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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.

Space Station: Hollywood vs. Reality:

For an example of Hollywood vs. reality, see <https://wandering.shop/@cstross/111544578799536542>

Saturn Award Finalists:

A full list of the finalists for the Saturn Awards is too long to include here and can be found at <https://file770.com/2023-saturn-awards-nominations/>.

The Saturn Awards have been presented each year since 1972 by the Academy of Science Fiction, Fantasy and Horror Films and the winners will be revealed during a ceremony to be streamed from Los Angeles on February 4, 2024.

Mini Reviews, Part 13 (film reviews by Mark R. Leeper and Evelyn C. Leeper):

This is the thirteenth batch of mini-reviews, all science fiction.

WESTWORLD (1973): WESTWORLD is an older film (it was released 50 years ago in October), but with all the current brouhaha about artificial intelligence, it is certainly topical. In WESTWORLD, the giveaway on who is a robot is the hands, which they cannot get just right. That seems still to be a problem--one of the ways to detect A.I.-generated photo-realistic images is that there are often too many fingers, or out-of-proportion fingers. [-ecl]

Released theatrically 24 October 1973. Rating: +2 (-4 to +4), or 7/10.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0070909/reference>

What others are saying: <https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/westworld>

MISSION IMPOSSIBLE--DEAD RECKONING PART 1 (2023): MISSION IMPOSSIBLE--DEAD RECKONING PART 1 reminds me of "Macbeth".

In particular, it reminds me of Act V, Scene 5: "It is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing."

There are a lot of chases and stunts, but so far as I can tell they merely serve to 1) provide a whole lot of adrenaline rush for the audience that likes that sort of thing, and 2) provide a way to pad out the film so people will have to pay to see how it ends in part two. Also, the "science" of the "rogue AI" seems far too advanced for something taking place now.

And I want more Benji (Simon Pegg) and Luther (Ving Rhames).

As they say, this is the sort of thing you'll like if you like this sort of thing. [-ecl]

Released theatrically 10 July 2023. Rating: low +2 (-4 to +4), or 7/10.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt9603212/reference>

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

BIOSPHERE (2023): In BIOSPHERE, there has been some sort of world-wide disaster, and Billy and Ray are the last survivors, living in a biosphere with a bunch of fish for food. The quantity of fish looks totally insufficient for them. Billy used to be was President, but doesn't look old enough. (Actually, the actor is 47, and the minimum age for President is only 35, but the character looks--and acts--much younger.)

When the last female fish dies, threatening their on-going food supply, one of the male fish changes to female. Ray talks about "Life will find a way" and all that, and pretty soon Billy is starting to change as well.

There is a lot of stuff about sex and gender, none of it particularly profound, and the thought that these two people are going to repopulate the earth is pretty scary in itself. (Apparently neither has heard that the minimum population to reproduce successfully is close to a hundred, not two.) [-ecl]

Released streaming 7 July 2023. Rating: high 0 (-4 to +4), or 5/10.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt15301000/reference>

What others are saying: <https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/biosphere>

THE ROAD TO ROSWELL by Connie Willis (copyright 2023, Random House Audio, 14 hours, ASIN: B0BJ4M36YM, narrated by Jesse Vilinsky) (audio book review by Joe Karpierz):

Long time fans of Connie Willis know that she is one of the few writers that can pull off humor in science fiction (another that comes to mind is John Scalzi). With a title like THE ROAD TO ROSWELL, readers can't help but believe this is going to be something more light and and funny than her serious works--THE DOOMSDAY BOOK, for example--and they'd be correct.

Francie is going to Roswell for her college roommate's wedding to a UFO enthusiast (I mean, where else would a UFO enthusiast get married). They've been friends forever, and Francie has always been there to talk Serena out of making big relationship mistakes. Francie is once again going to try to do just that. After all, aliens and UFOs aren't real, and what happened at Roswell is just as made up as what happened at Area 51. So Francie arrives in town, and meets Serena at the Roswell alien museum to start either a) planning for the weekend's festivities, or b) hopefully try to talk Serena out of yet another relationship that is sure to fail. Serena has Francie try on her bridesmaid dress, and then sends Francie out to her car to retrieve some decorations that need to be put up in the museum.

So, what happens? It's obvious, isn't it? Francie gets abducted by an alien. This alien doesn't look like what we all expect aliens to look like. No, this alien is a tumbleweed with tentacles, and it makes itself very clear to Francie that it wants her to drive the car out of town toward...where, exactly? That's the initial question out of this abduction. Well, where and why?

As the story unfolds, Francie and the alien pick up Wade, essentially a hitchhiker; Lyle, a UFO enthusiast who is all bluster about aliens until he learns that he has just been added to the party of humans that has been abducted by a real alien; Eula Mae, an elderly woman who goes from casino to casino to gamble a bit and eat at the free buffets; and Joseph, a Western movie enthusiast who is touring places of the Old West in his RV which he calls a "Western trail wagon". Together the gang drive around New Mexico and Las Vegas--at the direction of Indy, so named by Francie and Wade because of his whip-like tentacles--trying to get Indy where he needs to go while all teaching him English, listening to Lyle spout alien conspiracy theories, Joseph talk about his Western movies, and Wade being, well, mysterious. So what we have is an alien abduction road movie in a book, complete with romance, humor, and a number of people who are not quite what they seem to be. Several of the group each have something in their background that spice up the mystery of Indy and the tumbleweed aliens.

This is Connie Willis having fun with her work. The dialog is witty and funny, and the story mostly moves along. There are sections of the novel that drag a bit in which the gang is trying to teach Indy English. Those sections are funny but tedious at times, but once Indy learns enough English to get by--and his method of communicating with humans is different--the story moves along at a breakneck pace, all the while not losing any of the traits that make it a joy to read. There are a few things that make you scratch your head, maybe making the reader ask themselves "now wait a minute, how did that work?", but given the nature of the story, it's easy to let those slip by.

Narrator Jesse Vilinsky does a serviceable job with the novel. Her reading did not take me out of the story, either with her voice, tone, or pronunciation. I've listened to a few novels recently where I was jolted out of the story when I knew that a word was pronounced a particular way. I didn't have that problem here, which is a good thing. On the other hand, there was nothing in Vilinsky's narration style that I would consider outstanding or noteworthy. And yes, one of these days I'll get a handle on how to better review book narrators. Today is not that day.

All in all, *THE ROAD TO ROSWELL* is a fun romp of a story. Willis is clearly having fun with her work late in her career, and I hope she continues writing stuff that brings joy to her readers. *THE ROAD TO ROSWELL* can be enjoyed by all readers, sf fans or not. I recommend it. [-jak]

Looking for Book and Movie Pairs (comments by Evelyn C. Leeper):

We are in a science fiction (and some fantasy) book discussion group which is a "Movie and Book" group. It was originally a "Book-to-Movie" group, but we expanded to a "Movie and Related Book" idea. (The last meeting was *SLEEPER* and H. G. Wells's *WHEN THE SLEEPER WAKES*.)

However, after fifteen years of monthly meetings we are running out of pairings, and in particular recent movies, since of late science fiction movies are either in franchises or based on original scripts. While it's true that one can pair *EX MACHINA* with "Helen O'Loy", we would prefer a more direct pairing.

Any suggestions? A list of what we have done so far can be found at <http://mtsf.c1.biz/seen.htm>. [-ecl]

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

Last week I wrote about two books that had a similar premise, but one was a non-fiction book and the other a novel about in an apparently different genre. This week I'm going to do it again (with a bit of a spoiler on the novel).

The first is *WHEN LIFE NEARLY DIED: THE GREATEST MASS EXTINCTION OF ALL TIME* by Michael J. Benton (Thames &

Hudson, ISBN 978-0-500-29193-1), about the Permian extinction. It was a bit more technical and academic than I expected (I was hoping for something on the order of Steven Jay Gould's WONDERFUL LIFE), but by judicious skimming and skipping I was able to get a good sense of the possible causes, and definite effects, of the Permian extinction.

The other book was ALL THE HORSES OF ICELAND by Sarah Tolmie (Tor.com, ISBN 978-1-250-80793-9), a novel set in the 9th century which follows a Norse trader to the steppes of Central Asia and back again. The connection to WHEN LIFE NEARLY DIED is the epilogue, which (SPOILER) describes the historical 1783 Laki Fissure Eruption, which killed 50% of Iceland's livestock and 25% of Iceland's human population (through starvation from crop failure due to contamination). This is not quite up to the Permian level, but clearly similar. The author suggests that it is possible that all the remaining horses in Iceland were descended from a single horse that plays an important role in the book.

I recommend WHEN LIFE NEARLY DIED if you are interested in extinction level events, and ALL THE HORSES OF ICELAND if Norse sagas appeal to you. (See also WINTER'S DAUGHTER: THE SAYING OF SIGNE RAGNHILDS-DATTER by Charles Whitmore, a post-Holocaust novel written in the style of an Icelandic saga.) [-ecl]

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Quote of the Week:

Have enough sense to know, ahead of time, when your
skills will not extend to wallpapering.
--Marilyn vos Savant

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