

MT VOID 09/22/23 -- Vol. 42, No. 12, Whole Number 2294



09/22/23 -- Vol. 42, No. 12, Whole Number 2294

Table of Contents

- [Correction](#) (pointed out by Allan Kugel)
- [Stanislav Yevgrafovich Petrov \(Fortieth Anniversary\)](#)
(comments by Evelyn C. Leeper)
- [GODZILLA '98](#) (film review by Mark R. Leeper)
- [THE GENERAL](#) (letter of comment by Gary McGath)
- [This Week's Reading](#) (random reading and "chuck-it" lists)
(book comments by Evelyn C. Leeper)
- [Quote of the Week](#)

Co-Editor: Mark Leeper, mleeper@optonline.net
 Co-Editor: Evelyn Leeper, eleeper@optonline.net
 Sending Address: evelynchimelisleeper@gmail.com
 All material is copyrighted by author unless otherwise noted.
 All comments sent or posted will be assumed authorized for
 inclusion unless otherwise noted.

To subscribe or unsubscribe, send mail to eleeper@optonline.net
 The latest issue is at <http://www.leepers.us/mtvoid/latest.htm>.
 An index with links to the issues of the MT VOID since 1986 is at
http://leepers.us/mtvoid/back_issues.htm.

Correction (pointed out by Allan Kugel):

Allan Kugel pointed out that the link in the 09/15/23 issue for my review of PATRIOTIC GORE was wrong. It should be <http://leepers.us/evelyn/reviews/wilson.htm#gore>. [-ecl]

Stanislav Yevgrafovich Petrov (Fortieth Anniversary) (comments by Evelyn C. Leeper):

On 26 September 1983, Stanislav Yevgrafovich Petrov probably averted nuclear war. Shortly after the Soviet military had shot down Korean Air Lines Flight 007, the Soviet nuclear early-warning system reported that a missile had been launched from the United States. As Wikipedia describes it, "Petrov judged the reports to be a false alarm, and his decision to disobey orders, against Soviet military protocol, is credited with having prevented an erroneous retaliatory nuclear attack on the United States and its NATO allies that could have resulted in a large-scale nuclear war."

So on Tuesday, raise a glass to Stanislav Yevgrafovich Petrov.

[See also Vasily Aleksandrovich Arkhipov and the Cuban Missile Crisis.]

[-ecl]

GODZILLA '98 (film review by Mark R. Leeper):

[Now that GODZILLA, a.k.a. GODZILLA '98, is being re-issued on 4K Ultra HD for its 25th anniversary, this seemed like a good time to run this review from 1998.]

Capsule: This film has little to do with the Japanese monster Godzilla. A mutated iguana grown to giant proportions gets loose in New York City. Most of the thrills are really warmed-over JURASSIC PARK. Matthew Broderick is wasted, but Jean Reno has some nice moments. The comic approach too often falls flat and does little for the story. Rating: 4 (0 to 10), low 0 (-4 to +4)

In 1954 there was an anti-American uproar in Japan. A Japanese fishing boat had unknowingly caught fish contaminated by an American nuclear test. The fishermen had been sickened but not in time to stop the fish from going to market. Japanese newspapers called the incident another American atomic attack on Japan. The Toho film company took outrage from this incident as inspiration. That combined with the recent successes of the film THE BEAST FROM 20,000 FATHOMS and the re-release of KING KONG inspired them to make their own monster movie. This was the bleak and very angry film GOJIRA. In the story Gojira was a mythical beast identified with a 200-foot radioactive dinosaur who comes out of the Pacific. Made on a very small post-war budget, it very ingeniously stretched some inexpensive special effects to massive effect. Some of the sets initially used wax miniatures of large structures to save money. Under harsh studio lights these props wilted and melted. As an inspiration an aerosol spray was added to the hand puppet that was Gojira's head together with the wilt effect combined so Gojira had breath that would fry chicken.

American film entrepreneur Joseph E. Levine saw GOJIRA and seemed oblivious to the anti-American tenor of the film. He crudely added additional footage with American actor Raymond Burr. The name "GOJIRA" probably sounded too Japanese for a country that had so recently been fought a vicious war with Japan, so the name of the monster was slightly modified to be less Japanese sounding but to still fit the same lip movements. The resulting film was redubbed GODZILLA, KING OF THE MONSTERS. The Americans turned this little anti-American film into a big international success, the first such success that there had ever been in the Japanese film industry. Godzilla has remained an enduring character in Japanese film, even as the character has been repeatedly modified. Two series of monster films have been built around him. Finally it was decided little more could be milked from the character, and Toho killed him off and licensed the copyright to be used by other studios. Roland Emmerich who made the films STARGATE and INDEPENDENCE DAY apparently wanted to do his own giant monster film. No name they could give their creature would have the marquee value of calling their beast Godzilla.

While the new Godzilla may indeed have been inspired by Toho's monster, the thing that they have ended up with has more differences than similarities. The new Godzilla is a mutant marine iguana owing its unusual genetics to French nuclear testing in French Polynesia. (Incidentally, there are no marine lizards in French Polynesia. The only marine lizard in the world is the marine iguana, and it is found only in the Galapagos Islands.) The creature, who would appear to be about a hundred feet high, with powerful enough hind legs that it walks bipedally, though bent over. The massive creature destroys a number of boats on its way from Polynesia to New York City, fulfilling a mission of his own.

Called in to investigate is Dr. Nick Tatopoulos (Matthew Broderick), an expert in atomic mutation called from a three-year study of earthworm mutation at Chernobyl. Nick follows in the wake of destruction left by the never-seen titanic beast destroying ships. Also following in the wake seems to be a sort of French secret agent, Philippe Roche played Jean Reno of LEON (in the US: THE PROFESSIONAL) and of MISSION IMPOSSIBLE.

A full-scale Godzilla movie with the sort of quality special effects that the Japanese could not afford to lavish on the film was, at least for me, an exciting idea. Unfortunately, this was not the film I was hoping for. The approach of GODZILLA is intended to be in large part comic, but only Jean Reno manages to make the humor really funny. Michael Lerner plays New York City Mayor Ebert and is made up to look like Roger Ebert. His assistant is Gene and looks just enough like Gene Siskel for us to realize that that is the point of the joke. But the joke just falls flat as often as it is used. As with INDEPENDENCE DAY there are several scenes that are homage to previous films, also just not very amusing. The film painfully lacks logic. People do some totally unmotivated actions to keep the plot going, though it often slows to a snail's pace. Or the plot will move forward by contrivance. Nico suddenly get the urge to do a very specialized chemical test on Godzilla's blood. It turns out he is looking for a result he apparently had no reason to suspect and which on the face of it seems impossible. But of course it turns out to be just the key chemical test to move the plot forward. Many of the effects and the thrill scenes are borrowed directly from JURASSIC PARK. The love story awkwardly thrown into the mix is totally superfluous. The empty plotting and failed humor attempts are certainly not new to Godzilla films, but it was hoped that they would be left behind with the low-budget special effects flaws.

The Japanese I have talked to have been anxious to see what GODZILLA was to be like with good effects and a serious plot. I am sorry to say that I expect that they will be disappointed. I rate this one a disappointing 4 on the 0 to 10 scale and a low 0 on the -4 to +4 scale. [-mrl]

THE GENERAL (letter of comment by Gary McGath): In response to [Evelyn's comments on THE GENERAL \(1926\)](#) in the 09/15/23 issue of the MT VOID, Gary McGath writes:

The movie isn't "inherently racist" any more than ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT is inherently pro-Kaiser; many Southerners enlisted out of mistaken patriotism rather than for the sake of maintaining slavery. In contrast, BIRTH OF A NATION is loaded to the brim with the worst kind of racism, explicitly glorifying the KKK. I won't give an opinion on GONE WITH THE WIND, since I don't think I've ever seen the movie, and it's been decades since I read the novel.

THE GENERAL is also, to the best of my knowledge, the only movie with a train wreck scene created by wrecking an actual bridge under an actual train. [-gmg]

Evelyn responds:

Some have pointed out that there are various scenes of slavery in the background of the earlier scenes which show how the people of Marietta were slave-holders, yet we are supposed to identify with them. Certainly the film is not as racist as BIRTH OF A NATION or even GONE WITH THE WIND.

And I'm pretty sure you're right about the train wreck. [-ecl]

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

I recently wrote about giving up random reading--letting my reading be driven by what I find at bookstores and book sales. I'm still not quite there (I recently picked up three books from a series of mysteries set in ancient Rome), but I did just drop a bunch of stuff off my "to-read" list. Most of them were books I had added because I read a review that made it sound somewhat interesting, or it was a Sherlock Holmes pastiche I could get from the library, or it got on in some way I can't even remember.

In the last few days, the Washington Post has run a couple of articles that relate to this. One is the idea of a "chuck-it list" (or a slightly ruder version): instead of adding to a list of things one hopes/plans to do before one dies, one should start looking at what is on the list and deciding what should come off because you have either lost interest, or because it is no longer feasible.

The other article is about books that have been on your "to-read" for a long time but you haven't gotten to. For many people these are daunting volumes such as WAR AND PEACE or REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST. (I've read the first, and given up on the second.) For others, it may be a book recommended or given by someone that they feel they should read, but do not have any real interest in. I don't have any in the first category, but much of what I dropped was in the second, though the recommendations were from reviewers rather than from friends.

But in any case my "to-read" list got shorter--at least until I went to Second Time Books and bought a half dozen books, and then ordered three more on-line. [-ecl]

Mark Leeper
mleeper@optonline.net

Quote of the Week:

A great book should leave you with many experiences,
and slightly exhausted. You should live several lives
while reading it.

--William Styron

Go to [our home page](#)