

# MT VOID 08/04/23 -- Vol. 42, No. 5, Whole Number 2287



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### Readercon Report by Washington Post Columnist Michael Dirda:

Michael Dirda published his Readercon Report in the 07/20/23 issue of the Washington Post (for which he is a reviewer):

<https://wapo.st/3Oyz5L9>

Dirda is a mainstream reviewer who is also an unabashed science fiction fan.

### Old Bridge Public Library Science Fiction Discussion Group Disbanding:

After twenty years of meeting, the Old Bridge Public Library science fiction discussion group is disbanding. Given that the last few meetings have been only three or four people, that sounds a bit more dramatic than it really is. Our final book was THIS IS HOW YOU LOSE THE TIME WAR by Amal El-Mohtar and Max Gladstone (Saga Press, ISBN 978-1-534-43100-3) and all three of us disliked it, so we have referred to this as THIS IS HOW YOU KILL THE DISCUSSION GROUP. The book swept all the major awards for novellas, so we are clearly in some sort of minority here.

But it was not really the book that killed the group, but the gradual drifting away of members. We tried both Zooming and in-person meetings. but though we had weathered the pandemic, the return to other opportunities for socializing et al made it harder to get people to attend.

The other factor is that everyone who was attending the Old Bridge group in the last couple of years is also in the Middletown Public Library science fiction discussion group, so it isn't as if we are giving up on science fiction discussion groups altogether.

If you want to be added to the mailing list for the Middletown group, contact Charles Harris .

A complete list of books discussed can be found at [http://leepers.us/obpl\\_sf.htm](http://leepers.us/obpl_sf.htm).

[-ecl]

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**OPPENHEIMER** (film review by Mark R. Leeper and Evelyn C. Leeper):

OPPENHEIMER tells the story of Robert J. Oppenheimer. There is a lot of substance to the film, but there is a lot of style as well (it is after all a Christopher Nolan film), and the style sometimes gets in the way of the substance.

Nolan jumps among three time periods: the 1930s to 1945, 1954, and 1959. (It could be worse; at least they all run forwards in time, as opposed to the two timelines in TENET.) The last two time periods are in black and white, reversing the usual practice of having older periods in black and white. But Nolan wants the "center" of the film to be Oppenheimer's career up to Hiroshima and Nagasaki, with his security revocation in 1954, and Lewis Strauss's (non-)confirmation hearing in 1959, more as news reporting of after-effects than narrative (although they are not actual news footage, but just more narrative film). This is often disorienting, and Evelyn said that it took a while for her to realize that the back-and-white sequences actually represented two totally different hearings five years apart.

There are a lot of characters, and it is difficult to keep some of them straight. And often the people you expect to see don't show up at all, or are merely in the background. The one woman scientist we see is Lilli Hornig, not Lise Meitner. Richard Feynman seemed to be a faceless background character in two scenes, identifiable only by his bongo drums, although his position in the credits indicates he may have appeared in other scenes and we just didn't notice him.

One question some reviewers ask is why the film was shot in IMAX. It consists primarily of people talking in rooms. The only "expansive" scenes would be the exteriors in New Mexico (a rather small proportion of the film), and the football field and the space below it in Chicago. the New Mexico scenery would look much better in IMAX, but to use it for the entire film seems overkill.

[-mrl/ecl]

Released theatrically 21 July 2023. Rating: +3 (-4 to +4), or 9/10.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt15398776/reference>

What others are saying: [https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/oppenheimer\\_2023](https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/oppenheimer_2023)

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**BLACK NARCISSUS** (letter of comment by Andre Kuzniarek):

In response to [Mark and Evelyn's comments on BLACK NARCISSUS](#) in the 07/28/23 issue of the MT VOID, Andre Kuzniarek writes:

Regarding BLACK NARCISSUS, this amazing (spoiler-laden) four-and-a-half-minute sequence says it all as to why it's so compelling and why it can be categorized as horror/fantasy adjacent:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H2HBC2FKUkQ>

[-ak]

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

The "Classical Stuff You Should Know" podcast has been doing an on-going series about the Plantagenets and is finally getting to Richard III (referred to from here on out as just Richard, since there is no other Richard in sight here). They have been quoting a lot from Winston Churchill, presumably from *A HISTORY OF THE ENGLISH SPEAKING PEOPLES: THE BIRTH OF BRITAIN* (Bloomsbury USA Academic, ISBN 978-1-472-58524-0), so I decided I should get the jump on them for Richard III, since I count myself as a Ricardian, which is to say, I believe that Richard did not kill the two Princes, and that Henry VII did. (And also that most of the other negative claims about Richard are also false.)

I will admit to being influenced by Josephine Tey's *THE DAUGHTER OF TIME* (Scribner, ISBN 978-0-684-80386-9, although I highly recommend the audiobook read by Derek Jacobi, BBC Audiobooks America, ISBN 978-1572702448), but I realize that is a work of fiction. Therefore what I base my conclusions on are facts that I can verify in real sources, and logical conclusions from them, rather than citations from (possibly) fictitious sources (e.g., Oliphant).

Starting with the obvious, Churchill seems determined to take Sir Thomas More's biography as reliable. First he explains why More should be considered unreliable: "Sir Thomas More late in the next reign wrote his celebrated history. His book was based of course on information given him under the new and strongly established regime. His object seems to have been less to compose a factual narrative than a moralistic drama. In it, Richard is evil incarnate, and Henry Tudor, the deliverer of the kingdom, all sweetness and light. The opposite view would have been treason. Not only is every possible crime attributed by More to Richard, and some impossible movies, but he is presented as a physical monster, crookbacked and withered of arm. No one in his lifetime seems to have remarked on these deformities, but they are now very familiar to us through Shakespeare's play [based on Holinshed's Chronicles, which were written under the Tudors as well]. Needless to say, as soon as the Tudor dynasty was laid to rest defenders of Richard fell to work, and they have been increasingly busy ever since."

(Just a reminder: Thomas More was eight years old when Richard was Killed Bosworth, so hardly a reliable witness to the goings-on of Richard's reign.)

After King Henry VI was replaced by Edward IV, Henry VI said (as quoted by Churchill), "Since my cradle, for forty years, I have been King. My father was King; his father was King. You have all sworn fealty to me on many occasions, as your father swore it to my father." Then Churchill goes on to say, "But the other side declared that oaths not based on truth were void, that wrong must be righted, that successful usurpation gained no sanctity by time, that the foundation of the monarchy could only rest upon law and justice, that to recognize a dynasty of interlopers was to invite rebellion wherever occasion served, ..." Churchill conveniently ignores what this means in terms of Henry VII, who was arguably a usurper and interloper (and who specifically claimed the kingship by right of conquest), or for that matter King William I (a.k.a. William the Conqueror).

Churchill acknowledges the possibility of an earlier marriage of Edward IV, saying, "[Clarence] may have discovered the secret of Edward's alleged pre-contract of marriage with Eleanor Butler which Richard of Gloucester was later to use in justifying his usurpation. Certainly if Edward's marriage to Elizabeth Woodville were to be proved invalid for this reason Clarence was the next legitimate heir, and a source of danger to the King [Edward IV]."

But then he announces, "More's tale however has priority." And why? Apparently because it describes a very dramatic scene at the Council in the Tower. Whether there is any evidence that this scene took place, or is one of the "impossible crimes" of Richard, Churchill does not say. But the fact that it is dramatic does not make it real.

Churchill also quotes Fabyan's Chronicle about how the English people came to hate Richard because of his crimes, and though he adds, "It is contended by the defenders of King Richard that the Tudor version of these events has prevailed," he still seems to take Fabyan as accurate--even though Fabyan's Chronicle was published (posthumously) in 1516, thirty years into the Tudor dynasty.

Later, he says of Richard's tour of England, "Yet he could not escape the sense that behind the displays of gratitude and loyalty which naturally surrounded him there lay an unspoken challenge to his Kingship." Apparently, Churchill can not only read minds, but can read minds 450 years dead. This is fabrication, pure and simple.

Churchill says, "[We] are invited by some to believe that [the Princes] languished in captivity, unnoticed and unrecorded, for another two years [after what Churchill says was their last appearance, in July 1483], only to be done to death by Henry Tudor." But apparently he believes that Richard would have the Princes killed in secret and pretend they are still alive--and expect to keep up this pretense for years, if not decades. As many have pointed out, if he had them smothered, the smartest thing to do would be to announce they had died of a sudden fever and display their bodies, thereby removing them as a rallying point.

Richard is quoted to have asked, "Whom should a man trust when those who I thought would most surely serve at my command will do nothing for me?" This is too similar to "Will no one rid me of this turbulent priest?" (Henry II speaking of Thomas Becket) to be

taken as accurate without some real evidence.

Of the supposed actual murderer, Sir James Tyrell, Churchill writes, "But it was not until Henry VII's reign, when Tyrell was lying in the Tower under sentence for quite a separate crime, that he is alleged to have made a confession upon which, with much other circumstantial evidence, the story as we know it rests." Why he would have confessed these murders is not clear (unless Churchill is referring to a confession to a priest). But note that it is merely alleged that he made such a confession, and all the other evidence is circumstantial.

In 1674, two skeletons were found under some rubble in the Tower, They were the apparent ages of the Princes, and the royal surgeon and others "reported that they were undoubtedly the remains of Edward V and the Duke of York." Charles II had them buried in Westminster with an inscription blaming Richard. Churchill dismisses attempts to clear Richard and to blame Henry VII by saying, "However, in our own time (1933), an exhumation has confirmed the view of the disinterested authorities of King Charles's reign."

Even if the exhumation proved the skeletons were those of the Princes (and there have been many criticisms of it, including that no tests were done to determine even the gender of the children, or the number, since what was found was not two intact skeletons, but disarticulated bones in a wooden chest), it is certainly true that in 1674, there was no way to determine whether they were murdered in 1483 or 1485.

Churchill does have a sense of humor, at one point saying, "Money--above all ready money. There was the hobble which cramped the medieval kings; and even now it counts somewhat." [-ecl]

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Quote of the Week:

The best effect of any book is that it excites  
the reader to self-activity.

--Thomas Carlyle

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