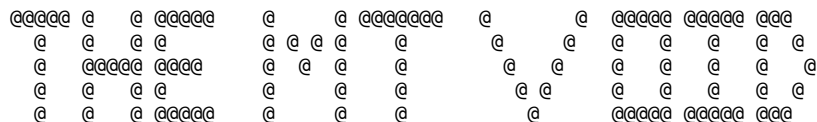


MT VOID 02/03/23 -- Vol. 41, No. 32, Whole Number 2261



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Mark Leeper's Top Ten Films of 2022 (comments by Mark R. Leeper):

All these films would be rated somewhere between a high +2 and a +3 (-4 to +4), but are close enough that I will just list them alphabetically.

AMSTERDAM: AMSTERDAM starts in the 1930s, but then jumps back to World War I and its aftermath before returning to the 1930s. The production design by Judy Becker and art direction by Danielle Osborne and Alexander Wei, the cinematography by Emmanuel Lubezki, and the script by David O. Russell all capture both periods.

APOLLO 10-1/2: APOLLO 10-1/2: A SPACE AGE CHILDHOOD starts out as the story of a young boy chosen for an Apollo mission because the lunar lander was accidentally built too small for an adult astronaut. In actuality, it is a reminiscence of growing up in the 1960s, specifically in Houston, but almost everything would strike a chord with anyone of that age. A wonderfully nostalgic film, and recommended.

BULLET TRAIN: The people who see BULLET TRAIN are going to have problems following it if they haven't taken the Evelyn Wood speed-watching-and-listening course. The dialogue is delivered really fast, as are the action sequences, and with five assassins trying to various people (mostly each other), there is a lot of action. But even if the film is a little hard to follow, what you can follow makes this film a lot of fun.

ELVIS: ELVIS is told as a series of reminiscences by Colonel Tom Parker (Tom Hanks, in a very atypical role), his lifetime manager. Baz Luhrmann is the writer and director, so you know the film will be compelling in both its visuals and its script.

GOOD LUCK TO YOU, LEO GRANDE: GOOD LUCK TO YOU, LEO GRANDE is a two-hander featuring Emma Thompson and Daryl McCormack, but it is clearly Emma Thompson's film. McCormack is there mostly to react and respond to Thompson (both as a character and as an actor). This is yet another film that focuses on women, and in this case older women, as characters in their own right, not just adjuncts to men.

JERRY & MARGE GO LARGE: JERRY AND MARGE GO LARGE is that rare film that makes mathematics look like fun with a seemingly super-powered handling of multiplication. The film is reasonably accurate about Jerry and Marge's lottery scheme, although the ending is perhaps more sentimental than real life. A delightful movie for an adult audience.

THE OUTFIT: THE OUTFIT is another tour de force for Mark Rylance (BRIDGE OF SPIES). Rylance is Leonard Burling, a cutter (*not* a tailor--tailors just do buttons and hems, according to his character) who has left England and come to 1950s Chicago, where he ends up making bespoke suits for a family of gangsters. The film relies on an excellent script, with all the action contained within the two rooms of Burling's tailor shop.

SIDNEY: SIDNEY is a fairly straightforward biography of Sidney Poitier; its interest lies in the story of Poitier's experiences and how they shaped his life and his work. His effect was felt not just within the Hollywood community, but throughout the wider society, particularly during the civil rights years.

TILL: TILL is the story of Mamie Till-Bradley, the mother of Emmett Till. While it does show some of Emmett's life, it concentrates more on her fight for justice. As such, it does not show Emmett's torture and murder, but does show his body at his open-coffin funeral.

WOODLANDS DARK AND DAYS BEWITCHED: WOODLANDS DARK AND DAYS BEWITCHED--A HISTORY OF FOLK HORROR is a 194-minute documentary on "folk horror" in cinema and an amazing in-depth study that every folk horror fan should see.

Honorable Mentions:

BURNING SEA, THE
GOOD NIGHT OPPY
OPERATION MINCEMEAT
THREE MINUTES--A LENGTHENING
YOU ARE NOT MY MOTHER

[-mrl]

STARRY MESSENGER: COSMIC PERSPECTIVES ON CIVILIZATION by Neil deGrasse Tyson (book review by Gregory Frederick): This is another interesting science book by Neil deGrasse Tyson. Tyson uses his own cosmic perspective to view our civilization on Earth in a new way. He states that if we humans were to view the planet and our place in it with a Cosmic Perspective many of our differences would disappear. The book looks at a number of the crucial fault lines of our time, such as; war, politics, religion, truth, beauty, gender, and race. In a time when our political and cultural views feel more polarized than ever, Tyson provides a much needed antidote to so much of what divides us. The author also lists a number of technologies we use today that came about due to advanced scientific research. If you ever had an MRI in a hospital, you have used a technology that originally came from two astrophysicists who were using radio telescopes and were studying clouds of hydrogen gas in our galaxy. Tyson wrote a good book that is a very user-friendly read for the casual reader. [-gf]

AND THEN THERE WERE NONE by **Agatha Christie** (comment by Kip Williams):

From junior high on, I was a fan of Christie's subtractive murder yarn, culminating in playing the Judge in 1976 (in what was the best cast and director I'd had the luxury of). There's a lot of trivia associated with it, book and play and movie (different endings! different statuettes!), but I'm thinking about the song just now, composed by Septimus Winner, a composer in Philadelphia who also brought us "Der Deutscher's Dog" (Oh where or where has my little dog gone?), and "Listen to the Mockingbird," and "Whispering Hope."

As Winner penned it, it was about Ten Little Indians (sic), and besides the verse, it also has a familiar chorus: "One little, two little, three little Indians (sic)..." The chorus seems to have been traditional. Winner published his song in 1868, and in 1869, what we could call the Christy Variant popped up--the version preferred by the minstrel shows (and Dame Agatha).

I have to say, though, it was cool to smash a statuette every night. I had so much fun in that part. [-kw]

Nuclear Rocket Engine (comment by Gregory Frederick):

NASA and DARPA are now getting into the act of creating a nuclear rocket engine. This one is a fission engine. This engine could reduce a six-month trip to Mars to 45 days.

"One of the bigger questions surrounding NASA's interest in sending a crewed mission to Mars surrounds the best way to get there, and it appears the agency might have found its answer. NASA announced today that it will be developing a nuclear thermal rocket engine in collaboration with the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA).

The collaboration is called DRACO, or Demonstration Rocket for Agile Cislunar Operations, and it's expected to reduce the travel time it takes to get astronauts to Mars and potentially more distant targets in deep space. NASA will lead technical development of the nuclear thermal engine that will be combined with an experimental DARPA spacecraft. The two agencies will further collaborate on combining the rocket with the spacecraft ahead of its demonstration in space as early as 2027."

<https://www.yahoo.com/news/nasa-darpa-collaborating-nuclear-powered-212000003.html>

[-gf]

Firefighters, Samuel L. Gravely, and the Breaking the Sound Barrier (letter of comment by John Hertz):

In response to [Evelyn's comments on firefighters](#) in the 11/04/22 issue of the MT VOID, John Hertz writes:

Alas for complicators, "firefighter" (MT VOID 2248, 4 Nov 22) is needless and even illiterate--alas for Harvard Press (MT VOID 2250, 10 Nov). The subject "-man" isn't masculine. It just means "person" Winston Churchill said, "Errors in the direction of the enemy are to be lightly judged"; this error, attacking sexism, is in the right direction, but there are better uses for our Cavalry.

In response to [Mark and Evelyn's comments on OPERATION SEAWOLF](#) in the 10/14/22 issue of the MT VOID, John writes:

Samuel L. Gravely, Jr., (1922-2004; MT VOID 2245, 14 Oct) was the first black in the U.S. Navy to serve aboard a fighting ship as an officer, first to command a Navy ship, first fleet commander, and first to achieve flag rank, retiring as a Vice-Admiral. I haven't seen OPERATION SEAWOLF (s. Luke dir. 2022), but in the poster (https://www.imdb.com/title/tt13429928/mediaviewer/rm594611201/?ref_=tt%20o_i) Hiram Murray, portraying Gravely, looks much like him, as you say. You remind me to see RUN SILENT, RUN DEEP (R. Wise dir. 1958), although Captain Beach thought it took undue liberties with his 1955 novel--which I first read, soon after it appeared, in a READER'S DIGEST CONDENSED BOOK volume. At the time I was an RD fan. I told my mother, "I don't see why people complain about RD"; she said, "That's because you're eight years old." Later I read RUN DEEP in the original.

In response to [comments on the breaking the sound barrier](#) in the 12/16/22 issue of the MT VOID, John writes:

Richie Bielak's and Scott Dorsey's corrections about exceeding the speed of sound (MT VOID 2254, 16 Dec) were worth making. Going faster than the speed of sound in level flight was the great breakthrough (you should pardon the expression). And I remember wondering why airplane propellers got more blades. [-jh]

Chengdu Worldcon (letters of comment by John Dallman, Mike Van Pelt, Gary McGath, and Scott Dorsey):

In response to [Evelyn's comments on the Chengdu Worldcon](#) in the 01/27/23 issue of the MT VOID, John Dallman writes:

[Evelyn wrote,] "As for Site Selection, I suspect China will not bid for 2025."

I hope not, but that decision may well not be in the hands of Chinese fans. Given the conduct of the convention so far, I suspect there will be a substantial anti-Chinese vote for any future bids. [-jd]

Mike Van Pelt responds:

Site selection (and other) voting is by membership of the convention, right? If the CCP wants to own WorldCon, at this point, they probably can. [-mvp]

Gary McGath notes:

First there has to be a bid. The Worldcon site doesn't currently show any bids for future China conventions: [-gmg]

But Evelyn observes:

With the change of dates, the deadline for filing a bid is now 180 days before October 18, or April 21. So far, only Seattle has filed. [-ecl]

Gary also says:

Good points, to which I'd add that getting a visa for visiting China is much harder than traveling to most of the Americas and Europe. [-gmg]

Scott Dorsey elaborates:

It depends. If you apply for a tourist visa and you're not famous and you don't have any friends with pull, they will take your passport for a couple weeks and make sure you haven't said too many bad things about China online and that you're probably an okay person. They'll also categorize you to decide how much you need to be watched in the country, and this takes some time.

BUT... if you have friends with pull, it goes very very quickly. The editor of an audio magazine I write for wanted to visit a microphone factory. The factory also supplies the PLA so the factory manager made a call and my editor got a visa in a day.

Scientific conferences usually arrange visas pretty quickly because they are usually run by people with pull.

What you are seeing right now is that the Worldcon is being run by young people who don't have pull. Because of that they are having trouble getting relatively easy things done. You have to work with the right people if you want to get things done. And that includes bringing in members from out of the country. [-gmg]

Gary responds:

If I were foolish enough to attempt it, they'd probably say, "Sure, give this guy a visa. And make sure there's a 'welcoming committee' for him at the airport." [-gmg]

Jewish Vampires, Breaking the Sound Barrier, BIGGER THAN LIFE, GATTACA, THE GREEN KNIGHT, THE PRIME OF MISS JEAN BRODIE, and Email Regularity (letter of comments by Taras Wolansky):

Thanks for many issues of the VOID. (It seems I've been keeping notes toward a LoC for months! Please feel free to drop anything too hoary down the memory hole.)

The discussion of Jewish vampires reminded me of the scene in BUFFY where Willow Rosenberg is nailing crosses all over Buffy's bedroom. (Angel is being naughty again, I think.) Willow does NOT say, but I wish she had: "You know, Giles says the Star of David works just as well ... in Tel Aviv and parts of Florida ... "

True, the 75th anniversary of the breaking of the sound barrier was little remembered, aside from (I find) websites connected to Chuck Yeager or to the Air Force. In this dark time, it's possible that the media are more ready to tear down a man like Chuck Yeager, than celebrate him.

The review of BIGGER THAN LIFE (1956) reminds me that at the time, and later, John F. Kennedy was using cortisone. I've often wondered if the mood swings from that medication (and others) accounted for his erratic performance in office--like agreeing to invade Cuba on the upswing, and then refusing to send air support on the downswing. The impression of weakness and vacillation he gave Khrushchev later led to the Cuban Missile Crisis.

I've always assumed GATTACA (1997) is a mashup of Robert Heinlein's BEYOND THIS HORIZON (eugenic society) and STARMAN JONES (forged papers to get into space). It may be significant that the star, Ethan Hawke, later headlined the movie, PREDESTINATION (2014), which is explicitly based on a Heinlein story.

Incidentally, GATTACA may overdo the constant DNA testing. In these Covid days, if you present a plausible looking vax card, nobody doublechecks your blood for antibodies. In GATTACA's society, it's plausible that people would simply assume that any imposter will immediately reveal himself by failing at his task--just like somebody who faked his SAT scores to get into an Ivy would tend to flunk.

Anachronisms in movies discussed: In THE GREEN KNIGHT (2021), a peasant woman is presented in the flashforward as distraught over her child being adopted as royal. She would be ecstatic. Not only was that one child in gravy, but every other child she bore would be half-siblings to royalty, and would all probably get cushy jobs in the castle.

Watching THE PRIME OF MISS JEAN BRODIE (1969) years ago, I found the title character's preference for the German-allied Falangists over the Russian-allied Republicans (in the Spanish Civil War) bizarre and wrong-headed. But that was 20-20 hindsight, I now realize. At the time the story takes place, Russia had already murdered millions of Ukrainians in the Artificial Famine, or Holodomor, while Germany's mass murders were still mostly in the future. Unlike Russia, "Germany is a civilized country", people said at the time. Turns out "technologically advanced" and "civilized" aren't exactly the same thing, who knew.

On the subject of email regularity, there's a difference between what one sends and what other people receive. For example, not infrequently I find periodicals I subscribe to sitting in my spam folder, because of some chance combination of words. And any reference to a certain article of male anatomy, which is sometimes alleged to require improvement, will go directly to my trash folder. Even if there are asterisks between the letters! [-tw]

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

Samuel Taylor Coleridge may be a great poet, but an astronomer he is not.

In "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner", he writes:

"All in a hot and copper sky,
The bloody Sun, at noon,
Right up above the mast did stand,
No bigger than the Moon."

If you think about how a solar eclipse works, it works because the sun and the moon are the same apparent size. The sun is actually 400 times the diameter of the moon, and 400 times farther away. (Coleridge is clearly not talking about absolute sizes, but apparent ones.)

Coleridge also writes:

"Till clombe above the eastern bar
The horned Moon, with one bright star
Within the nether tip."

The "horned Moon" is the crescent moon, and if there is a "bright star within the nether tip", you would probably think someone has built a base on the moon and turned on all the lights, because the part of the moon between the tips of the horns is still there, even if not visible. (Actually, quite often it is visible, because "earthshine" partially illuminates it.)

However, this has been seen by various people, and even has a name: "the Coleridge Effect". One explanation is that there is an optical illusion that makes the tips of the crescent moon seem to encompass more area than they do, and the star is just next to the moon. Another is that at least some of these viewings were of meteor showers or asteroids passing between the moon and Earth. [-ecl]

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Quote of the Week:

Most of the time growing up I never heard in the news
the word "billion".

--Mark R. Leeper

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