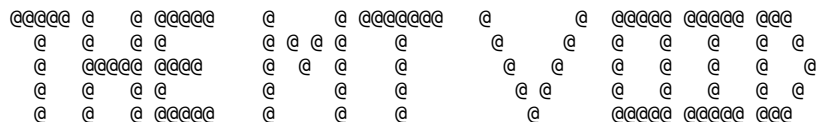


MT VOID 12/09/22 -- Vol. 41, No. 24, Whole Number 2253



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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.

Breaking the Sound Barrier (comments by Evelyn C. Leeper):

We just passed the 75th anniversary of an aircraft breaking the sound barrier on October 14, 1947, but there didn't seem to be any news items about it.

I say "an aircraft breaking the sound barrier" because before this, the sound barrier was broken by bullwhips and some firearm projectiles. It is also speculated that some long-tailed dinosaurs may have been able to break the sound barrier with the tips of their tails. [-ecl]

Mini Reviews, Part 6 (film reviews by Mark R. Leeper and Evelyn C. Leeper):

This is the sixth batch of mini-reviews, all films of the fantastic, and mostly animated.

WENDELL & WILD: WENDELL & WILD is the second of three stop-motion films from Netflix this year (the other two being THE HOUSE [reviewed in the 05/13/22 issue of the MT VOID] and GUILLERMO DEL TORO'S PINOCCHIO [reviewed below]). It is directed and co-written by Henry Selick, the same person who wrote and directed CORALINE. (The other co-writer is Jordan Peele, who wrote GET OUT, US, and NOPE). The stop-motion is well-done; for example, there is a nice effect of someone stepping into a frozen-over pothole. And there are definitely bits of humor ("holistic goat yoga"). The basic story--evil villains are trying to take over a town--has elements of IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE, though here we have demons rather than angels interfering. (The similarities between the Villainous Klaxons and a certain recent First Couple are no accident, according to Selick. Even the name is a pun.) And it also appears to have been heavily influenced by THE NIGHTMARE BEFORE CHRISTMAS. Well worth watching.

Released 28 October 2022. Rating: low +2 (-4 to +4) or 7/10

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt5181830/reference>

What others are saying: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/wendell_and_wild

GUILLERMO DEL TORO'S PINOCCHIO: This is called "GUILLERMO DEL TORO'S PINOCCHIO" to distinguish it from the *other* 2022 Pinocchio film, PINOCCHIO, which is a live-action Disney film starring Tom Hanks, while GUILLERMO DEL TORO'S PINOCCHIO is a stop-motion animated Netflix film. (This makes the third stop-motion animated film from Netflix this year, the first two being THE HOUSE [reviewed in the 05/13/22 issue of the MT VOID] and WENDELL & WILD [reviewed above].) There was also a Roberto Begnini version in 2002. GUILLERMO DEL TORO'S PINOCCHIO obviously has a very different look from current CGI animation--not as realistic, for example--but apparently del Toro is hoping for a stop-motion revival. del Toro is also not afraid to change the classic story in many ways. For example, it takes place in pre-World-War-II Italy, and fascism and war play an important role in the film. The animation is stunning, but the story was never really one of our core memories from childhood, so we had more difficulty connecting to it than many others will.

Released on Netflix streaming 9 December 2022. Rating: high +1 (-4 to +4), or 6/10.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1488589/reference>

What others are saying: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/guillermo_del_toros_pinocchio

DC LEAGUE OF SUPER-PETS: In DC LEAGUE OF SUPER-PETS, the dog Krypto comes to Earth with Superman, and of course he has super-powers. But when Lex Luthor and Lulu the Guinea Pig (don't call her a hamster!) start fooling around with green kryptonite and orange kryptonite, a group of animals at the shelter gain super-powers as well. This is clearly made to provide a family-friendly Marvel superhero movie (or family-friendler, since the Marvel superhero movies are, we believe, all PG-13). This is not an amazing addition to the canon (is it even canonical?), but there are some humorous moments, both for the adults and for the younger viewers.

(It is a little bizarre to have Dwayne Johnson voicing both Krypto and--in the inevitable coda--Black Adam.)

Released theatrically 29 July 2022. Rating: +1 (-4 to +4) or 6/10

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt8912936/reference>

What others are saying: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/dc_league_of_super_pets

BLACK ADAM: BLACK ADAM is another film in the DC Universe, and if we were more familiar with that universe, it would have been easier to follow. As it is the film has characters that are assumed to be familiar to the viewer, but for us, their powers are pretty much of the deus ex machina sort. the familiar starts with a scene so reminiscent of the beginning of SPARTACUS that we almost expected Peter Ustinov to show up (although one character is inexplicably wearing a pseudo-Viking-style horned helmet). This all takes place in Kahndag, a city-state in the Middle East apparently between Egypt and Palestine/Israel, according to Wikipedia. (Since Black Adam first appeared in print in 1945, the reference to Palestine would have been to British Palestine. This placement, by the way, makes the cuneiform writing shown in Kahndag incorrect, or at least anachronistic. Cuneiform was primarily a Mesopotamian writing method; its appearance in Egypt would be a couple of thousand years after the events in the early scenes.) The first scene is thousands of years ago, but in the present Kahndaq is occupied by the "Intergang". The MacGuffin is the Crown of Sabbac, which is made of Eternium, which is "too dangerous for anyone to have". (We found ourselves thinking they should throw it into the fires of Mordor.) Casting Dwayne Johnson as Teth Adam is a step away from realism but perhaps makes the film more fun. And even before one character expresses it, the audience may well find themselves thinking that given the actions of the Justice Society and those of Teth Adam, the assignment of the terms "good guys" and "bad guys" may be just a little off.

(Is it worth pointing out that the laws of inertia don't seem to be the same in this universe? As with so many superhero films, when the superhero grabs someone falling by the arm, or the shirt collar, or whatever, in *our* universe, this would not end well for the falling person.)

There is also some very annoying cheating in the editing, where you think you are seeing a single scene, but it is actually not.

And I don't know if they thought that referring to Black Adam with the line, "The world doesn't always need a white knight; sometimes it needs something darker," was clever, but to me it sounded more than a little offensive.

Released theatrically 21 October 2022. Rating: high +1 (-4 to +4) or 6/10

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt6443346/reference>

What others are saying: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/black_adam

[-mrl/ec]

WEDNESDAY (television review by Dale Skran):

I have never been a fan of the "Addams Family" in any of their many incarnations. I've never found this particular brand of macabre

humor to my taste, so I can't explain whether WEDNESDAY will please old-time fans or not, whether it follows "canon," and so on. What I can say is that WEDNESDAY, a new series on Netflix, is tons of fun. And yes, the Addams Family has been given the "Buffy" treatment, although in many ways Buffy the Vampire Slayer was built on the foundation of the Addams Family in the first place.

WEDNESDAY re-visions the original material, but makes Wednesday, the daughter in the Addams family, the main character. Add a bit of BUFFY and a dollop of the updated CW NANCY DREW and you get a supernatural detective story running on girl-power. And yes, this is a bit of a super-hero/super-team story as well, just as the CW NANCY DREW is and BUFFY was.

What's different in WEDNESDAY is Jenna Ortega playing the darkly cynical, whip smart, and mildly psychopathic Addams daughter to perfection. Ortega commands the screen, and is a joy to watch, transcending the usual super-powered stuff with a portrayal of a broken soul in search of some human connection, even if she won't admit it even to herself.

Wednesday faces down a dangerous modern villain and an ancient enemy of her family as she struggles to solve various crimes at the Nevermore Academy for outcast children. In this fantasy world, all the monsters you've ever heard of co-exist with "normies" but live in the shadows, perhaps with good reason. She is supported by her roommate, a werewolf who can only grow her claws to about three inches, "Thing," the familiar disconnected hand, and the "Nightshades," as this version of the "Scooby Gang" is called, including a Gorgon and a Siren, along with other monsters.

Mostly though Wednesday works alone, even if she needs the help of her friends in the final episode. Being an Addams has prepared Wednesday for virtually any danger, providing kung-fu training from Uncle Fester, sword fighting from her father Gomez, and precognitive visions inherited from her mother. Add to this her brilliant intellect [she has been writing mystery novels for years], a deep education in languages, the ability to solve codes and riddles, a total lack of fear, and more than bit of PTSD induced psychopathology, and you get a formidable supernatural girl detective.

WEDNESDAY feels like Hogwarts, but it's not. In many ways her isolation makes the character more real, and many modern folks suffering from trauma/PTSD may identify with her endless bleak outlook. And don't miss the outstanding dance sequence, where Ortega channels Siouxsie and the Banshees as she dances to The Cramps song "Goo Goo Muck."

I'm rating WEDNESDAY a solid +1 on the way to a +2 on the -4 to +4 scale. It seems like a lot of CW shows, but with Jenna Ortega as the lead, there is a lot more going on than in apparently similar shows. Although mostly directed by Tim Burton, the macabre aspects are more fun than not, making the series similar to Buffy in terms of gore, fear, and fighting, but with more chaste romance. You do have to get over Wednesday being a bit of an anti-hero. At one point to retaliate against bullies who torment her brother, she dumps piranhas in the pool they are swimming in, for example. I've seen some complaints about woke dialog, but to my ears Wednesday says the kind of things a very smart, but also very cynical teenage girl might say. Some of it is not true, or is misguided, but lots of things teenagers say are like that. Like BUFFY, WEDNESDAY targets a teenage audience, but many adults will find it a fun ride. Also, like BUFFY, although to a greater degree, this is a series about a girl, her friends and frenemies, the boys she finds attractive, and the women who variously mentor her or menace her. The men are not empty stereotypes of misogyny, but this is a story about Wednesday, and not any of the male characters. Although the ending satisfies, there are plenty of threads left to pull, so I am hoping Netflix renews the show. [-dls]

The MT VOID (letter of comment by Guy Lillian III):

In response primarily to the 11/30/22 issue of the MT VOID, Guy Lillian III writes in THE ZINE DUMP #56:

Every week or so The MT Void--get the pun? it took me a while--in my inbox, bearing reviews, anecdotes, funky LOCs, what have you. Let's take a gander at the latest issue, as I write at the end of November. Star of this issue is a cacophony of one-liners in response to a review of BLOOD RELATIVES in the last issue and discussion of NOSFERATU in the number before that. It asks the question, "Why would a crucifix affect a Jewish vampire (or, by extension, any unbeliever)?" Most are appropriately silly, but one or two are worthy extrapolations of classic vampire lore. (I like to think that Jesus, being the most powerful of spiritual beings, was a natural enemy of parasites like vampires, and his symbology would be deadly to them be they onetime Christians or not.) And the editor pokes fun at an antisemitic novel with "a fair amount of misogyny." This is just an example: Evelyn's reviews are almost always sharp. Mark Leeper often talks old movies (a fascination of mine) and was the first Sfer to send personal regrets when I revealed my Parkinson's--kind fella, he. I highly recommend MT Void for its variety, energy, and quality, and for the regular flow of fannishness it offers its subscribers. [-gl]

Evelyn responds:

"Every week or so The MT Void"? In the last two decades, we have missed a Friday publication date just once. (And before that, I don't think we ever missed one, because if I was on vacation, I delegated the sending out of the MT VOID.)

Even while traveling, most hotels we went to had Internet, so most of the US, Canada, Britain, Italy, Costa Rica, Cambodia, and Vietnam were no problem. Although once in Canada, we had the last room on a strip motel and the WiFi did not quite reach that far, so we had to sit in the office and mail the MT VOID. And in 2011 we had to send the 08/05 issue a day early because we were headed to an area around Crater Lake which had no Internet.

In Italy in 2010, we had to purchase an hour's worth of Internet in Florence and again in Venice, because it was not included in the hotels. In South Africa in 2012, one week we went to an Internet cafe in Cape Town, and we sent the next week's from the lodge at Kruger National Park. In Cambodia in 2014, our tour guide set up a WiFi hotspot on the bus while we were driving. And on the cruise ship in Greece in 2017, we bought a day's worth of Internet.

In 2012, when our power was out for ten days from Hurricane Sandy, we sent the MT VOID from (I think) the public library. And

when I broke my right hip in 2013, I managed to send it from the hospital on my netbook.

In fact, the only time in the last twenty years we missed the Friday deadline was when I broke my left hip on a Thursday in 2021, and I could have sent it from my smartphone except that it turned out that the "Contacts" icon on my phone did not access my actual Gmail mailing lists, but some local "Contacts". (I did send it out the next day, and also fixed my phone.)

On the other hand, if one doesn't read one's mail every day, I guess the "or so" makes sense.

(I realize this sounds petty. But having gotten to issue #2253, I am quite proud of having only once missed a deadline in spite of travel to remote places, major injuries, and natural disasters.)

[-ecl]

What Are Your Passenger Rights in Space? (letters of comment by Dale Speirs, Peter Trei, Scott Dorsey, and Keith F. Lynch):

In response to [the link to an article on passenger rights in space](#) in the 12/02/22 issue of the MT VOID, Dale Speirs in Calgary, Alberta (CA), writes:

"What Are Your Passenger Rights in Space?" is an issue that was addressed by the Canadian government when the Canada Space Agency joined the International Space Station. By law, any crime committed by a Canadian astronaut in space will be considered the same as if it were committed on Canadian soil. Currently the House of Commons is considering an update to extend that law to the Moon, since Canada is a partner in the Artemis project. [-ds]

Scott Dorsey writes:

Help! I'm at Marsport but my luggage is on a generation ship to Groombridge 1618! [-sd]

Peter Trei asks:

Does your 'baggage' rejoice in the name Hilda, by any chance? [-pt]

Scott responds:

I've never travelled in plastons. I'm not even sure what they are. [-sd]

Keith F. Lynch explains:

You're in Marsport Without Hilda. [-kfl]

and adds:

I had always heard that Saturn's rings are composed of lost luggage.

It was later determined that the size range of the ring particles is consistent with this claim. [-kfl]

Scott replies:

Thank you for explaining the joke. [-sd]

Cows (letter of comment by Dale Speirs):

In response to [Mark and Evelyn's review of COW](#) in the 12/02/22 issue of the MT VOID, Dale Speirs writes:

[Mark and Evelyn write,] "It took scientists a while to realize that cows make friends with other in much the same way that humans do, and that does not come out at all."

Farmers have known this for millennia but scientists would not take countless anecdotes as evidence. I grew up on a cattle ranch in west-central Alberta. Many times as a boy I would lean on a fencepost and watch our beef cattle grazing in the fields. Their behaviour was much the same as any group of humans strolling through a park.

Calves chase each other about and play tag. Mama always knew where her calf was and if it looked to be straying too far from the herd, she would moo at it. Just as with humans, every bovine has a different-sounding voice, so the calf in question could recognize its mother's moo.

As the herd moved across the rangeland, the cows would be looking at each other to see who had found the best grass. Those sitting on the ground chewing their cuds acted as babysitters for the calves.

Very young calves were like toddlers, not straying too far from Mama. (See the YouTube video "Acrobatic Hereford Calf" for a wonderful demonstration of this.)

As calves grew older, they became like teenagers, straying further and clumping together in cliques, exactly like human children. Think about your high school and how the cafeteria had a cool table, a jocks table, one for nerds, etcetera.

Newly introduced adult cows are hesitant of the herd and vice versa. The newcomers hang about on the edge and over several days work themselves into the herd.

Those were the days. Alas, the Speirs ranch is now part of the city of Red Deer, with no trace left of its existence.

The movie mentioned dehorning dairy cows. I was surprised to read that because I thought by now all dairy cattle were polled, that is, naturally hornless by controlled genetic breeding. Our beef cattle were horned because of coyotes on the rangeland but in many parts of the world even beef cattle are bred to be polled because large predators have been eliminated. [-ds]

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

In her review of NEPTUNE'S BROOD by Charles Stross (Penguin, ISBN 978-0-425-25630-5), Nalini Haynes writes, "Most novels are written using the basic 5,000 words of English; I guesstimate that Stross used several hundred words that are not included in the basic 5,000." (And in passing, I'll guess that "guesstimate" isn't, either.) I noted down all (or at least most of) the obscure (and possibly made-up) words in a single three-page interlude: mechanocytes, tensegrity, motiles, auroral, exsanguinated, thermocline, disphotic, saprophytic, visera, integument, mesopelagic, Bezos worms, stomatogastric, acuator, quiescent, techne, aphotic, intracellular, paraproteins, ribofabricators, now-flense, abyssal, dermal, vestigial, Hadean, Cerenkov, and disarticulated.

Which is to say that Stross is not for the faint of heart. His complicated economic structure, with fast, medium, and slow money, is also complex. Haynes thinks it is derived from Asimov and Heinlein, but I don't see that. For starters, the use of faster-than-light travel makes slow money unnecessary. Russell Letson says, "I just trust Stross on the key enabling idea [fast, medium, and slow money] in the same way I trust Greg Egan when he starts explaining N-dimensional geometries."

Okay, so the language is difficult and the underlying science seems to be economics (although there is a fair amount of biology and robotics as well). (Liz Bourke says, "I don't think I've ever read a novel so closely involved with financial theory and the workings of money and debt.")

Naomi Kanakia wrote of book discussions:

"One book club had a strong, vigorous discussion of Patrick Radden Keefe's history of the Troubles in Northern Ireland, SAY NOTHING (2018). Another book club had an equally prolonged discussion of Cory Doctorow's quartet of speculative novellas about the future of work, RADICALIZED (2019). So, what separated these books from ones we've had trouble discussing, books like Maggie O'Farrell's HAMNET (2020), Patricia Lockwood's NO ONE IS TALKING ABOUT THIS (2021), or Han Kang's THE VEGETARIAN (2007)? I mean, it's obvious, isn't it? The latter books are contemporary literary novels, whereas the former are nonfiction and science fiction, respectively. SAY NOTHING and RADICALIZED were fundamentally about ideas: What does the future hold? What motivates a person to kill for a cause? These are big, open questions that you can readily discuss. We all think about ideology. We all think about current events. We can engage easily with these texts and do it on a more even footing, arguing with their conclusions and adding our own experiences to provide a counterpoint. These are big, open questions that you can readily discuss. We all think about ideology. We all think about current events. We can engage easily with these texts and do it on a more even footing, arguing with their conclusions and adding our own experiences to provide a counterpoint. But because it's not grounded in literal truth or in ideology, most fiction isn't as permeable. You can read it. You can enjoy it. But when the experience is over, you're left with nothing to say other than 'I liked it' or 'I didn't like it.'"

I think Kanakia would approve of NEPTUNE'S BROOD as a book discussion book, even though she never explicitly says that discussion groups should choose more science fiction. (Her focus is to decry current literary fiction, not promote idea fiction.) [-ecl]

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Quote of the Week:

Newfoundland dogs are good to save children from
drowning, but you must have a pond of water handy and
a child, or else there will be no profit in boarding
a Newfoundland.

--Josh Billings

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