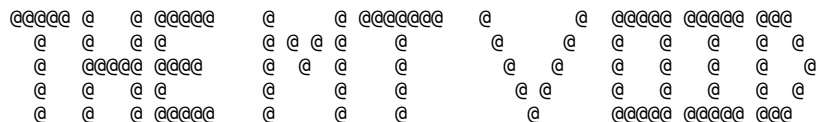


MT VOID 03/10/23 -- Vol. 41, No. 37, Whole Number 2266



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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.

Change to MTPL (NJ) Science Fiction Discussion Group:

The meeting on ORLANDO (film and book by Virginia Woolf) has been moved forward one week, to March 30, to avoid a conflict with Passover:

March 30, 2023 (MTPL): ORLANDO (1992) & novel by Virginia Woolf

Mini Reviews, Part 15 (film reviews by Mark R. Leeper and Evelyn C. Leeper):

This is the fifteenth batch of mini-reviews, all films of the fantastic:

PUSS IN BOOTS--THE LAST WISH: PUSS IN BOOTS--THE LAST WISH is the sequel to PUSS IN BOOTS (the 2011 movie), PUSS IN BOOTS (the 2012 video), and PUSS IN BOOTS (the 2015 film series), and it also features a quick shot of Shrek in the distance, tying it to those films as well.

Puss in Boots starts out singing about being a hero, which seems a little disingenuous--and indeed, that is the point. When he learns that he is a cat with nine lives who has used up eight of them.

This year it seems like many of the fantasy tales involve a fantasy universe different from ours, rather than fantasy occurring within our world. But then this is pretty much always true of animated films in some sense. (The "Toy Story" films are a major exception.)

Antonio Banderas is always delightful to listen to (so says Evelyn), but the plot of PUSS IN BOOTS--THE LAST WISH is incoherent and difficult to keep straight. There is Puss in Boots and his team, Goldilocks and the Three Bears, and Big Jack Horner and his cadre, as well as a magical map, and a secret from Puss in Boots's past. The messages are laid on a bit heavy but I guess that is to be expected from a film with children as a large part of its audience. Somehow, though, in spite of this, it is enjoyable to watch.

Released theatrically 21 December 2022. Rating: low +3 (-4 to +4) or 8/10

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt3915174/reference>

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

DON'T WORRY DARLING: DON'T WORRY DARLING is set in the Victory Project, a 1950s Utopian community. When we see our protagonist doing her housework, she is putting as much verve into it as if it were a high school rock and roll dance. One is reminded of THE STEPFORD WIVES, and that turns out to be a reasonable association. (As for the town, it seems like a mixture of the Village of THE PRISONER, and the homes in EDWARD SCISSORHANDS.) If anything, the Victory Project has stricter gender boundaries than THE STEPFORD WIVES, for the men as well as for the women.

The Victory Project, it turns out, is trying to bring order instead of chaos. The women all attend a ballet class in which the instructor tells them, "We move as one."

This is both a remake of THE STEPFORD WIVES without sufficient imagination to set it above other versions of the story, and a re-imagining of it that relies on a fair number of current tropes to carry it. In both aspects, it needed to have more ideas.

Towards the end, it falls apart as the protagonist's relationship with her husband turns into a non-stop shouting match, and we are treated to ... an uninspired car chase.

(There is a scene where the protagonist wraps her head in plastic wrap. Don't try this at home kiddies!

Released theatrically 19 September 2022. Rating: high +1 (-4 to +4) or 7/10

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/tt10731256/reference>

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

THREE THOUSAND YEARS OF LONGING: In THREE THOUSAND YEARS OF LONGING, the characters believe that to understand life one must understand stories. In the 1940s through the 1960s there was a reasonably popular sub-genre of films based on "The Arabian Nights". The strongest film of this set was THE 7TH VOYAGE OF SINBAD. This film is a new story for the "Arabian Nights" told as if it happened in the present, and uses the same structure as the original "Arabian Nights": stories nested within stories. The Djinn tells stories of his past, each of which ends with the cliffhanger of his being trapped in a bottle again.

THREE THOUSAND YEARS OF LONGING is every bit the property of production designer Roger Ford and art directors Nicholas Dare and Sophie Nash, all of whose strengths cover every scene.

Released theatrically 26 August 2022. Rating: +2 (-4 to +4) or 7/10

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt9198364/reference>

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

[-mrl/ecl]

Corrections (by Evelyn C. Leeper):

When I typed John Hertz's letter comment in for the 02/03/23 issue of the MT VOID, I made a couple of typos.

Where John had written:

The suffix "-man" isn't masculine

I had typed:

The subject "-man" isn't masculine

Where John had written:

there are better uses for our cavalry

I had typed:

there are better uses for our Cavalry

The complete, corrected paragraph should read:

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 suffix "-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. [-jh]

At least I didn't type "Calvary"! [-ecl]

EYES OF THE VOID by Adrian Tchaikovsky (copyright 2022, Orbit, 20 hours and 45 minutes, ASIN: B09VKHISKYN, narrated by Sophie Aldred) (audio book review by Joe Karpierz):

EYES OF THE VOID, the second book in "The Final Architecture" series by Adrian Tchaikovsky, picks up not long after the events of the first novel, THE SHARDS OF EARTH. The Architects, a race of beings whose sole purpose, it seems, is to change planets into flower-like constructs while killing off the inhabitants of that planet in the process, are back. In THE SHARDS OF EARTH, we learn that the Originators had artifacts that were able to protect planets from the attacks of the Architects, as long as those artifacts were on their planet of origin (for lack of a better term); that is, if the artifacts were moved from the planet of their discovery, they were no longer effective at turning away the Architects. Now, those artifacts have no effect. Basically, the Architects are back and everyone is doomed.

Once again Intermediary Idris Telemmier is at the center of the storm. Ints (as intermediaries are called), are the true pilots of unspace, that weird construct of space-time that allow ships to travel great distances in short periods of time. Idris is a hero of the prior Architect wars, as he was the one being that was able to cause the Architects to turn and run and not come back for decades. The Hegemony is in short supply of Ints, and desire to have Ints that are like Idris to help stave off the Architect attacks. The problem is that Ints like Idris pay a price for their abilities and existence. Each Int is different. In Idris' case, he doesn't sleep. At all. Ever. It's been over 70 years since he caused the Architects to leave at the original battle, and he hasn't slept since.

Galactic civilizations are conflicted with regard to how to stop the Architects this time around. The conflict is at a level where war may break out between multiple factions--and indeed does near the end of the novel--which of course is the wrong thing to have happen when a galactic level threat is breathing down your neck. And everyone wants Ints, particularly the Parthenon, which is made of up an all female cloned military. Solace and her Partheni colleagues recruit Idris to try to create Ints for them. If he succeeds, they can determine the genetic code for an effective Int and add it into their breeding program. This, of course, ticks off everyone else and leads to greater conflict in the galaxy.

Idris wants nothing to do with this. He would like nothing better than to not be involved, but of course he'd also like the conflict to be resolved. He realizes his place in the conflict, and so he must continue on. The reluctant hero is certainly a well worn trope, but I think it works and has its place here. Idris once again enters unspace and finds a place that potentially holds the answer to the conflict and the end of the war once and for all.

While it's the second book of a trilogy, EYES OF THE VOID generally doesn't feel like it is. Yes, it's setting up for what should be an exciting finish to the overall story, but there's enough here going on with regard to the storyline that *isn't* setup, as well as the continued fleshing out of the characters and races involved in the story that it doesn't necessarily feel like it's the second book in a trilogy. It seems as if Tchaikovsky is setting up for something big, and I'm looking forward to the final book in the series.

Sophie Aldred continues to impress me as the narrator of this series. She has to make her voice do all sorts of what seems to be unnatural things to give life to some of the weirder creatures in the novel, and she does it well while continuing to keep track of all the other voices she has to do while at the same time seamlessly switching between them all. [-jak]

CRUSADERS: THE EPIC HISTORY OF THE WARS FOR THE HOLY LANDS by Dan Jones (book review by Gregory Frederick):

Christians and Muslims lived as neighbors for a thousand years plus, and there were times of peace and war during that time. But after Christian armies of Europe captured Jerusalem in 1099, they started the most intense period of conflict between the two religions. Some think the fall of the holy city was either an inspiring grand legend or the greatest of horrors. The author, Dan Jones, investigates the wider story around this period of time.

Jones looks to the roots of Christian-Muslim relations beginning in the eighth century and tracks the effects of that crusading period to present day. He also extends geographical focus to many regions and not just the Middle East. Crusades occurred to many assumed enemies of the Church, including in Spain, North Africa, southern France, and the Baltic states. The author excels in telling intimate stories of individual journeys, conflicts, and battles. not only from the perspective of popes and kings, but from Arab-Sicilian poets, Byzantine princesses, Sunni scholars, Shiite viziers, Mamluk slave soldiers, Mongol chieftains, and barefoot friars. This book is very well written and exposes the true folly of many crusader actions. [-gf]

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

LONGBOURN by Jo Baker (Knopf, ISBN 978-0-385-35123-2) is the "downstairs" to Jane Austen's "upstairs" in PRIDE AND PREJUDICE. It is of necessity, therefore, a bit of a polemic about class distinctions in 19th century England. In UPSTAIRS, DOWNSTAIRS we see both sides (and admittedly the downstairs part is cleaned up a bit. But in LONGBOURN, Baker concentrates entirely on the servants, and does not whitewash their lives. And she appears to have really done her research.

For example, she describes emptying the chamber pots, cleaning the daughters' menstrual rags, scrubbing the clothes until the skin on the maid's hands cracked, and so on. She describes how the floors are cleaned by spreading damp (used) tea leaves on them, then sweeping them up, along with the dust, cobwebs, and other debris that adheres to them. It is this level of detail that is often missing, replaced by a simple, "Sarah swept the library floor." One is reminded of the famous data dumps of Kim Stanley Robinson.

What is done the best (in my opinion) is how Baker shows how little the upstairs gentry understand how the downstairs works. Yes, it's often that they don't care: one of the daughter's decides to discard a silk dress after Sarah spent hours of hard work carefully cleaning the mud from the hems (because you couldn't just boil silk). (In GOSFORD PARK, Lady Constance wants to wear the same blouse the next day, so Mary stays up until 1AM washing and ironing it, only to have Lady Constance casually decide the next morning not to wear it after all.)

But they also just don't understand a servant's life. One daughter gives Sarah a cast-off dress and thinks she has given her a wonderful present. All Sarah sees are is the time and work involved in removing all the lace and decoration unsuitable for a servant, then altering the dress to fit her. And all in what little free time she has, because her first priority is whatever the "upstairs" folk want.

Baker also includes social commentary that Austen avoided. Austen made no comments on the slave trade or the sugar plantations where many of the gentry made their money, but Baker does not avoid these (even if her introduction of Ptolomy, a former slave, does seem a bit forced). Unfortunately, Baker also changes the character of one of Austen's main characters by creating a back story that, while probably common in Austen's time, seems totally out of place in this story.

There is also a long section about military life during the Napoleonic Wars which is less likely to be of interest to Austen fans, and unlikely to draw in many Bernard Cornwell fans. Still, the book as a whole does round out the picture of Austen's time. [-ecl]

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Quote of the Week:

Immature poets imitate; mature poets steal.
--T. S. Eliot

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