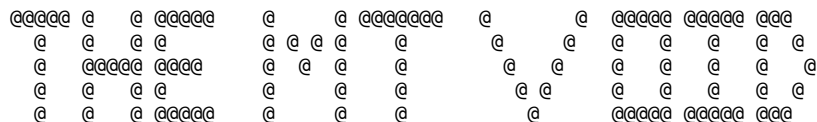


MT VOID 09/10/21 -- Vol. 40, No. 11, Whole Number 2188



Mt. Holz Science Fiction Society
09/10/21 -- Vol. 40, No. 11, Whole Number 2188

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Co-Editor: Mark Leeper, mleeper@optonline.net
Co-Editor: Evelyn Leeper, eleeper@optonline.net
Sending Address: evelynchimelisleeper@gmail.com
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More Mini-Reviews (film reviews by Mark R. Leeper):

FRENCH EXIT (2020): FRENCH EXIT is about a self-absorbed woman used to living a high and very expensive lifestyle who finds herself broke and relocates with her son to Paris. The film features a large number of strange characters, and was filmed mostly in Paris. The story also involves a talking cat. Available on DVD. Rating: +1 (-4 to +4).

AFTER THE DARK (2013): At its final session, a philosophy symposium experiences its philosophic questions happening in reality. Specifically, the issue is how to preserve the human race after a nuclear war. The viewer may compare their opinions with those of philosophers. There are special effects, but they are rudimentary. Sadly, the film winds down near the end, but it rises above most films found, as this was, on a multi-film themed DVD. Rating: low +3 (-4 to +4).

ZOMBIES ON BROADWAY (1945): RKO's zombie series really had only one good film, I WALKED WITH A ZOMBIE. ZOMBIES ON BROADWAY shares two very noticeable actors with that film, Sir Lancelot and Darby Jones. This is a somewhat racist comedy, with the "comedy" team of Alan Carney and Wally Brown, probably inspired by Abbott and Costello, but there is nothing very funny in the "humor." These days it is a very rare film to find on television (TCM showed it eight times between 1998 and 2007, then once again in 2015, and not since.) This film is yet more evidence that Bela Lugosi would act in any film that would pay him. (This is known as LOONIES ON BROADWAY in the UK.) Rating: -1 (-4 to +4)

[-mrl]

THE ESCAPEMENT by Lavie Tidhar (copyright 2021, Tachyon Publications, ISBN 9781616963279, \$16.95) (book review by Joe Karpierz):

THE ESCAPEMENT, by Lavie Tidhar, is quite possibly the weirdest book I have ever read. And no, I'm not saying it as if it's a bad thing. It just, well, is.

I was going to try to be clever, using a dictionary definition of the word "escapement" to help describe the book. The website dictionary.com has five definitions of the word escapement, none of which (for me) accurately describe the book. The website thesaurus.com wasn't much better. It gave eight synonyms for the word escapement, but I wasn't satisfied with any one of them.

It figures. The book defies description. But that's not a bad thing. It's really a good thing. How many books do readers come across these days that are so different, so offbeat, so ... weird, that they defy description? Not many. But we certainly have one here.

The Escapement (not the book, but the setting), is an alternate, parallel world populated with all sorts of weird creatures and occurrences. It is not unusual, to see on any given day, clowns (sometimes vicious), mimes (also sometimes vicious), bounty hunters, tarot cards, and giants made of stone. There are unexplained wars occurring, including wars between symbols. Heck, wars between different clown factions are referred to. The landscape is sometimes surrealistic, invoking images that remind the reader of Salvador Dali. We meet a version of John Wayne Gacy (as a clown, of course), who is nearly impossible to kill. It's ... weird. But that's not a bad thing.

Our protagonist, if he can be called that, is known as "the Stranger". He has come to the Escapement to search for a particular flower, the "Ur-shanabi", the Plant of Heartbeat. He has come from our reality, the one we are familiar with, where his son is dying in a hospital. Our reality is known as that "other place", and there are ways of intentionally travelling between the two worlds, all of which involve the use of mind-altering chemicals, whether it be alcohol or drugs. Sometimes the Stranger can see across to the other worlds. It's ... weird. But that's not a bad thing.

Without giving anything away, THE ESCAPEMENT tells the story of the Stranger looking for the aforementioned plant in order to help save his son back in our world. But while that's the story element the novel hangs its hat on, it is almost such a minor point as to be almost irrelevant. THE ESCAPEMENT is really Tidhar's excuse for taking a whole bunch of literary references and dumping them into one story to see if he can make them fit together. And if he can't, so what? Yes, there's a narrative thread to follow throughout the book, but it's only here in order for Tidhar to masterfully weave all sorts of different things together that make the reader's brain explode, or at the very least make readers shake their heads in bewilderment, but, ultimately, wonderment.

A few weeks ago as I write this Lavie Tidhar was a guest on The Coode Street Podcast. When talking about THE ESCAPEMENT, he said "that book is just weird". And I agree with him. But it's not a bad weird. It's a good weird. It's a book that doesn't telegraph where it's going. It's also a book that feels like it doesn't know where it's going until it gets there. But it's not predictable by any stretch of the imagination. And it does stretch the reader's imagination in a very good way. It's something different, and something weird. And in this case, it's a very good thing. [-jak]

Robby the Robot (letters of comment by Keith F. Lynch, Kevin R, and Dorothy J. Heydt):

In response to [comments on Robby the Robot](#) in the 09/03/21 issue of the MT VOID, Keith F. Lynch writes:

[Following up on his uncertainty about Robby being in "Condemned of Space"]

Okay, I just rewatched it, and technically you're right. Each episode ended with a brief teaser for the following episode. The last two seconds of "Ghost in Space" show Robby, as they're a teaser for the following episode, "War of the Robots."

That reminds me of the nitpick about when Curly and Shemp appeared together, creating a Three Stooges short with four stooges. Most sources say that only happened in "Hold that Lion!" It also happened in "Booty and the Beast," but that used the exact same footage as "Hold that Lion!" [-kfl]

Kevin R responds:

[Regarding "technically" being right]

...which, on USENET, is sometimes the most satisfying way to be right. :-)

Those teasers bugged me, but they were supposed to, borrowing the movie serials' "cliffhanger" chapter endings. They fit better on the Wednesday night showings of BATMAN, which, when it was cut back to one weekly episode for the final season, shifted to teasers. IMS, THE TIME TUNNEL used them, too, as Doug and Tony always escaped one horrible fate at the end of an episode, only to be switched to another era with its own dangers to be confronted. Both THE TIME TUNNEL and LOST IN SPACE were Irwin Allen shows.

Some of the Stooges shorts had only 2 Stooges, arguably:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shemp_Howard#The_%22Fake_Shemps%22_and_legacy

I was a big Shemp fan. [-kr]

Regarding Disney's contributions to FORBIDDEN PLANET, Dorothy J. Heydt writes:

Once long ago, when Bjo Trimble was living in LA, I visited her and she decided to take me to meet Forry Ackerman. So we drove up to his house. He wasn't home, but his door was unlocked and Bjo took me on in. We saw lots of neat artwork, and lying on his desk was a concept drawing of the Id Monster. It was a pencil drawing that neither moved around nor flashed in and out, and I could see clearly what it looked like.

You'll remember Morbius telling his visitors that the Krell didn't make pictures, and that the only clue he had as to what they looked like was the shape of their doorways.

But the visitor (and the audience) have already seen the plaster cast of the monster's foot, with its huge pad and long claw.

The Id Monster in the drawing had the body shape of a Krell, with two heavy clawed feet under it. It had no hands.

No wonder the Krell wanted to get past the need for any physical instrumentality!

But it had the face of an ape, with the fangs of a full-grown male chimpanzee.

I forget the name of the Disney artist who designed that thing. (*) But he was good.

* If I were at home I could get the DVD out, but I'm at a gaming convention, helping Hal shill for the gaming convention we're going to be running next February, Deo volente. (We had to cancel the one scheduled for this year.) [-djh]

Kevin R responds:

Happy shilling!

I think Joshua Meador is the animator in question.

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

<https://outline.com/ceXw5s>

which is:

<https://cdispatch.com/lifestyles/2011-08-21/rufus-ward-josh-meador-and-the-forbidden-planet/>

<https://www.oscars.org/events/mysteries-krell-making-forbidden-planet>

[-kr]

Dorothy replies:

Yes! That's what I saw [a copy of] on Forry's desk.

Cool, is it not? [-djh]

Alaric the Goth (letters of comment by Fred Lerner and Paul Dormer):

In response to [Evelyn's comments on ALARIC THE GOTH](#) in the 09/03/21 issue of the MT VOID, Fred Lerner writes:

How do the books you mentioned (ALARIC THE GOTH: AN OUTSIDER'S HISTORY OF THE FALL OF ROME by Douglas Boin and THE FALL OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE by Michael Grant) compare with THE FALL OF ROME by R.A. Lafferty? [-fl]

And Paul Dormer writes:

There's actually an R. A. Lafferty historical novel about Alaric--ALARIC: THE DAY THE WORLD ENDED, a.k.a. THE FALL OF ROME. [-pd]

Evelyn responds:

If I had read Lafferty's THE FALL OF ROME, it was years ago, so I went back to look at it now. The first thing to note is that people cannot seem to agree on whether Lafferty's book is a history, or historical fiction, or something in between.

Worldcat.org calls it history. Kirkus Reviews thinks it is history, but badly written. The review on LibraryThing.com calls it a historical novel. The consensus on GoodReads.com seems to be something in between. (FantasticFiction.com calls it a novel, refers to it as history, and lists its genre as science fiction, so they're all over the place.)

I would lean away from treating it as faithful history, based on Lafferty's claims that the Goths had positional notation for numbers, and also the concept of zero, but whether it's a historical novel is not clear. Lafferty also seems to include a lot of Alaric's early history, which Boin had said was largely unknown. At any rate, the style is that of a novel, and the history of it is not to be relied on. [-ecl]

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

THE CHOSEN AND THE BEAUTIFUL by Nghi Vo (Tordotcom, ISBN 978-1-250-78478-0) had to wait for its time to come--and 2021 was its time. Why? Because THE CHOSEN AND THE BEAUTIFUL is a retelling, or a refashioning, of THE GREAT GATSBY by F. Scott Fitzgerald, and 2021 was when THE GREAT GATSBY came into public domain. (See for my comments on THE GREAT

GATSBY.)

THE CHOSEN AND THE BEAUTIFUL differs from THE GREAT GATSBY in two major ways. First (and most obviously) it is told from the point of view of Jordan Baker. And while she is still a tennis star, in THE CHOSEN AND THE BEAUTIFUL she is Vietnamese and bisexual.

The second is that in Vo's world of Gatsby et al there is magic. Daisy's name before she married Tom was Daisy Fay, and the ambiguity is intentional. Some of the magic is overt, e.g., paper-cutting magic. But much is ambiguous.

For example, Jordan looks at Nick and notices that "[he] looked dubious, but I could tell that wouldn't last. He had come to Gatsby's party, he had eaten the food, he had fallen under Gatsby's spell. It was already too late." In a realistic novel (like Fitzgerald's version), the "spell" would be metaphorical. In Vo's world, it is the real spell of the faery world, where if you eat their food, you are trapped.

When Jordan says, "Young girls would rent out their bodies for ten minutes, an hour, or a day, and though there were charms to prevent pregnancy, injury, and disease, more than one girl opened her eyes to find herself in trouble with some group or other, whether it was the law, one of the organized crime factions, or some dupe man who had been entranced by canny eyes in a fresh young face," you think she is simply referring to prostitution. But when she goes on, "I ... came to the conclusion that if I were in their position, I would be a fair amount more clever than they were about who got to sit behind their faces," and you realize that what is going on is that the girls are renting out their bodies to be worn like a suit by someone else's personality/soul. (Possibly Vo was inspired by Robert Silverberg's classic story, "Passengers".)

So by the time we get to "a hall roofed in what Gatsby told us was the longest night of the year in some town in Norway," we are not totally surprised to find out that they "stood in that hall for several minutes, letting the Norwegian winter cool us down as shimmering green and violet lights danced above our heads."

It probably goes without saying that one should read THE GREAT GATSBY before reading THE CHOSEN AND THE BEAUTIFUL. (Apparently this book is now on high school reading lists, so it is much more widely read anyway than when I was growing up.) But I definitely recommend THE CHOSEN AND THE BEAUTIFUL. [-ecl]

Mark Leeper
mleeper@optonline.net

Quote of the Week:

The nose of a bulldog has been slanted backwards
so that he can breathe without letting go.
--Winston Churchill

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