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Mt. Holz Science Fiction Society
10/10/25 -- Vol. 44, No. 15, Whole Number 2401

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Mini Reviews, Part 23 (film reviews by Evelyn C. Leeper):

THE QUIET AMERICAN (1958) and THE QUIET AMERICAN (2002):

THE QUIET AMERICAN (1958) was the first adaptation of Graham Greene's 1955 novel of the same name. Greene hated that his anti-war message of non-intervention was turned into one of pro-American, anti-Communist involvement.

The font used for the credits and some of the sets is more Japanese than Vietnamese and the characters on the bandstand seem Chinese. Vietnamese uses what is basically the Roman alphabet with some additional diacritical marks.

Also, the three main Vietnamese characters are played by an Italian, a French woman, and a Japanese.

While this version has historical interest in that it was filmed in Saigon in 1958, THE QUIET AMERICAN (2002) with Brendan Frazier is much better. The newer version was also filmed in Saigon, except it was Ho Chi Minh City by then. (When we were in HCMC in 2001, the primary souvenir we saw being sold on the street was a (pirated) copy of Graham Greene's novel.)

One *BIG* difference between the two, of course, is that one was made before Vietnam War, and the other after. This is emphasized by the end of the 2002 version, which shows a sequence of news clippings about the events in Vietnam from the end of the film's narrative through the Vietnam War itself. But to some extent that makes the 1958 version more interesting, since it shows what was going on when people didn't know how it would turn out. It's easy to make a film set in the past with a lot of foreshadowing, even unintentional foreshadowing, but the people of the time did not know what was coming. The example I have heard was that when the Romans left Britain to fight the barbarians, no one had any idea that it was a permanent departure. So having a character looking at the ships departing and saying, "I wonder if we'll ever see them again" or even "I wonder when they're coming back" would be inaccurate.

Anyway, watching the two provides an interesting contrast.

Released theatrically 08 February 1958.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0052106/reference>

What others are saying: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/1143978-quiet_american

Released theatrically 07 March 2003.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0258068/reference>

What others are saying: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/1118347-quiet_american

[-ecl]

As Usual, Science Fiction Got There First (comments by Evelyn C. Leeper):

From the BBC:

An "AI actor" named Tilly Norwood has been causing a stir after its Dutch creators said the synthetic performer is in talks with talent agencies.

Norwood could be mistaken for a young, aspiring actress when one glances at its social media. The brunette poses for photos and showcases a fully AI-generated comedy sketch, where it is described as having "girl next door vibes."

"I may be AI, but I'm feeling very real emotions right now," Tilly's creators wrote on her page. "I am so excited for what's coming next!"

(More at <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c99glvn5870o>.)

See below for Mark's review of S1M0NE (first printed in the 09/20/2002 issue of the MT VOID) for how science fiction once again predicted reality.

And commenting on S1M0NE, I wrote in the 06/14/24 issue, "But Viktor nailed the current situation in a single line: 'Our ability to manufacture fraud now exceeds our ability to detect it.'" [-ecl]

S1m0ne (film review by Mark R. Leeper):

CAPSULE: A Hollywood director tired of pandering to the demands of spoilt brat actresses uses a new computer program to create an entirely digital actress who can be commanded to just follow his will. Andrew Niccol creates a sort of dual to his **THE TRUMAN SHOW** in which the world is real and the character is not. The result is an often clever satire of popular culture. Rating: 7 (0 to 10), +2 (-4 to +4)

In a comic reworking of **FRANKENSTEIN**, a film director tired of having to deal with prima donna actresses and actors tries an alternative. Victor Taransky, played by Al Pacino, gets an opportunity to use a secret computer program that allows him to create a digital image of a non-existent actress named Simone. Simone is really short for "Simulation One." Simone is purely an extension of Taransky, completely in his control, but that does not mean that the whole project does not get out of control as this new actress becomes a hot popular craze.

The film was written, produced, and directed by Andrew Niccol. Niccol previously wrote and directed **GATTACA**, my choice for the best science fiction film of the 1990s. He also wrote **THE TRUMAN SHOW**. That latter was about a real person in a totally artificial world. This film has a totally artificial person in a real world.

There are several large gaps in the plot logic. The largest is that the film glosses over the studio financial arrangements with a non-existent actress. Some of what is done with computers in this film also seems unrealistic considering what the capabilities of computers are ever going to be.

Rachel Roberts accepted the uncredited title role. In the credits it is claimed that Simone is played by Simone. She is supposed to be playing an amalgam of several great actresses. She allows her acting to be totally the opposite of the genuineness of those actors. Similarly the films that Taransky makes with Simone seem strangely dull and stylized to be the great popular successes the plot requires these films within the film to be. Though it is interesting in this Frankenstein story that she was in her own way pieced together from dead people. Pacino has a great time and shares it with the audience. He plays his role with just a light touch of schizophrenia as he speaks the lines to be repackaged for Roberts's lips. In some cases he actually argues with Simone in much the way that Anthony Perkins argues with his mother in **PSYCHO**.

This is an amusing satire of the Hollywood star system. While this film is no **GATTACA** it does make for a fun, science fiction comedy. I will rate it a 7 on the 0 to 10 scale and a +2 on the -4 to +4 scale. [-mrl]

And Then There Was Dickens ... (comments by Evelyn C. Leeper):

In **HARD TIMES**, Charles Dickens wrote, "[Coketown] contained several large streets all very like one another, and many small streets still more like one another, inhabited by people equally like one another, who all went in and out at the same hours, with the same sound upon the same pavements, to do the same work, and to whom every day was the same as yesterday and tomorrow, and every year the counterpart of the last and the next."

In a reversal of science fiction predicting reality, that sounds like the inspiration for **GROUNDHOG DAY**. Indeed, in **GROUNDHOG DAY** we have the following exchange:

Phil: What would you do if you were stuck in one place and every day was exactly the same, and nothing that you did mattered?

Ralph: That about sums it up for me.

[-ecl]

Yet Another Example of AI Not Having Common Sense (comments by Evelyn C. Leeper):

I was watching the Great Courses' "The Foundations of Western Civilization", and the professor was talking about "Oedipus Rex". I got to wondering whether Jocasta was still young enough to have children by Oedipus, so I asked DuckDuckGo's "Search Assist" how old Jocasta was when she married Oedipus.

It gave me a very complete answer. It told me Oedipus was thirty years old when he answered the Sphinx's riddle and married Jocasta, who was in her late twenties or early thirties.

I will remind you that Jocasta was Oedipus's mother, and that the ancient Greeks did not have time travel, and leave it at that.
[-ecl]

Possible Evidence of Life on Enceladus (pointer to article):

The Guardian reports:

"The likelihood that one of Saturn's moons may harbour life has risen, experts say, after finding an array of carbon-based substances being spewed out of Enceladus.

"The sixth largest of Saturn's moons, Enceladus has become one of the leading contenders in the search for bodies that could harbour extraterrestrial life, with the Cassini mission--which ended in 2017--revealing the moon has a plume of water ice grains and vapours erupting from beneath the surface at its south pole.

"The phenomenon has since been captured by the James Webb space telescope, with the plume reaching nearly 6,000 miles into space. The source of this material is thought to be a saltwater ocean that lies beneath the moon's icy crust.

"Now researchers studying data from the Cassini mission say they have discovered organic substances within the plume, with some types of molecule detected there for the first time."

Full article at <https://www.theguardian.com/science/2025/oct/01/prospect-life-saturn-moons-rises-discovery-organic-substances>.

Books and Bras (letter of comment by Andre Kuzniarek):

In response to [Evelyn's comments on books and bras](#) in the 10/03/25 issue of the MT VOID, Andre Kuzniarek writes:

Re: "I popped into Walmart to pick up a couple of bras, which I needed more than I needed more books." [-ecl]

Hah, nearly spat out my coffee!

What you need is to combine books and bras--the physics mentioned here might be interesting:

<https://benbellabooks.com/shop/the-bra-book/>

[-ak]

Evelyn responds:

And of course, along those lines there's the classic, Robert A. Baker's STRESS ANALYSIS OF A STRAPLESS GOWN.

THE BRA BOOK's subtitle is "The Fashion Formula to Finding the Perfect Bra". Frankly, my opinion is that the perfect bra is no bra, but YMMV. (To give due credit, THE BRA BOOK is by Jene Luciani.) [-ecl]

FINNISH (letters of comment by Gary McGath and Hal Heydt):

In response to [Evelyn's comments on THE WHITE REINDEER and Finnish](#) in the 10/03/25 issue of the MT VOID, Gary McGath writes:

I know two words of Finnish: Kalevala and Linux. [-gmg]

Evelyn responds:

And sauna. [-ecl]

And Hal Heydt points out:

If I'm not mistaken, Linus Torvalds native language is actually Swedish (a minority language in Finland). [-hh]

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

SPANGLISH: THE MAKING OF A NEW AMERICAN LANGUAGE by Ilan Stavans (Rayo, ISBN 978-0-06-008775-7) is about a subject near and dear to my heart. My father was born in Puerto Rico and came to New York in the 1930s. (One of the things he claimed was that it wasn't until much later he realized there was a depression going on.) So he was a "Nuyorican", albeit raised at a time when English was not just taught in the Puerto Rican schools but was the language of instruction there as well, so he had a fair grasp of English. But when he spoke Spanish, there were occasionally snippets of English: "Vamanos a camping" or "a la izquierdo a la supermarket".

(His comment about the Great Depression not looking different than life had been all along in Puerto Rico makes me think that "camping" wasn't a big concept when he was speaking Spanish down there. And he talks about clerking in a grocery store in New York when a woman asked him for "thyme". Not surprisingly, "thyme" wasn't in the basic English vocabulary taught in Puerto Rico, but "time" was so as you might imagine, this led to some confusion.)

Anyway, this book is a 60-page essay followed by a 170-page lexicon. I am not entirely convinced the lexicon is useful, and I'm sure it's not complete. The essay is written in what I think is supposed to look like Spanglish, but too often that just means Stavans will have an English phrase followed by its Spanish equivalent, or vice versa: "... in no way do I disagree with those who believe that Spanish and English should be spoken well--hablemoslos como se debe. ... Me gustan todas por igual; I like them all the same."

And while I thought the comparison to Yiddish was useful (if a bit obvious), he never even mentioned Ladino, which is to Spanish as Yiddish is to German. It may not be as familiar as Yiddish (okay, it's definitely not as familiar as Yiddish), but its relationship to Spanish would seem to warrant at least a passing mention.

Stavans described riding in a taxi with an obviously Asian driver who was having no difficulty communicating with the dispatcher in Spanglish, reminding me of Neal Stephenson's SNOW CRASH with its "taxilinga": "He overrides the warning buzzer, jams the stereo over to Taxiscan, which cruises all the taxi-driver frequencies listening for interesting traffic. Can't

understand a f***ing word. You could buy tapes, learn-while-you-drive, and learn to speak Taxilinga. It was essential, to get a job in that business. They said it was based on English but not one word in a hundred was recognizable. Still, you could get an idea. If there was trouble on this road, they'd be babbling about it in Taxilinga, give him some warning, let him take an alternate route so he wouldn't get [stuck in traffic]. Taxilinga is mellifluous babble with a few harsh foreign sounds, like butter spiced with broken glass." (Stephenson loved similes like Slovakian loves consonants, the more jarring the better.) [-ecl]

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Quote of the Week:

Don't join the book-burners. Don't think you're going
to conceal faults by concealing evidence that they ever
existed.

--Dwight D. Eisenhower

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