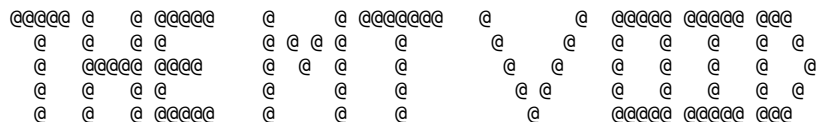


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Mt. Holz Science Fiction Society
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STAR TREK: THE ORIGINAL SERIES (television retrospective by Evelyn C. Leeper):

We have *finally* started watching our DVD set of STAR TREK: THE ORIGINAL SERIES, which has been nicely ageing on our shelf for five years since we bought it. And I have three observations.

The first is about the physical package. The 25 discs were packed in one of those book-hinged multi-disc holders with minimal teeth to hold the discs two discs to a side. The problem is that these minimal teeth break very easily in transit, even within the fairly sturdy case. So invariably, at least one disc is loose when you first open the package. In this case, four were loose. There is really only one solution: put all the discs in paper sleeves and put those in the outside case. Luckily, the book-hinger holder is not attached to the case, and the geometry is such that the paper holders with discs will fit. (We had to do the same thing with the WILD WILD WEST set.) It's actually better than the cases that have hard plastic trays glued to a cardboard fold-out holder--when those teetch break there is no way to replace the trays.

The second is more substantive: I had forgotten how sexist the show was. Not just that the women are in mini-skirts and spend a fair amount of time being flirtatious rather than professional. (Example: Uhura saying to Spock, "I'm an illogical woman, who's beginning to feel too much a part of that communications console. Why don't you tell me I'm an attractive young lady, or ask me if I've ever been in love? Tell me how your planet Vulcan looks on a lazy evening when the moon is full.") And it's not that Kirk talks about "where no man has gone before." It's also that the male crew members make all sorts of sexist and offensive comments about the women. (Example: "How'd you like to have her as your personal yeoman?") In "Charlie X", Charlie Evans picks up on this and hits Yeoman Rand's backside after he sees a crewman do the same thing. In "Where No Man Has Gone Before", Commander Gary Mitchell says to Dr. Dehner, "Improving the breed, Doctor? Is that your line?" and Dehner replies, "I've heard that's more your specialty, Commander, line included." And late Dehner declares, "Women professionals do tend to overcompensate." Even Mr. Spock gets into the act in "The Enemy Within", saying to Yeoman Rand, "The, er, impostor had some interesting qualities, wouldn't you say, Yeoman?"

"Mudd's Women" is obviously sexist in a way that the other episodes could not be, but forty-plus years later, one of the first questions that arises is "What effect do these women (and the Venus Drug) have on the gay and lesbian crew?" It seems unlikely they would appeal to gay men, and given that the aura they project is designed to appeal to men, would it also attract women? (Since Spock is

unaffected, that seems to indicate a pre-disposition is necessary.) For that matter, the whole process by which the Venus Drug works is pretty close to magic. Does it work through pheromones? Is it mind-altering? If you took a photo of a woman using it, what would the photograph show?

And what's with Yeoman Rand's hair-do (that whole "basket-weave" thing)? Well, according to one source, Roddenberry wanted all the crew to have odd hairdos, but the male actors put their foot (feet?) down and said they had lives off the set and weren't getting any strange haircuts. So they settled for pointed sideburns. Why they couldn't wear wigs the way Grace Lee Whitney and other women did isn't clear.

The third observation came after watching "Spacelift: Transporting Trek into the 21st Century". I was sort of okay with re-recording the opening theme, it was when they started talking about how they recreated the stock shots of the Enterprise with CGI, and saying things like, "If we wanted to make the Enterprise look vulnerable, we shot it from above," that I said, "Whoa! The original shot was done a certain way, and now they're changing it?!" And there is more: they added a blink to the Gorn, changed various elements of a destroyed base in another episode, added details to the Enterprise and other elements, and in general changed the original. Next they'll be taking the guns out of E.T.: THE EXTRA-TERRESTRIAL and changing who shot first in STAR WARS. [-ecl]

Jazz (letters of comment by Richie Bielak, Paul Dormer, and John Kerr-Mudd):

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

Noticed some comments you made on jazz in the MT. Void.

I could go on and on explaining how jazz works, but to save you time you might like this video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=feNV4gCNcSE>

[-rb]

Paul Dormer writes:

I remember reading somewhere--it might have been the humourist, jazz aficionado and double bass player, Miles Kington--that someone once published a book of chord progressions from popular songs. Apparently, it was claimed, that although the songs were copyright, the chords weren't. [-pd]

And John Kerr-Mudd helpfully replies:

Der derderder duh! [-jkm]

Scott Dorsey adds:

Indeed, this is why fake books are legal. They don't contain the songs, and if you don't already know the songs pretty well they won't help you play them. [-sd]

AIRPLANE! (letters of comment by Art Stadlin, Gary McGath, and Paul Dormer):

In response to [Mark's retrospective of AIRPLANE!](#) in the 07/09/21 issue of the MT VOID, Art Stadlin writes:

Mark really hit the nail on the head with his AIRPLANE retrospective. Excellent review of a classic. [-as]

Gary McGath writes:

I'd never even heard of THE BIG BUS before. Just now I found a clip on YouTube. Even without reading this history, I think I've had called it AIRPLANE! on the ground. [-gmg]

Paul Dormer responds:

I actually saw it when [THE BIG BUS] first came out.

Conversely, AIRPLANE! came out just before my first flight to the US in 1980 and one of the people I was travelling with had just been to see it and kept telling us about it on the flight. [-pd]

Midway, Historical Dates, and Timelines (letters of comment by Dorothy J. Heydt, Keith F. Lynch, Kevin R, Tim Merrigan, and R. Looney):

In response to [John Purcell's comments on MIDWAY](#) in the 07/09/21 issue of the MT VOID, Dorothy J. Heydt writes:

Is there a little children's verse about the Battle of Midway? Or is the commenter referring back to "Pop Goes the Weasel"?

If there is a children's verse about Midway, I'd like to know it. I was born while it was happening. (I didn't, obviously, know about it at

the time.)

[John wrote.] "That was a key victory for the American fleet back in 1942 that shaped the remainder of the Pacific war."

When a clerk at the pharmacy (or other place where they need to know) asks for my date of birth, I say, "June sixth, 1942," and sometimes add "Battle of Midway." And nineteen times out of twenty they have no idea what I'm talking about, and I explain with some language like that quoted above. [-djh]

Keith F. Lynch responds:

Not many people can boast that they had two major motion pictures made about the day they were born. [-kfl]

Evelyn adds:

Well, not me, but my mother's family perhaps. My maternal grandparents were married on the day World War I started (July 28, 1914) and my mother was born on the day the United States entered the war (April 6, 1917). [-ecl]

Kevin R writes:

Back when Things Were Normal, and I made small purchases in person, I used to confound cashiers by replying to their announcement of what I needed to pay with events from the matching date.

Example:

C: "...and that's \$10.66."

Me: "Battle of Hastings!"

or

C: "\$17.89"

Me: "Geo Washington elected." OR
"The Bastille Falls!"

Every once in a great while, there would be a glimmer of recognition.

I went through school, including a history BA, as the emphasis for learning dates was being relaxed. As one of my old instructors once remarked, it is less important to know the actual dates of key events than it is to be able to put them in the correct order. It helps if you know that the US settled on its current constitution and elected its first President under that form of government just as the monarchy was being threatened in France, even if one can only approximate the dates. Same for knowing that our "War of 1812" was fought during the last years of the Napoleonic Wars.

I can remember having books as a kid that reproduced "timelines of history" that allowed you to see at a glance which epic events occurred contemporaneously.

I loves me some timelines.

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

Keith replies:

By far the easiest way to put them in the correct order is to assign sequential numbers to them, rather than memorizing a long list of pairs of events along with which came first. If the numbers are equally spaced in time, that also helps with realizing just how close or how far apart two events are in time.

I enjoy collecting and sharing unexpected time ratios. For instance Cleopatra, who ruled Egypt in the BC years, lived closer to our time than to when the pyramids were built. The first Tyrannosaur lived closer to the release date of JURASSIC PARK than to the Jurassic.

GONE WITH THE WIND came out closer to the Civil War than to the present; lots of Civil War veterans watched the movie. But one actress who was in it died less than a year ago. Ironically, the character she played died in the movie.

Abraham Lincoln and Charles Darwin were born on the same day.

There's a television interview of a witness to Lincoln's assassination.

The American Revolution was closer to the present than to Columbus's discovery of America.

The year of my alleged crime, France was still executing people with the guillotine. The day I was arrested, Charlie Chaplin was still alive, my landlord/housemate was not yet born, and Bill Gates had been arrested the previous day.

Which happened first? The sinking of the Titanic or Robert Scott's death on the way back from the South Pole? The answer is that nobody knows; they were certainly within a few days of each other.

The two deadliest transportation disasters of the 20th century in DC, a plane crash and a completely unrelated Metrorail crash, happened the same *hour*.

The deadliest pre-9/11 fire in US history wasn't the Chicago Fire, but was an unrelated fire on the same day.

On the other hand, if events were in societies that had no contact with each other, the order doesn't really matter. Can you name who ruled China when Julius Caesar was assassinated? Can you even name the ruling dynasty? I can't. I could look it up, but it really doesn't matter, since those societies had no contact, direct or indirect.

According to special relativity, events sufficiently distant from each other in space and sufficiently close in time can't be put into any definite order.

What really gets me is how different the lengths of the historical timeline and the geological timeline are. More than a half century ago, I found some fossils which, using a book, I correctly dated to the Ordovician period. The time since the Ordovician is to a half century what a half century is to about three minutes. But the Ordovician was 97% of the way from the beginning of time to the present.

I recommend the YouTube video "Timelapse of the Entire Universe," which compresses all of the past into exactly ten minutes. Dinosaurs show up seven seconds before the end, and go extinct three seconds before the end. The Pleistocene ice ages are near the bottom of the last frame. All of recorded history, both BC and AD, fits on the last scan line of the last frame.

There's a sequel to that video called "Timelapse of the Future." It starts in 2019 at a speed of about one year per second, and doubles in speed every five seconds. Earth is destroyed by the sun after three minutes, after which the video runs for about another half hour, continuing to double in speed every five seconds. In other words, the future is enormously longer than the past. But it's trivially easy to write a computer program that will eventually end, but not before the furthest future time depicted in that video.

Tim Merrigan demurs:

I think, and the <https://www.unrv.com/economy/silk.php> page agrees with me, that while there was no direct contact between China and Rome at the time of Julius Caesar's assassination, there were Roman merchants dealing in silk, so that would be indirect contact.

Paul Dormer notes:

If [the television interview of a witness to Lincoln's assassination] was the nonagenarian appearing on the panel game "I've Got a Secret", it's viewable on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IRPoymt3Jx4>. [-pd]

And Evelyn adds:

I remember seeing that when it was first broadcast. [-ecl]

R. Looney writes:

Thanks [to Jim Susky] for the pointer [several months ago] to Richard Rhodes' MAKING OF THE ATOMIC BOMB--fantastic. Carrying it around, I call it The Doorstop, your nomenclature.

Your recent coverage of Midway movies reminds me of how Herman Wouk first explained that battle to me, in WAR AND REMEMBRANCE; but I think it's best described in the excellent 'berserker' essay by Lee Sandlin from 1997: Losing The War <http://www.leesandlin.com/articles/LosingTheWar.htm>. [-rl]

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

SUPERNOVA ERA by Cixin Liu (Tor, ISBN 978-1-250-30605-0) is not a new book. It was published in China in 2004 and seems new because it was not translated into English until 2019 (no doubt on the strength of Liu's Hugo win for THE THREE-BODY PROBLEM in 2015). As such, it is less polished than his later works, and has more obvious flaws.

One flaw is the use of Big Quantum as a sort of "get-out-of-jail-free" card, that gets them past the obvious problems of the first few days of the Supernova Era, with no good explanation for its existence, and then seems to disappear from the story. In this regard, it is similar to the potatoes in THE MARTIAN, which also are in the story because they are needed for the solution of a problem, not because there is any good internal reason to have them.

One could claim that the basic premise of SUPERNOVA ERA is also similar to that of THE MARTIAN in that both are totally inaccurate but necessary to get the plot going. In THE MARTIAN, the sandstorm as described is scientifically impossible. In SUPERNOVA ERA, the premise is that radiation from a supernova bathes the earth, and the effect is that everyone over the age of thirteen dies of chromosome damage, while the chromosomes of those under thirteen are able to heal themselves. Even if one accepts the age-related ability to heal, the notion of such a clear-cut division by age is on a par with science fiction movies where 59 minutes 30 seconds of radiation have no effect on the characters, but 60 minutes and 0 seconds kills them.

On a more basic level, the question of what a world populated entirely by children would be like is basic to the story. Liu's depiction, particularly Candytown and the Supernova War, has a definite "Lord of the Flies" vibe. But that scenario is not inevitable. In 1965, six boys from Tonga were shipwrecked on the deserted island of Ata for fifteen months, and managed fairly well without descending into violence. (See Rutger Bregman's HUMANKIND.) Obviously, there are differences between a small group stranded on an island where

they might be rescued, and an entire planet who have no hope of rescue.

On the other hand, the use of Big Quantum (and a fair amount of hand-waving) makes the transition period much smoother than one might expect. In both LORD OF THE FLIES and the Ata incident, the children revert to a more primitive state. Indeed this is a standard trope in post-apocalyptic fiction, and almost inevitable. Can a much smaller and mostly randomly selected population maintain a high-tech world? I find the idea that children could be trained in a single year to carry on all the functions of the current world, and even advance them, highly unlikely.

I know that stories such as this rely on the willing suspension of disbelief, but somehow it is easier for me to suspend disbelief on a clearly fantasy premise than a supposedly realistic but ultimately inconsistent one.

There are also some simple errors. One example is when the narrator says, "Ever since the purchase of Alaska and Hawaii, [the United States] no longer expanded into new territory..."

Actually, this is not true. Alaska was purchased from Russia in 1867, but Hawaii was never purchased--it was just "annexed" in 1898. Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Philippines were acquired in 1899 as a result of the Spanish-American War. American Samoa was annexed in 1900. The American Virgin Islands were purchased from Denmark in 1917. The Northern Mariana Islands became territories of the United States in 1986 by their own request. (One can, of course, argue that the characters seem to have a skewed view of the United States in general, but this is supposedly someone who has studied it more.)

Another error is having New York City and Shanghai flooded like Venice, but action going on in and around the White House, which sits on the District of Columbia flood plain and would also be submerged. Both of these are probably because the original copy editing was done in China, and so these were not caught there. [-ecl]

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Quote of the Week:

It is permissible with certain precautions to speak
in print of coitus, but it is not permissible to employ
the monosyllabic synonym for this word.
--Bertrand Russell

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