

MT VOID 06/23/23 -- Vol. 41, No. 52, Whole Number 2281



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The latest issue is at <http://www.leepers.us/mtvoid/latest.htm>.

An index with links to the issues of the MT VOID since 1986 is at http://leepers.us/mtvoid/back_issues.htm.

Correction:

The last issue should have been Whole Number 2280, not 2260.

Bell Labs News:

As reported by Citizens for Informed Land Use Preserve Holmdel and Friends of Holmdel Open Space:

On Tuesday, June 13th 2023, The Holmdel Township Committee voted (unanimously) to approve resolutions that will begin the process of acquiring two of the three parcels that make up the Crawford Hill property, home to the historically significant horn antenna and the top of the Holmdel watershed.

Mini Reviews, Part 26 (film reviews by Mark R. Leeper and Evelyn C. Leeper):

This is the twenty-sixth batch of mini-reviews, films of particularly visual interest:

BABYLON (2022): BABYLON is about the late days of silent film and the early days of sound film. It is somewhat of a remake of SINGIN' IN THE RAIN, and in fact that film is referenced explicitly. But it is not the sweet family film that SINGIN' IN THE RAIN is. BABYLON is full of excess, orgiastic parties, deaths, foul language, animal cruelty, and general chaos.

Nellie LaRoy is the Lina Lamont character. It's not her voice that's the problem, though, but her incredibly low-class, vulgar background. When she tries to "pass" as upper class at a party, she replies to a question about "Miss Julie" as if she is a person she has met, thinks George Eliot is a man, and tries to fake speaking French, only to have a real French-speaker respond. Meanwhile African-American trumpeter Sidney Palmer (an earlier version of Sidney Poitier?) is startling the guests by citing Scriabin as one of his influences, and not agreeing about how good race films are. Most of the main characters are fictional, but a few lesser characters are real historical people, or at least have the same names. (See <https://www.vulture.com/article/babylon-real-life-hollywood-inspirations.html> for details on who's who.)

So, okay, it's more social commentary than SINGIN' IN THE RAIN, and yes, the Oscar nominations for Music, Costumes and Production Design are well-earned, but as Lewis Carroll might have said, "It's too much of a muchness." Director Damien Chazelle is Baz Luhrmann (MOULIN ROUGE, THE GREAT GATSBY) on steroids.

And the film is over three hours long.

For fans of early film, and those who enjoy lavish visual spectacles, this is a must-see, but it can't be recommended for a general audience. [-mrl/ecl]

Released theatrically 23 December 2022. Rating: +1 (-4 to +4), or 6/10.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt10640346/reference>

What others are saying: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/babylon_2022

SAVING LINCOLN (2013): SAVING LINCOLN is a film by Salvador Litvak. Litvak was the co-writer and director of the Passover comedy WHEN DO WE EAT? (2005). (His wife, Nina Davidovich, was the co-writer for both films. Note: SAVING LINCOLN is not rated but is family-friendly; WHEN DO WE EAT? is R-rated.)

WHEN DO WE EAT? had several sequences with striking visual styles. SAVING LINCOLN is also unusual visually. There are no sets to speak of. Rather all the scenes are set against a background of actual photographs from the time. The closest it comes to having sets would be a few pieces of furniture in the foreground.

Look, it's not Steven Spielberg's LINCOLN, Tom Amandes is no Daniel Day-Lewis. But the visual conceit is unique. Some may say that is because it was not successful, and indeed it never really fools the eye. It is clear the backdrops are backdrops and not physically present sets. Then again, the scene in the taxi in CASABLANCA clearly has rear-projection in the back window, and no one expects a stage play to have fully constructed backdrops. So perhaps one should consider this a filmed stage play with far more settings than the average stage play.

And Litvak covers a lot that everyone else seems to have ignored. Yes, he throws in all the famous quotes (e.g., Lincoln speaking of Grant, "I cannot afford to lose this man. He fights.") But he also has Mrs. Keckley talk about her son, who passed as white to enlist in the Union Army and was killed at Wilson's Creek. [-ecl]

Released theatrically 13 February 2013. Rating: low +1 (-4 to +4), or 6/10.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt2034098/reference>

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

THE THIS by Adam Roberts (copyright 2022, Gollancz, 10 hours and 24 minutes, ASIN: B09KHLLG4S, narrated by Elliot Fitzpatrick) (audio book review by Joe Karpierz):

We live in a crazy media where social media is everywhere. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, Tumblr, Discord, just to name a few, have taken over the lives of many people. Many folks are addicted to social media; they can always be seen staring into their phones while walking down the street, oblivious to the world around them. Social media has been blamed for many of society's ills. Whether or not you believe that statement, I think it's fair to say that the world has changed immensely since and due to the advent of social media.

So, what if you could communicate directly with someone else without a keyboard, using a "hands-free Twitter", as the novel describes it? The This, the new social media platform, is just the thing for you if that sounds appealing to you. The corporation that has created The This basically inserts a neural implant through the roof of your mouth that burrows into your brain that allows direct mind-to-mind communication.

But really, did you think that the story actually revolves around The This? Well, yes, I guess it does, but as you might guess, the story revolves around the affect that technology has on humanity, and THE THIS is no exception.

The story takes place on two separate timelines. The first is in what seems to be the near future, the other is in the future. Rich, our near future protagonist, takes side jobs for extra cash doing freelance interviews. He gets an assignment to interview a representative of The This. He is warned not to call The This a cult, but the more questions he asks, the more curious he is, and eventually does refer to it as a cult. The interview ends without incident, and he turns in his work. Not long after, he finds himself the object of an intense recruiting campaign by The This, which is something that they never do. While he is trying to figure all this out, he meets an elderly woman named Helen Susanna, formerly a "member" of The This. That encounter sets him on a path that will hopefully save humanity.

I said "hopefully". In the future, to no one's surprise there is a hive mind made up of folks who joined The This. That hive mind is waging a war against baseline humans. They are trying to terraform Venus and use that as a base of operations for attacking the remaining humans on Earth. Adan, our future protagonist, is a layabout, living off his mother's finances and using his phone as a sex toy. Yeah, a little weird, but that actually is an important point in the story. Suddenly, his funds are cut off as his mother runs off to join a cult--yeah, that one--and ends up as a soldier on the front lines. His relationship with Elegy--that advanced, sophisticated sex toy--gets him special powers that allow him to survive attacks from the enemy. The military brass want to use him as a sort of kamikaze weapon (although that's not the right word, because he doesn't die), but as these things go events go in a different direction entirely.

As I said earlier, the novel isn't really about The This. The story is about how The This affects humanity, and how a revolutionary new social media platform can change the future of mankind completely. Once I finished listening to the book, it became obvious that I should have seen the obvious--that The This was going to create a hive mind that would believe it was the next step in human evolution, and that there would be an inevitable conflict between baseline humans and the hive mind.

While this all sounds straightforward, and the book really is readable, Roberts provides some weird and interesting scenarios and events that keep the reader engaged and focused. And the beginning and ending of the book, both of which take place in The Bardo, tie up together quite nicely. This is a pretty good novel, and has me interested in reading other novels by Adam Roberts. And that's what an author wants, I think.

Elliot Fitzpatrick is a narrator that seems to fit the material exactly. I'm not sure that his style and tone would fit a lot of other things that I've listened to, but given the nature of the story I can't imagine anyone else narrating it. He is a good fit and made the story more enjoyable for me. [-jak]

Herman Melville (letter of comment by Richie Bielak):

In response to [comments on Herman Melville in the 06/16/23](#) issue of the MT VOID, Richie Bielak writes:

The first book I read by Melville was TYPEE. I really enjoyed it. I was surprised how modern Melville's observations seemed. This led to a realization that one of the reasons great works of literature are great, because they touch upon universal themes of human condition, that haven't really changed that much through the ages.

I had read MOBY-DICK as well, and liked that one too. I should probably read it again. [-rb]

Evelyn adds:

Don't forget my annotations at http://leepers.us/evelyn/Moby-Dick_Annotations.htm

[-ecl]

One Octopus, Two ??? (letters of comment by Paul Dormer and Gary McGath):

In response to [comments on the plural of "octopus"](#) in the 06/16/23 issue of the MT VOID, Paul Dormer writes:

Chambers dictionary (2014 edition) gives:

pl oc'topuses, (archaic) octo'podes (or /-top'/); oc'topi is wrong

[-pd]

Gary McGath writes:

I dislike "octopi" even if some dictionaries accept it. The word comes from Greek: "octo" (eight) + "pus" (foot). The "-us" isn't a Latin noun ending, which is the only reason it would be pluralized with "-i".

I object to "platypi" for the same reason. [-gmg]

Paul responds:

Many years ago, when I was still working, some guy came to give a talk about a product he was pushing. He kept on referring to "stati" as a plural of status. Eventually I snapped. "It's not stati," I said. "The Latin plural is status, [pronounced "statoose"]". It's fourth declension."

I never did Latin at school, and at the time, I didn't actually know what fourth declension meant, but it has been explained to me. Afterwards, my colleagues said it was the best bit of the presentation. [-pd]

And Gary, apparently inspired by all this, writes:

I've started working on a filk on the subject. Here's the tentative last verse:

Though some may claim that "octopi"
Is not the hill where I should die,
I'll stand my ground against their forces
And won't yield even to a "Dorsus".

In case it isn't obvious, "Dorsus" is the reverse-constructed singular of "Dorsai". [-pd]

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

In the 04/07/23 issue of the MT VOID, I complained about the decline of proof-reading, as evidenced by a 2007 book (PAST IMPERFECT by Peter Charles Hoffer) where there was a reference to "Edgar Allen Poe" and "Samuel L. Clements". But apparently it is not a new phenomenon; Bruce Chatwin's IN PATAGONIA, published almost fifty years ago (1977), has the same error. And Marion Turner's THE WIFE OF BATH: A BIOGRAPHY (2023) talks about "FINNEGAN'S WAKE", which should not have an apostrophe. According to "The Guardian", Thomas Flanagan, a professor in the English department at UCB, "the insertion of an apostrophe would presuppose that Finnegan is an individual and that he is dead (hence his wake).

people), and the implied exhortation that they wake from their slumbers, precipitated by the weight of their history and the strictures of Catholicism." [The quote is from "The Guardian", not directly from Flanagan.]

The misspelling of Poe's middle name is probably the most common misspelling of authors or titles in English. (I do not count the omission of the diaeresis over the "e" in Bronte (which I omit here in the ASCII text version)).

I still think that proof-reading is declining, though.

I have been watching the David Suchet "Hercule Poirot" series in broadcast order. I just watched the Suchet version of CARDS ON THE TABLE by Agatha Christie (William Morrow, ISBN 978-0-062-07373-0) (Series 10, Episode 2) and while up until now the episodes have been fairly faithful to the books and stories (with just the usual elimination of minor characters, and making others

continuing characters through the series), this one really jumped the shark and several other marine animals as well.

SPOILERS

The original started with four murderers who had gotten away with it. The episode dropped one, but added another past murderer later in the show, changing a lot of the relationships and motivations as well. Recurring Christie characters are replaced by new characters to be able to make them suspects. One suicide subplot is dropped, but another one is added, as well as a burglary. Not one, but two, gay motivations are added (one might argue that one of them is implied in the novel, but not the other).

Then they make two characters who are totally unrelated in the novel close relatives, and eliminates one murder, while adding an "incriminating photographs" subplot.

As I said, some of this makes sense, but a lot of the changes don't seem to serve any purpose, other than to annoy those who have read the book.

The next Poirot episode was AFTER THE FUNERAL, which seemed to hew closer to the novel. But TAKEN AT THE FLOOD (Harper Collins, ISBN 978-0-008-12954-5) came next and was massively changed. People who died in the book survived in the adaptation, murders became suicides, accidents became murders, more assaults were added, there were additional drug addicts and anonymous callers, and in general it was even less recognizable than the previous one. [-ecl]

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Quote of the Week:

When I go to a bar, I don't go looking for a girl
who knows the capital of Maine.

--David Brenner

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