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Mini Reviews, Part 6 (film reviews by Mark R. Leeper and Evelyn C. Leeper):

This is the sixth batch of mini-reviews:

THE AMERICAN SOCIETY OF MAGICAL NEGROES (2024): Do not be misled by the very low rating for THE AMERICAN SOCIETY OF MAGICAL NEGROES in the IMDB--it is almost entirely due to an exorbitant number of "1-star" votes, which in turn indicates a lot of people with an agenda. (An exorbitant number of "10-star" votes in a small number of total votes usually indicates the cast and crew are boosting the score.)

That is not to say it's actually a great movie. It has its flaws.

It goes on a bit too long, and some of it seems a bit heavy-handed at times, but I like the premise. "Magical Negro" is a concept at least five hundred years old; the term was popularized by Spike Lee in 2001. The Magical Negro is a Black character who is there to help the white character(s) (often using magical powers) and has no purpose other than that. Spike Lee cited THE LEGEND OF BAGGER VANCE and THE GREEN MILE, by it goes back much further, including THE DEFIANT ONES. (Other examples are GHOST and DRIVING MISS DAISY. I might also claim that Big Sam in GONE WITH THE WIND pre-dates all of these.)

The premise of THE AMERICAN SOCIETY OF MAGICAL NEGROES is that Magical Negroes are real, and that there is a secret organization that trains and supervises them. Subtlety is not this movie's strong point, though according to the commentary a reference to Crispus Attucks apparently went over most audience members' heads.

(This made me wonder whether he was also the inspiration for the "Black guy dies first" trope in horror films.)

And the end is not just tacked on--it's actually signaled several times in the film, but so subtly (okay, there is more subtlety) that you won't notice it until the second viewing.

I would definitely recommend this if you are interested in modern racial (and gender) tropes in films. [-ecl]

Released theatrically 15 March 2024.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt30007864/reference>>

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

42 (2013): I'm assuming it goes without saying that "42" is more accurate than the older biopic (THE JACKIE ROBINSON STORY), just as "De-Lovely" is more accurate to Cole Porter's life than "Night and Day" was. But I do wonder if the scene in Rickey's office with PeeWee Reese and the letters is accurate, or fictional?

SPOILER: Maybe it's because I just saw THE AMERICAN SOCIETY OF MAGICAL NEGROES, but it does seem that Robinson is a bit of a Magical Negro for Rickey's personal issues. Of course, the big difference is that Robinson is a full character with his own motivation and arc, as is Wendell Smith, rather than just there to serve Rickey. END SPOILER

I will say that by the end of the film, seeing that Ben Chapman never managed again somehow didn't seem punishment enough. (Not a spoiler, anymore than saying Titanic sunk is a spoiler.)

Note 1: In SPIDERMAN: INTO THE SPIDER-VERSE, the "42" is a reference to Jackie Robinson, not to THE HITCHHIKER'S GUIDE TO THE UNIVERSE. (And though someone has even propounded the theory that THE HITCHHIKER'S GUIDE TO THE UNIVERSE's "42" was inspired by Jackie Robinson, Douglas Adams was British and it's pretty much agreed that he had no interest in baseball.)

Note 2: In the movie SMOKE, reviewed in the 09/13/24 issue of the MT VOID, the viewer needs to recognize that the baseball player wearing the number "42" and seen only from behind is Jackie Robinson.

I will probably read THE TEAM THAT FOREVER CHANGED BASEBALL AND AMERICA: THE 1947 BROOKLYN DODGERS (a collection of articles published by the University of Nebraska Press), especially since I can apparently get it through interlibrary loan through my library. However, given I have several thousand pages in the books I just got at Second Time Books, I doubt it will happen anytime soon. [-ecl]

Released theatrically 12 April 2013.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0453562/reference>>

What others are saying: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/42_2013>

THE HOUND OF THE BASKERVILLES (1983): This TV movie of THE HOUND OF THE BASKERVILLES has a lot of differences rom earlier (and indeed most later) versions.

[SPOILERS]

For starters, in earlier versions the girl Sir Hugo chases usually dies of fright (if her death is mentioned at all), while in this version it is explicit that Hugo catches and rapes her.

In this version, Laura Lyons's husband shows up, and apparently loves her even though he abuses her. And then Laura Lyons is killed.

Holmes disguises himself on the moor as a gypsy, and interacts with various main characters in this disguise.

Stapleton tries to kill Sir Henry in London. Beryl is revealed as the one who sent the warning letter to Sir Henry.

Holmes follows Stapleton into the mire and tries to save him. This is as opposed to the versions in which our heroes hear Stapleton apparently fall into the Mire and drown, or one in which Beryl has purposely moved the flags Stapleton used to mark the path so that he would fall into the Mire and drown. [-ecl]

Released on television 03 November 1983.

Film Credits:

THE ACID HOUSE (letter of comment by Arthur Kaletsky):

In response to [Evelyn's comments on THE ACID HOUSE](#) in the 11/01/24 issue of the MT VOID, Arthur Kaletsky writes:

Pedant-in-Chief respectfully begs to differ about the ACID HOUSE film. Welsh's demonstration that he can do a conventional literary short story as well as, say, Alice Munro or Raymond Carver is not in the film AFAIK. The story is "The Last Resort On The Adriatic", strongly recommended. [-ak]

Evelyn responds:

I'm not sure what you're differing on, since I merely said, "THE ACID HOUSE was made into a film incorporating all four stories in [the book THE ACID HOUSE]. It is available on Tubi." I didn't comment on the style or quality of any of the book, the story, or the film. I did make a mistake, however, in that the book THE ACID HOUSE (at least my edition) has twenty-two stories in it, not four as some reviewer of the film claimed (or implied). [-ecl]

Italian Architecture under Mussolini (letter of comment by Paul Dormer):

In response to [Evelyn's comments on Italian architecture under Mussolini](#) in the 11/01/24 issue of the MT VOID, Paul Dormer writes:

I spent a couple of weeks about ten years ago doing train travel around Italy. The main railway station in Milan dates from the Thirties and looks exactly like what you'd expect an ancient Roman railway station to look like. [-pd]

Languages in STAR TREK (letter of comment by Gary McGath):

In response to [Evelyn's comments on the confusion of "sun" and "son" in the episode "Bread and Circuses"](#) in the 11/01/24 issue of the MT VOID, Gary McGath writes:

I figured the natives of the planet spoke Latin or a Latin-derived language (it makes as much sense as any of the other Roman analogues), and the universal translator rendered the words for "sun" and "son" as homophones, creating an ambiguity which the locals weren't aware of. [-gmg]

Evelyn responds:

There was never any suggestion that the inhabitants were descended from people from Earth. I suppose it's possible, but you would think that Kirk or Spock would have mentioned this. [-ecl]

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

Okay, this is another one of those articles of picky comments on a book, or in this case just Chapter 1, of SNOW CRASH by Neal Stephenson (Del Rey, ISBN 978-0-553-38095-8).

"snow n... 2.a. Anything resembling snow. b. The white specks on a television screen resulting from weak reception."

This reminds me of the first line of William Gibson's NEUROMANCER ("The sky above the port was the color of television, tuned to a dead channel.") In both cases, the concept is meaningless to the current generation (or in Gibson's case, they think the sky was a bright blue!)

"[W]hen you get done using it, you have to plug it into the cigarette lighter, because it runs on electricity."

And while there is still a power outlet that is structured to take the cigarette lighter that cars used to have, cars no longer come with cigarette lighters, and they call it a power outlet now.

"Your car's tires have tiny contact patches, talk to the asphalt in four places the size of your tongue. The Deliverator's car has big sticky tires with contact patches the size of a fat lady's thighs."

My tires have more contact with the asphalt that Stephenson seems to assume.

"Tadzhikistan"

Now (and probably even then) spelled "Tajikistan".

"high-speed pizza delivery"

Again, this used to be a thing with Domino's Pizza (from 1979 to 1989): "Your pizza in 30 minutes or less." This ended after a \$78 million verdict against Domino's in a lawsuit claiming dozens of accidents and over 20 fatalities were caused by Domino's drivers trying to meet this goal. Will younger readers understand this?

"The Deliverator stands tall, your pie in thirty minutes or you can have it free, shoot the driver, take his car, file a class-action suit."

See above.

"brandishing their Seikos"

These days, Seiko watches (or any watches) are much less common.

"Abkhazia, Rwanda, Guanajuato, South Jersey"

Snarky on Stephenson's part.

"The pizza box is a plastic carapace now, corrugated for stiffness, a little LED readout glowing on the side, telling the Deliverator how many trade imbalance-producing minutes have ticked away since the fateful phone call. There are chips and stuff in there."

These days, using that much disposable plastics and electronics would be very bad, public relations-wise, and possibly against some states' laws..

"The address of the caller has already been inferred from his phone number..."

Again, this is meaningless now, with phone number portability, and with cell phones which could be anywhere (you could be ordering from a friend's house). Yes, some phones have GPS, but not all, and I believe it can be turned off.

"You don't work harder because you're competing against some identical operation down the street. You work harder because everything is on the line. Your name, your honor, your family, your life. Those burger flippers might have a better life expectancy--but what kind of life is it anyway, you have to ask yourself."

These days, of course, jobs require less commitment, because people change jobs far more often. The notion of lifetime employment has pretty much gone out the window.

"those seventies and eighties developments exist to be bulldozed, right? No sidewalks, no schools, no nothing. Don't have their own police force--no immigration control--undesirables can walk right in without being frisked or even harassed."

Now, of course, we have more and more gated communities, so this is becoming perhaps mopre accurate.

The Deliverator was a corporal in the Farms of Men Merryvale State Security Force for a while once. Got himself fired for pulling a sword on an acknowledged perp. Slid it right through the fabric of the perp's shirt, gliding the flat of the blade along the base of his neck, and pinned him to a warped and bubbled expanse of vinyl siding on the wall of the house that the perp was trying to break into. Thought it was a pretty righteous bust. But they fired him anyway because the perp turned out to be the son of the vice-chancellor of the Farms of Merryvale. Oh, the weasels had an excuse: said that a thirty-six-inch samurai sword was not on their Weapons Protocol. Said that he had violated the SPAC, the Suspected Perpetrator Apprehension Code. Said that the perp had suffered psychological trauma. He was afraid of butter knives now; he had to spread his jelly with the back of a teaspoon. They said that he had exposed them to liability."

Well, this sounds like a terribly familiar outcome for the rich (and white) perp.

"Fairlanes roads emphasize getting you there, for Type A drivers, and Cruiseways emphasize the enjoyment of the ride, for Type B drivers."

This made me think of I-95 versus the Merritt Parkway for traveling through Connecticut.

"cranking up the left lane of CSV-5 at a hundred and twenty kilometers"

"especially at a hundred and twenty kilometers per hour"

Okay, we've gone metric. But going 120 kilometers per hour is about 75 miles per hour, not unknown in the left lanes of freeways these days.

"New employee - put his dinner in the microwave--had foil in it--boom! the manager says. Abkhazia had been part of the Soviet f***ing Union. A new immigrant from Abkhazia trying to operate a microwave was like a deep-sea tube worm doing brain surgery. Where did they get these guys? Weren't there any Americans who could bake a f***ing pizza?"

Well, first of all, I suspect a new immigrant from Abkhazia would know how to use a microwave, but more to the point, this shows that this whole anti-immigrant, why-are-they-taking-our-jobs thing is not new.

"The LED readout on his windshield, which echoes the one on the pizza box, flashes up: 20:00. They have just given the Deliverator a twenty-minute-old pizza."

"He checks the address: it is twelve miles away."

What happened to metric? In any case, the twelve miles is by standard roads, and the reason the Deliverator thinks he can do it is that while it would require *averaging* 72 miles an hour on roads, he has a short cut in mind.

[-ecl]

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Quote of the Week:

As democracy is perfected, the [presidency] represents, more and more closely, the inner soul of the people. We move toward a lofty ideal. On some great and glorious day the plain folks of the land will reach their heart's desire at last, and the White House will be adorned by a downright moron.
--H.L. Mencken [1920]