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Tsundoku:

Today's magic word is "tsundoku": "the phenomenon of acquiring reading materials but letting them pile up in one's home without reading them. The term is also used to refer to unread books on a bookshelf meant for reading later." [-Wikipedia]

Mini Reviews, Part 19 (film reviews by Evelyn C. Leeper):

While I plan on watching most of the films on Mark's list of "Neglected Gems", I will be skipping a few. I think there may be one or two I don't have, and there are also films that I just find too unpleasant to watch. In this latter category are three films from the 1960s and early 1970s: THE MIND BENDERS (1962), WITCHFINDER GENERAL (THE CONQUEROR WORM) (1968), and BLOOD ON SATAN'S CLAW (SATAN'S SKIN) (1972).

UNEARTHLY STRANGER (1963): UNEARTHLY STRANGER was made by Anglo Amalgamated, who also made THE MIND BENDERS (another of Mark's "forgotten science fiction films") and the "Carry On" films.

The film is told in flashback, and there is an odd continuity problem which makes one think the framing sequence was added later by someone who did not read the script very closely. (In the opening, the character who is the skeptic in the main part of the film talks about how he believed and the other character was the skeptic.)

(Also, the claim is that the aliens don't blink, except they do.)

Once again we have a shot of a spiral staircase shot off kilter--this is a real favorite of directors.

Released theatrically April 1964.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0057623/reference>

What others are saying: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0057623/reference>

THE LAST MAN ON EARTH (1964): In general, people disparage voice-over narration, but if you have a movie called "The Last Man in Earth", and you aren't making a silent movie, you need something. What THE LAST MAN ON EARTH does is provide a voice-over of Morgan's thoughts, rather than a narration spoken to the viewer. It does seem a little forced at times, but I cannot think of anything that would work better. A large part of the film is flash-back, showing how the situation came about, so the voice-over thoughts are only about half the film.

(Okay, it turns out that the sentient beings who apparently don't count as men speak also. And of course, back in 1964 "men" was understood to include "women" as well.)

If garlic repels the vampires, why does Morgan just wear a necklace of garlic all the time? For that matter, are they vampires? They act more like zombies than any vampires from previous films. Actually, they are a mix: they shamble around like zombies, but they have the power of speech. They are also capable of feeling pain, which seems to fit with neither.

Also, collecting a bunch of small mirrors seems inefficient, especially since it's not clear what Morgan does with them.

The unsung heroes of this film are the location scout (whose name I cannot find anywhere) and the set designer (Brunello Serena Ulloa, who did only a half dozen films, all Italian). It is shot in widescreen black and white, and there are a lot of striking locations, both at the beginning, and then throughout the film.

Based on Richard Matheson's novel I AM LEGEND, its script was partly written by Matheson, but he was dissatisfied with it and insisted he be credited by the pseudonym "Logan Swanson". The novel has also been adapted as THE OMEGA MAN (1971) and I AM LEGEND (2007).

Released theatrically 06 May 1964.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0057623/reference>

What others are saying: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0057623/reference>

CRACK IN THE WORLD (1965): Apparently having a crack forming in the earth's mantle that is spreading and will destroy the earth is not enough--the screenwriter decided the story needed a love triangle as well. To quote Carl Denham:

Weston: "You never had a woman in any of your pictures. Why do you want one?"

Carl: "Holy mackerel! Do you think I wanna haul a woman around?"

Weston: "Then why?"

Carl: "Because the public, bless them, must have a pretty face."

Weston: "Sure, everybody likes romance."

Carl: "Well, Isn't there any romance or adventure without having a flapper in it?"

Englehorn: "Well, Mr. Denham, why not take a picture in a monastery?"

Carl: "Makes me sore. I go out, sweat blood to make a swell picture ... then the critics and the exhibitors all say: 'If this picture had love interest, it would gross twice as much.' Alright. The public wants a girl, and this time I'm gonna give what they want."

A lot of the stock footage in CRACK IN THE WORLD seems jarringly different in quality, and the science in this, especially at the end, does leave something to be desired.

Released theatrically 15 April 1965.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0057623/reference>

What others are saying: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0057623/reference>

THE DEVIL RIDES OUT (THE DEVIL'S BRIDE) (1968): THE DEVIL RIDES OUT was renamed THE DEVIL'S BRIDE when released in the United States (apparently to avoid sounding like a Western). There are two problems with this. First, there is no bride of the Devil in this film. Second, the soundtrack is by James Bernard, and Bernard has a quirk in his soundtracks where (when possible), he has the opening notes of the soundtrack be such that one can sing the title to it. However, Bernard is writing for the original film; when the United States distributor renames the film, this "trick" is broken.

This film also has the "fake ending" one sometimes see, where everything seems resolved but in fact there is yet another threat or twist. This is usually about twenty minutes from the end, and we first noticed it in POLTERGEIST. On our second viewing, when the "fake ending" came along, several audience members got up to leave (presumably to beat the rush out of the parking lot). We were torn between not wanting to give away anything to the people remaining, and wanting to yell at them, "Come back, you morons--you're missing the best part!"

(We see some of this in the multiple farewells of THE LORD OF THE RINGS: THE RETURN OF THE KING.)

Of the film, this is a stylish Hammer production, more literate than many of their films. The main flaw are some of the special effects, and the somewhat deus ex machina ending. The use of reversing and forwarding the film of one of the demons rather than creating more of the effect looks cheesy, and the spider is clearly crawling up a pane of glass.

This is considerably better than TO THE DEVIL A DAUGHTER (1976), the other Hammer film based on Dennis Wheatley's "Black Magic" novels, and miles ahead of THE LOST CONTINENT (1968), the third Hammer Dennis Wheatley film.

Released theatrically August 1968.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0057623/reference>

What others are saying: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0057623/reference>

[-ecl]

WHEN THE MOON HITS YOUR EYE by John Scalzi (book review by Paul S. R. Chisholm):

The Moon is now made of cheese. Okay, now what?

The answer depends on who you are. The President? The Pope? Young-Earth creationists? Astronauts preparing for an imminent landing? A space billionaire, specifically not Elon Musk or Jeff Bezos, building the landing craft for that mission, now on indefinite hold? Museum curators whose collections include (what were once) moon rocks? Finance bros turned wannabe gourmands?

Scalzi leans heavily into the absurdity of the situation in the first half of the book. Then the story takes a turn and the mood changes hard.

The ending, in retrospect, is inevitable. Even so, I was a little disappointed. (I felt the same way about REDSHIRTS.) I was also sad the book said nothing about outgassing.

Still, it's a good read. [-psrc]

Fear of Death (letter of comment by Hal Heydt):

In response to [Evelyn's comments on MICKEY 17](#) in the 08/01/25 issue of the MT VOID, Hal Heydt writes:

[Evelyn writes,] "But the logical continuation of that is that humans who believe in Heaven shouldn't be afraid of death, and the humans who believe in reincarnation/samsara shouldn't be afraid of death either." [-ecl]

By that logic, as someone somewhere between atheist and agnostic, I should be afraid of death. I'm not. I first faced my real chance of death a bit over twenty-five years ago and found it didn't bother me at all. (The situation was prepping for bypass surgery. Not all who undergo it survive. My vastly bigger fear was surviving with brain damage, which can also happen.)

Quietly, for a good many years, I have maintained that, if Dorothy's beliefs were correct, I will tear the afterlife apart seeking her out. If my beliefs are correct, all that is left of her are the words she wrote and the memories of the living. If I manage to carry out her last wishes, I will find out which of us is correct after at least another seventeen years. [-hh]

A CITY ON MARS (letter of comment by Hal Heydt):

In response to [Evelyn's comments on A CITY ON MARS](#) in the 08/01/25 issue of the MT VOID, Hal Heydt writes:

[Evelyn writes,] "I leave it to the reader to decide how likely this plan is, either in getting people to agree to it, or in creating a fully self-sustaining city when almost all the inhabitants are either children or permanently pregnant women." [-ecl]

See Asimov's story featuring "Might Maxon". I've forgotten the story title, but someone is sure the know once the character name is present as a trigger. [-hh]

[Evelyn writes,] "... Musk sets a million people as what is needed for a self-sustaining civilization, and seems to assume that is also sufficient. The logicians among you know that "necessary" and "sufficient" are not at all the same; if Forth Worth, Texas (a city of a million people) were somehow transported to Mars in a protective bubble, everyone would starve fairly quickly, assuming they didn't run out of oxygen first. How Musk thinks a highly technological civilization can be self-sufficient on Mars in forty years is a mystery." [-ecl]

Graydon Saunders in his "Commonweal" books grapples--peripherally--with the issue of how many people it takes to sustain a "technological" society. They periodically bring up the issue of whether or not 1.5 million is enough. There are references to a list being maintained of what they cannot--at any given moment--make for themselves with the note that the list starts with "abrasives" and isn't getting any shorter. One periodic mention is finding a substitute for tropical gums for binders in printers ink, as the Second Commonweal is completely within the temperate zone. [-hh]

RUMOURS (letter of comment by Paul Dormer):

In response to [Evelyn's comments on RUMOURS](#) in the 08/01/25 issue of the MT VOID, Paul Dormer writes:

[RUMOURS] is on Sky Cinema in the UK this week, and I've long been a Maddin fan, so I'm going to record it. [-pd]

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

SPEAKING IN TONGUES by J. M. Coetzee and Mariana Dimopulos (Liveright, ISBN 978-1-324-09645-0) is primarily about translation, and had its genesis in the fact that Coetzee wrote a short novel, "The Pole" in English, but which first appeared in print in Spanish, translated by Dimopulos. This led to the question of whether the English or the Spanish was the "original" text.

There were three aspects of translation that stood out in this discussion: gender, familiarity, and "mother tongues".

Gender: How do you translate from a language that is gendered and one that is not? In English, nouns are not gendered (e.g., "doctor" applies to both male and female doctors)(*), but pronouns are (or have been). In Spanish, both are gendered (e.g., "el medico" vs. "la medica", "el" vs. "ella"). In Turkish, neither are gendered.

(*) With exceptions such as "poetess", "actress", "Jewess", and a few others, many of which are disappearing from use.

So if the original is in Turkish, how does an English translation decide which pronouns to apply to an ungendered doctor who is not specifically described as male or female? And what does a Spanish translation from English do about "the doctor" with no pronouns: "el medico" or "la medica"?

Familiarity: In Spanish, "tu" vs. "usted" shows you the relationship between people--what does this in an English translation? And going the other way, how does the translator decide which to use when?

In some sense, both of these (gender and familiarity) are the same problem: distinctions in one language that do not exist in another. A common example given is that Russian has no single word for "blue", but instead has two words, one for "light blue" ("goluboy") and one for "dark blue" ("sinii"). (Both Google and DuckDuckGo translate "blue" as "sinii".)

"Mother tongue": If in a novel in English has some people occasionally speak in Spanish (being their mother tongue, or even as a way to conceal what they're saying), what does a Spanish translation do with this?

(When this happens in movies, I will sometimes switch the subtitles to that language, just to see what they do.)

Coetzee says to Dimoppulos, "your fantasy, that you were composing the book in Spanish, for the first time--that you were in a sense its author--was not unfounded." This immediately brought to mind the Jorge Luis Borges story, "Pierra Menard, Author of the Quixote", in which Menard does not translate DON QUIXOTE, but concentrates on the work so much that he in fact recreates the old Spanish as the author--the literary equivalent of method acting.

Coetzee also says, "In a film set in ancient Rome, you observe, we do not expect Julius Caesar to speak in Latin. But--a thought experiment--would it not be interesting if Shakespeare's JULIUS CAESAR could be performed in a hypothetical Latin two thousand years old, subtitled for our convenience in our own language? We might learn a lot from the experience, principally about points of untranslatability between Caesar's time and ours, points at which the Romans are irretrievably alien to us." But the subtitling is merely translation back into English, so it's not clear what is accomplished by this--there is no untranslatability visible to a viewer who doesn't know Latin.

And this has been done. Mel Gibson's THE PASSION OF THE CHRIST was entirely in Latin, Hebrew, and Aramaic, then subtitled in English. But it started with a script in English, which was then translated into Latin, Hebrew, or Aramaic. And the, that was translated into the English subtitles. This may be because subtitles have more restrictions than dialogue: they have to be brief enough for people to be able to read them in the time they are on the screen. (The rule of thumb seems to be no more than two lines of text, displayed from two to four seconds. How one would do this with rapid-fire dialogue is left as an exercise for the subtitler.)

(Of course, Greek was actually more in use than Latin at the time, but the translator decided to use Latin, for which there was more historical record of upper-class versus lower-class usage. See for more information.)

Gibson also filmed APOCALYPTO using the Yucatec Mayan language, although this was based on the modern language, as we have no records of what the pre-Columbian version would have sounded like.

All in all, a lot to get out of a 120-page book. [-ecl]

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Quote of the Week:

What has the study of biology taught you about the Creator, Dr. Haldane?" JBS Haldane: "I'm not sure, but He seems to be inordinately fond of beetles."

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