

MT VOID 09/08/23 -- Vol. 42, No. 10, Whole Number 2292



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Co-Editor: Mark Leeper, mleeper@optonline.net
 Co-Editor: Evelyn Leeper, eleeper@optonline.net
 Sending Address: evelynchimisleeper@gmail.com
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New York Times Article about the Holmdel Horn [unlocked]

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The article includes *lots* of photos.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/09/04/science/astronomy-holmdel-antenna-microwaves.html>

or unlocked:

<https://tinyurl.com/holmdel-horn>

Where the Universe Began

A half-century ago, a radio telescope in Holmdel, N.J., sent two astronomers 13.8 billion years back in time--and opened a cosmic window that scientists have been peering through ever since.

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On a field just below the summit of Crawford Hill, the highest point in Monmouth County, N.J., almost within sight of the skyscrapers of Manhattan, sits a cluster of shacks and sheds. Next to them is the Holmdel Horn Antenna, a radio telescope somewhat resembling the scoop of a giant steam shovel: an aluminum box 20 feet square at the mouth and tapering to an eight-inch opening, through which the radio waves are funneled into the "cab," a wooden hut on stilts. From a distance, the whole site could be mistaken for an old mining camp you might come across in Montana or Idaho.

...

Mini Reviews, Part 5 (film reviews by Mark R. Leeper and Evelyn C. Leeper):

This is the fifth batch of mini-reviews for this season, more films of the fantastic:

TRAVELLING SALESMAN (2012): TRAVELLING SALESMAN(*) has four mathematicians and a government representative sitting in a room and discussing what should be done with their proof that $P=nP$ (and the underlying algorithm). Should it be publicly realized? Should it be given to the government? Should it be licensed to corporations? The mathematics is not always valid (they had no consultants in making the film), but the underlying ideas would apply to many discoveries. (Explicit reference is made to Los Alamos.) And a lot of the discussion is trying to make the government guy (and the audience) understand the implications, rather than a discussion of the morality of various possible decisions. This is not a film that requires a big screen (we streamed it on Vimeo). The ending is a let-down, though, because it does not appear that the filmmakers have thought through the implications. (The same problem occurs at the end of EMERGENCE.)

* Yes, a double 'l' and no definite article.

Released theatrically 16 June 2012. Rating: +2 (-4 to +4), or 7/10.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1801123/reference>

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

PARADISE (2023): PARADISE is a German science fiction film whose premise is basically a variant on IN TIME (which was in turn "inspired" by the 1987 short "The Price of Life") All seem to be based on the proverb "Time is money." In IN TIME there seems to just be some sort of chip that keeps track of how much time you have left and works like a debit card, where you can add or subtract time. In PARADISE, there is some hand-waving about DNA matching and an operation to transfer the years from one person to another, as if they were just another organ. (Which in turn reminds us of NEVER LET ME GO, although that has a bit more scientific plausibility than PARADISE.)

The plot is fairly predictable: the main character is an enthusiastic supporter of this process until ... surprise, he finds himself (or rather, his wife) on the short end of it. And of course there are twists and turns in the plot--people who aren't who they seem, people who change during the film, etc.

(There's also a hint of the "Twilight Zone" episode "The Long Morrow".) [-ecl]

Released streaming 27 June 2023. Rating: +1 (-4 to +4), or 6/10.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt21308888/reference>

What others are saying: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/paradise_2023

CRYPTID (2022): CRYPTID is a run-of-the-mill monster film; the monster is from a reptilian species that has survived since ... well, they don't exactly say, but it seems to be from millions of years ago. Then again, so are crocodiles. The attacks all take place at night in the rain and when we do see the monster, it's a bit of a let-down. [-mrl/ecl]

Released streaming 3 January 2023. Rating: 0 (-4 to +4), or 4/10.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt4974812/reference>

What others are saying: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/cryptid_2022

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

Back in the day, when we used to travel, we would take only carry-on luggage, even for four-week trips. This meant that in general we did not buy large souvenirs, or large books. But in 1995 I made an exception for Greg Egan's AXIOMATIC (current ISBN 978-1-59780-540-7, Night Shade Books), which had just been published, only in the UK, and as a "format C" book--well, actually *larger* than a format C, because a format C is 135mmx216mm, and AXIOMATIC is 150mmx235mm. (I'm sure a Brit will send either a correction or a lengthier explanation to me.) But in spite of the size, I schelped this book all over Glasgow and Wales, and it was worth it.

Greg Egan and Ted Chiang are different in many ways (*), but in one way they are similar: neither one has ever turned out a bad story, or at least ever had a bad story published.

(*) They certainly vary in the volume of their outputs. The eighteen stories in AXIOMATIC were produced in a seven-year period, with four in 1991 and another four in 1992. Chiang has written twenty stories in twenty-two years.

Rather than a review per se, here are my various comments on the stories:

The Infinite Assassin (1991): Our narrator is an assassin trying to kill drug dealers. But the catch is that there are an infinite number of copies of him in an infinite number of universes, and the question is whether killing one dealer in one universe is meaningful.

The Hundred Light-Year Diary (1992): This has not time travel, but the passing of information back in time, and what it does for the perception of free will.

Eugene (1990): This one combines genetic engineering, time travel, and free will (three of Egan's favorite themes).

The Caress (1990): This murder mystery involving a chimera and a painting didn't do much for me.

Blood Sisters (1991): This is about twins and medical ethics, and seems more current (or at least nearer future) than a lot of the other stories.

Axiomatic (1990): Neural mods offer not only psychedelic experiences, but changes in personality and beliefs.

The Safe-Deposit Box (1990): A man wakes up every day in a different body (and different location, etc.). This has been happening since he was born. How does he cope?

Seeing (1995): This is a somewhat different take on the idea of an out-of-body experience.

A Kidnapping (1995): This uses the now familiar idea of a mind being uploaded to a computer.

Learning to Be Me (1990): One of two stories about an immortal brain replacement.

The Moat (1991): This is a genetic engineering story similar to "The Moat" but with a different goal in the engineering--which does not make it less disturbing.

The Walk (1992): Similar to "Axiomatic" in that neural mods offer changes in personality and beliefs, but here used in a different way.

The Cutie (1989): The protagonist buys a "Cutie"--genetically engineered, it looks just like a baby, but is not legally human, and dies after three years without ever being able to speak. Echoes of stories of cloning, but also of slavery and colonialism.

Into Darkness (1992): This one really stuck with me for some reason: a temporal and gravitational anomaly that keeps appearing and disappearing at random. When it appears, if you are in it, you can only move towards the center (or apparently around it), but never away from the center. If you reach the center before the anomaly disappears, you escape (somehow), The trick is not to be trapped in a corner, or by a curved wall. There's more to it, but this is the aspect that stuck in my brain.

Appropriate Love (1991): This is a story about surrogacy--and insurance companies.

The Moral Virologist (1990): A virus engineered to kill gay people and adulterers has some unexpected consequences.

Closer (1992): The other story about an immortal brain replacement.

Unstable Orbits in the Space of Lies (1992): Something causes mental states to become highly contagious, meaning if you are near a group of (e.g.) ethical vegetarians, you become an ethical vegetarian--not by choice, but by "infection". [-ecl]

Mark Leeper
mleeper@optonline.net

Quote of the Week:

Always code as if the guy who ends up maintaining your code will be a violent psychopath who knows where you live.

--Anonymous

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