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Table of Contents

[Correction](#)

[Mini Reviews, Part 15 \(A TOURIST'S GUIDE TO LOVE, INFINITY POOL\)](#) (film reviews by Mark R. Leeper and Evelyn C. Leeper)

[Will Science Fiction Conventions Ever Be the Same?](#) (letter of comment by Joe Karpierz)

[Raspberry Pi](#) (letter of comment by Hal Heydt)

[This Week's Reading](#) (FROM DUST, A FLAME; THE GHOSTS OF ROSE HILL; THE INQUISITOR'S APPRENTICE) (book comments by Evelyn C. Leeper)

[Quote of the Week](#)

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Correction:

In Gary McGath's letter of comment on BLIND WILLOW SLEEPING WOMAN in the 12/29/23, I accidentally credited Kip Williams as the author (cut-and-paste error). The TOPIC line and initials at the end were correct, though. [-ecl]

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

This is the fifteenth batch of mini-reviews, films about travel.

A TOURIST'S GUIDE TO LOVE (2023): A TOURIST'S GUIDE TO LOVE is a rom-com set in Vietnam, but more than that it's about a tourist and a tour in Vietnam. As such it had a lot of appeal to us, since we have been tourists in Vietnam, once on our own and once in a tour group. This film shows a third approach, which is a tour hat doesn't hit all the expected places in expected ways.

However, its notion of "off the beaten path" is odd. The claim is that the My Son Sanctuary is off the beaten path and not in the

guidebooks, yet it is a UNESCO site, and we visited it on our independent tour, so it must have been in *some* guidebook.

The plot is a bit predictable--okay it's a lot predictable. We weren't watching it for the plot, though. It also glosses over some of the facts about Vietnam--such as that it's very hot. And on every tour we have taken, there has always been at least one person who was "difficult"; this group is full of only wonderful people.

I can't really give this a strong recommendation. We watched it for the same reason we watched LARA CROFT--TOMB RAIDER--as a way of remembering a fascinating trip. [-ecl]

Released streaming 21 April 2023. Rating: +2 (-4 to +4), or 7/10.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt20115096/reference>

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

INFINITY POOL (2023): INFINITY POOL starts at a Club Med sort of resort (the Pa Qlpa Pearl Princess) in a poverty-stricken country where tourists never leave the resort. James and Em are tempted out by Gabi and Alban, and then bad things ensue.

SPOILER: James kills someone in a car accident. Under Li Tolqa law, he is supposed to be killed by his victim's oldest son, but there is an alternative: he can have himself cloned (which is expensive), and his clone will be killed instead. Gradually more levels of complication and strangeness are added on to this, raising some interesting philosophical questions, but more and more artificial at the same time.

[Of course, there is a problem with this system, and it's the same problem that led Steve Jobs to always park in the handicapped spaces.]

["Li Tolqa" and "Pa Qlpa" seem to come from the same language family as China Mieville's "Ul Qoma".]

[-ecl]

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

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt10365998/reference>

What others are saying: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/infinity_pool_2023

Will Science Fiction Conventions Ever Be the Same? (letter of comment by Joe Karpierz):

In response to [Evelyn's comments on science fiction conventions](#) in the 12/29/23 issue of the MT VOID, Joe Karpierz writes:

I think that science fiction conventions need to change, adapt, and evolve in the post-pandemic world. I'm not sure that hybrid conventions--that is, conventions where a portion of the programming or other activities is offered online via technologies like Zoom--will take over. Hybrid conventions are expensive to run, and there is a need for volunteers to have the technical know-how to put on a hybrid convention. Additionally, it's one thing for a Worldcon to be either fully online (like the recent New Zealand Worldcon) or hybrid (like the recent D.C. Worldcon), and quite another for a local convention to try it.

With regard to the travel costs for Worldcon, well, you're not wrong. However, I would submit that some fans go their entire lives without attending a Worldcon. Fans can get their fix by attending conventions that are local to them. Cost has long been a factor in attending Worldcons, whether we're talking today's costs or those of 40 years ago, when I started attending them. There are plenty of local conventions where fans can see their friends every year without traveling long distances.

Local conventions took a big hit from COVID. Capricon, the Chicago convention for which I am a con com member, took a massive hit in attendance. We went from 1200 a year or two before the pandemic to somewhere between 400 and 500 the first year we became an in-person convention post-pandemic in 2022 (we were fully online in 2021). Conventions also routinely still have COVID policies--Capricon is one example. While we no longer require proof of vaccination, we do require that attendees wear masks in convention spaces, which makes things like the con suites a different kind of social space than it has been in the past. Alas, you can't make everyone happy, so the masking policy will cause some people to stay away, while it will attract others. But Capricon's attendance was up to in the neighborhood of about 650 in 2023, and we're shooting for 750 in 2024, just a month from now. So it appears to be on the

mend.

With regard to the "graying of fandom", well, you're not wrong about that either. Capricon is making a concerted effort to attract younger fans, both to the con com and as regular attendees. And it does appear to be working for us. The thing that I see that is different from when we old fogeys came into fandom is that it doesn't appear to me that the young fans are as well read as we were. That doesn't mean they need to have read the writers of our day, but I'd like to see evidence of them reading the writers of the modern day. I'm not sure that's happening. I hope I'm wrong, but I don't think I am.

No, science fiction conventions will never be the same, but I don't think they should be. That way lies stagnation and the dying of conventions. An entire issue or nine of the Void could be dedicated to the future of the Worldcon. Go to and you'll see that there is currently no bid listed for 2027, and the voting for that Worldcon is in less than two years. But that's a rabbit hole for another day. [-jak]

Evelyn responds:

I will admit I was thinking mostly of Worldcons in this article, rather than regional or local conventions. Obviously local conventions have a much lower transportation cost (and hotel cost, if you're commuting). [-ecl]

Raspberry Pi (letter of comment by Hal Heydt):

In response to [Evelyn's comments on Raspberry Pi](#) (when she mentioned she had no idea what a Raspberry Pi was) in the 12/22/23 issue of the MT VOID, Hal Heydt writes:

Where have you been for the last 12 years? Raspberry Pi is a line of Single Board Computers (SBCs). The most expensive one is the current (Pi5) 8GB model that sells for \$80. Granted, you need a power supply (\$12 for the official one) and a microSD card (around \$5), plus the usual cables and such.

Pis have been very successful. Since the launch at the end of Feb. 2012, around 50 million of them have been sold. See raspberrypi.org. [-hh]

Evelyn responds:

Well, I have no idea what a Single Board Computer is either. I am not a hardware person, and certainly not one to keep up with the latest trends. Yes, twelve years is a long time, but I'm still using my HP 200LX which I got over twenty-five years ago. [-ecl]

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

I've been reading a lot of YA Jewish fantasy lately.

In *FROM DUST, A FLAME* by Rebecca Podos (Balzer + Bray, ISBN 978-0-062-69906-0) sixteen-year-old Hannah is tired of being constantly on the move with no explanation. Then on her seventeenth birthday she discovers her body is changing--not in the usual ways, but in that she suddenly has golden eyes with slits for pupils. Her mother leaves Hannah and her brother Gabe to try to find help, but after she fails to return, Hannah and Gabe must search out what clues they have to try to solve the mystery and cure Hannah. I'm not sure how much of the fantasy is "authentic" Jewish folklore, and how much is extrapolated, but it all fits together as Hannah and Gabe discover their pasts, and the pasts of their family.

THE GHOSTS OF ROSE HILL by R. M. Romero (Peachtree Teen, ISBN 978-1-682-63552-0) is a story told in free verse about Ilana Lopez, a teenage Jewish Latina sent to live with her aunt in Prague. There she discovers an abandoned cemetery, and a ghost named Benjamin, and the joys, the sorrows, and the terrors of the past.

THE INQUISITOR'S APPRENTICE by Chris Moriarty (Clarion, ISBN 978-0-547-85084-9) is set in an alternate early twentieth-century New York, where magic is real, but forbidden (although as with alcohol during Prohibition in our world, it still exists, both on a small-scale and on a large). Sacha is a rare sort who can see magic, and where the Inquisitors discover this, he is swept up to serve their purposes, apparently the first Jewish member of that group. There is a lot of atmosphere of the New York of our world in that time, with rival neighborhoods and gangs based on ethnic and religious differences, as well as the story of the effects of magic and such. It does make one egregious error, where Moriarty writes that the old Jewish men talk about "the possibility on a purely theoretical level of maybe perhaps coming up with a tentative plan for coaxing an obviously reluctant Messiah into coming back some time in the

next few millennia..." How can the Messiah come back when he was never here in the first place?

All three are probably good reads for teens (or, I suppose, adults). THE INQUISITOR'S APPRENTICE concentrates a lot more on Jewish life of the its time than the other two, sometimes to the level of heavy-handedness. [-ecl]

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Quote of the Week:

I always wanted to be somebody, but now I realize I
should have been more specific.

--Lily Tomlin

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