

MT VOID 10/14/22 -- Vol. 41, No. 16, Whole Number 2245



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Mini Reviews, Part 1 (film reviews by Mark R. Leeper and Evelyn C. Leeper)

It is that time of year again when I vote on awards for films. This is one very nice perq of my hobby of writing film reviews and being a member of the Online Film Critic Society (OFCS). Filmmakers and publicists *want* me to see their films in the hopes that they (the films, not the people) will be considered for awards. I get to see new films either on-line or I get discs (or used to--these seem to be on the way out).

I cannot write my usual format for every film I see, but I can write brief reviews for many. I do not always know where these films will play (or have played). These films may play in local theaters or in Manhattan art houses. But I can let people know what to look for on Amazon Prime, NetFlix, and other streaming services (of which there is no end).

This year is a bit closer to a standard year, as the Academy gradually pulls back the date of the ceremony. They used to be at the end of February, then in 2021 (for the 2020 films) they were at the end of April, and in 2022 (for the 2021 films) at the end of March. In 2023, they are in the middle of March (March 12). The OFCS will announce their choices for 2022 in mid-January of 2023, though I expect our mini-reviews to extend well past that date. (If that was hard to follow, skip it.)

As was true last year, these reviews are a collaboration between Evelyn and me. [-mrl]

A TRIP TO INFINITY: A TRIP TO INFINITY uses interviews, films, and a variety of animation styles to try to explain infinity, both as a mathematical concept and as how it relates to the universe, both in the small and the large. For example, if we look at any piece of matter in the universe, eventually its in pieces and if we look at this film it is in discrete sequences of vary interesting mathematics and physics. Some of the questions are inane ("Is human creativity infinite?"), but on the whole this is both worthwhile an enjoyable to watch.

Released on Netflix streaming 26 September 2022. Rating: +2 (-4 to +4) or 7/10

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt21929356/reference>

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

HUSTLE: I rarely like sports films, but this seems to have some serious content. Adam Sandler stars in the story of a basketball scout (and would-be coach) for the Philadelphia 76ers who finds an amazing player in Spain, and works against all odds to train him to make it into the NBA. Robert Duvall (in spite of fairly high billing) has a small part. There is also Juancho Hernangomez (an actual professional basketball player) as the prodigy (and reminiscent of Lock Martin as Gort in THE DAY THE EARTH STOOD STILL (1951)), as well as many real basketball players and personalities. (If you are not a basketball fan, you won't recognize the players, or even their names, and the jargon will probably confuse you as well.) This covers the ethics of basketball management as well as the nuances of coaching. Though it is predictable in that it follows a well-worn sports film trajectory it is still fairly enjoyable.

[As for the more informed viewers, a friend of ours who is a basketball fan from Philadelphia said, "It was super-fun and well worth the watch."]

Released on Netflix streaming: 08 June 2022. Rating: low +2 or 7/10

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt8009428/reference>

What others are saying: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/hustle_2022

OPERATION SEAWOLF: The first scene of OPERATION SEAWOLF takes place near the end of World War I (May 12, 1918), when we see a young Hans Kessler serving on a German U-boat that is torpedoed. This is done with a mix of English with German accents, and German with English subtitles. Luckily, they abandon this technique early on. Throughout they could really have used subtitles to make it possible to understand the accents and the sometimes muffled sound, but screeners often do not provide these. The main part of the film is of Kessler at the end of World War II (April 27, 1945), when he is chosen to lead an attack on the United States homeland by using a submarine to bring a V-2 rocket within range of New York City. (We should point out that this movie is fiction, and not based on an historical event.)

The underwater scenes seem partly produced by showing an empty room and smoke, and partly by simple animation. One scene appears to be borrowed from the "Panzerlied" scene of the film THE BATTLE OF THE BULGE.

Having an African American officer and crew on a submarine chaser seemed jarring, but was actually basically accurate, except that Captain Samuel L. Gravely, Jr., did not come aboard USS PC-1264 (as an ensign) until after the events of the movie. (The actor, Hiram A. Murray, bears a striking resemblance to the real Gravely.)

The film is primarily about the conflicts within the German military towards the end of the war: some wanted to fight on even when the result was obvious, while others felt that would be futile. Kessler is dismissive of the crew he is assigned (he says that are not wolves, they are boys), and this results in various acts of implicit disobedience that form the backbone of the film.

Released theatrically 10/03/2022. Rating: +1 (-4 to +4) or 6/10

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt13429928/reference>

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

[-mrl/ecl]

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

Our book discussion chose THE SIRENS OF TITAN by Kurt Vonnegut (Dial, ISBN 978-0-385-33349-8) in honor of Vonnegut's centenary this year. I had read this back in college, but after a half century, very little stuck with me except for the "chronosynclastic infundibulum". But this time a couple of passages struck me:

"We are disgusted by Malachi Constant," said Winston Niles Rumfoord up in his treetop, "because he used the fantastic fruits of his fantastic good luck to finance an unending demonstration that man is a pig. He wallowed in sycophants. He wallowed in worthless women. He wallowed in lascivious entertainments and alcohol and drugs. He wallowed in every known form of voluptuous turpitude.

'At the height of his good luck, Malachi Constant was worth more than the states of Utah and North Dakota combined. Yet, I daresay, his moral worth was not that of the most corrupt little fieldmouse in either state.

'We are angered by Malachi Constant,' said Rumfoord up in his treetop, 'because he did nothing to deserve his billions, and because he did nothing unselfish or imaginative with his billions. He was as benevolent as Marie Antoinette, as creative as a professor of cosmetology in an embalming college.

'We hate Malachi Constant,' said Rumfoord up in his treetop, 'because he accepted the fantastic fruits of his fantastic good luck without a qualm, as though luck were the hand of God. To us of the Church of God the Utterly Indifferent, there is nothing more cruel, more dangerous, more blasphemous than a man can do than to believe that--that luck, good or bad, is the hand of God!'

"Once upon a time on Tralfamadore there were creatures who weren't anything like machines. They weren't dependable. They weren't efficient. They weren't predictable. They weren't durable. And these poor creatures were obsessed by the idea that everything that existed had to have a purpose, and that some purposes were higher than others. These creatures spent most of their time trying to find out what their purpose was. And every time they found out what seemed to be a purpose of themselves, the purpose seemed so low

that the creatures were filled with disgust and shame. And, rather than serve such a low purpose, the creatures would make a machine to serve it. This left the creatures free to serve higher purposes. But whenever they found a higher purpose, the purpose still wasn't high enough. So machines were made to serve higher purposes, too. And the machines did everything so expertly that they were finally given the job of finding out what the highest purpose of the creatures could be. The machines reported in all honesty that the creatures couldn't really be said to have any purpose at all. The creatures thereupon began slaying each other, because they hated purposeless things above all else. And they discovered that they weren't even very good at slaying. So they turned that job over to the machines, too. And the machines finished up the job in less time than it takes to say, "Tralfamadore."

Our book-and-movie group was more a movie-and-book group this month, because the book for BETWEEN TIME AND TIMBUKTU by Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., (Bantam Doubleday Dial, ISBN 978-0-440-00719-7) was done after the movie (teleplay, really), and consists of the script interspersed with stills from the film. The film itself is a compilation of ideas from several of Vonnegut's works, including THE SIRENS OF TITAN and CAT'S CRADLE.

I have a few observations about the movie. It had way more women in NASA Mission Control in the movie than in real life during that era. And the Holiday Inn no longer costs \$30 a night.

There were a lot of jokes about Tang. At least Tang was really used in the astronaut program, although it was developed over a decade earlier. The freeze-dried ice cream ("astronaut ice cream") that we used to see in gift shops was developed *for* the space program, but never used in it.

Vonnegut apparently likes to create fictional religions (not unlike other science fiction writers). In CAT'S CRADLE, Bokononism is a religion that identifies with its own falseness, "a religion of harmless lies". (I'm sure that's a jab at all the "real" religions, most of which have lies not so harmless.) The Church of God the Utterly Indifferent is from THE SIRENS OF TITAN and sounds (at me, anyway) a lot like Deism.

[-ecl]

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Quote of the Week:

Let alone re-write, he doesn't even re-read
--Clive James,
'The Dreaming Swimmer'

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