

MT VOID 07/14/23 -- Vol. 42, No. 2, Whole Number 2284



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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.

The "Quatermass" Series (comments by Mark R. Leeper):

Next Tuesday, July 18, 2023, marks the 70th anniversary of the first broadcast of the first episode of the first BBC "Quatermass" play, all of which were written by British screenwriter Nigel Kneale.

This was "The Quatermass Experiment", to be followed by "Quatermass II", and "Quatermass and the Pit". "The Quatermass Experiment" was unexpectedly a huge media event. It virtually emptied the streets of London as people were all home watching the play. "The Quatermass Experiment" was the United Kingdom's first science fiction serial, and Quatermass was the first British television hero. (Alas, only a single chapter remains, since no one at the time bothered to film or save live broadcasts.) As two more plays were made each was more successful than its predecessor was, until churches started rescheduling services so that congregations and clergy would not miss the plays.

Each play was adapted into a film by Hammer Films of Britain, a studio that incidentally built their great success on horror and science

fiction after having success in the field with the first two "Quatermass" films. The third film was not made until the late 1960s. The titles of the films were the same as the BBC plays but "Experiment" was intentionally misspelled "Xperiment" to emphasize the "X"-certificate in Britain (more the equivalent of the US "R", rather than the US "X"). These films each got a modest release in the United States with the terrible respective names THE CREEPING UNKNOWN, ENEMY FROM SPACE, and FIVE MILLION YEARS TO EARTH. In 1980 a final Quatermass story was made for television, called simply "Quatermass". It was never re-adapted into a film, but a feature film (THE QUATERMASS CONCLUSION) was made by editing down the television movie. In 2005 the BBC again produced a television version of "The Quatermass Experiment", doing it as a live play, the first in several years. The original "Quatermass" plays were the inspiration for the "Doctor Who" series. Kneale was asked to write for "Doctor Who", but he did not like the series, thinking it was too scary for a children's series. [-mrl]

Hugo Award Finalists *Finally* Announced

We are not going to include the entire list here (it is almost 200 lines long--and that is the version with only the Roman alphabet representations). It can be found at <https://file770.com/2023-hugo-finalists-2/>.

We will list the two "major" categories, and will actually include all the info for them, rather than just the titles and authors:

Best Novel:

- THE DAUGHTER OF DOCTOR MOREAU, by Silvia Moreno-Garcia (Del Rey)
- THE KAIJU PRESERVATION SOCIETY, by John Scalzi (Tor Books)
- LEGENDS & LATTES, by Travis Baldree (Tor Books)
- NONA THE NINTH, by Tamsyn Muir (Tordotcom)
- NETTLE & BONE, by T. Kingfisher (Tor Books)
- THE SPARE MAN, by Mary Robinette Kowal (Tor Books)

Best Dramatic Presentation, Long Form:

- AVATAR: THE WAY OF WATER, screenplay by James Cameron, Rick Jaffa, and Amanda Silver, directed by James Cameron (Lightstorm Entertainment / TSG Entertainment II)
- BLACK PANTHER: WAKANDA FOREVER, screenplay by Ryan Coogler and Joe Robert Cole, directed by Ryan Coogler (Marvel Studios)
- EVERYTHING EVERYWHERE ALL AT ONCE, screenplay by Daniel Kwan and Daniel Scheinert, directed by Daniel Kwan and Daniel Scheinert (IAC Films / Gozie AGBO)
- NOPE, written by Jordan Peele, directed by Jordan Peele (Universal Pictures / Monkeypaw Productions)
- SEVERANCE (Season 1), written by Dan Erickson, Anna Ouyang Moench et al., directed by Ben Stiller and Aoife McArdle (Red Hour Productions / Fifth Season)
- TURNING RED, screenplay by Julia Cho and Domee Shi, directed by Domee Shi (Walt Disney Studios / Pixar Animation Studios)

Some of the delay was due to the difficulty of determining official word counts for the Chinese language nominees, and also in contacting the finalists (due to a bigger-than-usual problem with spam filters discarding email from China).

If/when there is a website showing where some of the short fiction works can be accessed free on-line, we will provide that URL. However, it is not even clear whether all the works will be available in English. [-ecl]

ROADSIDE PICNIC by Arkady and Boris Strugatsky (original copyright 1972; language translation copyright 2012; translated by Olena Bormashenko; Chicago Review Press, Incorporated; 209pp; \$15.95; ISBN 978-1-61374-341-6) (book review by Joe Karpierz):

One of the interesting things about reviewing an old book, a book that is considered a classic, a book that is over fifty years old, is finding out if the book--in the opinion of the reviewer--is really as good as its reputation makes it out to be. Does it stand the test of time? If it was written today, would it not only be published, but would it be any good?

Not long ago I read and reviewed William Gibson's NEUROMANCER. Basically, I said it didn't do too much for me and fell flat. I think that part of that feeling was that cyberpunk and all its descendants are so commonplace these days that the book didn't stand out for me at all. This is not the case with ROADSIDE PICNIC. The book is considered one of the greatest science fiction novels of all

time (although I'm not sure who made that pronouncement), and while it may or may not live up to that lofty title, it is still a terrific book, more than fifty years after its first publication in Russia.

The other issue with reviewing a book like this is that a great number of long time SF readers have probably read the book decades ago. So the challenge is reviewing it with those readers in mind, while still aiming to get younger, newer readers of sf interested in reading a book from more than fifty years ago.

The story is set in an English-speaking town called Harmont, and takes place after an event called the Visitation in which extraterrestrials stopped by to visit the planet for a couple of days. Harmont is the location of one of six Zones where the aliens landed. The aliens were pretty good about hiding themselves; no aliens were ever seen, nor was their arrival or departure ever seen, and this fact is true of all six Zones. What they did leave behind was an abundance of strange objects and technology in the Zones. The Zones also exhibit weird phenomena, much of which is dangerous to humans.

But where there are weird unknown objects, there is an opportunity for profit. Young people, known as stalkers, venture into the Zones (in spite of the dangers) to retrieve artifacts that are valuable on the black market. The novel follows Red Schuhart, one of these stalkers, who lives for entering the Zone and retrieving artifacts to sell. Of course, this fact in and of itself would make this a boring novel. Early in the novel, one of his trips inevitably goes wrong, and the events of the novel proceed from there.

While the novel deals with science fictional concepts, it is a less of a straightforward novel with conflicts and clear cut endings, and more of a philosophical story about the effect the visitation has on the characters in the book and humanity in general. Take, for example, the title of the novel. Doctor Valentine Pilman compares the Visitation to a picnic held by humans in a meadow off a country road. After a day and evening, the people continue on the journey they were on the day before, but in the process leave lots of junk behind. The local wildlife comes out of hiding to find all the stuff that is there, stuff they know nothing about or do not understand. He states that the Visitation was simply a roadside picnic. The aliens were traveling from one place to another, and stopped to rest for a couple of days. When they resumed their journey, they left a bunch of incomprehensible stuff behind. Humanity is the wildlife, coming out of the shadows to discover all junk left behind.

Another interesting thought is that the aliens didn't make their presence known. It's likely they didn't even know humanity was around. It's almost as if the human race was beneath their notice. Most alien encounters in SF imagine face to face contact, either in an adversarial way or in some pleasant fashion where we become friends with our visitors. Here? They didn't even notice us. Didn't care. How does that make us feel? There's nothing like feeling insignificant in the aftermath of the most important event in human history.

The novel is compact, clocking in at just over 200 pages, including the Foreword by Ursula K. Le Guin and the Afterword by Boris Strugatsky. Both of those are well worth the read, and I highly recommend them. The Strugatsky brothers tell a heck of a tale in this short book, and you can see the influence of Russian society throughout the novel. *ROADSIDE PICNIC* is a terrific novel, 50+ years after its original publication. Is it one of the best sf novels of all time? I'm not one of those people that would make that kind of pronouncements, but you know, it's really good. [-jak]

THE BIGGEST IDEAS IN THE UNIVERSE: SPACE, TIME, AND MOTION by Sean Carroll (book review by Gregory Frederick):

The quest to understand the universe and our place within it has captivated human curiosity for centuries. In *THE BIGGEST IDEAS IN THE UNIVERSE*, renowned physicist Sean Carroll presents a compelling and accessible exploration of the most profound concepts that shape our understanding of the cosmos. From the fundamental laws of nature to the mysteries of mechanics and the nature of time itself, Carroll takes readers on an awe-inspiring intellectual journey.

One of the greatest strengths of this book is Carroll's ability to distill complex scientific ideas into digestible nuggets of knowledge. He possesses a rare talent for making abstract concepts comprehensible without oversimplification. Each chapter serves as a window into a different facet of the universe, with Carroll guiding readers through the intricacies of space, time, space time, gravity, and black holes.

Carroll's writing style is engaging and conversational. He strikes a balance between scientific rigor and accessibility, ensuring that both novice enthusiasts and seasoned scientists can appreciate his explanations. By weaving historical anecdotes and personal insights into his narrative, Carroll injects a sense of wonder and humanity into the profound questions he tackles. But this book does require the reader to know Algebra and even some knowledge of calculus to fully understand the text.

THE BIGGEST IDEAS IN THE UNIVERSE covers a wide range of topics, providing readers with a comprehensive overview of the

fundamental principles that underpin our current understanding of the cosmos. Carroll navigates the intricacies of these concepts with clarity and enthusiasm. He explores concepts like the Einstein-Rosen bridge which is a wormhole and spinning black holes. He talks about classical mechanics and how the macroscopic realm is also governed by special and general relativity, offering readers a glimpse into the cutting-edge of scientific research.

Additionally, due to the fast-paced nature of the book, readers without prior exposure to physics might find themselves occasionally overwhelmed by the sheer volume of information.

Despite these minor shortcomings, *THE BIGGEST IDEAS IN THE UNIVERSE* remains a remarkable achievement in science communication. Carroll's passion for the subject matter shines through every page, igniting a sense of wonder and curiosity in the reader. The book serves as a testament to the power of scientific inquiry and the enduring human desire to unravel the mysteries of the cosmos.

In conclusion, *THE BIGGEST IDEAS IN THE UNIVERSE* is a captivating and thought-provoking journey through the deepest realms of physics. Having previous experience with basic physics and math like Algebra is really needed to have a better understand of this book. But an aspiring physicist or simply an avid science enthusiast should enjoy this book. [-gf]

The History of the MT VOID (letters of comment by Glen Taylor and David Leeper):

In response to [Mark and Evelyn's comments on the history of the MT VOID](#) in the 07/07/23 issue of the MT VOID, Glen Taylor writes:

Greetings from the distant past! I hope you are both (reasonably) well. It has been a very long time since we last spoke (probably on the order of 40 years), but I'm still enjoying reading what you have been up to via the MT Void. I particularly enjoyed the history of the publication. I can still recall seeing some of Mark's movie reviews printed out and posted on the door or wall in his office in Holmdel before you had even coalesced them into a fanzine. Of course, I would certainly still remember why it was "The Mt Holz Science Fiction Club." And, not really trying to take any undue credit, I think I may have been the person (one of the people) who helped rename it the MT VOID. I recall having an email exchange with you many years ago where I facetiously and as a joke suggested that "MT (empty) and Void" go together well so you should use MT Void.

Again, great to read this history and be reminded to reach out to old friends from decades past! [-gat]

And David Leeper writes:

Good story on the origin of MT VOID!

I recall, decades ago, when you published an advisory that said, "AT&T assumes no responsibility for anything that MT VOID says, and MT VOID assumes no responsibility for anything AT&T says. It's a very comfortable relationship." [-dgl]

or something like that(?).

Evelyn replies:

Glen could be right about the name. I remember I was pushing for "Last Dangerous Visions". The only record I have is what was printed in the 07/03/87 issue:

Eight years of being "The Holmdel Science Fiction Club," "The Lincroft Science Fiction Club," "The Holmdel-Lincroft Science Fiction Club," "The Lincroft-Holmdel Science Fiction Club," "The Lincroft-Holmdel-Middletown Science Fiction Club," and numerous variations on these have led to some confusion with outside organizations we deal with. Internally, of course, we are still simply "the science fiction club at the Holmdel location," but in order to get referred to in a reasonable manner externally we are now using the pseudonym "the Mt. Holz Science Fiction Society." (We had considered the "Holzmt Science Fiction Society" and the "Lzmtho Science Fiction Society," but we thought a name that could be pronounced by humans would be a nice touch.)

We have also finally named this publication. Since we are the only weekly science fiction newsletter that I know of, I thought we at least deserved a name. So welcome to THE MT VOID. Oh, and even though the volume number is only 6, we are really in our ninth year. We didn't start numbering the issues until 1982."

And while I don't have on-line archives going back to the AT&T days (versus Lucent), the disclaimer sounds like something Mark would have said. [-ecl]

Proof-Reading (letter of comment by Hal Heydt):

In response to [Jim Susky's comments on proof-reading](#) in the 07/07/23 issue of the MT VOID, Hal Heydt writes:

When my late wife--Dorothy J. Heydt--wrote A POINT OF HONOR, one of the characters described a particular design debate among the programmers who wrote the VR system in the book as a "big endian vs. little endian" difference.

When the proofs came back for checking, the copy editor had changed it to "big indian vs. little indian." Dorothy rather indignantly changed it back and added a marginal note, "See: J. Swift." When she mentioned this to me, I was able to point out that "big endian vs. little endian" is a real dispute among those who design computer hardware architectures. (She hadn't known that.) [-hh]

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

I know people say that synchronicity is just a fancy name for coincidence, but seriously ...?

Christopher Priest has a new novel out, EXPECT ME TOMORROW. I'm a big Christopher Priest fan, so I didn't read a description of the book: I saw my library had it and so I picked it up.

I also had read a review of Simon Winchester's latest book, KNOWING WHAT WE KNOW. My library did not have it (yet), but I saw that we had his book KRAKATOA, which I hadn't read yet. So I decided to read that for now.

In the early morning of June 2, I was reading the chapter of KRAKATOA that described the final explosion of Krakatoa, and how its effects were seen, heard, and felt around the world. There were spectacular sunsets in London, a shock wave that circled the earth seven times, and so on.

After lunch on June 2, I picked up EXPECT ME TOMORROW, which had been following a grifter, a glaciologist, an opera singer, and so on. But the chapter I read on June 2 was the glaciologist describing, not glaciers, but a news article about a volcanic explosion in the Dutch East Indies, followed by spectacular sunsets. This intrigued him, so he did more research, and discovered the shock wave, the change in the London fog due to particulate matter from the explosion, and so on. In other words, exactly what I was reading about in Winchester's book only eight hours earlier. And just to remind you: the books were chosen totally independently, and started totally independently as well. [-ecl]

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Quote of the Week:

My fake plants died because I did not pretend to water them.

--Mitch Hedberg

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