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**Mini Reviews, Part 21** (film reviews by Mark R. Leeper and Evelyn C. Leeper):

This is twenty-first batch of mini-reviews.

INDIANA JONES AND THE DIAL OF DESTINY (2023): INDIANA JONES AND THE DIAL OF DESTINY is the fifth (and please, God, the last) in the Indiana Jones series. It's not that it is absolutely terrible, but between the callbacks of now-elderly stars (Karen Allen, John Rhys-Davies) for the sake of re-creating the characters of their youth, to re-hashing old jokes and tropes (the whip versus guns, eels as watery snakes, a young boy "sidekick", etc.), to actually turning into a true alternate history (in our world Indiana Jones did not ride a horse through the New York Apollo 11 parade), this was made more to cash in on the fan base than because anyone had a good idea for the film. [SPOILERS] Adding time travel to the mix just makes it into something it never was. (And the concern about changing history seems to come a bit too late, since apparently there was already a change.)

It is perhaps not a coincidence that this is also the first "Indiana Jones" film not involving George Lucas as a writer or Steven Spielberg as the director.

As I said, not absolutely terrible, but not up to the first and third of the series. (Perhaps the less said about INDIANA JONES AND THE TEMPLE OF DOOM, the better.) [-ecl]

Released theatrically 14 June 2023. Rating: high +1 (-4 to +4), or 6/10.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1462764/reference>

What others are saying: [https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/indiana\\_jones\\_and\\_the\\_dial\\_of\\_destiny](https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/indiana_jones_and_the_dial_of_destiny)

THESE FINAL HOURS (2013): The end-of-the-world film THESE FINAL HOURS is basically an Australian take on the Canadian film LAST NIGHT. It is set in Perth rather than Toronto, and in THESE FINAL HOURS we are told what the cause of the end of the world is. (In LAST NIGHT, we never find out what the disaster is, although it seems to make daylight last until midnight.)

But I suppose that LAST NIGHT in turn was based on, or at least inspired by, ON THE BEACH, which of course was set in Australia. What goes around comes around. (I will note I am not the only person to see these connections.)

One way the Canadians and Australians differ is that (SPOILER) they don't plant a nuke in the asteroid/create a virus for an alien spaceship/plant a nuke in the Earth's core/create a giant space ark/move into mine shafts/... This was often given as the difference between American (U.S.) science fiction and British science fiction: the former was basically optimistic, the latter pessimistic. This may be less true now, and there is also a lot more to even just Anglophone science fiction than that dichotomy.

I can't say this is anything special, but it will appeal to fans of the apocalypse sub-genre. [-ecl]

Released theatrically in the U.S. 6 March 2015. Rating: +1 (-4 to +4), or 6/10.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt2268458/reference>

What others are saying: [https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/these\\_final\\_hours](https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/these_final_hours)> SPACEMAN (2024): SPACEMAN is an atypical science fiction film, where the basic plot has nothing science fictional about it. It takes place in a spaceship, and there's a giant alien telepathic spider, and there are a lot of dream sequences, but the central idea seems to be that if the main character loved his wife so much, he shouldn't have taken a job that requires him to be away from her for a year at a time. To those of us from military families that seems somewhat insulting. My father had five tours of duty of a year or more each, and we didn't have the benefit of Zoom calls or Facetime. (In the film, the title character is somewhere out near Jupiter, but through technobabble, he is able to talk to people on Earth with no time lag.) [-ecl]

Released on Netflix in the U.S. 1 March 2024. Rating: +1 (-4 to +4), or 6/10.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt11097384/reference>

What others are saying: [https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/spaceman\\_2024](https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/spaceman_2024)>

**THE ATROCITY ARCHIVES by Charles Stross** (copyright 2010, Recorded Books, 10 hours and 56 minutes, ASIN: B0032U80IA, narrated by Gideon Emery) (audio book review by Joe Karpierz):

THE ATROCITY ARCHIVES, originally published in 2004, is the first book in the long-running Laundry Series, and contains two stories: the short novel "The Atrocity Archive", and the winner of the Hugo Award in 2005 for Best Novella, "The Concrete Jungle".

"The Atrocity Archive" introduces readers to the main character of the Laundry series, Bob Howard (which is a pseudonym, since his real name can be used against him--more on this in a minute), a former I.T. consultant who ends up as a field agent for the Laundry, an British agency which deals with occult threats. If you think Lovecraftian horror, you're on the right track, although the stories do not take place in that universe. Howard got pulled into the Laundry because he re-discovered mathematical equations that would allow contact with other worlds, and the Laundry did not want that running loose in the world. As various characters discover throughout the two stories in the volume, the Laundry quite regularly gains new operatives when they discover people that have some affinity for the occult or magic. The reader also learns that magic, as the Laundry defines it, is a branch of applied mathematics, and thus computers are used alongside spells to combat and conquer denizens of the other (or under) world.

Anyway, Howard is charged with finding and protecting one Professor Mo O'Brien (her name is longer than that, but we don't need to get into that here), as the Laundry has taken interest in her work for the usual reasons. As part of his mission--and this is by no means all of what happens, but I certainly find it the most interesting--the two of them get a chance to tour the Atrocity Archive, a classified record of the efforts made and items used by the Germans in World War II. It is one of the most interesting and disturbing collection of curiosities that I've ever read about in a book. We also learn that the Wannsee Conference (the historians and World War II enthusiasts reading this will recognize the Conference as something very real) planned to harness the occult using the mass human sacrifice of the Holocaust (and now we know what the members of the Conference were really talking about). In any event, the upshot of the story is that Mo is captured by a group of terrorists and sent via a wormhole to an alternate universe where the Nazis succeeded. Bob and other members of the Laundry team infiltrate the alternate universe to rescue Mo, but not without cost.

"The Concrete Jungle" starts off with the discovery that there are too many concrete cows in Milton Keynes. The whole thing started because a CCTV network that had artificially emulated gorgons installed in them to fend off a potential attack by the Old Ones (a direct reference to Lovecraft, of course) was used to turn a cow to stone. Of course, an unauthorized use of the gorgon-capable CCTV network (I'm not sure I believe I actually typed that phrase) could place the entire country in danger. The whole affair ends up being weirdly convoluted but extremely typical of inter-office politics. It's really kind of tough to delve much deeper into the story without giving much more away, but rest assured that many of you will end up nodding your heads at the office squabbles going on within the Laundry.

I've been wanting to read THE ATROCITY ARCHIVES for a long time--it seems like it's been sitting on my shelf for a nearly a couple of decades, so when it showed up free with my Audible account I snatched it up. These first couple of stories are a terrific mixture of science fiction, humorous workplace interactions, spy adventures, and Lovecraftian horror. I really enjoyed them. They combine terrific story telling with snarky humor and dark horror. Stross always has been a good writer, and these 20 year old stories are an indicator of how his career would take off going forward. He's still writing Laundry as well as other novels. He's slowed down a bit, but the quality output is still there. I will definitely be reading (or listening to) more Laundry novels in the future.

Honestly, I don't remember much about Gideon Emery's narration, and that could be both a good and bad thing. It certainly didn't throw me out of the story, so that's a good sign, but his narration didn't do anything to distinguish itself from the ordinary, which I guess is okay too. Again, my lack of ability and technique in reviewing a narrator is showing through. [-jak]

**ALEXANDER and Alexandria** (letter of comment by Hal Heydt):

In response to [Evelyn's comments on ALEXANDER--THE MAKING OF A GOD](#) in the 03/08/24 issue of the MT VOID, Hal Heydt writes:

[Evelyn writes.] "My major complaint with the dramatizations is that the scriptwriter has decided to use Western-style nicknames: "Alex" for Alexander, "Ptol" for Ptolemy, and so on. I just don't believe that anyone called Ptolemy "Ptol".' [-ecl]

My father who had been there when sailing on commercial ships and possibly when he was in the Navy, usually referred to Alexandria, Egypt as "Alex".

We know that he was there because after the older of my two sisters died, in the accumulated papers we found a document permitting him shore leave there from a ship on which he was part of the crew. One half is signed by the ship's captain and is in English. The other half was signed by the local Chief of Police and written in Arabic. [-hh]

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

MAO TSE-TUNG ON GUERRILLA WARFARE by Mao Tse-Tung (translated by Brig. Gen. Samuel B. Griffith, USMC (Ret.)) (Praeger, no ISBN) was recommended to me somewhere, but I can't remember where.

Griffith's introduction summarizes what Mao says about guerrilla warfare, but he also has his own observations. One particular prescient one (written in 1961) was, "The position of active third parties in a revolutionary guerrilla war and the timing, nature, and scope of the assistance given to one side or the other has become of great importance. ... Any assistance given should, however, stop short of participation. The role of a third party should be restricted to advice, materials, and technical training."

Many years after the Vietnam War ended, an American general and a Vietnamese general met at some social function. The American general said, "You know, we never lost a single battle." The Vietnamese general agreed that was true, but also pointed out that it didn't matter, because the (North) Vietnamese had won the war.

In 1961, Griffith wrote, "There is in guerrilla warfare no such thing as a decisive battle; there is nothing comparable to the fixed, passive defense that characterizes orthodox war." The American general was apparently unfamiliar with this notion. [-ecl]

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Quote of the Week:

For the last 300 or so years, the exact sciences have been dominated by what is really a good idea, which is the idea that one can describe the natural world using mathematical equations.

--Stephen Wolfram

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