MT VOID 12/16/22 -- Vol. 41, No. 25, Whole Number 2254

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Bell Labs Holmdel / Bell Works (comments by Evelyn C. Leeper):

Here is another article about the use of the Bell Labs building in Holmdel (now Bell Works) in the Apple TV series "Severance" and other media, with pictures of the facility:

[-ecl]

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

This is the seventh batch of mini-reviews, all films of the fantastic.

NEXT EXIT: The opening of NEXT EXIT is reminiscent of the ALIEN logo, but if it is trying to look science fictional, it does not succeed. It is more fantasy, taking a new approach to life after death. A man and a woman "meet cute" while trying to rent a car to get to the center investigating this. He has a credit card but his drivers license is almost expired; she has a drivers license but no credit card, so they team up for a road trip. The dialogue is amusing and worth a chuckle or two, but in the end the explanation for what is happening is dissatisfying sci-fi, and it could have used a better ending.

Released theatrically 4 November 2022. Rating: high +1 (-4 to +4) or 7/10

Film Credits: https://www.imdb.com/title/tt19595494/reference

What others are saying: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/next_exit_2022

SHE WILL: SHE WILL combines witchcraft revenge with the #MeToo era in a psychological horror film that is more style than substance, From the beginning, in order to create an atmosphere that some might find threatening, the director uses an image of very simple mathematics. Then director Charlotte Colbert and cinematographer Jamie Ramsay create many surreal sequences which enhance the atmosphere. But again, it's more a question of style than anything else.

Released 15 July 2022 theatrically and streaming. Rating: high -1 (-4 to +4) or 7/10

Film Credits: https://www.imdb.com/title/tt9340916/reference

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

THE INNOCENTS: The elevator pitch for THE INNOCENTS might have been "'It's a Good Life!' meets VILLAGE OF THE DAMNED". So it is not a remake of the 1960 film of the same name. In this Norwegian film, there are four children with differing powers, who discover them over the course of a summer. It is nothing special, and definitely not for the squeamish.

Released theatrically 13 May 2022; available on various streaming services. Rating: low -1 (-4 to +4) or 2/10

Film Credits: https://www.imdb.com/title/tt4028464/reference

What others are saying: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/the_innocents_2022

[-mrl/ecl]

EVERSION by Alistair Reynolds (copyright 2022, Orbit, $17.99, trade paperback, 337pp, ISBN 978-0-316-46282-2) (book review by Joe Karpierz):

Alastair Reynolds has become a favorite author of mine ever since I picked up three or four of the Revelation Space series books at a Worldcon back in the Oughts--either Toronto or Denver (the memory fades as the years roll by). Being a sucker for space opera, Reynolds' books were right up my alley, and I read as many of them as I could. I've read 9 of his 20 novels, and, astoundingly enough, almost none of his short fiction (although I have three or four of his collections on my to-be-read list). As I said, I'm a sucker for space opera, and most of his work is space opera.

EVERSION is not space opera.

Well, there is a space ship. Eventually. After there are three other kinds of vessels over a total of four time periods. But while the vessels and the years change, the characters, mostly do not. Well, except when they do.

Silas Coade is a doctor aboard a sailing ship called the Demeter on an expedition to find the Ediface, a mysterious construct hidden within a hard-to get-to location in Norway. His job is what any other physician's job would be - keep the crew and passengers of the ship alive. In his downtime he is writing a book of "fantastical fiction", which we would probably call science fiction. The expedition is financed by and the idea of a Russian named Topolsky, who wishes to reach the Ediface at all costs. Others in the cast of characters are Captain Van Vught, a soldier named Coronel Ramos, a ship crewmember named Mortlock (who encourages Coade to continue writing his book), a mathematician named Dupin, and the enigmatic and annoying (at least to Coade) Ada Cossile, who seems to know more than everyone else on the expedition (In an amusing side story, Cossile is constantly criticizing Coade's novel, sending him back to his pen and paper to make revisions to the story. Coade complains that her many suggestions and corrections are slowing him down, and he fears that he may never get the book published because of her interference. I can't help but have the feeling that Reynolds was poking some fun at editors and the publishing business). The Demeter finds and approaches the Ediface, and discover that a ship has already been there, but it is a wreck as it has crashed. Eventually, the Demeter meets the same fate, and the crew is killed.

Or so we think. We turn the page, and the crew is back with us, on the steamship Demeter a number of years later than the first time, looking for the Ediface. The pattern is the same, with the Demeter locating the Ediface, discovering a crashed ship, crashing themselves, and dying. And then the same crew is on a dirigible, and then finally on a space ship. The pattern is the same, although the stories for each crew are different in each time period. Nevertheless, the outcome is the same, but with a difference. Coade is piecing together bits of information that only he is aware of, and he realizes that all this has happened before. And all the while, Ada Cossile is teasing him, tantalizing him, and even scolding him for not figuring out what's going on. At one point she tells him that she is disappointed, and that he's going to die again, and will keep dying until he figures it out.

EVERSION is a mystery, a puzzle. It's a puzzle that both the reader and Silas Coade are to figure out as the novel progresses. Each segment of the novel is written in an appropriate tone and language for the time period it's set in. This gives each story quite an authentic feel as the characters as well as the readers advance through time. This also serves to keep the reader in the story; it's tough to keep the reader invested when language and vernacular is out of place. That is not a problem here. There's a bit of Burroughs and Verne here, among others. The most amusing is the section of the story in which the characters are obviously in a 1930s or 1940s pulp era story, complete with absolutely absurd characters and dialog. I couldn't keep the smile off my face as I read this section, although at the same time I did a bit of cringing when it crossed my mind that this was what science fiction used to be; it's no wonder it used to be considered a ghetto.

In the end, the puzzle is not just figuring out what is going on with the different incarnations of the story; the Ediface itself is a puzzle,

a kind of inside out structure--hence the title EVERSION - that must be navigated in order to resolve the situation the characters find themselves in. Of course, there's another puzzle at work here, but one that only affects the reviewer. The trick is to review the book without giving too much away. To be fair, we've seen this kind of story before, but maybe not quite like this one. I guess in that respect we're all a bit like Silas Coade, remembering a story we've experienced before, just a little different than the one we're reading and experiencing now. [-jak]

WHY DOES E=MC^2 ? (AND WHY SHOULD WE CARE?) by Brian Cox and Jeff Forshaw (book review by Gregory Frederick):

In WHY DOES E=MC^2 ?, Professors Brian Cox and Jeff Forshaw go on a journey to the far reaches of twenty-first-century science to understand Einstein's famous equation. They explain and simplify the notions of energy, mass, and light. They demonstrate how the structure of the Universe is contained within this small equation. They visit the site of one of the largest scientific experiments ever conducted. That site is the now-famous Large Hadron Collider, a gigantic particle accelerator capable of recreating conditions that existed fractions of a second after the Big Bang. Overall this book gets into the details of some math needed to explain concepts presented but it never gets beyond simple algebra. So, this book is an interesting read but some math knowledge is needed. [-gf]

What Are Your Passenger Rights in Space? (letter of comment by Hal Heydt):

In response to Scott Dorsey's comments on baggage in the 12/02/22 issue of the MT VOID, Hal Heydt writes:

Shades of Flanders & Swann description of their tour of Canada. "Coming back, he had 120 lbs. of excess baggage. In the end, he had to leave her behind." [-hh]

Sound Barrier (letters of comment by Richie Bielak and Scott Dorsey):

In response to Evelyn's comments on breaking the sound barrier in the 12/09/22 issue of the MT VOID, Richie Bielak writes:

There seems to be a lot of evidence that the sound barrier was broken by other aircraft prior to Chuck Yeager and the X-1. Technically X-1 was the first to break the sound barrier in level flight.

There is a book I reviewed long time ago about this: http://richieb.from-nj.com/aces.html. [-rb]

And Scott Dorsey writes:

If you're going to be that picky, then you have to be even more specific. There were many occasions where propeller-driven aircraft were run up to engine speeds where the tips of the propellers were going faster than sound. The resulting shock wave, of course, caused rapid failure. You will notice through the 1940s a general increase in the number of blades per propeller in an attempt to keep rotational velocity down. [-sd]

GUILLERMO DEL TORO'S PINOCCHIO (letter of comment by Scott Dorsey):

In response to Mark and Evelyn's review of GUILLERMO DEL TORO'S PINOCCHIO in the 12/09/22 issue of the MT VOID, Scott Dorsey writes:

Given the massive-sounding changes, they should have called it "Carlo Collodi's Pinocchio," in the spirit of "Mary Shelley's Frankenstein" and "Bram Stoker's Dracula." [-sd]

DC LEAGUE OF SUPER-PETS (letter of comment by Jay E. Morris):

In response to Mark and Evelyn's review of DC LEAGUE OF SUPER-PETS in the 12/09/22 issue of the MT VOID, Scott Dorsey writes:

It's a DC project, not Marvel, and in the MCU the Deadpool movies did receive R ratings. [-jem]

Evelyn responds:

Mea maxima culpa. I wrote that in what was either a brain fart or a senior moment. But then again, I don't know which characters are in which universe anyway (even if the title does give it away). :-) [-ecl]

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

I started listening to "Literature and History", a podcast by Doug Metzger, but in the first episode he claims that the meaning of "Two sheep go Inana" would seem obscure to the people listening. Not for anyone who has read SNOW CRASH, that's for sure.

In the third lecture, he talked about THE EPIC OF GILGAMESH. in the epic of Gilgamesh, "When the gods created Gilgamesh, ... [t]wo thirds they made him god and one third man." [N. K. Sandars translation] At first this seems an impossibility, since genetics

works with dyatic fractions. But, hey--they're gods. They could actually build Gilgamesh's genetic code from scratch, with each gene hand-picked, and so could have one third of the genes godlike and one third human (assuming the number of genes is divisible by 3, of course). All this is on the assumption that godhood is somehow contained in one's genetic code, of course.

Then we meet Enkidu, who "ate grass in the hills with the gazelle and jostled with wild beasts at the water-holes." A trapper decides to subdue Enkidu (who is interfering with his trapping), and sends a harlot to seduce Enkidu. But "when he was satisfied he went back to the wild beasts. Then, when the gazelle saw him, they bolted away; when the wild beasts saw him they fled." This is the first appearance of the "virgin/unicorn" trope in literature.

And of course, the flood story originates at least as far back as Gilgamesh, which predates the writing of the Book of Genesis by a thousand years. (THE EPIC OF GILGAMESH was written around 2100 B.C.E.; the Book of Genesis was primarily written around 1050 B.C.E., with some revisions a few hundred years later.) On the other hand, there is some support for the idea that a catastrophic flood in the Black Sea about 5600 B.C.E. is what is remembered in both THE EPIC OF GILGAMESH and the Book of Genesis.

There was another interesting parallel between THE EPIC OF GILGAMESH and Judaism, in this case involving the Passover Haggadah rather than any of the scriptural writings. In THE EPIC OF GILGAMESH account of the Flood Ea rages against Enlil, who sent the Flood:

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    Would that a lion had ravaged mankind
        Rather than the flood,
    Would that a wolf had ravaged mankind
        Rather than the flood,
    Would that famine had wasted the world
        Rather than the flood,
    Would that pestilence had wasted mankind
        Rather than the flood,
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This structure seems copied in "Dayenu" ("It would have been enough for us"):

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    If He had brought us out of Egypt
        It would have been enough for us.
    If He had executed justice upon the Egyptians
        It would have been enough for us.
    If He had executed justice upon their gods
        It would have been enough for us.
    If He had slain their first-born
        It would have been enough for us.
    If He had given to us their health and wealth
        It would have been enough for us.
    ...
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[-ecl]

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Quote of the Week:

        Once you've put one of [Henry James's] books down,
        you simply can't pick it up again.
                                --Mark Twain
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