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http://leepers.us/mtvoid/back_issues.htm.

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THALE (2012): THALE is a Norwegian folklore film, just as WHITE REINDEER was a Finnish folklore film. But I suspect THALE was made with the intent of reaching a wider audience, and in fact was sold to fifty countries after its release. Thus is the difference between the international film market between 1952 and 2012. The budget sounds more like a 1952 budget, though--\$10,000--less than the cost of a new roof.

In THALE, two men who work for a company that cleans up death scenes find a girl hiding in the basement of a cabin that is a clean-up site. She seems unable to speak, but there are some audiocassettes that give tantalizing hints of what has happened. In fact, one criticism of the film is that it is too talky in terms of explanation. The ultimate explanation seems to have some parallels in the early evolution of the various species of the genus Homo.

THALE's success may have inspired other Norwegian folk horror films such as TROLL HUNTER (2010) or TROLL (2022) (not to be confused with the 1986 American film TROLL) and its sequel, TROLL 2.

Released theatrically 05 April 2013; currently streaming on Hoopla.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt2112287/reference>

What others are saying: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/thale_2012

A HARD PROBLEM (2021): The idea in A HARD PROBLEM is not a new one, at least in written science fiction. And there are films with similar ideas, though not the specific idea of the film. Ironically, the idea has been discussed in the real world as something that might be possible in the future.

The film raises issues of self-awareness, consciousness, and purpose. The title refers to 'the Hard Problem of Consciousness'--how humans (and others) have subjective experiences (qualia). These have been in science fiction for a long time. The difference in this film is the origin of the beings involved, which does not really add that much.

I realize this is all very vague, but I don't want to give too much away.

Released streaming 12 December 2023.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt11080042/reference>

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

DEAN MARTIN: KING OF COOL (2021): DEAN MARTIN: KING OF COOL covers Dean Martin's life--his entire life, not just the history of Martin and (Jerry) Lewis, and not just the history of the "Rat Pack", though both of those are covered.

The emphasis is on Martin as a family man, in spite of the fact that he was divorced three times. This seemed to be more because he loved all his children and remained close to them in spite of this.

As for Martin & Lewis, DEAN MARTIN: KING OF COOL makes it out to be entirely Lewis's fault. This may be true, but it is also reasonable to apply a certain level of skepticism, as it is not clear that the filmmakers ever got Lewis's side of the story. (One of Lewis's children was interviewed, but never spoke about the causes of the break-up--at least on camera.)

The famed 'reconciliation' arranged by Sinatra on the Jerry Lewis Telethon never really lasted. However, when Martin's son died, Lewis unobtrusively attended the funeral.

There are a couple of interesting takeaways, one favorable and one unfavorable.

Favorable: Martin stood by his friends. The Rat Pack supported JFK throughout his campaign, but Kennedy invited only Martin, Peter Lawford, Frank Sinatra, and Joey Bishop to his Inauguration Dinner. He excluded Sammy Davis, Jr., because Davis's wife was white. Sinatra and Bishop attended anyway, but Martin refused to go. (Ironically, up to this point JFK had

been very friendly with Sinatra, but after he was elected, he realized that Sinatra's Mafia ties made Sinatra a liability, and he cut all ties with him. This is shown dramatically in the narrative film THE RAT PACK.)

Unfavorable: When Martin started doing a solo act, he played a drunk. In reality, he was not a drunk, and drank apple juice on stage. But he made being drunk look cool.

Additional topical note:

The show features the Christmas shows with Dean Martin and Frank Sinatra. Stephen Miller (Trump's deputy chief of staff for policy and Homeland Security advisor, as well as the man behind the immigration agenda) recently posted, "Watched the Dean Martin and Frank Sinatra Family Christmas with my kids. Imagine watching that and thinking America needed infinity migrants from the third world."

Ignoring the use of "infinity" as an adjective, Miller was soundly roasted for his tweet.

Brian Krassenstein: "Both Dean Martin and Frank Sinatra were children of immigrants. Dean Martin didn't even begin to learn english until he was 5. Imagine watching a show with your kids and trying to figure out ways to use it to attack immigrants who are in need on Christmas day."

Rolling Stone politics reporter Nikki McCann Ramirez: "Dean Martin was born Dino Paul Crocetti and gave himself a stage name because of braindead xenophobes like Stephen. Sinatra was also a child of Italian immigrants. Imagine watching them and thinking immigrants didn't build the culture you fetishize today."

Bill Kristol, editor at large The Bulwark: "The parents of Frank Sinatra and Dean Martin (b. Dino Crocetti) were immigrants from ~third world~ parts of Italy. In the U.S., various Sinatras and Crocettis had occasional run-ins with the law. They were the kinds of immigrants Stephen Miller would have been eager to deport."

I will just quote Jeff MacNelly (from the comic strip "Shoe"): "You can't fix stupid."

Released theatrically 19 Nov 2021.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt11346000/reference>

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

SUNDAY BEST: THE UNTOLD STORY OF ED SULLIVAN (2025): SUNDAY BEST is not quite a biography of Ed Sullivan, and not quite a history of THE ED SULLIVAN SHOW. It is a bit of both, but focusing on Sullivan as an instrument of social change.

It was not just Elvis Presley and the Beatles. It was the stars from the neighborhood where Sullivan was born--Harlem. And it was the African-American performers from all over the world that Sullivan booked that put black faces on the television screen when the only black faces on television were whites in black-face.

And he did not just book them. He stood next to them, he shook hands with them, he put his arm around them--all actions that the network censors had told him not to do.

But one thing I noticed watching this was that every time they panned across the audience of the show, every audience member was white.

Released streaming 07 July 2025.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt7264336/reference>

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

[-ecl]

Riddle (answer to riddle [and new riddle] by Keith F. Lynch):

Last week we published this riddle from Keith F. Lynch:

What do Australia, Chile, Costa Rica, Cuba, Czechia, France, Iceland, Laos, Liberia, Luxembourg, Netherlands, New Zealand, North Korea, Norway, Panama, Russia, Samoa, Slovakia, Taiwan, Thailand, Trinidad & Tobago, the United Kingdom, and the United States have in common? [-kfl]

John Kerr-Mudd mused:

Eccentrically positioned Capitals? (hmm, not Czechia, France, Luxembourg, Panama). Narrow little sticky-out bits? Ah, parts you need a boat to get to some other bits of?

Ah well, I gave it a go. [-jkm]

Evelyn notes:

I suspect most countries have "narrow little sticky-out bits," and everything not land-locked (and not having large lakes) has "parts you need a boat to get to some other bits of." [-ecl]

Keith answers:

They all have red, white, and blue flags, i.e. their flags contain all three colors and contain no other colors.

(Correction: Costa Rica's flag also contains a small amount of green.)

Can you name any nation whose flag contains *none* of these three colors? As far as I can tell, there's currently just one. [-kfl]

Science Fiction as a Predictor (pointer to article, with comments by Evelyn C. Leeper):

The Guardian had an article titled "Mass surveillance, the metaverse, making America 'great again': the novelists who predicted our present"; the title says it all.

As a bonus it also mentions Borges in the subtitle: "From Jorge Luis Borges to George Orwell and Margaret Atwood, novelists have foreseen some of the major developments of our age. What can we learn from their prophecies?":

"It's often said that Borges's story ["The Garden of Forking Paths"] foreshadows the multiverse hypothesis in quantum physics--first proposed by Hugh Everett in 1957, then popularised by Bryce DeWitt in the 1970s as the 'many worlds interpretation' of quantum mechanics."

They're wrong of course, in the sense that Murray Leinster's "Sidewise in Time" (1934) predates "The Garden of Forking Paths" (1941) by seven years.

At any rate, here's the article; I believe it is not paywalled:

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2026/jan/10/mass-surveillance-the-metaverse-making-america-great-again-the-novelists-who-predicted-our-present>

YOUR BEHAVIOR WILL BE MONITORED (comment by Evelyn C. Leeper):

In response to [Joe Karpierz's review of YOUR BEHAVIOR WILL BE MONITORED](#) in the 01/09/26 issue of the MT VOID, Evelyn writes:

Joe wrote:

Those readers who work or have worked in a corporate environment will recognize situations from their own corporate life. This makes the story relatable and (to me) funny. I've been in enough meetings that look like those in the novel that I swear Einstein was sitting right next to me in them. [-jak]

This brought to mind this extract from Connie Willis's novella 'Bellwether':

"All right, fellow workers," Management said. "Do you have your five objectives? Flip, would you collect them?"

Elaine looked stricken. Gina snatched the list from her and wrote rapidly:

1. Optimize potential.
2. Facilitate empowerment.
3. Implement visioning.
4. Strategize priorities.
5. Augment core structures.

"How did you do that?" I said admiringly.

"Those are the five things I always write down," she said and handed the list to Flip...

[-cw]

[-ecl]

Hard Science Fiction, Soft Science Fiction, and Fantasy (letter of comment by John Hertz):

In response to [Dale Skran's comments on why hard SF is losing its audience](#) in the 12/26/25 issue of the MT VOID, John Hertz writes:

Even I observed that Dale Skran's ChapGPT paragraph ion the thick of vociferous talk about Artificial Intelligence at .

I'll let others discuss whether the paragraph reveals its ChatGPT origin, whether the question was wisely (or satirically) posed to ChatGPT, and like that.

It makes a sad and I believe mundane (if I may use that term) assumption, that speculative fiction (in which I include science fiction and fantasy, although Heinlein said not to) is in the predicting, or the hoping, business; readers like it if it appears to promote a world they want, or work against one they don't.

Setting this aside--if possible--here are some further thoughts I propose for attention.

Are the terms "hard" and "soft" science questionable? I believe they emerged in the 1960s from sociology--a "soft" science--and to some extent put down "hard" science; "soft" science is welcoming, "hard" science is harsh; then of course they were adopted defiantly in the "hard" sciences.

Setting this aside--if possible--I too have the impression that more "soft" science fiction than "hard" appears these days, and more fantasy than science fiction. I don't object to fantasy; some of it is quite good; a few authors have done both, even (if I may use that term) Heinlein and Niven. I don't say this (if true) is sex-related: I'd consider FRANKENSTEIN "hard" science--although it's one of those books everybody talks about but nobody has read; and women have done "hard" science--I recently proposed for Best Related Work a biography of Marie Curie.

Five decades ago [James] Michener's SPACE--a novel I think we neglect (is it science fiction? back into the can, worms!)-has scientists more involved with art than artists with science. True? Relevant?

I see resistance among some college students--how large a part of the public? of the book-buying public?--to requirements that they study outside their major interest. I've run into science students protesting, as even worse than "soft" science, general education--such worthless subjects as literature and philosophy. Widespread? Contrary to SPACE? (Can fiction be contradicted? back, worms!) Do literature and philosophy count among the arts?

Speaking as a philosophy major, and a literature lover, I confess that all too much of these is, bluntly, glop. My own profession--I'm a lawyer--is a terrible offender.

Fifteen decades ago one of the most literary and philosophical lawyers, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., said "the life of the law has not been logic: it has been experience." True? Relevant?

Eight decades Vladimir Nabokov, active in both literature and "hard" science, said "this is the worst thing a reader can do, he identifies himself with a character in the book." True? Relevant?

Today we are not invited to do things, but to experience them. Do readers want to immerse themselves? Do more thus want fantasy than science fiction? If so, why? Do authors think so? Publishers? Hugo voters?

As Nabokov used to say, ponder this. [-jh]

Evelyn responds:

You seem to move back and forth between talking about "hard science fiction" and "hard science". FRANKENSTEIN was science fiction (and yes, I have read it, as well as Shelley's THE LAST MAN), but Marie Curie was doing science.

As for writing both hard science fiction and fantasy, Catherine Asaro comes to mind.

I will also note that fantasy is taking over not just speculative fiction, but mainstream fiction. On a recent trip to the public library, a friend and I noticed that a substantial percentage of books filed in the "Fiction" section were actually fantasy: time travel (with any science fiction basis), ghosts, magical realism, etc. [-ecl]

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

In the preface to THE PRINCESS BRIDE (1973, Ballantine, ISBN 0-345-25483-X), William Goldman writes, "Fact: BUTCH CASSIDY AND THE SUNDANCE KID is, no question, the most popular thing I've ever been connected with. When I die, if the Times gives me an obit, it's going to be because of BUTCH."

William Goldman's most famous quote is that in Hollywood, "Nobody knows anything."

Well, he knew half of it. Yes, his New York Times obituary started out, "William Goldman ... won Academy Awards for his screenplays for 'Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid' and 'All the President's Men' ..."

But it went on to say, "Mr. Goldman ... was a prolific novelist as well, and several of his screenplays were adapted from his own novels, notably 'The Princess Bride' and 'Marathon Man.'" So while BUTCH CASSIDY AND THE SUNDANCE KID

was mentioned first, THE PRINCESS BRIDE was recognized as well.

As for the book itself (and the film), Goldman seems oddly prescient.

Florin is celebrating its 500th anniversary. The United States is now celebrating its 250th.

One of the villains in THE PRINCESS BRIDE has six fingers on his right hand. A "photograph" of Trump praying in church was shown to be AI-generated when people noticed he had six fingers on his right hand.

Prince Humperdinck is generating false narratives and false evidence to start a war with Guilder. Trump said Venezuela was about drugs (Venezuela is not a major supplier of drugs to the US), and then about regime change (though he left in place everyone else in Maduro's regime). So far as anyone can tell, it was about oil. (This is not the only current example.)

I'm still torn between "warthog-faced baboon" and "miserable, vomitous mass".

In THE TOTALLY GEEKY GUIDE TO 'THE PRINCESS BRIDE' (Lulu.com, ISBN 978-1-847-28739-7), MaryAnn Johanson writes, "When, for example, Princess Buttercup is in great danger, seemingly, of being eaten by the Shrieking Eels, the logical part of our moviegoing brains knows that she'll be fine, she will be safe--she has to be safe, because she is a major character in this story, and her story has not yet resolved itself in any way that satisfies what we unconsciously understand are the demands of storytelling; she must be reunited with Westley, her true love, or she must fail to be reunited with him through some action or fault of her own..."

I have seen this argument put forward by other critics about other movies: we fear for the heroine, but we also know she will survive whatever peril there is, because she is the heroine.

I have just one question for these critics: have they never seen PSYCHO? [-ecl]

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Quote of the Week:

Fanaticism consists of redoubling your efforts when you
have forgotten your aim.

--George Santayana

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