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Mini Reviews, Part 7 (film reviews by Mark R. Leeper and Evelyn C. Leeper):

This is the seventh batch of mini-reviews:

EVIL UNDER THE SUN (1982): There were a lot of changes in this version, and not just dropping characters, etc., to make it fit in the time slot.

The setting was moved from England to the Balkans, the Jolly Roger is now a yacht rather than a hotel, the hotel manager is Daphne Castle, an amalgam of Mrs. Castle and Miss Darnley, and so on. Given all that, it wasn't terrible, with all the plot problems imported from the novel. (The whole business with Linda Marshall's watch makes a lot of assumptions of when Linda will and will not look at her watch. But at least they dropped the witchcraft.)

It was more common back then to change plots rom the book to the movie, but it is true that this continues even now, especially with the later Poirot and Marple adaptations for the BBC. (Several of the later "adaptations" add Miss marple to stories she was never in. To my knowledge they never did this with Poirot, possibly because they had so many more Poirot books to adapt--39 versus 13 for Miss Marple. [-ecl]

Released theatrically 05 March 1982.

Film Credits: https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0083908/reference

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

2010: MOBY DICK (2010): Unless you are a "Moby-Dick" completist, you can skip this. Even if you *are* a "Moby-Dick" completist, you can probably skip this. Yes, it copies the basic plot, sort of, and it uses a lot of the names of people and ships from Melville's novel, but many are just the names with none of the characteristics. Queequeg and Pip, for example, have no similarity to the originals (well, okay, Pip is black). One character is even named after a ship from the book. I will agree that having the U.S.S. Essex is a nice reference. And it does have a gigantic prehistoric whale. But these bits do not redeem the film. [-ecl]

Released on video 23 November 2010.

Film Credits: https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1694508/reference

What others are saying: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/2010_moby_dick

THE ACID HOUSE (1998): THE ACID HOUSE is an anthology film based on three stories by Irvine Welsh (collected in the book of the same name with nineteen other stories). Welsh is best known as the author of TRAINSPOTTING, but these stories preceded that book. However, this movie came after the movie TRAINSPOTTING. Such are the rewards of success.

The story I was most interested in (and the only one I watched) was "The Granton Star Cause", which has been compared to or borrowing ideas from Franz Kafka's THE METAMORPHOSIS. I would say it has taken its inspiration from BEDAZZLED (the original 1967 Peter Cook and Dudley Moore version)--in particular, the episode in which Stanley Moon is turned into a fly. In "The Granton Star Cause" Boab Coyle is turned into a fly by God (who is disgusted with what people in general and Boab in particular have done with their lives). There is also a bit of "The Court of Tartary" by T. P. Caravan (F&SF December 1963, and THE BEST FROM FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION: 14TH SERIES). (That I remember the story, even though its only reprint was sixty years ago says something, though I will admit I had to Google to find the name and author.)

As far as the movie, if you did not like TRAINSPOTTING because there was too much profanity, sex, drugs, and general grossness, then you probably won't like THE ACID HOUSE either. (On the other hand, if you did like TRAINSPOTTING--and a lot of people did--you might want to give this a try. I watched it on Tubi, where you can see it for free.) [-ecl]

Released theatrically 06 August 1999.

Film Credits: https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0122515/reference

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

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Short Film about Quatermass (link sent by Rob Mitchell):

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AAijLPntwqU&list=WL&index=4

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

I had expected a more mathematical approach in CAESAR'S CALENDAR: ANCIENT TIME AND THE BEGINNINGS OF HISTORY by Denis Feeney (University of California, ISBN 978-0-520-25801-3), discussing the lunar calendars in use at the time of Julius Caesar, as well as the Roman year which had gotten completely out of sync with the seasons. Instead, for a great part of the book Feeney discusses the concept of time, not in an Einsteinian sense, but in the sense of how historians (and ordinary people) fixed events in time. For example, the common use of B.C./A.D. did not arise until the eighteenth century. (However, the year of Jesus's birth was "determined" by Dionysus Exiguus in the sixth century, and clearly the worry about "the Millennium" indicates that people did have some idea of fixing the date based on Jesus's birth.) Even dating from the founding of Rome was not widely used.

Another "surprise" Feeney reveals is that the use of "decade" and "century" was originally limited to lengths of time, and only in the eighteenth century for centuries and the twentieth century for decades did they become periods of time, as in "the seventeenth century" or "the 1920s". (For what it's worth, there is a similar notion of five years in other languages; I know Spanish has one, but I cannot recall it.) This has not, to the best of my knowledge, been used to specify a period of time rather than a length of time.

Instead of having a fixed point from which an event is dated, the Romans used a variety of methods, the most common being saying who were the consuls in that year. The Greeks used battles and other major events (e.g., "three years after the Battle of Salamis"), and the Romans copied this as well.

As for the placement of the start of the year. the Romans initially placed it at March 1 (in the sense that the consuls took office that day). But they moved it to January 1 when the empire expanded to include Spain. Why? Well, when the empire was more compact, the consuls could take office on March 1 and be in the field in time for the "battle season". But when the empire got larger, the consuls needed more time to get to the far reaches, and so moved the date back to January 1. (And then it was moved to March 25 in 1155 and it wasn't changed back in the British Empire until to 1752, when the Gregorian calendar was adopted. However, January 1 was often celebrated as the start of some new year as early as the 13th century.)

Ironically, this reason for the Roman change in the start of the new year is strongly tied to the reason that the inauguration of President of the United States was moved from March 4 to January 20, but in reverse. The original date was to allow for travel to the capital, particularly difficult during the winter. January 20 became a viable date that eliminated a long lame-duck period, and it was changed in 1937, after roads and railroads improved and even air travel was possible.

Feeney also discusses the concept of "anniversary". Roman dating was based on the nones, the ides, and the calends, But rather than counting from the start of the month, these were based more on the end, and given the varying lengths of the months, this led to some confusion when Julius Caesar introduced his calendar. The ides was the middle date of a month, the nones was the ninth day before the ides (counting the ides as a day, so we would say the eighth day before the ides), and the calends was the first day of the month.

But dates were calculated backward from these markers, so something would be described as happening, e.g., "six days before the nones".

So what happened when Rome switched from the "Republican calendar" to the Julian one?

Well, let's look at the Julian-to-Gregorian switch first. Washington was born on 11 February 1732 (Julian calendar). Britain (and the United States) changed from the Julian calendar to the Gregorian calendar in 1752. In 1753, the question arose as to when his birthday fell: on 11 February (after only 354 days) or on 22 February. The latter won out with Washington, although for a while in the early days of the United States, many kept to 11 February to celebrate his birthday. But, as Feeney puts it, the day (365 after the last) was chosen over the date (its "name").

For some 3% of the population, this was a moot point--if your birthday was between 3 September and 13 September inclusive, you couldn't celebrate it on that date in 1752 even if you wanted to.

Julius Caesar instituted his new calendar on 1 January 45 B.C.E. Before that the Republican calendar year had four long months (31 days each) and eight short months (28 or 29 days each), which added up to 355 days. Caesar added ten days, making several of the short months 31 days long. But apparently he left the ides of those months on the same date, i.e., the 13th, rather than moving it to the 15th. So the dates in the first "half" of the month are fine over the change, but the end of the month gets weird. The example Feeney gives is Livia's birthday. It had been the "third day before the Kalends of February" under the Republican calendar. Since January was a short month of 29 days under the Republican calendar, and that the counting was inclusive, this meant it had been on January 28. Livia kept the date--the third day before the Kalends of February--even though this was now January 30, a day that didn't even exist before the new calendar. I guess my question is whether, if the Romans counted the date backwards, the concept of "January 28" was even considered as meaningful. After all, we don't lay any importance on a day being "the third day before the beginning of the next month".

So I guess Feeney got into the mathematical aspects after all. [-ecl]

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Quote of the Week:

War does not determine who is right--only who is left.
--Bertrand Russell

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