



Table of Contents

[An Old Dog Can Learn New Tricks](#)  
[BACK TO THE FUTURE](#) (film review by Mark R. Leeper)  
[FRAU IM MOND \(WOMAN IN THE MOON\)](#) (comments by Gary McGath)  
[PERCY JACKSON & THE OLYMPIANS: THE LIGHTNING THIEF](#)  
(TV series review by Paul S. R. Chisholm)  
[THE NIGHT OF THE HUNTER and Charles Laughton](#) (letter of comment by Kip Williams)  
[This Week's Reading](#) (DEVIL'S CONTRACT) (book comments by Evelyn C. Leeper)  
[Quote of the Week](#)

Editor: Evelyn Leeper, [evelynchimisleeper@gmail.com](mailto:evelynchimisleeper@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 [evelynchimisleeper@gmail.com](mailto:evelynchimisleeper@gmail.com)  
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](http://leepers.us/mtvoid/back_issues.htm).

An Old Dog Can Learn New Tricks:

As proof that an old dog can learn new tricks, I am finally getting around to adopting the 21st century style rules and putting only a single period after a sentence, rather than two. This will only be noticeable in the text version of the MT VOID and in my emails, though I expect to slip up occasionally there for a while, sort of like writing the old year on checks. That I talk about writing checks indicates that in some ways I am still an old dog with old tricks.

[And even in typing this, I found myself putting two spaces after a sentence.]

Of course, the fact that "vi" still puts two spaces (when you join two lines together and the first ends with a period) may trip me up occasionally. :-( For that matter, I have to watch that it doesn't do that when the first line ends in an abbreviation. [-ecl]

BACK TO THE FUTURE (film review by Mark R. Leeper):

[For the 40th anniversary of BACK TO THE FUTURE, I am reprinting Mark's review from 1985.]

The last film that came out with Stephen Spielberg's name on it was GOONIES. After seeing that I decided that these Spielberg-produced films were on a downward spiral. I told myself that I would avoid them in the future. Then a local theater had a sneak preview of BACK TO THE FUTURE and hope sprang eternal. For the first ten minutes of the film I was asking myself why I didn't listen to my advice to myself and stay away. After all, why do I need a film about a cute kid on a skateboard and a horribly over-acted mad scientist? The remaining 106 minutes answered that question rather nicely.

In fact, BACK TO THE FUTURE has few or none of the script problems that I saw in GOONIES. Instead, we have a tightly written science fiction story with likable characters, a fair amount of wit that really \*is\* funny, and a great collection of time paradoxes presented in a witty fashion. Nobody who has read the basics of science fiction or seen much of science fiction cinema will find much in the way of real ideas, but the old ideas are tied together in a way as entertaining as they have ever been in the past.

The story deals with Marty McFly, whose father is a life-long nerd and whose life is in a shambles. Marty has somehow acquired the friendship of a really weird scientist (Christopher Lloyd), who one night reveals that he has made a few special modifications to a DeLorean car. When it is powered with plutonium and is moving at precisely 88mph, it becomes a time machine. It isn't too long before our hero finds himself trapped in 1955 and madly trying to repair changes he has made in history.

The script (by director Robert Zemeckis and producer Bob Gale), after a shaky start, is remarkable for clever lines and for attention to technical detail. In spite of a few bizarre touches, this film works as a piece of science fiction.

The cast is made up almost exclusively of unknowns. The minor exceptions are Lloyd, whose face is familiar from ONE FLEW OVER THE CUCKOO'S NEST--he played a belligerent inmate--and from TO BE OR NOT TO BE. Also familiar-looking is James Tolkan as the vice-principal of the local high school.

This is a +2 film (on the -4 to +4 scale) and I consider it to be the best thing with Spielberg's name on it since E. T.: THE EXTRATERRESTRIAL. [-mrl]

FRAU IM MOND (WOMAN IN THE MOON) (comments by Gary McGath):

Gary McGath posted in rec.arts.sf.fandom:

In 1929, Fritz Lang's silent movie FRAU IM MOND (WOMAN IN THE MOON) came out. It depicts a trip to the Moon which gets an amazing amount right, considering it was released 40 years before Apollo 11. It includes a countdown, a multi-stage rocket, G-force stress, retro-rockets for landing, and more.

I've written a blog post discussing the points it got right, along with a few errors and some translation problems.

<https://garymcgath.com/wp/fritz-lang-woman-in-the-moon/>

Also, I've posted this part of the film, with my accompaniment, on YouTube. I'm less impressed with the rest of it, and 2 3/4 hours of music was more than I wanted to do. The part in the video is about 40 minutes long, from 50 minutes before launch to opening the hatch on the lunar surface.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JVSXSEGXV2c>

If you want to see the whole movie, which is now in the public domain, it's easy to find on YouTube. [-gmg]

PERCY JACKSON & THE OLYMPIANS: THE LIGHTNING THIEF (TV series review by Paul S. R. Chisholm):

Rick Riordan's first fantasy novel, PERCY JACKSON & THE OLYMPIANS: THE LIGHTNING THIEF, was adapted into a Disney+ series. I think the series was, unusually, better than the original source material.

Context: Riordan's children's novels are part of the second best-selling fantasy series, for any age group, of all time. The first seven Percy Jackson books form the heart of the series. The first novel was made into a forgettable 2010 feature film; a sequel movie was released in 2013, but no third film was made. The 2023 Disney+ adaptation, with considerable input from the author, is much better.

Percy Jackson is a twelve-year-old with ADHD, dyslexia, and a tendency to see impossible things. He discovers these are all symptoms of being a demigod a.k.a. "half-blood," a child conceived by a mortal and a Greek god. From Aphrodite to Zeus, these deities are as powerful, petty, and irresponsible as the myths portray them. They are, to put it mildly, not protective of their children, who tend to die young.

Percy discovers he's a half-blood. He's attacked and chased by monsters, and finds refuge in a summer camp for young demigods. Once Percy is claimed by his immortal father, he's accused of stealing Zeus's "master bolt." Percy, another demigod (Annabeth Chase), and a satyr (Grover Underwood, who's been entrusted to protect young half-bloods) are sent on a quest to retrieve the missing bolt. Monsters pursue them at every step. They travel across the country before returning, by way of Hades's Underworld, to Olympus (the 600th floor of the Empire State Building). The novel is a good adventure story with a quirky sense of humor. Chapter 1 is titled, "I Accidentally Vaporize My Pre-Algebra Teacher."

Riordan, along with producers and writers of the Disney+ show, have carefully adapted the novel into an eight episode series. As with THE PRINCESS BRIDE, the original author trimmed what was unnecessary and expanded what could helpfully be fleshed out. For example, the book's quick trip through a theme park became a longer and much more interesting sequence.

Again like THE PRINCESS BRIDE, THE LIGHTNING THIEF was improved by giving the creator a second bite at the apple. I watched the series, then read the book. I preferred the series.

An adaptation of the second novel, SEA OF MONSTERS, will appear in December 2025. Disney has announced a third series, THE TITAN'S CURSE.

Recommended for fans of kid-friendly fantasy. [-psrc]

THE NIGHT OF THE HUNTER and Charles Laughton (letter of comment by Kip Williams):

In response to [Evelyn and Mark's comments on THE NIGHT OF THE HUNTER](#) in the 06/30/25 issue of the MT VOID, Kip Williams writes:

Laughton also directed and starred in a radio play, the "Don Juan in Hell", a stand-alone excerpt from MAN AND SUPERMAN by George Bernard Shaw, with Charles Boyer, Agnes Moorehead, and Cedric Hardwicke rounding out the foursome. I happened upon the LPs, but it's available at Archive.

THE NIGHT OF THE HUNTER is one of the most literal translations from text to screen since they pasted up printed pages of THE MALTESE FALCON. I saw the movie first, and the book and movie feel like two prints from the same negative in many ways, though James Agee's adaptation achieved the effect in ways that, like Raymond Chandler's script for DOUBLE INDEMNITY, worked in the intended medium--and so well, it feels like a clone.

And the atmosphere! Like you say. To me, it feels like a silent movie because the visuals are so very rich.

I sure would like to know why he didn't direct another movie! [-kw]

Evelyn responds:

Mark really liked the radio play of "Don Juan in hell"; we even bought a copy on LP on eBay before it became available on-line.

Apparently THE NIGHT OF THE HUNTER initially got negative reviews and was a financial failure, which discouraged Laughton from ever directing another. (And, of course, it also probably made it harder to find backers for another.) [-ecl]

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

I had thought that DEVIL'S CONTRACT: THE HISTORY OF THE FAUSTIAN BARGAIN by Ed Simon (Melville House Publishing, ISBN 978-1-68589-104-6) would be about the Faust legend in literature and the arts through the ages. Instead, it is more a political tract on how people have through the ages made their own "pacts with the Devil" to gain their own ends. So he cites the Molotov-Ribbentropp Pact as not just a Faustian bargain, but a mutual Faustian bargain at that.

This in itself would not be a problem, just not what I expected. But the copy editing at Melville House is terrible:

- Simon loves sentence fragments ("A biography that was at least rumored to be replete with espionage, torture, sodomy, and blasphemy.") and uses them to excess.
- He sometimes uses the wrong word ("the young Christ fastens a number of clay statues of birds which he then endows with life" when he means "the young Christ fashions a number of clay statues of birds ...").
- He will re-use the same phrase too soon, not for effect, but apparently out of carelessness ("the vagaries of class and gender" appears twice within a page of each other).
- He ignores punctuation rules, leading to confusion. Are "Dido, the Queen of Carthage, The Jew of Malta, Edward the Second, the two parts of Tamburlaine, Dr. Faustus, and the Massacre at Paris" six plays, seven plays, or eight plays? Only the lower-case "the" in the first title gives a [partial] clue.
- It has no index.

There is a hint of where Arthur C. Clarke may have gotten Clarke's Law. Clarke's law is "Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic." Simon quotes Roger Bacon as saying, "... many secrets of nature and art are thought magical by the unlearned, and the magicians trust foolishly in symbols and incantations to bring them power; pursuing them, they leave behind the work of nature and of art for the sake of the error of incantations and symbols."

I'll close with Simon's description of the "Faustian bargain" the German conservatives made with Hitler, as true now as it was then:

"Hitler's rise can be told as a tale of various coinciding Faustian bargains. To begin with, there were the capitulations and concessions given to Hitler and his National Socialists by the mainstream political parties of Weimar Germany, men who believed that Der Fuehrer could be constrained and used to further their own political aims. Like most conventional conservatives, they were elitists, nationalists, chauvinists, and racists, though not necessarily genocidal. As elitists, they found the buffoonery of a little man like Hitler contemptible, but they felt that his histrionics could be bottled, that he could be deployed as a creature capable of granting them power, but whom they'd steadfastly control. As distasteful as Hitler may have been to them, he was a tool for bashing liberals and labor unions, socialists and communists. YThey were felled by not taking Hitler seriously, by not understanding the demonic import of his claims. Nobody signs a contract with Satan and avoids hell."

[-ecl]

Evelyn C. Leeper  
evelynchimisleeper@gmail.com  
  
Quote of the Week:  
  
Show me a congenital eavesdropper with the instincts  
of a Peeping Tom and I will show you the makings  
of a dramatist.  
  
--Kenneth Tynan

Go to [our home page](#)