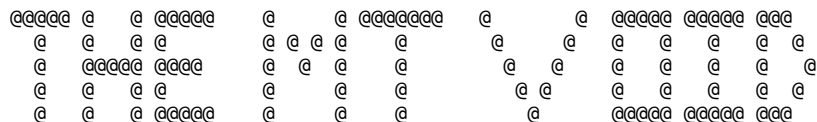


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http://leepers.us/mtvoid/back_issues.htm.

Mini Reviews, Part 7 (film reviews by Mark R. Leeper and Evelyn C. Leeper):

Here is the seventh batch of mini-reviews, with more science fiction and fantasy films.

DON'T LOOK UP: DON'T LOOK UP seems to be a "humorous" version of DEEP IMPACT, if Earth being struck by a "planet-killer" comet can be presented as humorous. For example, the credits are presented in a way that seems too fun-loving for the seriousness of the topic. Then again, DR. STRANGELOVE was a success. It is definitely a satire, though whether of climate change deniers, or anti-vaxxers, or anti-maskers, or of some other group is not clear.

Released 12/24/21; available on Netflix. Rating: high +2 or 8/10.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt11286314/reference>

What others are saying: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/dont_look_up_2021

SETTLERS: SETTLERS starts with a family of three in a surprisingly Earth-like environment on Mars. This is eventually explained, but is at first quite off-putting to the viewer. Eventually the film also adds an anti-colonial aspect. This is basically a John Ford Western on Mars (down to using some of Ford's trademark shots), with a minimal cast. It also has minimal dialogue and is so slow-moving as to be soporific.

Released theatrically 07/23/21; available on various streaming services. Rating: 0 (-4 to +4), or 4/10.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt9373688/reference>

What others are saying: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/settlers_2021

OLD: OLD is the latest M. Night Shyamalan film. ****SPOILERS**** It is almost impossible to talk about an M. Night Shyamalan film without having at least some slight spoilers. In this case, it's the premise of the film--that a group of people from a tropical resort find themselves trapped on a beach where they are aging rapidly (about a year every thirty minutes). Shyamalan tries to cover all the obvious questions, but there are still some inconsistencies (for example, the children seem to mature mentally as well as physically), and the ending is not entirely satisfying. But if you've liked other M. Night Shyamalan films, you'll probably like this one.

Released theatrically 07/23/21; available on various streaming services and on DVD. Rating: +2 (-4 to +4), or 7/10.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt10954652/reference>

What others are saying: <https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/old>

THE DJINN: This is a classic story of a child, Dylan, being stalked by a supernatural creature, with the added twist of the child being both mute and asthmatic. This is caused by the child being home alone at midnight and getting up to mischief with a grimoire. Dylan fights battles his father (seen only at the beginning and the very end) doesn't suspect. Much of it is filmed through a red lens, and the director creates tension by having very limited dialogue. The film produces some genuine shudders.

Released in limited theatrical release 05/14/2021; available on various streaming services: Rating: low +1, or 5/10.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt9352356/reference>

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

[-mrl/ec]

LEVIATHAN FALLS by **James S.A. Corey** (copyright 2021; Recorded Books, Inc.; 19 hours and 40 minutes; narrated by Jefferson Mays; ASIN B0971RBRV8) (audiobook review by Joe Karpierz):

The hardest thing to do when writing this review is not to wax poetic about the entire Expanse series. Little did James S.A. Corey (pen name of co-authors Ty Franck and Daniel Abraham) know that **LEVIATHAN WAKES**, the first book in *The Expanse*, would have such a massive effect on the science fiction genre and their careers. Now, nine novels, several shorter stories, and a six season television series later, "*The Expanse*" stands as one of the greatest (in my opinion) works of science fiction that has ever been conceived. And did I mention the novels and shorter stories won the Hugo Award for Best Series in 2020?

But all good things must come to an end, and *The Expanse* is no exception. Well, sort of. There is one more novella, "*The Sins of Our Fathers*", coming out as part of a collection of all *The Expanse* short works which will be published in March, which takes place after the conclusion of the ninth and final book, **LEVIATHAN FALLS**.

Winston Duarte, the head of the Laconian Empire, has apparently met his end. Duarte was, in fact, trying to unite all of humanity under the umbrella of the empire. But Duarte had other plans up his sleeve, and as we learned in **TIAMAT'S WRATH**, other powers had a different idea of how things should go. As a refresher course, way back in **LEVIATHAN WAKES** we learn about the protomolecule, something that was thought to be an alien weapon. As the novels progressed, we learned that the protomolecule was created by a race of beings for their own purposes. The problem is that there was another more vast and powerful entity out there, which destroyed the protomolecule builders. What we're finding out is that now that ancient enemy is now awake because of what Duarte was doing, and is coming after the human race.

I think it would be obvious at this point to say that **LEVIATHAN FALLS** is the story of how that threat is defeated by our band of intrepid heroes. While the novel focuses on the crew of the *Rocinante*, it is more than just James Holden, Naomi Nagata, Amos Burton, and Alex Kamal that take part in saving humanity. However, it is the crew of the *Roci* that take center stage in the end. It is fitting that Corey brings the series back to its roots, back to basics, in focusing on the crew. And while there are a bunch of other characters that we know from previous books along the way, like Teresa Duarte and Elvi Okoye (and a surprise return of a character I wasn't expecting to see ever again), or new ones like Aliana Tanaka, the focus is really on those that have been with us all along. And that crew, which has been through so much over the years, is still a family. Sure, sometimes a dysfunctional one, but still a family. And the characters have grown over the years. Alex and Amos surprise the reader up until the end, Naomi shows us a side of herself that I think was there all along but never really came out, and Holden...is Holden. Sure, he's grown up too, but in true Holden fashion he does something that is reckless and necessary, because he's always been motivated to do what he thinks is right to save humanity. You know--because he's James Holden. It's what he does. But of course, like just about every other crazy chance he takes, his action comes at a price.

Corey does a magnificent job wrapping up the story that began in 2011 with **LEVIATHAN WAKES**. He takes all the time he needs to let the readers know where each character ended up and why, including in a nice epilogue which I didn't see coming. And yet, it's not boring, it's not slow. It really is necessary. All of the crew may not be in a better place, but they're in a place they belong, and they are performing roles and actions that are meant for them and that make sense.

And one more time, what can I say about narrator Jefferson Mays? He really is the only person that could have narrated this series to perfection. Or maybe as the series progressed I came to feel that he's the only one that could have done "*The Expanse*" any justice whatsoever.

LEVIATHAN FALLS is an absolutely terrific conclusion to the story that began over ten years ago in **LEVIATHAN WAKES**. It's not often that a series ends in such a satisfying manner. While I will miss the characters and the story, I know they will always be there on the pages if I want to visit them again. Still, it's a melancholy feeling to say goodbye to them this time around. It's been a heck of a

ride. [-jak]

DUNE (letter of comment by Gary McGath):

In response to [Mark and Evelyn's review of DUNE](#) in the 01/07/22 issue of the MT VOID, Gary McGath writes:

[Mark and Evelyn wrote,] "And though the studio concealed it in all its advertising, this is "DUNE--PART ONE"--it is only the first half of the story. The second half is due out in the fall of 2023." [-mrl/ecl]

If it worked for Bakshi...

Well, actually, it didn't work very well for him. [-gmg]

Evelyn notes:

However, DUNE--PART TWO is officially "greenlit". While nothing is final until it is actually released, it does seem like it will happen. [-ecl]

Bibles (letter of comment by Jim Susky):

In response to Evelyn's comments on Bibles in the 12/31/21 issue of the MT VOID, Jim Susky writes:

I don't recall which Bible was in use at the Lutheran church Mom liked. We had at least one KJV at the house.

The night manager at the McDonalds where I worked one summer was active Air Force--a Baptist, who stated he liked to debate scripture with LDS folks (the KJV is standard fare for both sects).

Anyway, the NIV New Testament was then newly published. Mr. Combs recommended it, and I got a copy. The difference between 1603 KJV and 1976 NIV was striking. Plain English--a blessed relief. [-js]

Evelyn notes:

For those unfamiliar with the abbreviation, "LDS" stands for "Latter Day Saints", a.k.a the Mormons. [-ecl]

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

I just re-read THE AFFIRMATION by Christopher Priest (Faber & Faber, ISBN 0-571-11684-1). This is an earlier work by Priest, who is now best known for THE PRESTIGE. But many of the underlying ideas in THE PRESTIGE appeared here fourteen years earlier. For example, the unreliable narrator who constantly points out his unreliability: "This much I know for sure: My name is Peter Sinclair, I am English and I am, or I was, twenty-nine years old. Already there is an uncertainty, and my sureness recedes. Age is a variable; I am no longer twenty-nine."

And even more in "I was becoming aware of the deceptiveness of prose. Every sentence contained a lie."

How to refer to that line is another example of another aspect that shows up in a slightly different form in THE PRESTIGE. Do I say Priest said thus and so, or do I say Priest's character Peter Sinclair said thus and so? (I had this problem when annotating MOBY-DICK: when was Melville speaking as himself and when was he speaking as Ishmael?)

Compare the lines quoted above to the start of Alfred Borden's section of THE PRESTIGE: "I write in the year 1901. My name, my real name, is Alfred Borden," followed later by, "Already, without once writing a falsehood, I have started the deception that is my life. The lie is contained in these words, even in the very first of them. It is the fabric of everything that follows, yet nowhere will it be apparent."

Priest's observations on this are in the statements, "To discuss matters like this is my writing I had to be at a stage removed from myself. There was a duplication of myself involved, perhaps even a triplication. There was I who was writing. There was I whom I could remember. And there was I of whom I wrote, the protagonist of the story," and "But to do that I should first have to acknowledge that I really had become two people: myself, and the protagonist of the story."

Another question of the book is the question of what reality is. Is it a consensus of its participants? Is it different for each person? Or is there an objective reality independent of observers? This arises early on when Peter's sister comes to visit and perceives his house quite differently than he does, as Peter says: "I was shocked. My white room was the focus of my life in the house. Because it had become what I imagined, it was central to everything I was doing. The sun dazzled against the newly painted walls, the rush matting was pleasantly abrasive against my naked feet, and every morning when I came down from sleeping I could smell the freshness of the paint. I always felt renewed and recharged by my white room, because it was a haven of sanity in a life become muddled. Felicity threw this in doubt. If I looked at the room in the way she obviously did ... yes, I had not yet actually got around to painting it. The boards were bare, the plaster was cracked and bulging with fungus, and mildew clung around the window frame. But this was Felicity's failure, not mine. She was perceiving it wrongly. ... Felicity saw only narrow or actual truth. She was unreceptive to higher truth, to imaginative coherence, and she would certainly fail to understand the kinds of truth I told in my manuscript."

The two come together in the rumor that the athanasia treatment, which allows the winners of the Lotterie to live forever, involves inducing total amnesia on the subject and then reconstructing their memories based on an autobiography that they have written.

There are also touches of something made more explicit in China Mieville's *CITY & THE CITY*: the morphing of one city into another, both real but with a reality controlled by the person experiencing the city.

(Priest also mentions "archaic non-decimal currency", a nod to the tenth anniversary of the decimalization of British currency in 1971 (the book was published in 1971).)

I thoroughly recommend *THE AFFIRMATION*, and indeed any of Priest's work set in the Dream Archipelago. [-ecl]

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Quote of the Week:

More than one newspaper has been ruined by the
brilliant writer in the editor's chair.
--Lord Camrose

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