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Table of Contents

[Our Status After Henri and Ida](#) (comments by Evelyn C. Leeper)
[More Comments on FORBIDDEN PLANET](#) (comments by Mark R. Leeper)
[ALIEN DAY by Rick Wilber](#) (book review by Joe Karpierz)
[Robby the Robot](#) (letters of comment by Gary McGath, Kevin R, Keith F. Lynch, and John Kerr-Mudd)
[This Week's Reading](#) (ALARIC THE GOTH, THE FALL OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE, and DER FALL ROMS) (book comments by Evelyn C. Leeper)
[Quote of the Week](#)

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Our Status After Henri and Ida (comments by Evelyn C. Leeper):

A few people have asked, so we'll just say here that we are fine. Neither Henri nor Ida gave us more than some heavy rain, and we had no damage from either that or any wind. We seem to have been to the south of the main tracks for both of them. [-ecl]

More Comments on FORBIDDEN PLANET (comments by Mark R. Leeper):

Last week I recommended FORBIDDEN PLANET as by Turner Classic Movies pick of the month. But even such a great film as FORBIDDEN PLANET has a few flaws, and I will talk about them this week.

Apparently MGM wanted to get the film out with as little expense as possible. It already has cost \$1.9 million, then the most ever spent to make a science fiction film, and they did not want to sink much more in. The executives decided on releasing the rough-cut of the film that it did not want to pay for a final editing. As a result we see many editing problems that really should have been corrected. There are little pieces of conversations that seem either incomplete or totally incoherent. When the cruiser comes out of hyperspace, Cmdr. Adams (Leslie Nielsen) is momentarily angry at Jerry, perhaps for navigating the cruiser so close to a star. But Adams never finishes his sentence and the matter is totally dropped, so we have no confirmation what it was all about.

In another scene we can suppose that Dr. Ostrow (Warren Stevens) has started to say something to Adams and stopped himself. But it would seem the scene was cut. All we have left is him telling Adams "nothing important, skipper." In another scene Altaira has decided she loves Adams, but there is nothing that makes it obvious when seeing her. Still Adams tells Ostrow, "Something new has been added." Ostrow looks at Altaira and somehow knows what Adams means. He comments, "That will complicate things." He can see love in Altaira somehow, but what he is seeing is invisible to the viewer. It can also be seen by the tiger apparently and he turns on her, though why a tiger should behave differently to her because she was in love is never explained. Adams seems surprised that Alta does not understand, but I have to admit I don't either. Much of the dialogue is scientifically absurd, like the implication that lead isotope 217 is lighter than ordinary lead. Some of the science jargon is complete nonsense, with phrases like "short-circuit the

continuum on a 5 or 6 parsec level."

I might be overruled on this but that sounds like a load of jargon duck tires.

There are signs that even director Fred M. Wilcox did not give the script a close reading. We are told that the energy shaft is twenty miles square. Morbius tells this to Adams pointing horizontally saying, "Twenty miles," and then pointing in the opposite direction repeating, "Twenty miles." That would make the shaft forty miles across and the characters would already be in the center. In fact, they probably were in a corner of the shaft and he was supposed to be pointing along two perpendicular edges. In another scene, Altaira describes a dress in detail for Robby to make. When we see the dress the length is about right, but otherwise it looks very different from what was described. More possible errors: the credits call Anne Francis "Altaira," but in the film she is almost always called "Alta." She is introduced with the shorter name, but characters seem to know about the longer one. When the monster is tracked on radar it is as big as a house, when we see it is roughly the size of an elephant.

There are some other visual problems. Even the outdoor sets were clearly shot on soundstages, giving the film a claustrophobic set-bound feel. The outdoor paintings are all too obviously paintings, albeit imaginative, with an inexhaustible supply of nearby moons. The feel is again one reminiscent of the early days of "Star Trek." Some of the props are a little strange. The klystron monitor looks like a distiller; blasters look a little too much like dressed-up packing tubes. When we first see Altaira with a tiger, the cat walks in front of a red bush and Altaira follows it. Someone must have sprayed the bush between when the cat was filmed and when Francis was. The bush turns redder in pieces as Francis walks by it. We see the camera move just a little each time a panel is shut around Morbius's home.

MGM was not able to do themselves all the effects for FORBIDDEN PLANET and got some technical aid from Disney Studios. The result is that several of the scenes have the unmistakable feel of Disney animation. When we see sparks in Robby's dome, or long arcs of electricity, they look like Disney animation. When walking to the reactor, we see a scene in the power shaft that looks very much like Disney animation. I assume they also did the rays coming out of the blasters, but not very well. The line of the blast remains steady even though the gun is shaking around.

But even with all the groundbreaking approaches in this film, the filmmakers were afraid to make a future without paying their tribute to religion. A special effort is made to show that these future people still believe in God. As Ostrow says, "The Lord sure made some beautiful worlds." [-mrl]

ALIEN DAY by **Rick Wilber** (copyright 2021, Tor, \$29.99, Hardcover, 247pp, ISBN 978-1-250-26024-6) (book review by Joe Karpierz):

What's better than a good old-fashioned nasty sibling rivalry? Why, a good old-fashioned sibling rivalry between alien brothers who are arguing over the control of planet Earth. What's better than that? Well, not only both human and alien sibling rivalries, but the humans getting involved in the aliens' rivalry. And that's just for starters.

ALIEN DAY is the sequel to **ALIEN MORNING**, Rick Wilber's highly entertaining and very original take on first contact and alien invasion all wrapped into one. As a quick summary, the S'hudonni have come to Earth to attain goods from Earth in exchange for advanced science and technology. And, of course, it turned out to be something quite different, as this arrangement ultimately results in humanity living in the shadow of the S'hudonni. Oh, humanity does appear to prosper and reap benefits under this arrangement, but there's a nagging suspicion--at least I have a nagging suspicion--that not is all as it appears with this arrangement.

However, there are factions within both humanity and the S'hudonni that don't like the way things are going. Twoclicks is the current leader of the S'hudonni on Earth, but his brother Whistle is not happy with the arrangement in the very least, and a violent conflict erupts between the two. As a result, there are to be family negotiations back on the S'hudonni to determine who gets control of Earth (like I said, a little suspicious, I tell you). Peter Holman, the protagonist of **ALIEN MORNING**, gets to go to the homeworld to witness the negotiations and broadcast them to an anxious human population on Earth.

Meanwhile, Peter's brother Tom leads a group of people rebelling against what appears to be Twoclicks' benevolent rule. He and his gang go about sabotaging various crops that contribute to the creation of the alcohol that the S'hudonni are so fond of. In reality, Tom is more tied into the conflict between Twoclicks and Whistle than he is letting on. The intertwined conflicts make for some interesting situations as Tom escalates his attacks.

All is not a bed of roses for Peter on the S'hudonni homeworld. He is there alone without human companionship. He does have Treble, the offspring of Twoclicks and Whistle to keep him company and parade him around the homeworld. Through Treble, Peter gets to meet the great Mother of the sparring siblings, who will make the final decision as to who is in control of Earth. Throw Peter's sister Kait into the mix, and you have a full family outing in this novel.

As a reader who lives in the United States, I feel that there is a parallel between what is going on with both the S'hudonni and humanity and what is going on here in the U.S. The world situation in the novel is pitting brother against brother as a result of entities who are struggling for the power to control the population, a scenario we are seeing played out every day here in the United States. The conflicts are eerily similar. I don't know if Wilber intended it, but given the time frame in which I'm guessing the book was written, I suspect that national, if not global politics played a large part in shaping the story in **ALIEN DAY**.

Having said that, the undertones don't override what is a really terrific story. All of the characters we enjoyed in **ALIEN MORNING** are back here in **ALIEN DAY**, contributing to this novel in the same way they contributed to the prior novel. The book is well written and moves along; I was never bored nor did I look ahead to see what was coming up next. I was engaged in the story and the characters, just as I was in **ALIEN MORNING**. This book is well worth reading, and I expect the third novel in the series to be the same way. I'm looking forward to it. [-jak]

Robby the Robot (letters of comment by Gary McGath, Kevin R, Keith F. Lynch, and John Kerr-Mudd):

In response to Mark's comments on FORBIDDEN PLANET in the 08/27/21 issue of the MT VOID, Gary McGath writes:

There's a "Twilight Zone" episode where an inventor is working on a secret project in the basement. I cracked up when the invention was shown to be Robby. [-gmg]

Kevin R responds:

3 eps of "Lost In Space" featured Robby.

"When Tin Cans Clash!" {War Of The Robots}: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0636256/>

Also "Ghost in Space" (1966) and "Condemned of Space" (1967).

Robby has "worked" into this century!: https://www.imdb.com/name/nm1119475/?ref_=nmbio_bio_nm

Over fifty years of credits! [-kr]

Keith F. Lynch writes:

I'll have to rewatch "Ghost in Space". I knew Robby was in the other two "Lost in Space" episodes you mention, but not that one. [-kfl]

John Kerr-Mudd replies:

Danger! Will Robinson! IIRC, WIMN. [-jkm]

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

ALARIC THE GOTH: AN OUTSIDER'S HISTORY OF THE FALL OF ROME by Douglas Boin (Norton, ISBN 978-0-393-63569-0) is more about the history of the Goths and the fall of Rome than about Alaric the Goth. Boin starts out by saying how little documentation there is about Alaric, so it isn't surprising, but titling it "Alaric the Goth" is a bit deceptive. In addition, Boin's focus seems to be on how civilized the Goths really were, but that the Romans' prejudice against immigrants led them to mistreat, oppress, and murder them.

The book was written in 2020 and one example of how Boin is trying to emphasize parallels to the present day is his description of the Romans' treatment of Gothic children:

"The plan, instituted by Emperor Valens, was to distribute the Gothic children "into various towns to prevent them, when grown to manhood," of plotting what many people feared would be an "insurrection." According to the Roman writers who live to witness this episode, the government's policy applied to Gothic boys eight to ten years old--"those persons," it was said, "who were too young for war." Following the usual Roman military practice, many of the older boys were likely enrolled as cadets. The young Gothic boys were identified, processed, and sorted, the impersonal nature of the border guards' tasks little different from the inhumanity of the colonial-era Dacian slave trade. ... State resources were soon allocated to implement the border separation policy in full. ... The rugged plateaus and cities beyond the Taurus Mountains, in Roman Asia, were identified as suitable holding pens for the children. Gothic children were forced to say good-bye not only to a familiar landscape of childhood memories, but to their actual parents, grandparents, and siblings. No documentation was ever kept, as far as historians know, that would have identified the children or helped reunite them with their families. An obvious paper trail, in fact, is quite likely what the Roman government wanted to avoid. Cruelty was the intention. Many Gothic parents never saw their sons again."

Sound familiar?

What I found strange, though, was that while Boin's last chapter talks about subsequent sacks of Rome, he completely omits the Sack of Rome in 1527 by the troops of Charles V, arguably the worst sack of Rome. It lasted a month, and 45,000 Romans were killed, wounded, or exiled.

The problem is that the lack of focus on Alaric results in a real scatter-shot book: it touches on the history of the Goths (and the Vandals), the attitudes of fifth and sixth century Romans toward immigrants and diversity, (some of) the later sacks of Rome, the archaeology of the Goths and their sack of Rome, and a lot of other stuff. (It still doesn't tell me why they haven't tried to find Alaric's burial place in the Busento River using metal detectors, since a great hoard was supposedly buried with him.)

In my opinion, Boin should have picked a focus, e.g., the history of the Goths and their interaction with Rome, and written that. (An example of this sort of book would be THE STORM BEFORE THE STORM by Mike Duncan, focusing on a specific period at the end of the Roman Republic rather than a specific individual.)

THE FALL OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE by Michael Grant (Collier, ISBN 978-0-02-028560-4) is 250 pages long, which is rather short for such a comprehensive title, especially since the historical description is only about a tenth of that. (One could claim that this is because leaving out the decline saved a thousand pages, but that would just be snarky.) This book could more accurately be titled THIRTEEN INTERNAL CONFLICTS THAT HELPED CAUSE THE FALL OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE, such as "The Generals against the State" and "The Other World against This World".

But one could just as easily have lists of other lengths, depending on how much one wants to collect related causes under a single banner. "The Poor against the State", for example, includes agrarian slavery, blockage of land by large landholders, destruction of peasantry, feudalization, large landed properties, and taxation, all of which are separate items in Alexander Demandt's 210 items listed in his DER FALLS ROM(*). (His list is also marvelously self-contradictory, listing abolition of gods, Christianity, lack of religiousness, mystery religions, religious struggles and schisms, superstition, and the ever-popular "Jewish influence").

Obviously, one has to see if these "causes" would also apply to the Eastern Empire, but the truth is probably that it was the conjunction of all these causes. If the Eastern Empire only had 157 of Demandt's causes, that might not have been enough to tip the scales. At any rate, for someone looking for a book a bit less intimidating than Edward Gibbon's opus, and that doesn't cost \$90 and have 719 pages of German like Demandt's, this is a reasonable overview of some of the causes of the Western Empire's fall.

(*) Abolition of gods, abolition of rights, absence of character, absolutism, agrarian question, agrarian slavery, anarchy, anti-Germanism, apathy, aristocracy, asceticism, attacks by Germans, attacks by Huns, attacks by nomads on horseback. Backwardness in science, bankruptcy, barbarisation, bastardisation, blockage of land by large landholders, blood poisoning, bolshevisation, bread and circuses, bureaucracy, Byzantinism. Capitalism, change of capitals, caste system, celibacy, centralisation, childlessness, Christianity, citizenship (granting of), civil war, climatic deterioration, communism, complacency, concatenation of misfortunes, conservatism, corruption, cosmopolitanism, crisis of legitimacy, culinary excess, cultural neurosis. Decentralisation, decline of Nordic character, decline of the cities, decline of the Italic population, deforestation, degeneration, degeneration of intellect, demoralisation, depletion of mineral resources, despotism, destruction of environment, destruction of peasantry, destruction of political process, destruction of Roman influence, devastation, differences in wealth, disarmament, disillusion with state, division of empire, division of labour, earthquakes, egoism, egoism of the state, emancipation of slaves, enervation, epidemics, equal rights (granting of), eradication of the best, escapism, ethnic dissolution, excessive aging of population, excessive civilisation, excessive culture, excessive foreign infiltration, excessive freedom, excessive urbanisation, expansion, exploitation. Fear of life, female emancipation, feudalisation, fiscalism, gladiatorial system, gluttony, gout, hedonism, Hellenisation, heresy, homosexuality, hothouse culture, hubris, hyperthermia. Immoderate greatness, imperialism, impotence, impoverishment, imprudent policy toward buffer states, inadequate educational system, indifference, individualism, indoctrination, inertia, inflation, intellectualism, integration (weakness of), irrationality, Jewish influence. Lack of leadership, lack of male dignity, lack of military recruits, lack of orderly imperial succession, lack of qualified workers, lack of rainfall, lack of religiousness, lack of seriousness, large landed properties, lead-poisoning, lethargy, levelling (cultural), levelling (social), loss of army discipline, loss of authority, loss of energy, loss of instincts, loss of population, luxury. Malaria, marriages of convenience, mercenary system, mercury damage, militarism, monetary economy, monetary greed, money (shortage of), moral decline, moral idealism, moral materialism, mystery religions, nationalism of Rome's subjects, negative selection. Orientalisation, outflow of gold, over-refinement, pacifism, paralysis of will, paralysation, parasitism, particularism, pauperism, plagues, pleasure-seeking, plutocracy, polytheism, population pressure, precociousness, professional army, proletarianisation, prosperity, prostitution, psychoses, public baths. Racial degeneration, racial discrimination, racial suicide, rationalism, refusal of military service, religious struggles and schisms, rentier mentality, resignation, restriction to profession, restriction to the land, rhetoric, rise of uneducated masses, romantic attitudes to peace, ruin of middle class, rule of the world. Semi-education, sensuality, servility, sexuality, shamelessness, shifting of trade routes, slavery, Slavic attacks, socialism (of the state), social tensions, soil erosion, soil exhaustion, spiritual barbarism, stagnation, stoicism, stress, structural weakness, superstition. Taxation, pressure of terrorism, tiredness of life, totalitarianism, treason, tristesse, two-front war, underdevelopment, useless diet, usurpation of all powers by the state, vaingloriousness, villa economy, vulgarisation."

[-ecl]

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Quote of the Week:

Precedents do no stop where they begin, but,
however narrow the path upon which they enter,
they create for themselves a highway whereon they
may wander with the utmost latitude ... no one thinks
a course is base for himself which has proven
profitable to others.

--Velleius Paterculus

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