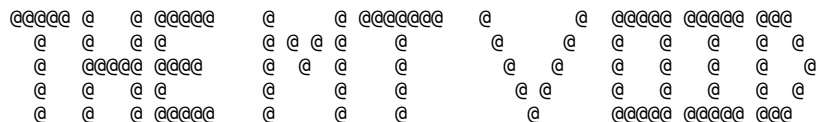


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Mt. Holz Science Fiction Society
07/08/22 -- Vol. 41, No. 2, Whole Number 2231

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

R.I.P. Dorothy J. Heydt (1942-2022)

Dorothy J. Heydt, a regular contributor to the MT VOID, passed away on June 28.

From Worldcon in Memoriam:

Author Dorothy Heydt (b.1942) died on June 28. Heydt edited the first Star Trek Concordance and created one of the first Vulcan languages. She published two novels as well as numerous short stories. An early member of SCA, she helped create the oath of fealty.

CONTACT (film review by Mark R. Leeper):

[In honor of CONTACT's 25th anniversary on July 11, here is Mark's original review of that film.]

Capsule: The first contact with an alien race has a huge impact on society. We see that impact through the eyes of one woman who devoted her life to the search for extraterrestrial life. The film adaptation of Carl Sagan's CONTACT is in some ways a betrayal of Sagan's philosophy and has some hefty revisions to the book. Knowing that I would like to down-rate CONTACT, but I have to admit what remains is a substantial and intelligent film. CONTACT was produced by Sagan and his wife, Ann Druyan, and that may be why so much of the film was on-track. While not perfect, it is the best science fiction film we have gotten in a good long time. Rating: low +3 (-4 to +4) 8 (0 to 10) Spoiler warning: there are minor spoilers in the main body and larger ones in the afterward.

Jodi Foster has obviously gotten a little more sanguine on science for gifted children since she directed and starred in LITTLE MAN TATE. That was the film in which she had a budding scientific prodigy saying "I am working on an experiment involving sulfuric acid, lasers, and butterflies." In CONTACT she plays one of those prodigies grown up in a film considerably more positive on science. This

is the story of the career of the fictional Dr. Eleanor Arrowway (Foster) who at an early age was bitten by the astronomy bug. Her mother died giving birth to her and her father, Ted (David Morse of THE CROSSING GUARD) instilled in her the love of science to devote her career to SETI, the search for extra-terrestrial life. The SETI project turns out to be professional suicide in the field of astronomy. But she feels compelled to listen to the sky and to search for signs of intelligent life. The career choice earns her no respect from her colleagues, and it makes life a constant set of battles for even minimal funding. Her chief nemesis and occasional boss David Drumlin (Tom Skerritt), National Science Advisor to the President, who one way or another betrays her at every opportunity. A one-time lover and sometimes adversary is Palmer Joss (Matthew McConaughey), a failed priest who becomes a sort of Billy Graham figure. When funding has run out and Drumlin is forcing her off the Very Large Array, the huge radio telescope made of twenty-three dish antennae, in the desert of New Mexico, suddenly she hears a signal that can mean only an intelligent alien broadcast. This is a scene we have seen recently in INDEPENDENCE DAY and THE ARRIVAL, but never with the scientific verisimilitude that we have here. Arrowway announces to the world that contact has been made and nothing is ever the same again.

The film takes off and continues at a high pace until the end. We start with a very believable picture of just what would happen if such an announcement were made. The National Security Advisor Michael Kitz (James Woods) struggles to take control of any information received from the aliens, so does Drumlin, each trying to get the ear of the President. (My credits list has Sidney Portier playing the President, but apparently in a last minute substitution they have William Clinton in the role. The film is, after all, directed by Robert Zemeckis who had several Presidents appearing in FORREST GUMP. It is sure to be a controversial piece of casting, but I think Clinton does a fine job as the President.) CONTACT is not just a political drama about the after-effects of contacting alien life in space. This is a long film that keeps going and going--almost three hours long--and if you have seen the trailer you will find that the science fiction content is certainly there if you wait for it. If you have read the book, you may be a bit disappointed, since there is far more science fiction content in the original story, but the film does not exactly remain earthbound either.

The opening sequence demonstrating for us how far into the galaxy our radio broadcasts have reached is both breath-taking and scientifically informative. The film is almost worth seeing just for that sequence. Other scenes are technically impressive, but a little nonsensical. In one tracking shot the camera leads Arrowway running up a flight of stairs and into a bathroom and in the end we see we are seeing her in the medicine cabinet mirror and have been through the scene. There is enough good in CONTACT to make a film I would give very high marks to, and enough that is irritating for me to really down-rate it. Generally when that happens I try to excuse the faults. So while I thought there was much that was dishonest about CONTACT, overall I would have to give it a low +3 on the -4 to +4 scale.

SPOILER WARNING

Visually you could not ask for a lot more from the film, with one major exception. While it is not chock full of special effects and the mattes of the Transporter seen from a distance are not convincing, the design of the Transporter is just about as believable as an interstellar transporter could be. The scenes of the Transporter running were stunning, and the journey was terrific though perhaps a little derivative of 2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY. Then she plops down at the far end and it is the "Oh, shoot!" experience. What a failure of imagination! It was like watching THE BLACK HOLE II.

There is so much that is right with this film and so much that is wrong, it is hard to know where to begin to evaluate the ideas. The film I would have liked to see is the one this would have been if Carl Sagan had not died during the production. I cannot be positive it would be different, but aspects of this film seem to run very counter to what I understand as Sagan's philosophy. Places where the book took chances and had some engaging thoughts about religion and faith have been reframed to change their meaning. Certainly false information would never have been added to the arguments in the film. (The film claims that 95% of the world's population believes in a Supreme Being. Actually about 21% of the world is atheist or non-religious and while there may be some who believe in a Supreme Being among the non-religious, there are certainly also atheists and agnostics who at least nominally belong to religions. This also makes the dubious assumption that Confucians and Shintoists believe in a Supreme Being. The 95% figure used in the film is wildly inaccurate.)

What I did find surprising was people in the audience getting angry because the "hero" of the film implied that she was either an atheist or an agnostic. She never tries to convince anyone to agree with her, she simply explains why she believes what she does. Other people punish her for her belief and nobody in the audience got (audibly) upset about that. Apparently with everything else this film does, it gets people agitated at its ideas. The novel actually had a nice piece looking at what could be a proof of the existence of God, while the film turns into an affirmation of religious faith in its final scenes. And Arrowway complains that Drumlin tells the people what they want to hear about his views on religion! [-mrl]

QUATERMASS AND THE PIT (letters of comment by Paul Dormer, John Kerr-Mudd, and Peter Trei):

In response to [Mark's comments on QUATERMASS AND THE PIT](#) in the 07/01/22 issue of the MT VOID, Paul Dormer writes:

I remember Glover in a Doctor Who episode, "City of Death", scripted (under a pseudonym) by Douglas Adams.

I never saw the TV version [of QUATERMASS AND THE PIT] when it was first broadcast--I was only 5--but I remember my mother saying later she'd been watching it on her own and it frightened the life out of her.

I recall some episodes being shown at the 1979 Worldcon in Brighton. Kneale attended the con and absolutely hated fans. He went on to write a sitcom, Kinvig, about SF fans and UFO enthusiasts. He did not show us in a good light.

Last week, the Science Fiction Foundation had its AGM and before the main event, there was a panel discussion on Kneale and John Christopher, both of whom had their centenaries this year. [-pd]

John Kerr-Mudd adds:

<https://www.ancestry.co.uk/name-origin?surname=quatermass>

Says Hertfordshire (not Wales). [-jkm]

Paul Dormer notes:

Incidentally, for people in the UK, QUATERMASS AND THE PIT (the film version) is being shown on Sunday night on the Legend channel.

Legend appears to be part of a re-branding of the Horror Channel and is also showing re-runs of SPACE 1999. [-pd]

Peter Trei notes:

Quatermass and the Pit can be viewed at the Internet Archive: <https://archive.org/details/quatermass-and-the-pit>

Evelyn adds:

And I found this gem while Googling: "The Verge of Something Ugly? Hybridity, Nation and Invasion Anxiety: A Critical Re-appraisal of the 1950s Quatermass Films" by Christopher A. Auld as his doctoral thesis in philosophy:

<http://tinyurl.com/quatermass-dissertation>

It downloads as a PDF of 272 pages, so you probably don't want to print it! [-ecl]

Adrian Tchaikovsky (letter of comment by Paul Dormer):

In response to [Evelyn's comments on Adrian Tchaikovsky](#) in the 07/01/22 issue of the MT VOID, Paul Dormer writes:

[Evelyn wrote,] "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." [-ecl]

Well, technically he's British, but presumably of Polish extraction. [-pd]

Changing Movies You Remember--RETURN OF THE JEDI (letter of comment by Warren Montgomery):

[From a mailing list I am on, with permission.]

Warren Montgomery writes:

While I was doing other things I left the TV on to a showing of STAR WARS EPISODE VI (RETURN OF THE JEDI). While I've got a VHS of it (and a functional VCR) it had been a while since I bothered to run it and thought it might provide a bit more enjoyable background noise than the hum of the Air Conditioner. What little I paid attention to seemed much like what I remembered--until the final sequence. Instead of the Ewok's partying with the principal characters to music that seems a bit goofy, there were scenes of celebration in various sci fi cities, some new and some that looked recycled from other locations in other movies. The Ewoks were in there too, but the music was different, a more inspiring and appropriate instrumental piece (at least in my opinion.) The face that showed as Anakin Skywalker resurrected was completely different from what I remember. I did some poking around online and found that indeed Lucas tinkered with it at some point and that the re-imagination of a resurrected Anakin Skywalker is controversial among fans.

I know that movies often get edited when remastered to clean things up, but this seems like more wholesale modification than most. Makes me wonder what else might be doctored in new releases of old movies. (And maybe I ought to watch those three "Star Wars" prequels again in new releases to see if they actually made them watchable, but there was so much wrong I thought they were basically beyond saving.) [-wm]

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

Well, I did manage to watch all (*) of the nominees for the Dramatic Presentation, Long Form Hugo Award.

(*) I watched only the first three episodes of WANDAVISION, because I had to watch that at a friend's house, and couldn't binge ten hours' worth.

DUNE--PART ONE (Warner Bros / Legendary Entertainment): This is the third adaptation of Frank Herbert's novel, following the movie in 1984 by David Lynch and the television mini-series in 2000 by John Harrison. This version, by Denis Villeneuve, has a stunning visual design, perhaps the best we are likely to see in film in years. The scale of the scenery and everything in it is huge. The landscape is reminiscent of Luke's planet in STAR WARS, but that is not strange--STAR WARS is reported to have gotten its inspiration for this (and for its worm carcass) from John Schoenherr's illustrations for the serialization of the novel DUNE. We see some fascinating equipment in the desert, but the viewer is left in suspense as to what a full sandworm looks like. The people on the planet are drawn with a pseudo-mysticism that adds to the images. But as impressive as the mise-en-scene is, it cannot keep the viewer entertained by itself and it isn't too long before DUNE starts testing the viewer's patience and in general bewildering them. I am not

sure I could put my finger on exactly where it happened but somehow a very good film turned into a moderately bad one. Perhaps we have spent too much time in the desert.

One question: If spice is necessary for interstellar travel, and spice occurs only on Arrakis, how did the people (presumably from Earth, but clearly not from Arrakis) get to Arrakis in the first place?)

And though the studio concealed it in all its advertising, this is "DUNE--PART ONE"--it is only the first half of the story. The second half is due out in the fall of 2023. I find it hard to give a Hugo to an incomplete story (though it was done for THE LORD OF THE RINGS, all three times).

ENCANTO (Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures): I really liked COCO, and thought VIVO was decent, but somehow ENCANTO just didn't do it for me. I can see why it might be popular, and yes, it's got that magic realism thing going for it, but it didn't hit Hugo level for me. (Is Disney working their way through all the Latin American countries?)

THE GREEN KNIGHT (BRON Studios/A24): There are quite a few changes in this version from the canonical poem. In this version, for example, that the "game" involves a beheading is not explicitly known before Gawain accepts the challenge, so Gawain has no reason to think there will be any sort of real reckoning in a year. It becomes, therefore, a different sort of test--he had the option to show mercy and *not* behead the Green Knight. The Gawain of this film also tries to avoid seeking out the Green Knight, and there seem to be multiple green sashes. The ending, much discussed, is also different from the poem's (and I won't reveal it here). The film was worth watching, and better as a film than either of the two earlier versions I watched.

SHANG-CHI AND THE LEGEND OF THE TEN RINGS (Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures): Visually striking, but I cannot recall the plot, which either says something about the film or something about me. It is part of the ridiculously large Marvel franchise but is mostly independent of the other films.

SPACE SWEEPERS (Bidangil Pictures): Boy, I wish I could remember any of this. All I remember is that we started it once and gave up on it. Then after it was nominated we watched the whole thing.

WANDA VISION (Disney+): As I said, I only saw the first three episodes, so I'm doing my ranking based on an extrapolation. I liked some of what I saw, but even after just three episodes, it was starting to bear thin, and just seemed too slow.

Ranking: THE GREEN KNIGHT, SHANG-CHI AND THE LEGEND OF THE TEN RINGS, ENCANTO, WANDA VISION, no award, DUNE--PART ONE, SPACE SWEEPERS

[-ecl]

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Quote of the Week:

It is not the answer that enlightens, but the question.
--Decouvertes

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