

Released theatrically 07/23/21; available on various streaming services. Rating: high +1 (-4 to +4), or 6/10.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt13622084/reference>

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

MLK/FBI: In the 1950s and 1960s was a (usually) quiet war between Martin Luther King, Jr. and J. Edgar Hoover. Some of the most interesting pieces in MLK/FBI are taken from the mass media of the time. For example, King is seen being interviewed by people like Merv Griffin. At the same time, Hoover appeared in propaganda pieces with names like "Espionage Target--You!" to stir up paranoia. This seems to cover mostly familiar material, at least for older viewers. It does have some newly declassified material, but the focus is more on the legality and morality of what the FBI and other agencies were doing rather than the bare facts.

Released theatrically 01/15/21; available on various streaming services. Rating: +1 (-4 to +4) or 6/10.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt12801356/reference>

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

ROADRUNNER--A FILM ABOUT ANTHONY BOURDAIN: This seems to be the year for documentaries about celebrity chefs, although Bourdain is also known as a world traveler and author. It is interesting that this film should be released at the same time as WOLFGANG. However, Bourdain has a natural feeling for the obnoxious and while we can compare the two, Bourdain's manner defeats his style.

Bourdain became famous with his memoir, KITCHEN CONFIDENTIAL. Then someone suggested "A Cook's Tour", but as a television show rather than just a book. Bourdain's ideas of travel up to this point was from books and movies, not actual travel. When he started traveling, he was very introverted and had difficulty engaging with other people. He seems to have undergone a change when he found himself in Lebanon during the civil war there. His show also changed, and became more about eating weird food.

Bourdain was apparently always difficult to work with. Towards the end of his career (and life) he brought in Asia Argento as director in Hong Kong and also started a personal relationship with her. After this, his attitude changed and he started doing things like insisting on retakes of (often) heart-breaking documentary scenes with directions as to how the people should deliver their (supposedly unscripted) lines. He also fired his long-time cameraman in a dispute between the cameraman and Argento.

Some people are taking his philosophical pronouncements as profound but he barely seems able to apply them to himself, and they often do not seem to say anything of any value in any case. For example, he sees some profundity in how he confronted his heroin addiction. Hey, Anthony, you might have been better off not taking the heroin in the first place. His capacity for self-indulgence was immense. Criticism that has been made is that the Bourdain voice-overs are not always Bourdain, but rather AI-generated voice-overs (of Bourdain's actual words) using real Bourdain clips as input. A more serious criticism might be that the dramatic conclusion (involving a friend defacing a Bourdain mural) was completely staged. The friend had jokingly suggested that Bourdain would not approve of all the murals with his picture, and the filmmakers asked him (six months later) if he would agree to deface a mural specially commissioned by them for that purpose. That this might suggest to people that defacing other people's public artwork is a good idea apparently never occurred to any of them.

Released theatrically 07/16/21; available on various streaming services. Rating: 0 (-4 to +4), or 4/10.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt14512538/reference>

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

[-mrl/ecl]

COMFORT ME WITH APPLES by **Catherynne M. Valente** (copyright 2021, tordotcom, \$17.99, hardcover, 103pp, ISBN 978-1-250-81621-4) (book review by Joe Karpierz):

"Comfort Me With Applies", the latest novella from Catherynne M. Valente, is a slow burn, a book that crept me out at times, and by the end had me thinking "well, THAT was an interesting twist that I didn't see coming".

The story takes place entirely in a housing development called Arcadia Gardens, and follows the story of Sophia who just recently moved in with her husband. She thinks Arcadia Gardens is perfect, she thinks her house is perfect, she thinks her husband is perfect, and she thinks her marriage is perfect. Arcadia Gardens is a typical development, with a set of Home Owners Association rules that are slowly revealed throughout the book in short, separate chapters. The HOA rules are part of the slow burn mentioned previously. The more of the rules we learn, the less we want to live there. But that's all okay as far as Sophia is concerned because her husband, no matter how much he is gone on business, always comes back to her and is always faithful to her. In fact, Sophia believes she was made for him.

Still, there are strange things going on in Arcadia Gardens and in her house. The house is too big for her, and not in the way we typically mean. Everything is just too tall. It's as if it were made for giants. Then Sophia starts finding things in her bedroom and kitchen that are sinister. This, combined with a visit with her neighbors as well as a gala night planned especially for her, makes her realize that things just aren't as perfect as they seem. And it all comes to a head when she meets a mysterious stranger in a location in the Gardens she doesn't recognize, a stranger who tells her the truth of what's going on.

"Comfort Me With Apples" is a good, fast read. Not that I read it in one sitting; I never read anything in one sitting. But most people should be able to devour it quickly. I found it interesting and engaging and found myself really wanting to know what was going on. It's not often that I can't see where a book is going, but this is one of them. The story could be one that polarizes readers, and maybe that's the best kind. There's nothing like (well okay there probably is, but let's just go with it, okay) sitting up late at night with a friend and a favorite beverage discussing a book that the two of you have a different viewpoint on. I enjoyed this book, and I hope you do too. [-jak]

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

In **PASSING**, two old friends meet; both are African-American, but Irene (Reenie, played by Tessa Thompson) is married to an African-American man and living in Harlem as an African-American. Clare (played by Ruth Negga) is married to a white man and "passing" as white--even her husband John, a vocal racist, does not know the truth. When John meets Reenie in the company of his wife, he obviously thinks Reenie is white. (This in spite of Reenie's skin color and facial structure, which would seem to have given him some pause. To the audience of the film, Reenie looks like an African-American passing as white.)

The film has crisp black and white photography like something out of classic "Life" magazines. Is this a bit of a pun, an attempt to evoke 1929, a way to make it easier to use lighting and/or make-up to emphasize or conceal race, or a bit of all of them? The director also uses camera angles, such as when Irene and Clare are climbing some stairs the director has them look down in the center of a spiral moving inwards, paralleling both their confinements imposed on them by a racist society.

This is, I believe, the first film about "passing" that is not written and directed entirely by white Americans. It is based on a work by an African-American writer (the book by Nella Larsen), and the writer/director Rebecca Hall has English, Dutch, and African-American origin. The three best-known films on this topic before this were **IMITATION OF LIFE** (1934 and 1959) and **PINKY** (1949).

Released on Netflix 11/10/21. Rating: +2 (-4 to +4), or 7/10.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt8893974/reference>

What others are saying: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/passing_2021

[-mrl/ecl]

LAWRENCE OF ARABIA (film comments by Evelyn C. Leeper):

Watching **LAWRENCE OF ARABIA** again, a couple of things struck me.

In the film's narrative, Lawrence survives all sorts of dangers in Arabia, then is killed (in a motorcycle accident) when he returns to England. In England, Lawrence drives through a construction zone with all sorts of warning signs posted and has no problems, but then is killed further down the road in a perfectly safe area. Was the latter true, or just made up to make a parallel to the bigger story?

Also, Lawrence claims that probably no one in the Arab Bureau knows that the Arabs have attacked Medina (because it is reported only in the Arabic newspapers), but in the next scene we see Dryden holding an Arabic newspaper and talking General Murray about it. Clearly Lawrence has a somewhat incorrect opinion of the Arab Bureau. [-ecl]

Star Trek Economics (letter of comment by R. Looney, Kip Williams, and Jim Susky):

In response to various comments on Star Trek economics in the [01/28/22](#) and [02/04/22](#) issues of the MT VOID, R. Looney writes:

Enjoyed your post-scarcity Treconomics discussion, and shared it with my brother, who's a more intense fan than I. Talk of replicators reminds me of Damon Knight's **A FOR ANYTHING** and its Gismo. Had to point out that my brother corrected your second mention of Noonian ("Of course, we didn't spend the 1990s fighting Kahn Noonian Soong")--that's actually a different Noonian, Kahn Noonian Singh (aka Ricardo Montalban), not Data's creator. But I'm guessing your inbox is now overflowing with messages about this, from pedantic Trekkers.

More interesting to me is comparing biblical translations, specifically in Ecclesiastes. I was raised a Methodist and issued a Revised Standard Bible. Its second verse of this book matches the King James: "Vanity of vanities, said the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity." I find the New International Version strange, the one-word change altering the meaning significantly: "Meaningless! Meaningless!" says the Teacher. "Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless" which is more of a Buddhist notion IMO, and doesn't address the human urge for adornment and narcissistic mirror-gazing the way the former does, and I'm surprised I see no other reactions and objections like mine, to the NIV (or at least its Ecclesiastes). [-rl]

Kip Williams writes:

The Star Trek universe lost lots of cred for me with the Quatloos bit. The Triskelion gamesters are wagering, and it goes something like this:

A: I will wager twenty quatloos on the champion!

B: I will wager a million billion quatloos on the challenger!

A: Jeez, Larry! Get a grip! You always do this. Nobody's going to take us seriously!

The net effect, for me, was of someone winging it with no thought of making sense, and it pulled me right out of the story back in the day. [-kw]

Jim Susky writes:

Having seen 98% of the 1996-68 series, about half of "Next Generation" and at most 1/3 of "Enterprise", my sample is limited and I may not be part of his audience, but I can't help but think that the likes of Manu Saadia (as recounted by the redoubtable Dale Skran) give too much credit to the world (various worlds) of Star Trek.

Given the multiplicity of writers, producers, and showrunners, one should hardly expect coherency. When you add the pervasive demands of network television along with "Standards and Practices" nannies, it's no surprise that little in Trek addresses the concerns of grownups and their vices.

I invite the better informed to "correct the record" which follows:

Did anything in Trek come even close to the ultimate addiction (excepting the possession and exercise of unchecked power)? That is, direct stimulation of cranial pleasure centers (as the Tasp in Ringworld Engineers.) The portrayal of Louis Wu as a "wirehead" suggests that this stomps holodeck addiction as a means of disconnection.

What about drug use via "derms" (see Gibson's Spawl novels)--already in current use?

What about *any* drug use--(excepting, of course, various "liquors")?

As for economics, I credit Skran for correctly characterizing the Ferengi as (at best) unsavory and not as "capitalists".

I thank him for "taking one for the team" and suspect that he (or an actual economist) would better succeed with richly characterizing current economic worlds and future Trek Worlds. [-js]

Movies, Books, Bible Translations, and the MT VOID (letter of comment by Guy Lillian III):

In response to the MT VOID in general and various specific comments in the 01/28/22 issue of the MT VOID, Guy Lillian writes in ZINE DUMP #54:

Only the latest e-zine from Evelyn and Mark; there's more out by now. Over the weeks the Leepers and their contributors review and review and review. Along with such regular contributors as Gary McGath riding their lettercols, they provide witty and perceptive opinions, up-to-date, popular and obscure: movies (the Japanese DOOR INTO SUMMER, animated CRYPTOZOO, Arthurian films, 1938's Yiddish gem THE DYBBUK), books (THE ECONOMICS OF STAR TREK--huh?--PROJECT HAIL MARY, LEVIATHAN FALLS), both (that great science fiction classic, BILLY BUDD--portrayed by William Shatner in an early TV version). They even hit on the differing translations of the Bible (the KJV or the Revised Standard; I shrink from the so-called New English). [-gl]

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

Our science fiction discussion group chose THE TIME MACHINE by H. G. Wells (available in more editions than you could shake a stick at). This is obviously not the first time I have read this, but I can still notice new things in it.

The Time Traveler (from hence forth to be known as TTT) says he was in the future for eight days, then later talks about a fruit being "in season all the time [he] was there." Unlike the Mariphasa Lupina Lumina, most fruits stay in season more than eight days.

The future is not totally idyllic: TTT says when he arrived, "A pitiless hail was hissing round me..."

One runs across the question, "What if in this interval the race had lost its manliness and had developed into something inhuman, unsympathetic, and overwhelmingly powerful?" These characteristics re-appear in the Martians in THE WAR OF THE WORLDS.

Wells has TTT initially see the world of the future as the triumph of communism. (Reminder: THE TIME MACHINE was written in 1895, a full decade before even the 1905 Russian Revolution, and over two decades before the 1917 Revolution.) And one result is the blurring of boundaries: "... or the strength of a man and the softness of a woman, the institution of the family, and the differentiation of occupations are mere militant necessities of an age of physical force..." Also, "strength is the outcome of need; security sets a premium on feebleness." The TTT points out the benefits of selective breeding in plants and animals, and assumes that selective breeding has been used on humans--which of course is true, though not in the way TTT thinks, and not with the "happy" results he at first perceives.

Eventually he discovers the truth and also concludes that the Eloi are not even human any more. Speaking of Weena, he says, "She always seemed to me, I fancy, more human than she was, perhaps because he affection was so human." This is how some people talk about their dogs. And of the Morlocks he says, "... it was impossible, somehow, to feel any humanity in the things."

Our group spent a lot of time discussing why Wells included the sequence with the crabs and whether they liked it. One person mentioned that another discussion group he was in read THE TIME MACHINE in conjunction with "Homefaring" by Robert Silverberg and "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" by T. S. Eliot. [-ecl]

Mark Leeper
mleeper@optonline.net

Quote of the Week:

Nothing is impossible for the man who doesn't have
to do it himself.

--A. H. Weiler

Tweet

Go to [our home page](#)