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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 Holmdel Horn:

CILU, PH and FOHOS via ActionNetwork.org (info+save-bjg-bang-antenna-info@sg.actionnetwork.org) reports:

"On Tuesday, January 23rd, Holmdel Mayor Rocco Impreveduto announced that Holmdel Township has officially acquired the upper 35 acres of Crawford Hill (lots 6 and 6.01) and now owns the historic horn antenna. The Township Committee also moved to introduce an ordinance to formally establish "Dr. Robert Wilson Park". Articles citing the announcement can be found on Patch and in the Asbury Park Press."

I guess Arno Penzias gets the short end of the stick. [-ec]

Mini Reviews, Part 19 (film reviews by Mark R. Leeper and Evelyn C. Leeper):

This is nineteenth batch of mini-reviews, all films of the fantastic.

POOR THINGS (2023): POOR THINGS is based on the concepts behind Mary Shelley's FRANKENSTEIN, but it totally separate from it. (There also seems to be a touch of THE ISLAND OF DR. MOREAU in the menagerie we see.)

POOR THINGS takes the same cinematographic approach as OPPENHEIMER: film the past in color and the present (ay least in the early London environs) in black and white, although Bella's adventures are in color (perhaps because these are less connected to our reality). There is also heavy use of fisheye lenses and other distorting effects.

Bella (Emma Stone) has no filters, and no sense of social proprieties, so her dialogue is both literal and shocking. Credit should go to writer Tony McNamara and to Alasdair Gray who wrote the original novel. The presence of the latter probably explains at least some of the surrealism, although given that director Yorgos Lanthimos also directed THE LOBSTER, he certainly contributed his share. (There's even what may be a Monty Python homage.) Her creator, Godwin Baxter (a.k.a. God) (Willem Dafoe) is far more complicated than Shelley's Victor Frankenstein, and his assistant, Mark McCardles (Ramzi Youssef), has much more substance than that role usually has in films. There is also Duncan Wedderburn (Mark Ruffalo), who has his own best laid plans that, well, go awry; Harry (Jerrod Carmichael), a philosopher; and Madame Swiney (Kathryn Hunter).

Bella has many guides through her learning experiences: Baxter, McCandles, Wedderburn, ... And each has a specific ambit, so the chapters represent not just locations, but states of mind. Many social and even philosophical concepts are raised and considered, and one can even see connections to current discussions of artificial intelligence. [-ec]

Highly recommended.

(This film comes from some tentacle of the Disney Corporation, so the full frontal nudity of both sexes, and relatively explicit sex scenes, may surprise viewers, so be warned.)

Released theatrically 8 December 2023. Rating: high +2 (-4 to +4), or 7/10.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt14230458/reference>

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

WONKA (2023): WONKA is a prequel to WILLY WONKA & THE CHOCOLATE FACTORY (of which there was a 1971 film (with Gene Wilder) and a 2005 remake renamed CHARLIE AND THE CHOCOLATE FACTORY (with Johnny Depp). This is a musical, but the beginning is also a spoof of the musical genre. It is also Dickensian with a dash of Victor Hugo.

The basic plot is that Wonka has recipes for chocolate but no venue in which to sell them. He also seems to know many of the strange tricks performed by stage magicians, and somehow Wonka's chocolate seems frequently to combine fresh chocolate with various mechanisms. He finds a hotel, but his hotel room turns out to be part of a workhouse. (As someone says, "The greedy beat the needy. It's the way of the world." But he is also told, "Every good thing in this world started with a dream."

Some of the music and the design of the Oompa-Loompas is re-used from the Gene Wilder version of WILLY WONKA & THE CHOCOLATE FACTORY.

Released theatrically 15 December 2023. Rating: high +2 (-4 to +4), or 8/10.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt6166392/reference>

What others are saying: <https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/wonka>

ALL OF US STRANGERS (2023): In ALL OF US STRANGERS, Adam (Andrew Scott) is a apparently one of only two residents in a high-rise block of flats in London. After an encounter with his slightly menacing neighbor Harry (Paul Mescal), he decides to re-visit his childhood home. He runs into someone he knows, who takes him "home". The someone turns out to be his father, who seems no older than Adam, and the same is true of his mother. And the car in the driveway is an old car. Then we find out that both parents had died when Adam was twelve years old. From there, things get stranger.

[SLIGHT SPOILER]

ALL OF US STRANGERS seems a bit like a "Twilight Zone" episode; this has not one but three episodes it has connections to ("Walking Distance", "The Trouble with Templeton", and "Of Late I Dream of Cliffordville", and a Ray Bradbury story to boot). But it's original in its approach. It's not a "time travel to the past", and it's not "a visit to heaven". It is, I suppose, a sort of a ghost story. It is rather an examination of how people relate, and how sometimes it seems that when one is ready to connect, the other isn't, and then later the second one is, but the fist has moved on.

Released theatrically 22 December 2023. Rating: high +1 (-4 to +4), or 6/10.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt21192142/reference>

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

Saturn Awards:

The Saturn Awards, as given by the Academy of Science Fiction, Fantasy & Horror, were announced on 02/04/24; the (very long) list can be found at . The major awards (IMHO) are:

- Best Science Fiction Film: AVATAR: THE WAY OF WATER
- Best Fantasy Film: INDIANA JONES AND THE DIAL OF DESTINY
- Best Horror Film: TALK TO ME
- Best Superhero Film: GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY: VOL. 3
- Best Action / Adventure Film: MISSION IMPOSSIBLE - DEAD RECKONING PART ONE
- Best Thriller Film: OPPENHEIMER

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

A couple of weeks ago I mentioned that if you were looking for authors whose work was similar to Howard Waldrop's, Terry Bisson was one possibility. This prompted me to re-read Bisson's classic collection, BEARS DISCOVER FIRE (Orb, ISBN 978-0-312-89035-3). And yes, several of the stories seem Waldropian (in some way I cannot quite explain): "Bears Discover Fire", "They're Made Out of Meat", and "Over Flat Mountain". Other stories remind me of other authors; for example "By Permit Only" seems like something Frederik Pohl could have written back in the 1950s (and also depressingly possible in our future).

"England Underway" is particularly notable in this regard. Published in 1993, its premise is that the island of Great Britain has started moving first south, then west towards America. (As happens with British politics, when England decides to do something, it drags Wales and Scotland along with it--this time literally. These is actually discussion of why Northern Ireland isn't moving with it, as well as some of the outlying islands.)

But what makes this story notable is that Jose Saramago wrote THE STONE RAFT (A JANGADA DE PEDRA) in 1986. The plot of this is that the Iberian peninsula breaks loose from Europe and drifts into the Atlantic Ocean. However, Saramago wrote in Portuguese, and THE STONE RAFT wasn't translated into English until 1994. So while it is possible that Bisson had heard of the book before writing his story, he could not have read it, and this seems to be just a coincidence rather than a literary influence one way or the other. (I reviewed THE STONE RAFT in the 05/15/15 issue of the MT VOID; the review can be found at <http://leepers.us/evelyn/reviews/saramago.htm#stoneraft>.)

[-ec]

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Quote of the Week:

Mathematics deals exclusively with the relations
of concepts to each other without consideration
of their relation to experience.
--Albert Einstein

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