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Mt. Holz Science Fiction Society
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Mt. Holz Science Fiction Society (comments by Evelyn C. Leeper):

As you probably did not notice, we have dropped the "Mt. Holz Science Fiction Society" from our header. The "Mt. Holz Science Fiction Society", a.k.a., the "Science Fiction Club at Bell Labs", hasn't existed for over twenty years now, and including it masks the fact that the MT VOID is really just Mark's and my perzine.

R.I.P., Mt. Holz Science Fiction Society

[-ecl]

Bell Labs Holmdel / Bell Works (comments by Evelyn C. Leeper):

And speaking of Bell Labs, there is a three-minute video talking about the use of the Bell Labs building in Holmdel (now Bell Works) in the Apple TV series "Severance", with a bit of a tour of the facility:

<https://newjersey.news12.com/holmdel-s-bell-works-becomes-perfect-backdrop-for-apple-tv-s-dystopian-thriller-severance?s=02>

Quatermass and QUATERMASS AND THE PIT (film comments by Mark R. Leeper):

I was at my last Toronto International Film Festival--likely to remain my last Toronto International Film Festival ever for a variety of reasons. In any case, you run into all sorts of film fans not just from Toronto but from all over the world. I was making notes on the last film I had seen and the man sitting next to me asked me about what films what films the TIFF were featuring. Then he asked what films I had liked and then generally what my favorite film of all time was. That was a good way to get a lot of information about me and my interests. But I think that he was expecting me to give him some general popularity film, maybe a Spielberg film. Without even taking a breath I gave him QUATERMASS AND THE PIT. My new friend was English (if I am correct about accents), and English fans seem to think that QUATERMASS AND THE PIT is almost unknown in the colonies.

QUATERMASS AND THE PIT is something of a legend in Britain. The three Quatermass plays were written for and played on the BBC. Quatermass (which, by the way, is a familiar name in Wales) was the head of the British rocket group. Each play has Quatermass facing down an alien that represents a threat to humanity, with Quatermass first having to get some understanding of what kind of threat we face. By the time the series was broadcasting the third play, churches and were changing their schedules because people were home watching Quatermass.

Director Roy Ward Baker is able to give a deep and frightening atmosphere to this film that is not often found in an urban setting.

Writer Nigel Kneale skillfully blended several story touches to tie this project with then-current news items, e.g., they are doing work in an underground tunnel at the same time similar things were being done in the real world. One way to see how good the writing is on this film is how much is it relevant to today. My observation is that it is extremely relevant.

And I like the kind of science fiction reasoning when (for example) Colonel Breen and Quatermass discuss the possibility of ancient visits by doomed Martians is what people are interested in science fiction for.

One goof in either the writing or the art design is that what Quatermass calls a pentacle is not a pentacle. It might be a hex-something, but not a penta-something.

It is surprising that nobody figures out that a skull encased in a metal shell would be something very strange. It's Quatermass who asks the telling question, what has been protecting the skull? For that matter, it is odd that the surrounding rocks formed a sort of a chamber where fossils would be discovered, especially since there are not too many flat vertical walls in nature. A bigger goof is that apparently the sinews of the skeleton have not disintegrated or been torn by the rocks.

Two examples of good art design: The statue of some alien in the lab is visually very similar to one of the workers. This will be subtly significant later in the story. There are also many strange curves on the found device which compares impressively against the object's shape in the original television version. Hammer's set designer also creates a set that is actually nearly believable.

If you want a good embodiment of confirmation bias, just listen to Colonel Breen as more information is discovered. He remains in total denial. Interestingly, Andrew Keir's Quatermass is on the fence as to whether the fossils found are significant. The real hero of the film is Miss Judd.

It is a good touch that as the archive reader goes through the Latin text, he has to stop and go back and pick up a word from the previous page because sentence structure and word order is different in Latin than in English.

I cannot prove, but genuinely believe, that I discovered that the scene on the "mind-reading" visual analyzer was borrowed by Baker from the early Hammer science fiction film FOUR-SIDED TRIANGLE. I had never noticed it until many years later but I definitely heard people citing it after I mentioned it in an article.

(This is the one science fiction idea in the film that does not ring true; it is very unlikely that in such a short time one could develop a "visual analyzer".)

The "alien playback" scene is the one scene that really could use much better special effects. It seems very amateurish-looking. If the film is ever remade this should be where the additional effort is put. Another scene with flawed special effects is the scene in which we first see the telekinetic effects. It has a heavy use of wire work which is not quite believable. However, this aspect is clearly one that would look better in a film made today.

Barbara Shelley (who plays Miss Judd) was one of Hammer films most favored actresses, although this was her last Hammer film, and (except for one film) her last feature film. (She basically did a lot of television work for the next twenty years.)

Julian Glover (who plays Colonel Breen) had a very long career, showing up in many later fantasy films, including films in the "Indiana Jones" series, the "Harry Potter" series, and THE GAME OF THRONES, and is still acting.

Bee Duffell (who plays the lab assistant) was actually in a surprising number of Hammer horror and science fiction films. Her suicide in Fahrenheit 451 is one of that film's memorable touches. She was also in A NIGHT TO REMEMBER, along with nine (!) other actors from QUATERMASS AND THE PIT. Since Baker directed both films, he may have just decided to use many actors he was already familiar with.

Duncan Lamont (who plays Sladden, the driller, in an iconic performance) played the monster in THE QUATERMASS XPERIMENT and has been in many films for Hammer and other studios. [-mrl]

POWERS AND THRONES: A NEW HISTORY OF THE MIDDLE AGES by Dan Jones (book review by Greg Frederick):

If you want to read a recent and well-written book about the Middle Ages, POWERS AND THRONES would be that book. The author

starts this book with the Fall of the Western Roman Empire in the 400's A.D. and ends around the time of the Reformation. What is especially great about this book is how Jones continually makes connections between the past and our World today. He proves that the past can help to explain the present. Examples of these connections include facts like the initial laissez-faire attitude the Mongols had toward religion. One modern scholar referred to in the book thinks that this could have been an influence on the framers of our Constitution. And of course the religious persecution of the early American colonists was another major factor in the creation of our religious freedom.

The Islamic world in its early period had a rich intellectual environment; ninth century scholars like al-Khwarizmi known as the father of Algebra and a brilliant chemist, Jabir ibn-Hayyan were making great discoveries. But though the Christian realms and Islamic world abutted each other little information trickled across. It was not until the turn of the twelfth century during the crusading era which occurred in the Iberian peninsula that cities like Toledo, and Cordoba came under Christian control. This was when a major information exchange happened. Islamic and forgotten ancient Greek and Roman knowledge was transmitted to the Christian world.

Climate change and technology had an impact on the people of the past and effected history. For several hundred years after A.D. 900 global temperatures rose. But around 1300 this changed especially for Western Europe. A rapid cooling effect caused by intense volcanic activity occurred. This climate change was one but not the only reason for the Great Famine of 1315-1321. There was basically too many people for the technology of the time. The population of England increased from 1.5 million at the time of the Norman Conquest to around 6 million by the time of the Great Famine. Technological improvements in agriculture and food production were the cause of this population increase. As mentioned before this is a well-written and great resource to learn about the Middle Ages. [-gf]

Adrian Tchaikovsky and Cyrillic (letters of comment by Gary McGath, Paul Dormer, Keith F. Lynch, and Scott Dorsey):

In response to [Evelyn's comments on ELDER RACE by Adrian Tchaikovsky](#) in the 06/24/22 issue of the MT VOID, Gary McGath writes:

The name touched my curiosity, so I checked and found from Wikipedia that it's a pen spelling of Adrian Czajkowski. If there's any indication that he's related to the composer (who didn't leave any descendants), I don't know of it. [-gmg]

Paul Dormer responds:

I've heard that he adopted that spelling as people know how to spell the composer's name. Unless they use the German spelling of 'Tschaikowsky'. I think there was one British newspaper that insisted on spelling the composer as 'Chaikovsky'. [-pd]

Keith F. Lynch notes:

Unfortunately, the proper Cyrillic letter of the composer's name begins with isn't in ASCII, but it looks just like the numeral 4, so perhaps we should spell it that way: 4ANKOBCKNN. (The Ns should be backwards, and some of the letters should have accent marks, but that's pretty close.) [-kfl]

Scott Dorsey replies:

In the case of the composer, you have at least three different systems to transliterate from the Cyrillic that you can pick. (Although the Cyrillic version of the name itself changed during the simplification of 1917.) Which one is correct? [-sd]

Evelyn adds:

Not to be confused with the "Great Simplification" in A CANTICLE FOR LEIBOWITZ.

The author apparently isn't related to the composer (other in that we are all related somehow); the author is Polish and the composer Russian. The author says he hopes that if he ever sells the Polish rights to his books, he will see his "real" name on the cover. (Note of course that Polish is written using the Roman alphabet, not the Cyrillic, but does have its own special letters.) [-ecl]

Gary McGath continues:

Transliterating Cyrillic is an art. One letter looks like a backwards R and is pronounced "ya." Tanya Huff once wondered how her first name got transliterated into the Russian edition with four letters, and I explained it to her. I also noted that the name of a certain late lamented toy store chain should be pronounced "Toys Ya Us."

A SPINDLE SPLINTERED (letters of comment by Robert Woodward, Scott Dorsey, and Gary McGath):

In response to [Evelyn's comments on A SPINDLE SPLINTERED](#) in the 06/24/22 issue of the MT VOID, Robert Woodward writes:

[Evelyn writes,] "A SPINDLE SPLINTERED by Alix E. Harrow ... is a re-imagining of the story of Snow White in all its iterations."

If there is a Spindle, shouldn't this be a re-imagining of Sleeping Beauty? [-rw]

Scott Dorsey replies:

It's mostly Sleeping Beauty but there are constant references to other fairy tales throughout. I really wanted to like this book but it just

did not gel for me. [-sd]

Gary McGath adds:

In case anyone here likes crossover stories, I've posted one where a major historical figure of the Reformation meets a legendary person who was derived from a real one. My project for today is "reconstructing its original German text," to read to my German language group.

<https://garymcgath.com/wp/the-magic-battery/snares-of-satan/>

[-gmg]

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

RIVER OF THE GODS: GENIUS, COURAGE, AND BETRAYAL IN THE SEARCH FOR THE SOURCE OF THE NILE by Candice Millard (Doubleday, ISBN 978-0-385-54310-1) is a non-fiction book about the search for the source of the (White) Nile by Sir Richard Francis Burton and John Hanning Speke. This quest was portrayed in the fiction film 1990 MOUNTAINS OF THE MOON, as well as the earlier (and hard to find) 1971 documentary mini-series THE SEARCH FOR THE NILE.

The historical facts are that Speke was correct in his claim that Lake Nyanza (now Lake Victoria) is the source of the Nile. Burton's misgivings about that, while justified,, turned out to be misplaced. In spite of this, Burton is remembered and honored, and Speke is known to far fewer people.

Millard also describes the two personalities, based on their writings and other sources, and seems to conclude that there is enough blame to go around for the disastrous falling-out between the two. Of the first expedition, Millard writes, "Speke's pride ... made it difficult for him to bear not only Burton's fame but [Burton's] complete confidence in his own ability and his easy assumption of the role of leader, a position that he himself craved. ... Speke had also begun to rewrite the expedition in his own mind, making himself not simply a late addition to the group but its true commander."

But Burton was not without his own prideful failings. Millard goes on, "Burton ... had a maddening tendency to disregard what Speke considered to be not just his own contributions to the expedition, but his own property. Believing that, as the leader of the expedition, it was his duty to put to public use anything that he and his men gathered during a government-funded expedition, Burton had assumed control of both Speke's journal and the natural history specimens he had collected during his aborted journey to the Wady Nogal." Burton sent the collection to a zoologist who published his findings and used only a few excerpts of Speke's notes in his paper. (Speke had intended this collection to be part of a natural history museum he planned to build.)

Millard does give more space to Sidi Mubarak Bombay than most accounts of these expeditions that I have seen. But this was not immediately obvious: since I had always hear him referred to as "Sidi Bombay" I assume that one should look under "Sidi" in the index. And there was an entry for "Sidi Mubarak Bombay" there, but only one, referencing a poem in the introduction. It turns out that he is indexed under "Bombay", but there should at least be a "see also" under "Sidi". [-ecl]

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Quote of the Week:

No man really becomes a fool until he stops asking questions.

--Charles Steinmetz

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