY*. There are cameo appearances of such notables as Howard Jarvis and Ethel Merman. All in all, *AIRPLANE!* is a lot of film packed into its all too scant 88 minutes. [-mrl]

Wine Clubs (comments by Evelyn C. Leeper):

It seems like everyone is starting a wine club these days. Slate.com, NPR, New York Times (and other newspapers), National Geographic, Turner Classic Movies (TCM), ...

Well, National Geographic makes some sense, featuring wines from around the world. But what is the point of NPR's "Wait, Wait, Don't Tell Me" wine?

But it's really the TCM wine club that I want to comment on. I could understand a Francis Ford Coppola wine--he does have a winery, after all. But a Mickey Rooney wine (wasn't Andy Hardy--the role mentioned in connection with this wine--underage)? A Peter Sellers wine (purity of essence, anyone)? A Ruby Dee and Ossie Davis wine?

And what's with the wine named for "Boris Karloff / Frankenstein" on the label? TCM should know that Karloff was not named "Frankenstein", and if "Frankenstein" refers to the movie, they missed a bet. They should have connected it to "The Bride of Frankenstein", in which the following exchange takes place:

```
Hermit: And this is wine--to drink.  
Creature: Drink!  
Hermit: Drink!  
[they drink]  
Creature: Good! Good!
```

Not to mention that a Frankenstein wine makes one think of "Frankenfoods", and who wants their customers to think about "Frankenfoods" when they are looking to buy wine?

[After I wrote that, Mark pointed out that there are a couple of wine references in the original "Frankenstein" movie. The first is at the wedding:

```
Baron: And now, how about a little drink, eh? My grandfather  
bought this wine and laid it down. My grandmother wouldn't  
let him drink it. Bless her heart. Here's to your very  
good health.
```

And at the end of the film:

```
Servant: If you please, Herr Baron, we thought that Mr. Henry  
could do with a glass of his great-grandmother's wine.  
Baron: Fine old lady, my grandmother. Very foreseeing of her  
to prevent my grandfather drinking this.]
```

Of course, some films just won't work by their very nature. Obviously there are problems with films such as *DAYS OF WINE AND ROSES* or *THE LOST WEEKEND*, which (one assumes) are not going to be paired with any wines in the club. But some "no-go"s are less obvious.

Bela Lugosi's *DRACULA*, for example, is out, especially since one of the title character's most famous lines is "I never drink ... wine." (Ironically, the line also appears in Francis Ford Coppola's *BRAM STOKER'S DRACULA*.) Or *SIDEWAYS*--though it is a paean to wine in general, the line everyone remembers is "I am *not* drinking any f***ing Merlot!" [-ecl]

LAND (film review by Mark R. Leeper):

LAND is shot in a documentary film style by director Robin Wright. The ever-flexible Robin Wright also chose to star in the film when scheduling requirements made it difficult to get anyone else. The film follows her character as she gives away her interface to the technical environment and returns to nature.

The viewer gets few clues through much of the film as to what her mission is in this return to an existence of grass, rocks, hills with little more civilization than her diary. We often have no idea how much time is passing as we see hints of her psychological breakdown. At times she appears like a modern Thoreau (though Thoreau was much less isolated than Wright's character, or even than

his popular image). But she has no experience of wilderness living, so this leads to disaster (or at least near-disaster).

This is one of many stories of modern adults pitted against nature, whether by choice or accident. In fact, in 2007, Wright's then-husband Sean Penn directed a similar film, INTO THE WILD.

Rating: +2 (-4 to +4)

[-mrl]

Romper-Noir (letters of comment by Gary McGath, Dorothy J. Heydt, and Paul Dormer):

In the 07/02/21 issue of the MT VOID, Mark wrote:

```
All around the mulberry bush,  
The monkey chased the weasel  
The monkey thought it was all in fun,  
But he was DEAD wrong.
```

Gary McGath responded:

That had me wondering if the monkey was chasing the wrong weasel. I'd always heard it as "All around the cobbler's bench." A quick check, though, shows that both versions have been around for a long time.

The mulberry version makes me think of T. S. Eliot's:

```
Here we go round the prickly pear  
Prickly pear prickly pear  
Here we go round the prickly pear  
At five o'clock in the morning
```

[-gmg]

Dorothy J. Heydt responded:

I remember reading that both a "monkey" and a "weasel" are technical terms for cobbler's tools. And the second strain reads

```
"A penny for a spool of thread,  
A penny for a needle;  
That's the way my money goes:  
Pop goes the weasel."
```

In other words, the cobbler isn't bringing in enough cash to cover his expenses, and when Saturday comes he hasn't enough cash to buy enough cheap gin to get him drunk enough to forget his troubles. (Gin was sold at the rates of "drunk for a penny, dead drunk for tuppence.") So he goes out and pops (pawns) his weasel till Monday morning, assuming he has something to redeem it with. [-djh]

Gary replies:

The account I've seem more often is mostly different. A spinner's weasel (also used by cobblers) was a device that measured out a certain amount of thread and then popped when the spool was full.

Concluding anything about the cobbler's drinking habits is a stretch, but The Straight Dope mentions a 19th century version that has "Up and down the City Road / In and out the Eagle." That one sounds more like visiting too many taverns. Some sources confirm that "pop" is or was a Cockney word for "pawn."

Old rhymes have gone through multiple versions and perhaps multiple meanings. "Ring Around the Rosy" is often claimed to be a plague song, but there's no written record of it until the 19th century, and many variants are even harder to connect to a plague. Who knows what it's really about, if anything.

And then there's Tolkien's reconstruction of the "original" version of "Hi Diddle Diddle." :-) [-gmg]

Paul Dormer adds:

The version usually appearing in the UK is:

```
Half a pound of tuppenny rice,  
Half a pound of treacle.  
That's the way the money goes,  
Pop! goes the weasel
```

```
Every night when I go out,  
The monkey's on the table,  
Take a stick and knock it off,  
Pop! goes the weasel
```

Up and down the City road,
In and out the Eagle,
That's the way the money goes,
Pop goes the weasel

The City Road in is just north of the City in London, the Eagle is a pub. [-pd]

Evelyn notes:

I haven't done an exhaustive check, but I suspect Mark's example of romper-noir has drawn the most comments per word (23 words total) of anything we've published. [-ecl]

The Battle of Midway, THE CALCULATING STARS, and Long Form Dramatic Presentations (letter of comment by John Purcell):

In response to various items in [the 07/02/21 issue of the MT VOID](#), John Purcell writes:

Getting back into the swing of writing letters of comment again feels good, as is researching a couple of articles for fanzines other than mine. Writing a brief loc to you helps foment the creative juices. Take that however you wish.

That little children's verse to start this current issue sets a dark tone, but you recover well with excellent review/commentary regarding two movies about the Battle of Midway. That was a key victory for the American fleet back in 1942 that shaped the remainder of the Pacific war. I have not yet seen the 2019 version of MIDWAY, and I freely admit to enjoying the 1976 version. The fact that this newer movie is more historically accurate than the former appeals to me, so it is now added to my watchlist. I am glad that Mark feels it is much more historically accurate than the other, and taking the story from 1937 to 1942 sounds like a very good idea to put everything into perspective. That is a big plus in my book.

In response to Joe Karpierz's review of THE CALCULATING STARS in the 07/02/21 issue of the MT VOID, John Purcell writes: I have read very little fiction by Mary Robinette Kowal, who is the new chairperson of DisCon III (and I am not going to talk about that here, so you're safe on that topic), but what I have read I have enjoyed a great deal. When it comes down to series books, I prefer to read them in order, so when I do get around to reading the "Lady Astronaut from Mars" books, I will definitely start with THE CALCULATING STARS. Thank you for the preview of the second book; it definitely sounds interesting.

Evelyn's capsule reviews of this year's Dramatic Presentation Long Form Hugo nominees conclusively proves to me that these awards no longer are relevant to the science fiction community I inhabit. It is highly unlikely I will ever care enough about the Hugo Awards to participate in nominating anything. All of these "nominees" don't work for me at all. So, *bleagh!* I am done with them.

Now watch: for ChiCon 8 I might actually have watched something that's actually worth such recognition. We shall see. [-jp]

Evelyn responds: Keep in mind that 2020 was a very peculiar year for Long Form Dramatic Presentations, with the theaters closed for most of the year, including the summer when the big SF films traditionally come out, and the end of the year, when the prestige films traditionally come out. 2021 may suffer from a lack of production in 2020, but the choices should be a lot better. [-ecl]

Jazz (letter of comment by Kip Williams):

In response to [Evelyn's comments on jazz](#) in the 07/02/21 issue of the MT VOID, Kip Williams writes:

I can help with one specific query you seemed to make about jazz: How do the sidemen know what harmonies the soloist is about to play? I even know a couple of terms because I audited a quarter of this in college, back around 1982. Woo, me!

Anyway, there's Free Jazz, which is totally out there and as much of a mystery to me as you were saying all jazz is to you. Some people just live in music and can do amazing things.

Then there's the rest of jazz, which often is charts of changes. These are usually in measures, like sheet music, but just contains skeletal information, the most important of which is what chords are played in which measures. My instructor told us that a lot of these are simply the chord progressions from some particular song or other, which have taken on a life of their own away from the original context.

And some progressions are known to everybody, apparently. Twelve-bar blues, for instance. And if you can do three chords in some of the most popular keys (like from zero sharps to two sharps), you can play along with most '60s rock hits.

There's more, but it boils down to experience. [-kw]

THE HUMAN COSMOS and New Grange (letter of comment by Kevin R):

In response to [Gregory Frederick's review of THE HUMAN COSMOS](#) in the 07/02/21 issue of the MT VOID, Kevin R writes:

[Gregory Frederick wrote.] "One example mentioned occurs during the summer solstice at a 5,000-year-old tomb at New Grange in

England." [-gf]

I know the English once stole the whole flippin' island, but Newgrange is in Ireland, unless there's a second one to the east: [-kr]

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

In my review of *THE FORGER'S SPELL* by Edward Dolnick (MT VOID, 07/25/2008), I wrote about how paintings always reflect the time of their creation, which is why forgeries become less convincing over time. In particular, people are painted to the standards of attractiveness of the era of the painter, and standards change. I mentioned how this also extends to films, in that one can almost always tell when they were made. One example I saw recently combining film and painting is the painting of Vlad Tepes in Dan Curtis's *DRACULA* (1974). Supposedly a very old family portrait, the faces of Vlad and his wife (?) look very much like mid-20th century faces, and not at all like faces from paintings of the 15th or even of the 19th century. Similarly, the original painting of Dorian Gray in the 1945 version of *THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY* looks very much like a 1945 portrait would look, and not like an 1890s portrait or a current portrait.

(Of course, sometimes films get it ludicrously wrong. *IN HARM'S WAY* seems to have been about an alternate Pearl Harbor attack where everyone had 1960s hair styles and clothing. :-)) [-ecl]

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Quote of the Week:

Conscience is thoroughly well-bred and soon leaves off
talking to those who do not wish to hear it.
--Samuel Butler

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