

# MT VOID 11/12/21 -- Vol. 40, No. 20, Whole Number 2197



Mt. Holz Science Fiction Society  
11/12/21 -- Vol. 40, No. 20, Whole Number 2197

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### "Pythy" Puzzle (puzzle by Tom Russell):

This should be attempted without using any device or even pencil and paper:

The sides of a certain right triangle are all of integer length. The shortest side is 7. What are the other two sides? [-tlr]

### Mini Reviews, Part 2 (film reviews by Mark R. Leeper and Evelyn C. Leeper):

Here is the second batch of mini-reviews, on Jewish-related themes.

**SHIVA BABY:** SHIVA BABY is a comedy of Jewish manners that looks at what goes on under the surface of a shiva (a "Jewish wake" which takes place after the funeral). Directed and written by Emma Seligman, it focuses on Danielle (played by Rachel Sennott), who is about to graduate from college, and her extended family and friends. Her father is played by Fred Melamed (best known for the Coen Brothers film A SERIOUS MAN); the other actors are relatively unknown but worth watching. Perhaps as one sign of her confusion, Rachel claims to be a vegetarian but eats lox and other non-vegetarian fare. Rachel and the people she interacts with are all hiding secrets from each other. Not surprisingly, many of these come out.

Released 04/02/21; available on Blu-ray. Rating: low +1 (-4 to +4), or 5/10.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt11317142/reference>

What others are saying: [https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/shiva\\_baby](https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/shiva_baby)

**THE MEANING OF HITLER:** This is the story of the life of Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party, as well as a look at their influences and

parallels today. It tries to examine the meaning of Hitler (what else?) in terms of what caused his rise, how he maintained it, and what the continuing effect of it is. The director tells us about the history of Jewish and Nazi relations, and one example of the influences today is footage of a tour led by Holocaust denier David Irving to Treblinka, Sobibor, Belzec and Majdanek, in which Irving explains how everything history tells us about those camps is wrong. Other footage shows neo-Nazi marchers and YouTubers. The film is eclectic in scope, covering even subjects like how a particular microphone work, which probably does not greatly improve the information content of the explanation. The film draws many parallels between Adolf Hitler and Donald Trump over the belief that they have many psychological parallels. As one witness concludes, the problem is not that the Nazis were abnormal, but that the Nazis were \*not\* abnormal.

Released theatrically 08/13/21. Rating: high +2 (-4 to +4), or 8/10.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt13490106/reference>

What others are saying: [https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/the\\_meaning\\_of\\_hitler](https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/the_meaning_of_hitler)

[-mrl/ecl]

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**KURT VONNEGUT: UNSTUCK IN TIME** (film review by Mark R. Leeper and Evelyn C. Leeper):

In **KURT VONNEGUT: UNSTUCK IN TIME**, a biography of Kurt Vonnegut, most of his early life is told mostly with home movies. Later the narrative is composed from photos of his articles, books, first pages of manuscripts, and footage shot by director Robert B. Weide and others. Weide took almost forty years to make this film (he started planning in 1982, and shooting in 1988). Weide is best known for documentaries about famous comedians, and for the movie and series **CURB YOUR ENTHUSIASM**.

After Vonnegut is introduced as being either insane or the only person not insane, the documentary reverts to a more traditional biography. His family was fairly well-to-do, but they were wiped out by the Depression. They lost their home, and he had to leave private school. In public school, he became immersed in pop culture, and a fan of comedians such as Laurel and Hardy. Vonnegut was the family comedian from when he was young, and described his books as "screamingly funny." During World War II, he was a POW in Dresden during the fire-bombing there. (Vonnegut claimed he actually saw Dresden in a premonition before it happened.) He went to work after the war for General Electric as a publicity writer, but finally had to choose between an industrial career at GE or a career of writing. It was not much of a fight. He quit GE and wrote full-time.

Vonnegut seemed to live by phrases he uses repeatedly in his writing. "Billy Pilgrim has become unstuck in time." "So it goes." It is not clear that they mean much beyond Vonnegut's attachment to them.

At the end of his life, Weide says, all of Vonnegut's books were in print. One person said of him, "Vonnegut was championed by the people, not by the critics," although eventually he was given critical acclaim by the literary establishment. Either way, Vonnegut was a writer whose outlook was shaped by his fear of failing. Some of his books made it and some did not. So it goes.

Releases theatrically 11/19/2021. Rating: high +1, or 6/10.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1461238/reference>

What others are saying: [https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/kurt\\_vonnegut\\_unstuck\\_in\\_time](https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/kurt_vonnegut_unstuck_in_time)

[-mrl/ecl]

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**Variations in Middle English** (letter of comment by Fred Lerner):

In response to [Evelyn's comments on the differences between the Middle English of Chaucer and the Gawain poet](#) in the 11/05/21 issue of the MT VOID, Fred Lerner writes:

Chaucer lived and wrote in London, where the local English dialect had been infiltrated for three centuries by Norman French. The Gawain poet wrote in the Midlands dialect, where Anglo-Saxonisms had persisted. When Caxton set up his printing press in London in 1476, he naturally favored the London dialect, which established that as the dominant form of English.

In most parts of Europe where two languages contended for dominance, it was the one in which the Bible was first printed that prevailed. (One reason that Welsh is still a living language today, while Scottish Gaelic is barely hanging on, is that the Bible was translated into Welsh in the 1580s, but there was no complete Gaelic version until two centuries later. Now that the BBC has full-time radio broadcasts in both languages, we can hope that their chances for survival will improve.) [-fl]

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**Byzantium** (letter of comment by Keith F. Lynch):

In response to [John Hertz's comments on Byzantium](#) in the 11/05/21 issue of the MT VOID, Keith F. Lynch writes:

"Why did Constantinople get the works? That's nobody's business but the Turks!" [-kfl]

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

THE FOOD OF THE GODS AND HOW IT CAME TO EARTH by H. G. Wells (many different publishers, as well as Project Gutenberg) was our bi-monthly book discussion choice.

One thing that struck me was that THE FOOD OF THE GODS has more sarcasm/irony than most of Wells's better-known science fiction works. This is in addition to the Skinners (particularly Mr. Skinner and his heavy lisp). It was indeed a great relief when Skinner and his lisp vanish from the narrative.

There also doesn't seem to be much consideration of how much more of a strain on Earth's resources a race of giants would be. I guess back when Wells was writing, Earth's resources seemed infinite, much as the bison to the first white people to cross the plains and the whales did to Melville. Melville wrote, "Though so short a period ago--not a good lifetime--the census of the buffalo in Illinois exceeded the census of men now in London, and though at the present day not one horn or hoof of them remains in all that region; and though the cause of this wondrous extermination was the spear of man; yet the far different nature of the whale-hunt peremptorily forbids so inglorious an end to the Leviathan. Forty men in one ship hunting the Sperm Whales for forty-eight months think they have done extremely well, and thank God, if at last they carry home the oil of forty fish. Whereas, in the days of the old Canadian and Indian hunters and trappers of the West, when the far west (in whose sunset suns still rise) was a wilderness and a virgin, the same number of moccasined men, for the same number of months, mounted on horse instead of sailing in ships, would have slain not forty, but forty thousand and more buffaloes; a fact that, if need were, could be statistically stated."

For years, Dover Books used to have a hardback edition of SEVEN SCIENCE FICTION NOVELS OF H. G. WELLS, which included THE WAR OF THE WORLDS, THE TIME MACHINE, THE INVISIBLE MAN, THE ISLAND OF DR. MOREAU, THE FIRST MEN IN THE MOON, THE FOOD OF THE GODS, and IN THE DAYS OF THE COMET. Later there appeared SIX SCIENCE FICTION NOVELS OF H. G. WELLS from Canterbury Classics (and possibly others), dropping IN THE DAYS OF THE COMET. Now Dover has a boxed edition of six Thrift Editions, having dropped IN THE DAYS OF THE COMET and THE FOOD OF GODS and added a volume of short stories. I predict the next to go will be THE FIRST MEN IN THE MOON. [-ecl]

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Quote of the Week:

A full belly makes a dull brain.  
--Ben Franklin

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