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Mini Reviews, Part 26 (film reviews by Mark R. Leeper and Evelyn C. Leeper):

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

MOEBIUS (1996): I watched MOEBIUS the other day, albeit under less than ideal conditions. First of all, it was on YouTube, so was interrupted for commercials every fifteen minutes or so. And second, it was in Spanish. It did have subtitles (well, closed captions), but they were also in Spanish and apparently auto-generated, since some words were missing, particularly proper names which were not always recognized as words. The also seemed to be strange abbreviations, such as "hbe" (if I remember correctly) for "hombre". Let's just say if I didn't already know the story, I probably still would not know the story.

The story is, of course, "A Subway Named Mobius" by A. J. Deutsch. This may have achieved its greatest fame when it was included in Martin Gardner's FANTASIA MATHEMATICA, although Groff Conklin's OMNIBUS OF SCIENCE FICTION was also widely read.

The original story was set on the Boston MTA; the film MOEBIUS, being an Argentinian film, is set on the Buenos Aires Underground (Subterraneo). (In 2014, murals commemorating the film were installed on the wall of the San Jose Station.)

The film is fairly accurate for most of the time, but in order to make it feature length, the screenwriters added a long mathematical/philosophical discussion between two topologists. Somehow the subway is outside of time, and travels at the speed of thought, and so on. I cannot claim to have understood everything said, but what I did understand seemed like the usual cliches.

There are six screenwriters; this was a film made by a group of film students and their professor. This also explains the cheap budget--US\$250,000. The budget necessitating filming in the actual tunnels, which ended up giving the film a great atmosphere. The Cathedral station was renamed "Borges" in honor of Jorge Luis Borges, the famous writer from Buenos Aires whose works included many references to mazes and labyrinths.

One language note: "sin fin" sounds a whole lot cooler (to me, anyway) than just plain "endless".

I would recommend this to anyone who likes mathematical science fiction and can at least somewhat follow the Spanish. It was shown in New York at one point with English subtitles, but I have no idea if that is available anywhere.

Released theatrically in Argentina 17 October 1996.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0117069/reference>

What others are saying: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/moebius_1996

SIMONE (2002): SIMONE is even more topical now than when it came out in 2002. Then the idea of a computer-generated actor who passed as human was science fiction; now it is more like one of those "day-after-tomorrow" stories (if even that far in the future). Actually, the visual technology of SIMONE is what is today's technology; her conversation is all produced by someone else speaking in her voice. Today, Viktor would have used A.I. to have SIMONE carry on her own conversations.

But Viktor nailed the current situation in a single line: "Our ability to manufacture fraud now exceeds our ability to detect it."

Released theatrically 23 August 2002.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0258153/reference>

What others are saying: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/simone_2002

STRAWBERRY MANSION (2021): STRAWBERRY MANSION could have been written by Frederik Pohl or Cyril M. Kornbluth, possibly with a dash of Philip K. Dick. In the future, dreams are taxed, but also, ads are inserted in dreams. (This is not a spoiler--you realize this early on.) But Bella and her husband(?) have invented ... well ... AdBlocker. This is revealed to the taxman who comes to collect the back taxes on Bella's dreams.

Because so much of the film shows the dreams of Preble and Bella, there are a lot of surrealistic video effects and situations, and the whole is frequently disorienting (with what appear to be nods to THE FLY and RESURRECTION). The poster makes it look like a children's film, but I would probably call it PG-13 because of some frightening images.

Appropriately enough, I watched this on Tubi, an ad-supported streaming service.

I'm going out now to buy a Feckle freezer.

Released theatrically 18 February 2022.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt11398346/reference>

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

Word Use and Mis-Use (letters of comment by Jim Susky and Larry Kaniut):

In response to [Evelyn's comments on word use and mis-use](#) in the 05/04/24 issue of the MT VOID, Jim Susky writes:

Sometime last century I read a New Year's review in which certain non-standard (mis-) usages were cited. One I remember--to NOT use "impact" as a verb. This "innovation" has an advantage--often it is a succinct way to replace a multi-syllabic phrase.

FORTUITOUS

Your opener (2024MAY05) caused me to seek out Merriam-Webster

<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/fortuitous>

As "dictionarians" must (eventually) do, M-W has bent to fashion, in that they (it?) have (has?) added "fortunate" to Definition #2--stating that this usage as been used in a standard if not elevated fashion since you (and I) were born (!)

M-W is NOT OED--only the primary "By chance" sense was documented as "first used" in the mid-17th century.

Few of us, I suspect, "read the dictionary"--instead absorbing words by context. 70 years of misuse has firmly implanted the "fortunate" meaning between my ears.

DIFFERENCE - ANCESTOR/DESCENDANT

At first this "got me going". Then realized that context solves the problem--one (most of us?) would not misuse one for the other in a phrase, sentence, etc. (parent/child anyone?)

I am fond of using successor and predecessor but will often pause to get it right.

USING PLURAL PRONOUNS IN ALL CONTEXTS

This one still ties a knot in my brain. So far I still use the "Queen's English" (now, of course, the King's) to the extent that the leader of a committee is not a piece of furniture.

Keep up the good work. [-js]

Evelyn responds:

No, the leader of a committee is a chairperson--nothing hard about that.

And if plural pronouns were good enough for Jane, they're good enough for me.

"Namesake" is another tricky one. It originally meant someone named after someone else, but now seems to also mean the reverse. This puts it in the same group of words as "cleave", "sanction", "fast", and so on; these are called contronyms (or contronyms). See:

<https://www.merriam-webster.com/wordplay/words-own-opposites>

[-ecl]

Larry Kaniut responds to Jim:

Good points. [-lk]

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

When I reviewed Thomas Jefferson's NOTES ON THE STATE OF VIRGINIA, WITH RELATED DOCUMENTS (in the 03/27/2015 issue of the MT VOID), I said of Jefferson's comments about African-Americans, "In some ways, Jefferson may have been a genius, but in others, he was a horse's ass."

Well, now I am reading FAMILIAR LETTERS OF JOHN ADAMS AND HIS WIFE ABIGAIL ADAMS (Kesinger, ISBN 978-0-548-12197-9), and I begin to wonder if it is a common state of the founding fathers. In school we all hear about how in a letter of March 31, 1776, Abigail wrote to John: "I long to hear that you have declared an independancy--and by the way in the new Code of Laws which I suppose it will be necessary for you to make I desire you would Remember the Ladies, and be more generous and favourable to them than your ancestors. Do not put such unlimited power into the hands of the Husbands. Remember all Men would be tyrants if they could. If perticular care and attention is not paid to the Laidies we are determined to foment a Rebellion, and will not hold ourselves bound by any Laws in which we have no voice, or Representation. That your Sex are Naturally Tyrannical is a Truth so thoroughly established as to admit of no dispute, but such of you as wish to be happy willingly give up the harsh title of Master for the more tender and endearing one of Friend. Why then, not put it out of the power of the vicious and the Lawless to use us with cruelty and indignity with impunity. Men of Sense in all Ages abhor those customs which treat us only as the vassals of your Sex. Regard us then as Beings placed by providence under your protection and in imitation of the Suprem Being make use of that power only for our happiness. [all spelling errors sic]

(Well actually, what is usually taught is just "Remember the Ladies," but I wanted to provide the context.)

And how did John respond? On April 14, 1776, he replied: "As to your extraordinary Code of Laws, I cannot but laugh. We have been told that our Struggle has loosened the bands of Government every where. That Children and Apprentices were disobedient--that schools and Colleges were grown turbulent--that Indians slighted their Guardians and Negroes grew insolent to their Masters. But your Letter was the first Intimation that another Tribe more numerous and powerful than all the rest were grown discontented.--This is rather too coarse a Compliment but you are so saucy, I wont blot it out. Depend upon it, We know better than to repeat our Masculine systems. Altho they are in full Force, you know they are little more than Theory. We dare not exert our Power in its full Latitude. We are obliged to go fair, and softly, and in Practice you know We are the subjects. We have only the Name of Masters, and rather than give up this, which would compleatly subject Us to the Despotism of the Peticcoat, I hope General Washington, and all our brave Heroes would fight. I am sure every good Politician would plot, as long as he would against Despotism, Empire, Monarchy, Aristocracy, Oligarchy, or Ochlocracy. -- A fine Story indeed. I begin to think the Ministry as deep as they are wicked. After stirring up Tories, Landjobbers, Trimmers, Bigots, Canadians, Indians, Negroes, Hanoverians, Hessians, Russians, Irish Roman Catholicks, Scotch Renegadoes, at last they have stimulated the [] to demand new Priviledges and threaten to rebel."

In other words, he is claiming that it is really women who have the power.

John Adams did write, perhaps more seriously, to James Sullivan on May 26, 1776: "But why exclude Women? You will Say, because their Delicacy renders them unfit for Practice and Experience, in the great Business of Life, and the hardy Enterprizes of War, as well as the arduous Cares of State. Besides, their attention is So much engaged with the necessary Nurture of their Children, that Nature has made them fittest for domestic Cares. And Children have not Judgment or Will of their own. True. But will not these Reasons apply to others? Is it not equally true, that Men in general in every Society, who are wholly destitute of Property, are also too little acquainted with public Affairs to form a Right Judgment, and too dependent upon other Men to have a Will of their own? If this is a Fact, if you give to every Man, who has no Property, a Vote, will you not make a fine encouraging Provision for Corruption by your fundamental Law? Such is the Frailty of the human Heart, that very few Men, who have no Property, have any Judgment of their own. They talk and vote as they are directed by Some Man of Property, who has attached their Minds to his Interest."

A comment on the Internet seems to think this supports women having the vote. This reads to me not as supporting votes for women, but as comparing women to children, and then explaining why men of no property should not have the vote either.

And in a letter from France to Abigail on December 27, 1778, John wrote, "The King and Queen are much beloved here." That wasn't true even then, and that became clear a few years later.

Like I said, a horse's ass.

Abigail also wrote (on March 31, 1776), "I have sometimes been ready to think that the passion for Liberty cannot be Equally Strong in the Breasts of those who have been accustomed to deprive their fellow Creatures of theirs. Of this I am certain that it is not founded upon that generous and christian principal of doing to others as we would that others should do unto us." I will merely observe that the states who claim to be "freedom" states these days are in fact mostly the states that Abigail is referring to, and are also the states most eager to take freedoms away from just about everyone. [-ecl]

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Quote of the Week:

As far as the laws of mathematics refer to reality,
they are not certain; as far as they are certain,
they do not refer to reality.

--Albert Einstein

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