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An index with links to the issues of the MT VOID since 1986 is at http://www.leepers.us/mtvoid/back_issues.htm.

Mini Reviews, Part 15 (film reviews by Evelyn C. Leeper):

EL ETERNAUTA/THE ETERNAUT (2025): EL ETERNAUTA is a Netflix series whose title implies some sort of time travel. But the first six episodes have no time travel; only at the end of the sixth episode is there even a hint of it. Which is the other major problem: the implication was that this was a limited series, but it ended on a cliffhanger, a second season has been announced, and in general continuing means committing to an indefinite amount of time. Given that what has appeared so far seems basically "War of the Worlds" with some possibly magical elements(*), I think I will give up on it.

It is based upon a science fiction comic from Argentina which was quite a cultural phenomenon there, but apparently unknown here.

By the way, in spite of the ending "eternauta" appears to be a masculine noun.

(*) There is a battle scene where the shots from the point of view of one side seem to be in bright sunshine, while from the other they have an overcast sky. Is this intentional, or just bad continuity?

Released streaming 30 April 2025.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt27740241/reference>

What others are saying: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/tv/the_eternaut

DREAM SCENARIO (2023): The premise of DREAM SCENARIO is intriguing: Nicholas Cage's character starts appearing in random people's dreams. At first he is merely a bystander and observer to events, but gradually he becomes mote threatening, and then actually brutal. In parallel, at first he is merely a social media phenomenon because of his ubiquity. But as his personality in the dreams changes, so do people's attitudes towards him. The problem is this is all rather obvious, and unexplained, and (SPOILER) remains unexplained. (It's a bit like PICNIC AT HANGING ROCK in that regard.) There is a development at the end, but it does nothing to explain the phenomenon, but just build on it. This was a disappointment.

Released theatrically 10 November 2023.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt21942866/reference>

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

ISLE OF DOGS (2018): Director Wes Anderson seems to bounce back and forth between animation and live-action films. Before the animated ISLE OF DOGS, he did live-action film THE GRAND BUDAPEST HOTEL., and after he did the live-action films THE FRENCH DISPATCH and ASTEROID CITY, then a series of animated shorts for Netflix, and more recently the live-action film THE PHOENICIAN SCHEME.

ISLE OF DOGS may be his most political film; consider this speech:

[Mayor Kobayashi speaking in Japanese as Simul-Translate Machine translates] Simul-Translate Machine: As you know, we all hate dogs. Chairman Fujimoto-san, President of Kobayashi Pharmaceutical. You secretly introduced mega-quantities of infected fleas and contagious tick-larvae into a metropolitan city center, creating an unprecedented animal disease outbreak. Thank you. [applause] Simul-Translate Machine: General Yamatachi-san, Commander of the Megasaki Municipal Task Force. You oversaw the deportation of over 750,000 caged-animals to a nearly uninhabitable offshore refuse center. Good work. [applause] ... Simul-Translate Machine: Yakuza Nakamura-san, Head of the Clenched-Fist Gang. You eliminated all Pro-Dog opposition through the use of bribery, extortion, intimidation, and violent force. My compliments. [applause] Simul-Translate Machine: Brains have been washed. Wheels have been greased. Fear has been mongered. Now we prepare for the final stage of our conspiracy theory: the permanent end to the Canine Saturation Crisis.

There are also two haiku. Everyone seems to remember the one from the end of the film:

Whatever happened
To man&e's best friend
Falling spring blossom.

But I found the one at the beginning far more striking:

I turn my back
On mankind!
Frost on window pane.

Released theatrically 13 April 2018.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt5104604/reference>

What others are saying: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/isle_of_dogs_2018>

[<ecl]

NYT Summer Bucket Reading List:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2025/05/30/books/summer-reading-bucket-list.htm>

Briefly:

- Read one of The New York Times's Best Books of the 21st Century
- Read a book published in the last year
- Read a book in a genre you don't typically read
- Read a book in translation
- Read a book by a writer you've never read before
- Reread a book you loved as a kid
- Listen to an audiobook
- Read a book set somewhere you've never been
- Read a book that takes place during the summer
- Check out and read a book from your local library (bonus points if it's recommended by a librarian!)

Well, for science fiction and fantasy fans, number 8 is not a problem. :-)

And Hugo voters are pretty much covered in number 2.

There are several SFF books on the "Best Books of the 21st Century" list:

- Station Eleven, Emily St. John Mandel 2014
- The Collected Stories of Lydia Davis 2010
- Pastoralia, George Saunders 2000
- The Plot Against America, Philip Roth 2004
- The Fifth Season, N.K. Jemisin 2015
- Cloud Atlas, David Mitchell 2004
- The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay, Michael Chabon 2000
- The Road, Cormac McCarthy 2006
- Never Let Me Go, Kazuo Ishiguro 2005

I highly recommend THE COLLECTED STORIES OF LYDIA DAVIS (reviewed in the 06/15/2018 issue of the MT VOID). [<ecl]

THE TAINTED CUP by Robert Jackson Bennett (copyright 2024, Random House Audio, 13 hours and 51 minutes, ASIN: B0C6YMC RBM) (audio book review by Joe Karpierz):

One of the benefits of voting for the Hugo Awards every year, and thus reading all the novel Hugo finalists, is reading authors that are new to me. I say new to me simply because I end up discovering that an author that I'd never heard of has quite the list of novels in their catalog. Such is the case with the author of THE TAINTED CUP. Robert Jackson Bennett has apparently been around for quite awhile, and has a goodly collection of fantasy novels (which may explain why I'm not familiar with him, given that I prefer reading science fiction over fantasy, although if the fantasy is good or the author is terrific, I branch off in that direction) to his credit, some of which were award-worthy. This is also something I didn't know, but after having read THE TAINTED CUP, I can see why.

Dinios Kol (Din for short) is a new apprentice investigator assigned to Investigator Anagosa Dolabra (Ana, as you might guess). Ana is an unusual investigator in that she stays in her own abode most of the time and remains blindfolded in order to avoid overstimulation. Ana claims this allows her to concentrate better, and that may be true, but I suspect that the real reason is that she has a disability that makes it difficult to be around other people or external distractions. Thus, she sends Din to do the investigating for her, he reports back what he has found, and she uses incredible reasoning skills to figure out what's going on. Din is helped by the fact that he is an Engraver, a sublime (we'll get to that) who is imbued with perfect memory. This ability allows him to recall conversations, pictures, writing (although that is difficult for him as he has much trouble reading (we'll also get to that)) and all sorts of things that make him invaluable to Ana.

It's probably time to talk about sublimes and a little bit of the world of THE TAINTED CUP. The Empire of the story spends a good deal of time trying to repel the incursions of leviathans, which break through the walls protecting the Empire. Sublimes are people who are modified to have special skills--mathematics, strength, and perfect memory. The modifications allow them to serve in the protection of the Empire. Din is an odd one. He passed his Engravers test, but failed all the other exams, probably mostly due to his inability to read. Of course this bit of information comes into play during the course of the novel.

Ana and Din are assigned to investigate what turns out to be a very unusual death. The deceased, Engineer Blas, is found dead in a mansion owned by a very wealthy and influential family, the Hazas. The death was unusual in that Blas was killed by a tree that grew through his body. As this death occurred during a season in which a leviathan is about to attack the defending wall, Ana and Din are sent to the canton of Talagray, near the front line of the leviathan attack, to further investigate the death (which is now presumed to be a murder). And so the story continues from there.

THE TAINTED CUP is a fascinating and well thought out murder mystery. It involves a good deal of political intrigue, espionage, and complicated plots within plots, as the count of murder victims mounts as well as the number of murderers. All throughout the investigation, Din displays special talents and initiative, going places and doing things that no normal investigator would do. As for Ana, the reader can envision her sitting on a throne, pronouncing the truth of what is going on as more and more clues are revealed making connections that anyone unfamiliar with murder mysteries would just shake their head at in wonder (like me, for example). The final revelation, and how Ana arrived at is, is quite amazing.

THE TAINTED CUP is a tightly written novel with several interesting and engaging characters. My favorite, really, is Ana. She reminds me a little bit of Avasarala from The Expanse novels. Nowhere near as profane--check that, not profane at all--as Avasarala, but quick witted, with a sharp tongue that can make anyone wither if they are the object of her diatribes. But the other thing that's fascinating about the novel is that if you squint a little bit, and tilt your head to one side, you could think that this book could be considered science fiction. Genetic mutations? Check. Chemicals that trigger certain reactions in sublimes, especially Engravers? Check. Large monsters that are attacking cities? Think Godzilla. So while THE TAINTED CUP looks like a fantasy, tastes like a fantasy, and smells like a fantasy, it might not be a fantasy. But it was probably intended to be a fantasy, so we might as well go with it. I did like this novel, and might be tempted to read the second book in the series. I think it might be worth a try.

The real reason that I read THE TAINTED CUP is that it's a finalist for the Best Novel Hugo this year (2025 if you're coming upon this review a few years from now). I listened to the audio book rather than read a printed (or electronic) copy because I consume most of the novels I read that way. It's hard to not let the narration of the novel affect my view of any book, but I will say that narrator Andrew Fallaize was terrific. His portrayal of Ana was terrific, and what made me think of Avasarala. While I don't listen to an audio book based on the narrator (with maybe the exception of Jefferson Mayes, who narrated The Expanse novels as well as James S. A. Corey's new book), I'd be more than happy to listen to other books that he narrates. [-jak]

"The Essential Terry Pratchett" (letter of comment by Paul S. R. Chisholm):

In response to [the link on "The Essential Terry Pratchett"](#) in the 06/06/25 issue of the MT VOID, Paul S. R. Chisholm writes:

This is less a list of "essential" books than the reviewer's personal favorites. She suggests one might "find the flow charts daunting." For those who do, I recommend the text in:

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Discworld%2FStorylines>

For those who don't, there's a link there to a flowchart.

If you're still daunted, here's my recommendation: start with GUARDS! GUARDS!, read the other Watch novels in publication order at least through NIGHT WATCH. Then go nuts. [-psrc]

Magna Carta, The Book of Kells, and the Sears & Roebuck Catalog (letters of comment by Scott Dorsey, Gary McGath, and Blueshirt):

In response to [Evelyn's comments on the Magna Carta](#) in the 06/06/25 issue of the MT VOID, Scott Dorsey writes:

In reference to the Magna Carta, Evelyn Leeper writes, "One might claim, I suppose, that it is often cited in the same way as the Bible--by people who take pieces out of context and are unfamiliar with the entirety." [<ecl]

In my father's Orange family, this was taken in an almost-humorous way by the Book of Kells. "Male prostitution? Oh yeah, that's in the Book of Kells." "You need a recipe for pie crust? It's probably in the Book of Kells."

Many years later, I went to Dublin for the Worldcon and actually saw the Book of Kells and it was not as comprehensive as I had been led to believe. [-sd]

Blueshirt explains:

That's because the folios that had the pie crust recipe were among the ones that were lost in medieval times... [-bs]

Evelyn notes:

Magan Etheridge reminisces about the Sears & Roebuck catalog the same way:

"That big catalog was the source for most store-bought merchandise needed on the farm and the principal reference book in addition. An example of this function is that when I asked how to spell 'genuine' I was sent to the saddles and found the word in the description: the saddle was made from 'genuine leather,' of course. The catalog also provided a detailed education as to what ladies wore under their dresses ... the country boy's Playboy magazine years before that came about!"

<https://tryondailybulletin.com/2019/06/21/remembering-sears-roebuck/>

[<ecl]

Gary McGath observes:

There was a Robin Hood movie I saw where the Magna Carta is supposed to contain guarantees of rights to all the people, far beyond anything it actually said, and King John immediately tore it up (which also isn't historical).

When discussing it afterward, I suggested there was a first draft which he found unacceptable (and somehow escaped the notice of history), and he later signed a more limited one. [-gmg]

THE SEVENTH VICTIM (letter of comment by Jay Morris):

In response to [Evelyn's comments on THE SEVENTH VICTIM](#) in the 06/06/25 issue of the MT VOID, Jay Morris writes:

[Evelyn wrote.] "One thing that never made any sense to me was why Esther (who owned a cosmetics company) was so upset that her employee Frances was talking about the company's logo. It was the symbol of the Palladists, but if it was so secret, why did Esther put it on all their products?"

Was the logo known outside the group to be the symbol of the Palladists or just the logo of some cosmetics company? If the latter, and Frances was talking about the former, that could be a problem. [-jm]

Evelyn replies:

If I recall correctly, it was just as a logo. [ecl]

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

Listening to the BBC adaptation of THE LORD OF THE RINGS, I found myself wondering why all the characters in that and in THE HOBBIT react differently to the Ring. To take it chronologically after Isildur loses The One Ring (TOR), first we have Deagol who finds TOR. Almost immediately, Smeagol murders him for the Ring. So both of them seem to have been corrupted by merely being in the presence of TOR.

Then Smeagol has it for a long time, and it turns him into Gollum. I won't list all the ways he changes, but it seems to be physically, mentally, and emotionally.

Rivendell finds it. He has it a long time (possibly not as long as Smeagol), and he uses it, but it doesn't seem to have a negative effect on him, rather than his "feeling stretched" or "spread thin". The only negative effect seems to be when Frodo shows him TOR in Rivendell and he goes quite fierce for a second.

But he leaves TOR for Frodo at Gandalf's suggestion/insistence. He has some unconscious reluctance when he keeps forgetting to actually put it on the mantel.

Frodo has TOR for a while, but apparently has just kept it in a trunk or something. Then Gandalf returns with more knowledge of TOR, and that it is dangerous. Frodo offers him TOR, but Gandalf flatly turns it down, so somehow he is able to resist the effect.

They go to Rivendell, where the fellowship is formed. None of the elves there seem affected by the presence of TOR. For that matter, most of the fellowship (Aragorn, Gimli, Legolas, Merry, and Pippin) don't seem to be affected at all despite their extended time physically near TOR.

They go to Lothlorien, where again no one seems to show any effects. Frodo offers TOR to Galadriel, who seems tempted, but ultimately refuses TOR. (Or is she just telling Frodo what the offer implies?)

But as they are traveling, Boromir suddenly decides to try to get TOR from Frodo. Why? And why then? And why does his brother Faramir later declare (quite honestly) that he has no desire for TOR?

Meanwhile Frodo has been carrying TOR a long time, yet seems unaffected by it. Only when Sam offers to carry it, and later does carry it briefly, does he "fly off the handle."

Sam, on the other hand, seems totally unaffected by his contact with TOR. Yes, it was brief, but it took no time at all for Deagol and Smeagol to get taken over.

So how does TOR work? It's not a question of time (Deagol and Smeagol), nor of physical proximity (most of the fellowship), nor of race (we see beings of each race who are affected and beings who aren't). I know Tolkien was very diligent about his world-building, but I can't help but feel he was not as careful with this aspect. [<ecl]

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Quote of the Week:
Never fight an inanimate object.
--P. J. O'Rourke

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