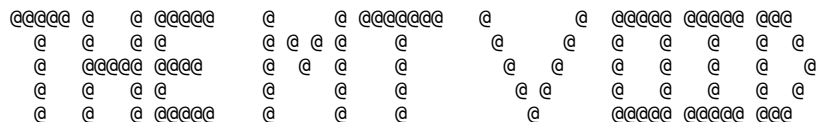


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An index with links to the issues of the MT VOID since 1986 is at

http://leepers.us/mtvoid/back_issues.htm.

TCM'S October Programming:

Turner Classic Movies has a couple of articles about their programming in October:

Star of the Month: Robots

<https://www.tcm.com/articles/Programming%20Article/021674/star-of-the-month-robots?lid=srfvuhjd1wxh>

Screamin' Shelley Winters

<https://www.tcm.com/articles/Programming%20Article/021679/screamin-shelley-winters?lid=a7r0I0ige2fe>

GATTACA (film review by Mark R. Leeper):

[In honor of GATTACA's 25th anniversary on October 24, here is Mark's original review of that film.]

Capsule: GATTACA is a cold film that frequently stretches credibility, but still it stands as one of the more intelligent science fiction films of the 90s. Anatomy truly is destiny in a world where almost everything about you can be determined quickly from a DNA sample. One man with a dream of traveling in space carries out a long identity deception in a world where it should be impossible, by using another man's DNA to fool all the detectors. This is also a philosophical detective story as well as a science fiction film that looks deeply at the implications of too much genetic knowledge. Rating: +2 (-4 to +4), 8 (0 to 10)

While some pairs of identical twins lead surprisingly similar lives, frequently they do not and frequently they show different interests and potential. So there are limitations on the information about the adult that can be augured by a DNA examination. That makes it seem to be unlikely that we would ever get to the world as it is shown in GATTACA where everything anyone wants to know about you is encoded into your DNA. However, GATTACA assumes that the world has decided that DNA is the most reliable way of judging

a person in spite of counter-examples like Vincent (played by Ethan Hawke) the main character of this story. Vincent has been delegated to the labor class based on his DNA. He looks wistfully at the rockets blasting off from the Gattaca Corporation and dreams of going off into space. He is highly motivated, but nobody notices because his DNA says that he just does not have the potential to be much more than a floor sweeper, permanently a part of the under-class. One wonders how so inaccurate a test could be accepted without question by a society, particularly after age of civil rights and civil liberties advances.

Vincent knows he does not have a chance of being chosen by the Gattaca Corporation for one of their probes into space, so he decides to literally reinvent himself. There is a criminal element who are willing to match him up with a human with a much better DNA structure who can supply him with hairs, urine samples, blood samples and any other kind of sample so that all the samples that Gattaca takes from him will really be from Jerome (Jude Law). Jerome agrees to live with Vincent, providing him with sufficient biological specimens to give to the company and letting Vincent take on Jerome's name. This is a tricky process involving things like false finger tips filled with Jerome's blood form the ID machine that takes a sample. We see how Vincent is occasionally able to substitute Jerome's specimens for his own, but it is never really convincing that he could do that whenever the need arises. Vincent romances a fellow employee Irene Cassini (Uma Thurman) who gets pulled into this web of deception.

The story moves at a languorous pace showing how the world has changed since the conversion to the DNA standard. Andrew M. Niccol who wrote and directed has given us a "not too distant future" that is not entirely convincing, but is still worth seeing. Loose ends abound, but that may be part of the point. For example, Vincent has taken over for Jerome and is telling the world that he is the same person, but Jerome has a "toffee-nosed" British accent and so presumably comes from an environment that would produce such an accent. Vincent does not have a British accent at all. Yet nobody seems to even care to compare Vincent to his claimed background. It is hard to place how far this world is in the future. Women and men at Gattaca dress in almost identical uniforms and women wear their hair in almost masculine styles. Cars make the whining sound of turbines, but still look a lot like the cars of today.

The photography by Slawomir Idziak is just a bit showy, bathing some scenes in yellow or blue light. Particularly in the first half of the film it is often his camerawork that creates the mood in scenes devoid of any music. It gives the world a repressive, sterile, dry feel. Michael Nyman's score when it does kick in is repetitive almost to the point of being minimalist.

GATTACA has a few places where it could have had the details better developed, but it is a complex story, perhaps of the complexity of a novel. It is told without the too common problems of science fiction of too much special effects replacing careful thought. If anything, GATTACA is a film that substitutes intelligence for explosions. This is about people caught up in a sort of cautionary dystopic world. It may not be a likely world, but it has well-developed character in this world. Overall I would rate GATTACA a +2 on the -4 to +4 scale. [-mrl]

PRINCE OF DARKNESS (film review by Mark R. Leeper):

[And because it is Halloween and in honor of PRINCE OF DARKNESS's 35th anniversary on October 23, here is Mark's original review of that film.]

Capsule: A very demanding and very rewarding horror film. Horror and science fiction combine together to make a film for real long-standing horror film fans only. Lots of old stuff but a lot that even the long-time fans have not seen before. The last half-hour is a let-down, but it is hard to imagine an ending fitting the buildup. Rating: +2

A lot of horror films are coming out about now. Released in one weekend are both PRINCE OF DARKNESS and NIGHT FLYERS. Earlier this year Clive Barker directed and wrote HELLRAISER. BELIEVERS, based on a respected horror novel, came out this year. Then there were a number of minor pieces of the NEAR DARK ilk. Horror, I understand, sells well on videocassette, so it is pretty tough for a horror film to lose money. I was vaguely aware that the aforementioned PRINCE OF DARKNESS was from John Carpenter, but he has had a spotty career. I like his DARK STAR, HALLOWEEN, THE THING, and maybe a few others. His most recent, BIG TROUBLE IN LITTLE CHINA, was a good idea that went amazingly bad. But then things are not always what we expect. PRINCE OF DARKNESS, for example, turns out to be the best thing that Carpenter has ever done. It may well be the fantasy film I will want to remember from 1987.

For 2000 years the Brotherhood of Sleep have kept secret what Christianity was *really* about--have kept secret the true nature of evil and of the Devil, a secret with roots far older than humanity. Now, 2000 years after they discovered the secret, it is becoming important to understand it once more. The laws of physics are changing and the focus of all that is happening is one small rundown church in Los Angeles. There a group of scientists, their graduate students, and a priest are trying to unravel the mystery of what is happening. And what is happening will tie together particle physics, mathematics, and orthodox Christianity.

PRINCE OF DARKNESS has everything it needs but the payoff. The final third of the film is good Carpenter-style suspense, but it fails to live up to the promise of the first two thirds of the movie. If it had, this would have been an excellent science fiction film as well as a good horror film. As it is, PRINCE OF DARKNESS is rich in ideas and has some good suspense to boot, but doesn't quite deliver.

I really enjoyed the film, but have to give this film a qualified recommendation. It takes a lot of effort just to understand as much of what is going on as the director wants to show you. There are many scenes that are deliberately disturbing and a lot more that are violent, though it has been pointed out to me that there is very little actual blood. If you haven't seen many horror films, you may not find this one worth your effort; there are a lot of other good films out there. If you have seen a lot of horror films, you will recognize little ideas here and there from (are you ready?) DRACULA, THE EXORCIST, THE THING, THE QUIET EARTH, THE LEGEND OF HELL HOUSE, THE NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD, ESCAPE FROM NEW YORK, FIVE MILLION YEARS TO EARTH, THE KEEP, and THE TERMINATOR. Yes, there are recognizable ideas inspired by each of these, yet there are so many new ideas in this horror film that the familiar ones are outnumbered.

The name of the man who crafted all these ideas into a single screenplay is Martin Quatermass. Perhaps that is a pseudonym and even a film reference. Since some of the images, like the marauding street schizophrenics, are reminiscent of images out of Carpenter's *ESCAPE FROM NEW YORK* and *ASSAULT ON PRECINCT 13*, it is at least conceivable that the film was written by Carpenter himself. In any case, it is often hard to follow exactly what is happening; the film makes the audience work a little. And a little knowledge of paradoxical 20th Century physics helps to set the atmosphere (that's a remarkable statement all by itself!).

If you are tired of seeing old ideas rehashed in horror films, *PRINCE OF DARKNESS* will show you a lot you haven't seen before. You people (and me) who wanted to see a horror film of power in Clive Barker's *HELLRAISER*: sorry, Barker didn't deliver, but *PRINCE OF DARKNESS* is what you were expecting. I'd give it a high +2 on the -4 to +4 scale.

DISCLAIMER: As might be obvious, a film that audaciously plays with ideas will appeal to me more than to the viewing public at large. A prime example is *LIFEFORCE*, itself a film that gave a science fictional alternate interpretation to traditional beliefs. [-mrl]

THE CAPTAIN'S DAUGHTER by Peter F. Hamilton (copyright 2022, Tantor Audio, ASIN B09P9SS761, 9 hours and 32 minutes, narrated by Elizabeth Klett) (audio book review by Joe Karpierz):

THE CAPTAIN'S DAUGHTER, second book in the audio-only YA Arkship Trilogy by Peter F. Hamilton, picks up where the first audio book in the series, *A HOLE IN THE SKY*, left off. Hazel and her band of friends, have sealed the hole in the hull of the *Daedalus*, through which air was leaking out and giving people headaches because of the low pressure. This act, in turn, has angered the Yi, the creatures that have taken over control of the *Daedalus*. The Yi, if you remember, essentially put the members of the colony ship into a sort of agrarian society, and have perpetrated the story that things are the way they are because of a mutiny that happened several hundred years ago. But now Hazel knows better, and is trying to give that information to the rest of the colonists. This knowledge, and much more, was given to her by a command AI she encountered at the front of the ship; what's more, it turns out she's actually the Captain's Daughter--well, she's the descendant of the Captain, which makes her the Captain of the *Daedalus*. It is a role she neither wants nor is ready for. But now, it's time to go find another command AI--at the behest of the first one--that can tell her more of what happened during the mutiny. Unfortunately, what she finds out is not very pleasant--as if what she's already found out isn't unpleasant enough as it is. So now, she must find a way to take back the ship, and with the help of friends and family she sets off to do just that.

THE CAPTAIN'S DAUGHTER suffers from being the second book in a trilogy. It is a bridge between the setup and the finale, and while the information the reader learns about the Yi and the history of the *Daedalus* is important and useful, there really isn't that much advancement of the plot of the narrative. What Hamilton does in this installment is make us intensely dislike the Yi, to the point of being disgusted with them. If there is an advancement in the plot, it's to make things worse for the band of heroes that is out to save the colonists and the mission of getting to a colony planet.

That's not to say that *THE CAPTAIN'S DAUGHTER* is a bad book; it is not. But it really doesn't do much to advance the characters from when we first met them. If there is a fault with what goes on here, it's that Hazel--the titular character of the book--is continually bailed about by her whip-smart younger brother. If one of the points of the exercise in the Arkship Trilogy is to show the independence and leadership of its female lead character, it's not doing too good of a job.

What it does do well is showcase Hamilton's skills at writing alien creatures, battle scenes, and inter-character dynamics. And while, like the first book, the storytelling is linear and more constrained--in a colony ship rather than out in the vastness of space--we see the same techniques that Hamilton uses in his standard "wide screen space operas". They are just muted, as the story dictates that they need to be.

Readers need to remember that the Arkship Trilogy is YA, and in the confines of that space Hamilton does a pretty good job. No, it's not like his other works, but it's not intended to be. It needs to be read and enjoyed--or not--on its own merits for what it is.

I see that in my review of *A HOLE IN THE SKY* I say that the name of the narrator is Elizabeth Katt. Her correct name is Elizabeth Klett, and my apologies go out to her. She is doing a fine job of narrating the Arkship Trilogy novels. I'm sure she'll do just as fine a job on the third one. [-jak]

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

I recently re-watched *THE PRIME OF MISS JEAN BRODIE*, which prompted me to read (re-read?) the book by Muriel Spark (Penguin, ISBN 978-0-141-18142-4). The film has a timeless theme: the charismatic leader who is more concerned with their own power than with what is right or beneficial for their followers. Miss Brodie idolizes Franco, Mussolini, and her own opinions, and transmits these beliefs to some of her students that she has picked out as "Miss Brodie's set". (This obviously now reminds one of "Jerry's Kids". perhaps a not-inapt comparison.) One suspects she chooses "her" girls as the ones most suggestible, or useful to her.

And of course, she sees herself, and her girls, as not constrained by societal rules or morality. (Of one, she says, "She is above the common moral code, it does not apply to her." Miss Brodie has had a sequence of lovers, and sees no problem with trying to get one of them to take a sixteen(?) year-old girl as his next lover. But they have to follow her rules; for example, she criticizes one girl for opening the window more than the six inches she deems appropriate, and another for having her sleeves rolled up.

And of course the theme is timeless--throughout history charismatic egotists have manipulated people to their own ends (which made just be to gain a feeling of power). One might argue that the notion of teachers inculcating their ideas and beliefs into their students, independent of what the government or school administration might want, but the idea go back as far as Socrates, tried and executing for corrupting his students, the youth of Athens.

Spark has an unusual writing style. Her narrative jumps around in time, not just by having flashbacks in an otherwise straight timeline, but by jumping forward as well as backward, and having these jumps not in their own chronological order. She also uses a technique reminiscent of Homeric poetry, where she has a descriptive phrase that is frequently (but not always) attached to the various girls. For example, one girl is frequently described as "famous for sex" even when that is irrelevant. Another has her mathematical ability cited. One is a gymnast, and at one point Miss Brodie orders her to perform some somersaults to entertain the other girls--yet another example of Miss Brodie's dictatorial bent.

(Significantly, in the book it is not any immorality on Miss Brodie's part that causes her downfall, but her politics.)

The book is good (and was named one of the "Top 100 English-Language Novels of the 20th Century" by the Modern Library), but the 1969 film is great. [-ecl]

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Quote of the Week:

All bad poetry springs from genuine feeling.
--Oscar Wilde

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