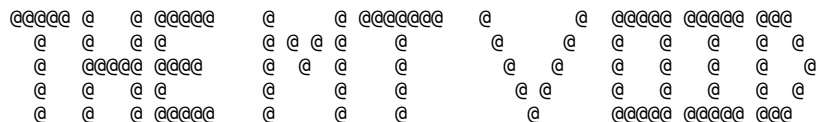


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Mt. Holz Science Fiction Society
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Co-Editor: Mark Leeper, mleeper@optonline.net
Co-Editor: Evelyn Leeper, eleeper@optonline.net
Sending Address: evelynchimelisleeper@gmail.com
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An index with links to the issues of the MT VOID since 1986 is at http://leepers.us/mtvoid/back_issues.htm.

SF Trailer Featuring Bell Labs Holmdel (comments by Evelyn C. Leeper):

SEVERANCE is a series that releases on Apple TV+ this Friday. Two seasons have been scheduled so far; the first has nine episodes, the second ten. The IMDB description is "Mark leads a team of office workers whose memories have been surgically divided between their work and personal lives. When a mysterious colleague appears outside of work, it begins a journey to discover the truth about their jobs." Interestingly, they list it as "Drama, mystery" without even mentioning science fiction.

On imdb.com, the trailer is at <https://tinyurl.com/5h3bmpk>.

One presumes the series may have even more shots of BTL Holmdel. [-ecl]

The Better Films I Saw in 2021 (film comments by Mark R. Leeper):

Every year I have been making my list of the films I saw the previous year that I thought were the ten best. But once again this year the circumstances are quite unusual, as I am sure the reader is aware. Again, I have seen far fewer films and while 2021 was better than 2020, the list is still a bit unusual, with few major films appearing. But at least most of these are "top-ten-worthy." Here in my opinion are among the best I saw. (A couple are older films first seen in 2021.)

1. NIGHTMARE ALLEY: NIGHTMARE ALLEY is described by its makers as a new adaptation of the book by William Lindsay Gresham, not a remake of the 1947 classic film noir version. There is a great deal of difference between the two, but this is every bit as good as the previous film. The production design, art direction, set decoration, and costume design are all note-worthy, and this film has a star-studded cast who bring it to life.

2. HOUSE OF GUCCI: This is more than a film about fashion--it is an Italian family epic in much the same style as THE

GODFATHER, and based on a true story. There is conspicuous wealth, scheming, betrayal and yes, even murder.

3. **LAST NIGHT IN SOHO**: **LAST NIGHT IN SOHO** looks back at the 1960s through the dreams; the use of camera filters and different film stock helps fix the time periods of the various scenes, as well as the set design. This is a surprising film with enough ideas for two films.

4. **A HERO**: When the secret girlfriend of Rahim (the title character) finds a purse full of gold coins, he thinks this will solve his debt problems, but it only entangles him further into a web of lies and deceptions. Very much a film about honor and reputation, this does not rely on flashy techniques but on good solid story-telling and acting.

5. **WORTH**: **WORTH** is a film about the September 11 Victim's Compensation Fund, and uses two very good actors in a strong and even riveting conflict: when forced to name a dollar amount as the worth of a human being, how can someone actually fairly assign a monetary value on the worth of a human? Michael Keaton, Stanley Tucci, and Michael Tucci star.

6. **LAPSIS**: **LAPSIS** is set in a world not quite our own, where Ray takes a job running cables connecting large, metal cubes in a (mostly) deserted forest. This is not a big-budget sci-fi flick, but a low-budget satire of aspects of our lives today.

7. **THE COURIER**: **THE COURIER** is a classic spy thriller based on historical fact and starring Benedict Cumberbatch. It is not quite up to the recent **BRIDGE OF SPIES**, but is definitely a quality film. Again, this does not rely on expensive special effects or stunts, but on writing and characterization.

8. **JUNGLE CRUISE**: **JUNGLE CRUISE** (the movie) was based on "Jungle Cruise", a Disneyland ride, so we weren't expecting much, and were definitely pleasantly surprised. The script owes some of its intelligence and humor to **THE AFRICAN QUEEN** and **ROMANCING THE STONE**, as well as **THE MUMMY** (1999) and **RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARK.**, but there is nothing wrong with using classics as inspiration. All in all, this is a fun movie.

9. **AMERICAN EXPERIENCE--CITIZEN HEARST**: Most people know William Randolph Hearst only as the fictional title character in **CITIZEN KANE**. Almost four hours long, this documentary looks at the real William Randolph Hearst and the power he wielded as perhaps the first media mogul. Sadly, this film would not qualify for Oscar consideration because it played on PBS rather than theatrically. But the American Experience films made for PBS deserve recognition for their consistent quality, and this year **I MAKE THE RULES**.

10. **THE FATHER**: This is a look at dementia from the inside--Anthony Hopkins is suffering from progressive dementia and cannot remember people, places, or events. What makes this different is that, for example, when Hopkins does not recognize his daughter, she is played by a different actress than when he does, so we experience his perception from inside his head. Other techniques are used as well. Disturbing, but recommended.

[-mrl]

THE PLANETS by Andrew Cohen with Professor Brian Cox (book review by Gregory Frederick):

This 2019 book is a large-size edition science book with many beautiful color images of the planets and their moons plus new photos of the dwarf planet Pluto from the New Horizons space craft. Knowledge gained from decades of robotic missions into our Solar System is contained in this large format book. Billions of years ago Mars and possibly Venus too were much more like Earth is today. That is, there was liquid water lakes and oceans on those planets and an atmosphere which had a comparable density and depth similar to Earth's. But only Earth has survived with a stable life-sustaining environment for more than 3.5 billion years or so. These days Venus has temperatures as high as 457 degrees Celsius and a surface pressure as high as 89 Earth atmospheres. And Venus has a very dense thick atmosphere of mostly CO2. Mars currently is a cold very dry desert planet with a very thin atmosphere that is only 1% the density of Earth's atmosphere. The only water on Mars today is frozen solid at the poles and under the dusty soil of the planet.

For most of the history of astronomy we only had our Solar System of planets to study. But since we began recently studying the solar systems around other stars we have discovered that our Solar System is quite unique. Most of the planetary systems around other stars is very different from our own Solar System. Inward from Mercury our Solar System is empty until you reach the Sun. But when you look at that same region around other stars you find the region is packed with a completely different class of planet called Super Earths. Super Earths are 2 to 8 times the mass of the Earth and have thick hydrogen rich atmospheres. They orbit around their star at very fast rates because they are so close to their star. We also find large mass planets like Jupiter size or greater orbiting much closer to their star. Scientists have been conducting many computer simulations of the early days of our newly forming Solar System and finding out that Jupiter could have been moving closer to the Sun back then and helped to form the Solar System we have today. Eventually as Saturn formed its massive gravity pulled Jupiter back to the location it has today. This is a well written book with great images of our Solar System's planets and moons. [-gf]

Star Trek Economics (letters of comment by Gary McGath and Scott Dorsey):

In response to [comments on Star Trek economics](#) in the 02/11/22 issue of the MT VOID, Gary McGath writes:

The Ferengi are a running joke. Any trading culture knows that reputation is highly important. They might grossly cheat people, but they work hard to keep the appearance of honesty. The Ferengi don't even try. They literally have a book on how to cheat people. [-gmg]

Scott Dorsey responds:

You've never bought a car from a dealer, have you? [-sd]

But Gary replies:

They try hard to appear honest. [-gmg]

THE TIME MACHINE (letters of comment by Jeff Urs, Scott Dorsey, Kevin R, and Robert Woodward):

In response to [Evelyn's comments on THE TIME MACHINE](#) in the 02/11/22 issue of the MT VOID, Jeff Urs writes:

[Evelyn wrote,] "Our group spent a lot of time discussing why Wells included the sequence with the crabs and whether they liked it." [-ecl]

Clearly, Wells was aware that everything eventually evolves into crabs. [-ju]

Scott Dorsey elaborates:

CLAMS -> PEOPLE -> CRABS [-sd]

Kevin R adds:

Some crabs have been around a long time. I encountered this one a lot as a kid.

<https://www.nwf.org/Educational-Resources/Wildlife-Guide/Invertebrates/Horseshoe-Crab>

[-kr]

Scott responds:

Those are RANK IMPOSTORS! They are not actual crabs at all! They are just giant arthropod scabs taking jobs away from innocent crustaceans. Blue blood, indeed! Write your congressman today! [-sd]

Robert Woodward jumps in:

What do you mean imposters! Horseshoe crabs have been around twice as long as so-called "true crabs" (who just a bunch of Johnny-come-latelys). [-rw]

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

****SPOILERS**** (but the book **is** almost seventy years old!)

The first time I read END OF ETERNITY by Isaac Asimov (Orb, ISBN 978-0-765-31919-7) I really liked it, but I was probably about fourteen and it was still the tail end of the post-war era. Now when I read it, it seems incredibly sexist, and often makes little sense to boot.

Oh, the basic idea of a "time patrol" (under whatever name) is nifty, and can result in some intriguing philosophical questions. But Asimov's "Eternals" are working only in our future, so there's never any look at the history we know (as there is in Poul Anderson's TIME PATROL, for example), and no real in-depth discussion of the future periods (other than how much skin women uncover, and what the attitudes toward sex are).

As for women, Asimov writes that all the Eternals are men, because removing women from the timeline is "ten to a hundred times more likely to distort Reality" than removing men, because of births that didn't happen, etc. Apparently Asimov was confused about who is responsible for pregnancies and births--he seems to think humans reproduce by parthenogenesis. (And don't even get me started on how Eternals can request a "liaison" and be issued a woman, much as one would request a new jacket.)

(Also note that when Twissell calls himself "queer", he is using the old definition of being peculiar. There is apparently no homosexuality in the entire timeline. Probably just as well; Asimov's attempt at writing a heterosexual sex scene is appallingly bad.)

Asimov (or his characters) never explain why the Eternals would choose a return to the "Basic State" that would effectively wipe them all out. Even calling it the "Basic State" implies that it is the "correct" one and the rest are incorrect or artificial. Why not declare that the harnessing of fire, or agriculture, or speech, destroyed the "Basic State"? And while the Basic State allowed the Galactic Empire that Asimov had already written about (at least the "Foundation" trilogy, if not the later books), it left the question of why there were no non-human intelligent races in it, since in this book the Eternals specifically say that these races exist.

Okay, so this is a book the Suck Fairy got to. More evidence that going back and reading one's old favorites from one's childhood may not be a good idea. [-ecl]

mleeper@optonline.net

Quote of the Week:

I don't want to become immortal through my work.
I want to become immortal through not dying.
--Woody Allen

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