



Mt. Holz Science Fiction Society  
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on that film, I will talk about three of Nigel Kneale's television plays for the BBC.

**NINETEEN EIGHTY-FOUR (1954):** This starred Peter Cushing (as Winston Smith) before he became a big Hammer star. One bit that resonated with current events is when Winston Smith is re-writing old news reports to say that Big Brother claimed the enemy would take place where it actually did rather than where he originally (and incorrectly) claimed he would, and when the reduction of the chocolate ration was described as an increase.

Actually, there are a lot of bits that resonate with current events. Alas.

The show was considered so horrifying and graphic at the time that questions were raised in Parliament about it. By today's standards, of course, it would probably get a PG-13.

It is available at [archive.org](https://archive.org). (Avoid the colorized version.) Released televised 12 December 1954.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt14473100/reference>

**THE YEAR OF THE SEX OLYMPICS (1968):** Set in a future when war, conflict, and other "tensions" have been banished, and the government controls the population by broadcasting sex (and the Sex Olympics) and telling people to "watch, not do." (They do the same with food.)

And then when a protester dies and the audience responds, the government invents what is basically "Survivor": three people on a (supposedly) deserted island, and various threats against them. Given that they have no idea even how to start a fire, or grow food, this seems a bit redundant.

And whenever something bad happens, the only audience reaction is laughter, because they have never learned any other emotions.

(It is true that CANDID CAMERA predated THE YEAR OF THE SEX OLYMPICS, but that was a fairly minimal version of a reality show. Not until AN AMERICAN FAMILY in 1973 did the reality show become a full-fledged genre.)

THE YEAR OF THE SEX OLYMPICS is available at [archive.org](https://archive.org). (Avoid the colorized version.)

Released televised 29 July 1968.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0142001/reference>

**THE STONE TAPE (1972):** THE STONE TAPE was a 1972 "Christmas ghost story" by Nigel Kneale broadcast on the BBC. The "ghost", how it is described by witnesses, how people react to it, and so on, bear a strong resemblance to those elements in Kneale's 1958 BBC play QUATERMASS AND THE PIT and its 1967 movie version.

We start with a bunch of "tech bros", and Kneale was very prescient here: they are every bit as obnoxious as the ones are now. They are moving into an old house to develop a new recording medium, but one, the house is much older than they think, and two, it seems to be "haunted".

At one time, this and THE YEAR OF THE SEX OLYMPICS were very difficult to find, especially on this side of the Pond. Now that the BBC is releasing most (all?) of their oeuvre, it is easier to see these works by the author who was known pretty much only as the creator of Quatermass.

(Kneale also did the script for SHARPE'S GOLD, and it was a doozy. He added an entire subplot of a tribe of Aztecs surviving in caves in Spain. Back in the day when the History Channel was the \*History\* Channel, they ran the "Sharpe" series with Sander Vanocur interviewing Bernard Cornwell about each episode. When Vanocur asked Cornwell why he had included Aztecs, Cornwell was quick to emphasize that \*he\* never wrote \*that\*.)

Released televised 25 December 1972.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0069316/reference>

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### **Harry Lime and the Cuckoo Clock** (comments by Evelyn C. Leeper):

In the film THE THIRD MAN, Harry Lime makes a speech contrasting Italy and Switzerland. This speech was written by Orson Welles, not Graham Greene, and is very dramatic and perhaps even convincing. But Lime (Welles) was wrong in what he is saying:

"... in Italy, for thirty years under the Borgias, they had warfare, terror, murder and bloodshed, but they produced Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci and the Renaissance. In Switzerland, they had brotherly love, they had five hundred years of democracy and peace--and what did that produce? The cuckoo clock."

Lime does not specify what 500 years he is referring to, but in terms of parallels to fifty years of the Italy of the Borgias he is conveniently certainly overlooking the religious wars in Switzerland between 1529 and 1531. For that matter, trying to find a 500-year period of peace in Switzerland, one has to dodge the wars in which it was involved in 1315, 1386, 1422, 1440, 1474, 1499, 1511, 1653, 1656, 1712, 1798, 1799, 1802, 1806, 1809, 1813, 1815, 1830, 1847, ... There is no 500-year period of democracy and peace. (John Calvin's government in the 1540s in Geneva was not a democracy.)

(Also, it is generally believed that the cuckoo clock was invented in Germany.)

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### **"Computing... There I Was" (new podcast):**

Member Richie Beilek has started a new podcast of interviews with people who have been in computing for a long time:

[https://rss.com/podcasts/computing-there-i-was/?\\_gl=1%2az6hs4q%2a\\_gcl\\_au%2aMTc5NzMyNzg0LjE3NTY4NTk4MTI](https://rss.com/podcasts/computing-there-i-was/?_gl=1%2az6hs4q%2a_gcl_au%2aMTc5NzMyNzg0LjE3NTY4NTk4MTI)

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### **A Trip to Mars** (pointer):

The New York Times reports on the 28th Annual International Mars Society Convention:

"A Trip to Mars? They're Ready to Go.

"Fans of the red planet joined scientists at an annual conference sponsored by the Mars Society. One attendee said he would take a 'one-way ticket.'" [-nyt] Full article (\*not\* paywalled) at [https://www.nytimes.com/2025/10/15/style/mars-society-convention.html?unlocked\\_article\\_code=1.uk8.anzQ.njPNHeJoFkgL&smid=url-share](https://www.nytimes.com/2025/10/15/style/mars-society-convention.html?unlocked_article_code=1.uk8.anzQ.njPNHeJoFkgL&smid=url-share)

However, I think that link is good for only thirty days (from 10/19 in this case). The paywalled link is at <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/10/15/style/mars-society-convention.html>

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### **Crackpots, Issue 2400, THE DIVINE COMEDY, Colonitis, and Freedom** (letter of comment by John Hertz):

In response to [Mark's quote](#) in the 09/26/25 issue of the MT VOID, John Hertz writes:

[Mark wrote,] "A sufficiently advanced scientist is indistinguishable from a crackpot." [-mrl]

One of Jerry Pournelle's notions was that 10% of any funding should be given to contrarians.

Also Ignaz Semmelweis comes to mind. [-jh]

In response to the 09/26/25 issue of the MT VOID, John writes:

Hurrah for No. 2400! [-jh]

In response to [Evelyn's comments on Dante's INFERNO](#) in the 10/03/25 issue of the MT VOID, John writes:

Whose tr.? I recommend Dorothy L. Sayers' tr. of THE DIVINE COMEDY. Even Gillian Polack, sore at the liberties DLS admittedly took to achieve "terza rima" (note that I use the term "achieve"), agreed with me that the notes are superb. [-jh]

Evelyn responds:

The particular translation I just bought is by Robert M. Durling, but I already had Sayers's (of the entire DIVINE COMEDY), as well as John Ciardi's of THE INFERNO. I also have H. F. Carey's translation from Project Gutenberg. [-ecl]

In response to [Evelyn's comments on THE PITY OF IT ALL: A PORTRAIT OF THE GERMAN-JEWISH EPOCH 1743-1933 by Amos Elon](#) in the same issue, John writes:

I haven't gotten to this yet. I do wish Brother Elon hadn't (i) succumbed to colonitis--a title so catchy as to be incomprehensible, followed by a colon and the real title; (ii) said "epoch" when he meant "era". [-jh]

Evelyn responds:

I thought I had commented at some point on the distressing occurrence of what John calls "colonitis", but I cannot locate the article now. It may be okay when the books are "face-out" in a bookstore, but when one is looking over the spines (as one does in a used book store), the catchy title is pretty much useless. A particularly egregious example is Doris Kearns Goodwin, who has TEAM OF RIVALS: THE POLITICAL GENIUS OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN; THE BULLY PULPIT: THEODORE ROOSEVELT, WILLIAM HOWARD TAFT, AND THE GOLDEN AGE OF JOURNALISM; and (in a burst of double colonitis) NO ORDINARY TIME: FRANKLIN AND ELEANOR ROOSEVELT: THE HOME FRONT IN WORLD WAR II. (One can argue that the term "bully pulpit" gives at least some hint as to the content of the second book in the list. [-ecl])

In response to [Adlai Stevenson's quote](#) in the same issue, John writes:

[Adlai Stevenson said,] "A free society is one where it is safe to be unpopular." [-as]

"freedom for the thought we hate", United States vs. Schwimmer, 279 U.S. 644, 655 (1929) (Holmes, J., dissenting) [-jh]

**MÜNCHHAUSEN** (letter of comment by Paul Dormer):

In response to [Evelyn's comments on MÜNCHHAUSEN](#) in the 10/17/25 issue of the MT VOID, Paul Dormer writes:

[SLIGHT SPOILER]

This turned up on the BBC one afternoon many years ago and I have since got the DVD. The opening sequence, with its

amusing reveal, really got me.

As the IMDb says, Erich Kästner, author of EMIL AND THE DETECTIVES, wrote the screenplay under a pseudonym, although no credit is given. It's said that as Goebbels commissioned the film, he and the director decided to make a film about a liar as big as Goebbels. [-pd]

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

The "Very Short Introduction" series is a series from the Oxford University Press of literally hundreds of books about almost every subject you can think of (and probably a lot you cannot). (Examples include advertising, astrobiology, cancer, Druids, family law, privacy, rivers, and work.) (There are 824 in the latest list I could find, including the scheduled but not yet published volumes.) They are 4.5 inches by 7 inches (or 11cm by 17.5cm), and about 150 pages each, give or take. As I had noted, I picked up about fifteen of these recently and am working my way through them chronologically. So far I have read "Classics" and "History", and am now reading "The Ancient Near East", to be followed by "Ancient Assyria". "Classics" is not about \*the\* classics, as in just literature, but rather the entire field of study about the Greeks and Romans, and in particular focuses on a specific temple in an isolated part of Greece, its origins, purpose, uses, etc.

I am also working my way through the dozen or so Great Courses I have recently bought. In the car, I am listening to "The Joy of Science" (60 lessons). I have just finished "Foundations of Western Civilization" on DVD, and am now watching "The History of Science Antiquity-1700" (36 lessons), to be followed by "The History of Science 1700-1900" (also 36 lessons).

And then there's BABYLON 5. (I'm in Season 4.) After that, THE SOPRANOS is waiting in the wings.

All this has cut into my \*film\* watching. This is a real change in lifestyle; I find myself weirdly feeling guilty if I don't watch at least one movie a day. I realize this makes no sense, but over forty years of dedicated film watching with Mark (dating from when we got our first VCR) makes it seem like a fixture.

I therefore find myself adding films to my to-watch list and then eventually realizing that it isn't that I \*want\* to watch them, but that I feel that I should.

(Obviously, I am still watching enough to write the mini-review columns, so I haven't given up entirely.) [-ecl]

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**Quote of the Week:**

A Galileo could no more be elected president of the United States than he could be elected Pope of Rome. Both high posts are reserved for men favored by God with an extraordinary genius for swathing the bitter facts of life in bandages of self-illusion.

--H. L. Mencken

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