

MT VOID 10/29/21 -- Vol. 40, No. 18, Whole Number 2195

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Mt. Holz Science Fiction Society
10/29/21 -- Vol. 40, No. 18, Whole Number 2195

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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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To subscribe or unsubscribe, send mail to eleeper@optonline.net

The latest issue is at <http://www.leepers.us/mtvoid/latest.htm>.

An index with links to the issues of the MT VOID since 1986 is at

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

Science Fiction (and Other) Discussion Groups, Films, Lectures, etc. (NJ):

Both groups have returned to the B.C. (Before Covid) schedules, and the films will be shown as part of the Middletown meetings.

November 4 (MTPL), 5:30PM: Halloween Horror: NIGHT OF THE DEMON,
short story "Casting the Runes" by M. R. James

<https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/9629>

November 18 (**NOTE DATE SHIFT**) (OBPL), 7:00PM: EXHALATION
by Ted Chiang: "The Merchant and the Alchemist's Gate",
"Exhalation", and "Anxiety Is the Dizziness of Freedom"

<http://tinyurl.com/alchemists-gate-pdf>

<http://tinyurl.com/dizziness-of-freedom>

December 2 (MTPL), 5:30PM: Stanislaw Lem Centennial: PILOT PIRX'S
INQUEST (1979), short story "The Inquest" by Stanislaw Lem

<https://tinyurl.com/Pirx-More-Tales>

NIGHT OF THE DEMON (comments by Mark R. Leeper):

Of the next Middletown film and fiction discussion(*), I have this to say:

In NIGHT OF THE DEMON Dana Andrews plays an American skeptic who goes to Britain to investigate the death of a fellow skeptic. This draws him into a life or death conflict and sets him against a powerful wizard. A slightly different version of this film goes under the title CURSE OF THE DEMON. It is an adaptation of the short story "Casting the Runes" by M. R. James. The film features an excellent performance from Niall McGinnis as the wizard Julian Karswell.

(*) "Film and fiction" rather than "film and book" because the film is based on a short story contained in the book GHOST STORIES OF AN ANTIQUARY 2.

[-mrl]

My Picks for Turner Classic Movies for November (comments by Mark R. Leeper):

I have gotten myself in trouble before when I recommended the film WATERSHIP DOWN, first as a film and later as a book. "Well, you see, it is an animated film about a colony of rabbits uprooted from their home and looking for a safe place to live. Well, they have human-sized minds and interesting minds. If I remember Hazel is in charge the security of the warren, but it is really led by Fiver, a rabbit with psychic abilities." Richard Adams wrote the book and shopped it around to twelve publishers before one was willing to publish it. After that it remained at the top of the bestseller list for eight months.

[WATERSHIP DOWN (1978), November 19, 6:15PM]

Evelyn notes there are also several "mini-fests" of interest:

Silent Euro SF/Horror:

11/01/2021 01:00 AM Metropolis (1926)
11/01/2021 03:45 AM Vampyr (1932)
11/01/2021 05:15 AM Haxan (1922)

Fairy Tales:

11/19/2021 06:00 AM The Glass Slipper (1955)
11/19/2021 07:45 AM Jack and the Beanstalk (1952)
11/19/2021 09:15 AM Beauty and the Beast (1946)
11/19/2021 11:00 AM Tom Thumb (1958)
11/19/2021 12:45 PM Gulliver's Travels (1939)
11/19/2021 02:15 PM The Phantom Tollbooth (1970)
11/19/2021 03:45 PM The Wonderful World of the Brothers
Grimm (1962)
11/19/2021 06:15 PM Watership Down (1978)

Horror Marathon:

11/23/2021 06:15 AM Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde (1932)
11/23/2021 08:00 AM The Hunchback of Notre Dame (1939)
11/23/2021 10:00 AM The Tell-Tale Heart (1941)
11/23/2021 10:30 AM The Picture of Dorian Gray (1945)
11/23/2021 12:30 PM The Woman in White (1948)
11/23/2021 04:45 PM The Curse of Frankenstein (1957)
11/23/2021 06:30 PM Dracula (1931)

And in the non-SF area, there is TCM's Veterans Day tribute marathon:

11/10/2021 11:45 PM Malaya (1950)
11/11/2021 01:30 AM Background to Danger (1943)
11/11/2021 01:45 AM Malaya (1950)
11/11/2021 03:00 AM Manpower (1941)
11/11/2021 03:30 AM Background to Danger (1943)
11/11/2021 06:00 AM The Rack (1956)
11/11/2021 08:00 AM Action in the North Atlantic (1943)
11/11/2021 10:15 AM Bombardier (1943)
11/11/2021 12:00 PM Torpedo Run (1958)
11/11/2021 01:45 PM Fighter Squadron (1948)
11/11/2021 03:30 PM The Dirty Dozen (1967)
11/11/2021 06:15 PM Paths of Glory (1958)
11/11/2021 08:00 PM The Best Years of Our Lives (1946)
11/11/2021 11:00 PM G.I. Blues (1960)
11/12/2021 01:00 AM Sergeant York (1941)
11/12/2021 03:30 AM Mister Roberts (1955)

[-mrl]

NO TIME TO DIE (comments by Mark R. Leeper):

The writers of the James Bond films have (tiresomely) played the same April-Fools joke on the audience going back to THUNDERBALL. In that film a crypt bore the initials "JB." But Death is ever-present in Bond films as after he has passed his use-by date. It is rather fantastic to keep expecting him to dodge all those bullets fired intentionally and/or randomly. The stories were becoming too familiar, too simple. Bond is thinking about the irony that his former friends may become his current enemies and vice versa. "Well," he concludes, "ya live long enough." That is a sentiment very applicable to this film. Bond finds himself facing down

some of his old enemies to a musical score incorporating old songs to the strains of "We have all the time in the world." He is not rushing to the inevitable restage of "All the Time in the World." There are lots of call-backs to call-out souvenirs of previous films of the series, with enough time to bring back familiar and popular touches from the progenitors of the series. This is just my opinion: Daniel Craig is the best James Bond. But I have to say he is the ugliest actor to play James Bond. He has a face like a prizefighter who has lost more than once. There are times the script calls for him to be attractive. Maybe part of the reason he is interesting playing Bond is that he is different from the pack. It is like the case for Jean-Paul Belmondo. Ever notice? [-mrl]

"The Adventure of the Beryl Coronet" by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (comments by Evelyn C. Leeper):

Continuing my occasional comments on Sherlock Holmes stories:

1. I am certainly not the first to observe that no matter how exalted the person, presenting a *public* possession as security for what is evidently a private loan is not ethical.
2. He says, "Any injury to it would be almost as serious as its complete loss," yet later when it is recovered in a damaged state, no one seems overly concerned (although the concern seems to be replacing any lost beryls, and the beryls are recovered).
3. That the banker thinks carrying the coronet with him an keeping it in a drawer of a wooden dresser is safer than keeping it in the bank's safe indicates that he doesn't think his bank is very secure at all.
4. And when he has made the coronet insecure, he then tells his son and his niece all about it.
5. Offering a reward makes the whole affair public, which will certainly put the exalted personage in a very awkward spot for having used the coronet as collateral.
6. It costs the banker 4000 ponds to recover the beryls, with Holmes apparently claiming the 1000-pound reward as his fee.

[-ecl]

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

WOLFGANG is a basically a biography of celebrity chef Wolfgang Puck, as well as a look at how he transformed the restaurant industry. (This is also another film of food porn.) Some of what is said seems to contradict what had been his story up to now. For example, his abusive stepfather had been described as his mother's second husband; in fact, she was unmarried when Wolfgang was born and the stepfather was her first husband.

In the 1970s, being a chef was a blue-collar job. The owner of a restaurant might be known, but not the chef. Food in the United States was fairly terrible (think TV dinners). Puck changed that. For example, he apparently invented the Asian chicken salad. He also started the whole celebrity chef/food show culture. As he laments early in the film over a small watermelon, the world is speeding up for him.

How did he do this? After being a chef in France, Puck came to Los Angeles to Ma Maison, which had a terrible reputation. He worked to get fresher and higher ingredients, and also looked for new ways to prepare them. The film reveals more of the stress between Puck and Ma Maison owner Patrick Terrail (who claims Ma Maison's rise to success was his doing, rather than Pucks).

Puck left Ma Maison over this conflict and opened Spago's in Los Angeles. Spago's was the first serious restaurant to have an open kitchen. Spago's customers were notable people in the film industry, and Spago's also seated them based on status. After Spago's in Los Angeles came media appearances, more restaurants, packaged food, and so on. It is almost a cliché that he wants to spend more time with his family, but that seems to turn into more time teaching his son Byron to be a chef. (What about his other sons? This seems more predicated on spending time with his family professionally than as family.)

The film ends with a bunch of platitudes: follow your dreams, do what you love, etc. Puck says that success in the restaurant business is just, "You start with the best product and then you don't screw it up." And rather than people who said he wanted to change jobs because the grass is greener on the other side of the fence, he observes, "The grass is greener where you water it the most."

Released 06/25/21 on Disney+. Rating: +1 (-4 to +4), or 6/10.

[-mrl/ecl]

LICENCE TO KILL (letter of comment by Gary McGath and Keith F. Lynch):

In response to [Mark's comments on LICENCE TO KILL](#) in the 10/22/21 issue of the MT VOID, Gary McGath writes:

[Mark writes:]

Got a licence to kill (to kill)
And you know I'm going straight for your heart
(Got a licence to kill)
Got a licence to kill (to kill)
Anyone who tries to tear us apart
(Got a licence to kill)
Licence to kill
Gotta hold onto your loving
Licence to kill
Ooohooo!
Kill

{This is why we need stricter gun control. Ooohooo, Kill}
[-mrl]

These days, a license to kill is called qualified immunity in the US. I don't know about UK law. [-gmg]

Keith F. Lynch replies:

Nitpick: Qualified immunity means that you can't successfully sue a cop who had a warrant for a different address who bursts into your home at midnight and murders your wife and children and cripples you. It doesn't mean that he can't be arrested and convicted of murder. It's true he won't be charged with that or any other crime, but not because of qualified immunity, but because the prosecutors are part of the same gang as him. [-kfl]

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

HINT FICTION edited by Robert Swartwood (Norton, ISBN 978-0-393-33846-1) contains 125 stories of "hint fiction". But what is hint fiction?

Well, there is the "six-word story", attributed to Ernest Hemingway ("For sale: baby shoes, never worn."), the dribble (the story of precisely 50 words), and the drabble (precisely 100 words). Then there is micro fiction, flash fiction, and sudden fiction, followed by the more traditional short story, novelette, novella, and novel, not to mention the multi-volume (and often never-ending) series. Swartwood doesn't mention the latter, nor does he comment on the 221B, which is a Sherlockian story of 221 words in which the final word begins with a 'B'. (I will mention here that I have contributed to the latter category; see <http://leepers.us/mtvoid/2017/VOID1020.htm#221b>). To these categories, Swartwood has added hint fiction, which he defines as "a story of 25 words or fewer that suggests a larger, more complex story." However, some of these don't quite qualify, because they depend on their titles to make sense, and that puts them over 25 words. For example, "The Newton Boys' Last Photograph" by Blake Crouch is 25 words, but makes no sense as a story without the five words of the title.

Even more, "Not Waving" by Hannah Craig is not very meaningful unless not only is the title included (pushing it up to 27 words), but also that the reader is familiar with the Stevie Smith poem.

And Will Panzo is really pushing it with "The Man of Tomorrow or Maybe You've Already Heard This One Before, But You've Never Heard It Like This"--the title is more than three-quarters as long as the actual story.

THINKING IN NUMBERS: ON LIFE, LOVE, MEANING, AND MATH by Aniel Tammet (Back Bay Books, ISBN 978-0-316-18736-7) is a collection of essays. It's cataloged as math, but there is not a lot of math, and at least one statement that I am pretty sure is flat-out wrong. Tammet says that the digits in pi "follow no periodic or predictable pattern," and then says, "Circles, perfect circles, thus enumerated, consist of every possible run of digits." That may be true, but it does not immediately follow from the non-periodic, unpredictability.

THE SCIENCE OF CAN AND CAN'T: A PHYSICIST'S JOURNEY THROUGH THE LAND OF COUNTERFACTUALS by Chiara Marletto (Viking, ISBN 978-0-525-52192-1) sounded so promising. Counterfactuals--like "what if the speed of light were slower?" or "what if the Earth had no moon?" But no, it was more like "when I use a word it means just what I choose it to mean, neither more nor less." In other words, Marletto is channeling Humpty Dumpty from THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS. She never really defines "counterfactual", but she says, "... counterfactual explanations ... are explanations about what physical events could or could not be made to happen." Sorry, there is already an accepted definition for "counterfactual", which is a situation contrary to fact, whether or not it is possible. Both "Napoleon won at Waterloo" and "Napoleon is now living on the moon" are both counterfactuals, even though one is something that *might* have happened, and the other is not. [-ecl]

Mark Leeper
mleeper@optonline.net

Quote of the Week:

Nothing in progression can rest on its original plan.
We may as well think of rocking a grown man in the
cradle of an infant.

--Edmund Burke

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