

MT VOID Typeface (comments by Evelyn C. Leeper):

Reports are that the typeface is much better. Now I just hope I can remember how to keep it that way! [-ecl]

Mini Reviews, Part 8 (film reviews by Mark R. Leeper and Evelyn C. Leeper):

Here is the eighth batch of mini-reviews, with movies from other countries in languages other than English.

WIFE OF A SPY (SUPAI NO TSUMA): (SPOILERS**)** We have seen a lot of spy thrillers set in Europe, usually with American or British spies, but **WIFE OF A SPY** is a bit different. This, the latest film from Kiyoshi Kurosawa (not relation to Akira Kurosawa), is set in 1940 in Japan, and has as its spy a Japanese businessman. We can tell he has some problems with the current Japanese government, as he and his wife are warned they are too Westernized (clothing-- although the clothing edict seems to apply mostly to women-- whiskey choices, etc.). (Several of the conversations between the main character and his friend in the Japanese security forces, discussing whether to inform on people, seem reminiscent of conversations between Ben-Hur and Masala.) The plot is not always easy to follow, and several characters are not what they seem (well, it is a spy thriller). There is probably a lot that Japanese audiences will pick up on that Western audiences might miss (e.g., apparently one of the wall hangings has a motto that can be taken as a comment on the situation), but others are clearer (a comment about a year-end corporate gift of rice cakes and sugar is that it is to help with the ration cards). Halfway through we discover the focus of the espionage which is the Japanese medical experiments at the infamous Unit 731 in Manchuria/Manchukuo. The Japanese government kept quiet on "crimes against humanity" for decades and the secret was basically kept for many years after the war, though some hints leaked out. It was not until this century that court cases and some official acknowledgement by the Japanese government has happened.

Released theatrically 09/17/21; available on various streaming services. Rating: low +2 (-4 to +4), or 7/10.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt11917942/reference>

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

FRANCE: In **FRANCE**, France de Meurs (played by Lea Seydoux) is a telejournalist who goes through a personal crisis and tries to change her style. At the beginning we see her arranging news scenes that appear to be off the cuff, but are being artfully staged or even faked, probably for ratings. Wherever she goes, France runs into people who know her from television; she has given up her private life for fame. Even when she thinks she has managed to shake her admirers (or stalkers), she finds she cannot avoid them. Much of the thrust is lost in translating the text. One good touch is that the production designer creates a scene and then makes many small objects in that scene the same striking color, giving it more of a feel of artificiality. The film as a whole is reminiscent of **NETWORK**, though France is no Diana Christensen.

Released theatrically 12/10/21; available on various streaming services. Rating: high +1 (-4 to +4), or 6/10.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt9714030/reference>

What others are saying: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/france_2021

BAD LUCK BANGING OR LOONY PORN (BABARDEALA CU BUCLUC SAU PORNO BALAMUC): *WARNING*: This film begins with an X-rated hardcore sex scene. (Boy, I tell you! Films are better than ever.) As the film begins, we focus on the attitudes of one group of people and their reactions to having a sex film of a teacher and her husband on the Internet. The director also gives us a view of the current economic status of Romania which helps the viewer to place the story in time, as well as a film about attitudes towards sex, ethnicities, nationalism, and other hot topics. Romania seems to be a land of noisy traffic and the director takes us on a slow tour of the streets of Bucharest, during which we see street scenes that run on for minutes. The film provides three different endings, one of which seems inspired by the song "Harper Valley P.T.A." Ultimately, the whole film seems like a joke.

Released theatrically 11/19/21; available on DVD from Netflix. Rating: 0 (-4 to +4), or 4/10.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt14033502/reference>

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

[-mrl/ecl]

THE DOOR INTO SUMMER (film review by Dale Skran):

A Japanese version of Robert A. Heinlein's THE DOOR INTO SUMMER is running on Netflix, and I would strongly recommend any SF fan watch it. It's not a bad intro to SF for regular folks either. The beauty of this adaptation is that moving it to Japan removes pretty much all of the parts of the original novel that don't stand the test of time, while preserving what makes THE DOOR INTO SUMMER classic SF.

The plot has been somewhat modified, but not in any way that fundamentally alters anything good about the story. The framing device of the cat looking for a "Door into Summer" is retained, and the cat has been brilliantly cast, with the result that the sweetness of the hero's love for his pet shines through. The problematic aspects of a relationship with an eleven-year-old have been expunged by making her seventeen, and all the talky Fifties slang Heinlein dialog is now Japanese, totally filtering and updating it so that it is not jarring to the ear.

The original book has some brilliant description from the 1950s of what a real household robot might be like, and although details are wrong, you can clearly see the real-life Roomba shining through the text. The 2025 tech is possibly more advanced than it should be, but the anti-gravity is much deprecated in the movie [I actually missed it completely] and the movie cleverly focused on a "plasma battery" as a key new invention. The real "SF assumption" is, of course, time travel, but without time travel and cold-sleep there is no plot.

Since the entire story is about the evolution of robotics, there is a strong resonance with Japanese cultural tendencies. The updated story works surprisingly well as a touching romance as well as a tale of an engineer wronged who uses technology to set things right. After watching the movie, I came to see the cat's search for the "Door into Summer" as a metaphor, not just for the hero's search for a better life and revenge, but also for the entire history of the human pursuit of a better future. May we all find our own personal "Door into Summer," and as the rockets rise from Boca Chica Texas, the door to a brighter future for all of humanity is slowly cracking open in the depths of the Covid-19 winter.

I'm rating THE DOOR INTO SUMMER a +2 on the -4 to +4 scale, a must see for a serious SF fan, and a super must see for Heinlein fans. This is probably the best adaptation of any Heinlein book yet. THE DOOR INTO SUMMER is a G-rated(*): a no-sex, minimal violence movie suitable for all ages, although the complex plot will confuse most kids. However, they will like the cat. [-dls]

(*) Officially, there is no US rating. It is G-rated in Japan, and rated "12" in the UK. [-ecl]

TREKNOMICS: THE ECONOMICS OF STAR TREK by Manu Saadia (a book review in the form of an extended essay by Dale Skran) (part 2):

[This is the second part of a review of TREKNOMICS: THE ECONOMICS OF STAR TREK.]

Let's take a look at the most common elements of "Star Trek" technology:

- Communicators: They are pretty much a joke. We've made them real in just a few decades after Original Trek, and about 100x better than what is shown in Trek.
- Universal Translators: We have made enormous progress toward such devices, and seem on course to match or exceed "Trek" level capabilities over the next few decades.
- Tricorders: We are well on our way there, and surely will exceed what was shown in Trek in less than 100 years, if not much earlier
- Computers: Trek computers are more advanced than what we have now, but not that much more advanced. We seem on a path to achieve "Trek level" computers in much less than 100 years. Computers are one of the technologies that must be constrained to avoid a "Singularity" so the only plausible explanation for the limited capabilities of Trek computers is deliberate widespread restraint.
- Medical technologies: Certainly, Trek has some real advances over the present day, but the number of deadly diseases and plagues in the Trek universe are astonishing. People seem to live long lives by today's standards, but not that much longer. There does not appear to have been any systematic effort to extend the human lifespan, something that most probably is the result of the suppression of science and technology.
- Cloaking devices: One of the real-world technological advances I have found the most surprising is the development of "invisibility shields". There are currently working models of shields that work at some defined energy frequency, i.e., visible light, that make an object behind them invisible. It seems reasonable to expect that few hundred years of progress will result in something at least as useful as the Romulan cloaking device.
- Tractor Beams: Folks are working on them--see this link. It may not seem like that much, and they may never move a big spaceship, but gee, they work on small objects right now.

Clearly, any kind of genetic engineering is very limited in the Trek universe. We don't hear much of genetic disease, so a reasonable assumption is that somatic genetic cures are widely used, but germ line engineering is not. Also, there is very little "biological" technology on display, again suggesting systematic suppression of GMO plants and animals, as well as using biology for materials processing.

Trek writers have the conviction that genetically engineered "superhumans" will be afflicted with overweening arrogance and pomposity, leading them inevitably to endless internecine warfare. This is as though the "superhumans" consisted only of Caesar, Alexander, and Napoleon, when they could just as easily be Einstein, Hawking, and Curie. Trek stories about genetic engineering are best understood as "just-so" tales that buttress an assumption, rather than explorations of what might actually make sense or be possible.

Data is impressive as an android, but he was created in secret by one scientist, suggesting that such research is being systematically suppressed. Once Data was found, the Federation's ethics prevents him from being dismantled to understand how he works, resulting in the "Data" technology having little impact on the larger society, at least for a long time.

One curious feature of the Trek utopia is a complete lack of the current significant population of the mentally ill and addicted. We are forced to assume that federation medical technology has become quite successful in treating such issues, to a much greater degree than infectious diseases or aging. This may be an area where the Federation has secretly directed the allocation of vast resources such that here at least progress has been very great. Some episodes express concern about holodeck addiction, and indeed this does seem like a very real problem. The holodeck could fulfill any fantasy with no risk except a growing disconnection from the real world. Needless to say, the PG world of Trek is not one in which the dangers of the holodeck can be explored. For the holodeck technology to not have a devastating impact on Trek society, either there are strict limits on how it can be used, or the anti-addiction treatments are indeed powerful.

It is frequently declared in Trek that crime has been eliminated, but the details are vague at best. Via some magical means, criminals are "rehabilitated" via medical treatment and therapy. This sounds good, but from a glass half full perspective it may be little different from lobotomy. Ian Banks had a far more plausible solution--a robot is assigned to each criminal to follow them around and prevent them from committing a new crime. The criminal is free to engage in legal activities, but they have permanently lost any sense of privacy or control over their lives. One imagines that being followed by a robot at all times would make you a social pariah as well. Whatever the flaws in Banks's approach, it seems more implementable than that found in Trek.

The author devotes an entire chapter to the mental wellbeing Trektopia has achieved, and since his parents and many of his friends are psychologists, psychiatrists, and therapists, finds a special connection with Counselor Troi. The author is correct that perhaps the greatest scientific advance shown in Trek involves the eradication on a mass scale of virtually all mental disease. Aside from the "cheat" of having an empathic therapist, Trek is skimpy on the details. Much like the replicator, Trek solved all these problems before the addition of empathic Betazoids, so they can't be the key factor.

The author attributes a lot of this mental wellbeing to material abundance, and surely many poor folks in the real-world suffer from stress, anxiety, and depression that would be much relieved by an infusion of cash. However, we need only look at the lives of those in the real world who are well off to see that satisfaction of material wants alone does not resolve all mental issues. In fact, if we look at Hollywood in some ways it makes them worse. The only real value of the author's analysis is to focus attention on the benefits that would come from achieving universal good mental health.

It is easy to speculate that behind the curtain in Trektopia lies a highly coercive mental health apparatus. If you have some issue, you are mandated to accept the treatment. There appear to be no asylums, "Devil's Island" planets of the insane who refuse treatment, or wandering bums listening to voices and peeing on park benches. The only way this can be achieved is if there are generally accepted treatments for essentially all mental disease, and the usage of those treatments is mandatory. I'm more or less ok with this, but the author should be more honest about what Trektopia really requires.

This is not to say there is no technological progress in Trek, and certainly work related to energy, warp drive, and weapons seems quite advanced, but overall, aside from ending material want, and eliminating addiction/mental diseases, much of what humans might want from science is not available in the Trek universe.

A further curious feature of Trek mythology is that humanity is destined to evolve into something like the Organians, the Travelers or even the Q, all races with God-like power. However, exactly how this is supposed to happen with all the restraints on genetic engineering and artificial intelligence is unclear. The idea that Wesley Crusher, genius though he may be, would suddenly be able to travel through time and space via mind-power alone just a few 100s years in the future is risible. Trek tries to have it both ways--holding out the promise of vast evolutionary growth while delaying it to a vague and distant future. At times Trek seems to devolve into a kind of homo dominus philosophy--that there is something special about humanity that will lead to this amazing future.

The second to the last chapter explores in some depth the author's love of the Ferengi, who he sees as being a modest exaggeration of Western capitalism. In this role, he becomes a Ferengi apologist, suggesting that they do not loot and enslave [they do], and fails to grasp that they are terrible capitalists. The Ferengi completely ignore the profit-making potential of science, making them more like a primitive combination of mercantilists and pirates. The Ferengi appear to represent the author's understanding of capitalism, which is sadly limited. His vision is equally limited in that, although apparently from a Jewish background, he cannot grasp the degree which the Ferengi and indeed, the entire Star Trek: Deep Space Nine series, is suffused with anti-semitic overtones. Not only are the Ferengi a stereotyped representation of Jewish merchants, but the Cardassian/Bajoran conflict is a thinly disguised retelling of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict with the Palestinians/Bajorans as the heroes, and the Cardassians as a parody of the Israelis.

In the last chapter the author takes off his fannish mask and reveals himself as a European social democrat in political leanings. He appears to start from the assumption that capitalism is a bad thing, and leap directly to the wonders of Trektopia. He even seems to think that the economy is some kind of magical wealth machine that will rapidly build us

toward the Treknomic future as long as we adopt the commonplace nostrums of the left--high taxes, wealth redistribution, and a vast welfare state. The author, although trained in economics, does not seem to appreciate that the wealth he observes around him is the direct result of capitalism combined with stable law that protects intellectual property, and that absent these two motors there is no reason to think wealth would continue to grow. Certainly, the lesson of the 20 century is that the more extreme the implementation of socialism/communism, the poorer the society becomes. Like many on the left who have never run a business or seen the magic of capitalism in action, the author sees neither the benefits of capitalism or the deficits of socialism.

Finally, and surprisingly for a lover of Star Trek and SF, the author believes that space has no relevance to the future of humanity. He is further convinced that Elon Musk is deluded in thinking he can settle Mars without the full weight of a government behind him. Treknomics was written in 2016. One wonders if the events between 2016 and 2022 may have changed his mind? Musk is now the leading global space power, has the most advanced technology, and operates the largest satellite network that has ever existed, dwarfing any previous government effort. Also, richest man in the world. Also, really just getting started.

As many have said, SF is not about the future--it is about today--and that is certainly true of Star Trek. Trek can be a great inspiration, but is a poor guide to the real future, including our economic future. In fact, by design it avoids discussion what is most likely our real future:

- Rapid advancement of computers and artificial intelligence
- Development of extremely powerful medical and biological technology using genetic techniques, including but not limited to a much longer human lifespan.
- No faster than light travel or teleportation
- Widespread usage of 3D printers that really are "matter printers", but that still need elemental stocks to function
- Cheap [er] energy using Space Based Solar Power, ground solar, wind power, and eventually fusion.
- Development of space resources allowing effectively unlimited quantities of raw materials
- A rapidly peaking and then declining population on Earth as the world modernizes
- A need to adapt to climate change
- Essentially unlimited and all-pervasive communications technologies that are speed of light limited
- Humanities expansion into space confined to the solar system over the time period Trek covers

There may well someday be a "Capitalism 2.0" that replaces what we think of as capitalism today, but Trek's vision of utopian committees allocating unlimited resources seems unlikely to be our future. There is no real-world experience that suggests any mechanism better than money/market forces for resource allocation, and lots of real-world experience to suggest that "committees" are a terrible idea no matter who is on them. The author lays underfunding of orphan diseases at the feet of capitalism, but aside from a tiny group of libertarians, there is a strong consensus that government ought to be involved in funding research in parallel/cooperation with the private sector. Having both approaches seem obviously superior to either one, and Trek represents the end of "private" decisions in capital allocation. If orphan diseases are underfunded (and I agree they are) the government should allocate more resources to this task. The US government is currently writing trillion dollar checks to fight COVID--19 and shore up the economy, so surely a measly \$500M or so for orphan diseases can be found. Trek offers nothing that will make this kind of mis-allocation go away, although it is true that if we were all abundantly wealthy, there would be no pressure to raise the child tax credit, for example. But the key requirement here is MORE WEALTH not NO MONEY.

The chapter on the commons is especially unsatisfying. Trek offers no better solution to the problems of the commons than we can achieve today. Somehow, we managed to ban fluorocarbons and fix the ozone hole, so clearly a capitalist society can manage a "commons" problem. That we have not properly dealt with climate change is due in large part to the continuing attempt by a significant part of the left to use climate change as a lever to destroy capitalism. Since the goal of this faction is not preventing destructive climate change but instead the dissolution of capitalism, they are not much motivated to find cheap, low-carbon ways to generate energy, especially any "politically incorrect" energy like nuclear or fusion power.

The Achilles heel of TREKNOMICS lies in the fact that there will always be a need for some resource allocation, especially for large projects, and TREKNOMICS offers nothing any more advanced than the empty promises typical of socialism/communism. The author also knows that the infinite abundance of Trek World is unlikely to be achieved in the real world. Even if everyone is given a 3-D printer, those printers will still need supplies of all the elements to function, and those elements can only be obtained by mining, not magic. It is virtually impossible to imagine a transition from a world in which intellectual property rights are fundamental to our lives, not just to commerce, to one in which they do not exist.

Trek leaves unanswered how the resources are marshalled for any large project, like building a starship. The history of open-source projects suggests that although this approach can be at least competitive with proprietary software, it is not at all suited for any large-scale construction or research effort due to an inability to collect the needed resources, including focused project management, and large numbers of full-time dedicated staff. If science is done by "unpaid volunteers" in an extremely wealthy society, we are likely to get a much smaller, and quite slow-moving scientific enterprise, much as existed in the 18th or 19th century when only aristocrats could afford to do science. And this is exactly what we see in Trektopia.

It is quite possible to imagine a future in which every citizen receives a substantial basic income, and the higher that basic income is, the more like Trektopia we will become. We

might start with a fully rebated carbon tax, and add to that a fully rebated tax on software, robots, and AI. If this basic "dividend" is about \$25K a year, poverty is essentially eliminated. If it grows to something like \$250K/year, we are verging toward something more like Trek-topia. Somewhere between \$25K and \$250K per year, the burning question will be--who does the windows? In other words, how are the "dirty jobs" accomplished? The author seems to envision that folk will wait on tables just for fun, or perhaps to get a chance to work as a chef at the restaurant, but who works in the mines? Who builds the houses? Who cleans the toilets? If the answer is robots, and that almost certainly will be the answer, we will have a world of material abundance where the allocation of those robot resources is a key issue. Having a fully rebated tax on software/robots/AI seems like a fundamental foundation of this future.

The author struggles with the "moral hazard" robots create, and looks unfavorably on Asimov's "spacers" with their solitary, fearful, and decadent lives supported by a multitude of robots. He clearly hopes that Trektopia has some solution to this problem--perhaps by strictly limiting the role robots can play in society, although the details are never made clear.

I have long thought that to keep the mass of ordinary folks gainfully employed (since I don't think they will all be engaged in artistic and scientific endeavor!) certain segments of the economy should be "technology limited" so that they can employ many folks with no special abilities. For consideration, I nominate home construction, recycling, and healthcare.

Having said all of the above, this "universal dividend" future will still have the following familiar features:

- Money
- Private property
- Intellectual property
- Resource extraction industries
- Taxes
- A mix of government and private resource allocation

This future may well have some approximation of the material abundance Trek features, but with unpredictable impacts from AI and genetic technologies. Our record of anticipating the social impacts of networked computing is rather poor--who anticipated Twitter? Tik-tok? Instagram? We are already seeing strange impacts from AI, such as face recognition working poorly by race, and chatbots that rapidly learn to be racist. Trektopia may be right that some kind of restraint on AI and computer technology may be a social necessity, but the debate over exactly what those limits ought to be is going to be difficult. Personally, I'm close to the idea that banning social networks, or dramatical regulating what they can do, may be necessary for our survival. Their negative impacts are so much worse than is generally understood.

In conclusion, TREKNOMICS is thought-provoking, but frustrating in its blunders and misconceptions. [-dls]

Star Trek Economics (letters of comment by Sam Long, Tim Merrigan, Gary McGath, Scott Dorsey, Paul Dormer, and Alan Woodford):

In response to [Dale Skran's comments on Star Trek economics](#) in the 01/28/22 issue of the MT VOID, Sam Long writes:

I understand that the Starship Enterprise had a crew member--a ship's tailor--whose job it was to see to the uniforms of the rest of the crew. This fellow would (with the help of an early Data-like robotic assistant) issue new uniforms when needed, and repair uniforms that had suffered wear or damage aboard the starship or on a planet's surface. So it was that, when Captain Picard would return from one of his away-adventures with his outfit in tatters, he would (after he had changed uniforms) take the torn one down to the tailor's cabin, hand it to the robotic assistant, and say to the tailor, "Make it sew." [-sl]

Tim Merrigan writes:

I suspect that the existence of, and relatively easy access to, matter replication, and short distance teleportation (from high orbit to a planetary surface, so, at least tens, if not hundreds, of miles, and a transporter transmitter/receiver is nice to have, but not necessary) would have major effect on the economy. [-tm]

Gary McGath summarizes:

The moneyless economy of Star Trek is so incoherently presented in the shows that no one can really make sense of it. [-gmg]

Scott Dorsey responds:

"Oh, my parents don't use money. They have credit cards!" -- My friend's niece

Paul Dormer adds:

One of the affects of the pandemic in the last couple of years appears to be the abandoning of cash in favour of cards (debit as well as credit). The only cash I've paid last year was the barber and the window cleaner. Even a cheese vendor on a stall in the high street was taking cards. [-pd]

Alan Woodford replies:

I've used a little bit more cash than that, but only because a lot of the local car parks haven't updated their ticket machines yet. :-)

Mind you, I'd have been happier if one of the ticket machines I had to use out in the country last year *hadn't* been updated...

The car park was in a mobile phone not-spot, and it was taking a couple of minutes per person to actually connect and pay--imagine how happy the queue was! [-af]

Paul responds:

The smartphone I bought a couple of years ago turns out can't be used for contactless payment. [-pd]

And Alan says:

This was the ticket machine not able to phone home--most people (including me) were trying to use cards rather than phones for the payment.

Of course, in the good old days, the machine would have had a coin slot, but it is presumably cheaper not to have to empty the machine. [-af]

[A lot discussion of credit cards vs cash followed; see <https://groups.google.com/g/rec.arts.sf.fandom/c/YSGNy2KQUbU>.]

BILLY BUDD (letter of comment by Paul Dormer):

In response to [Mark's comments on BILLY BUDD](#) in the 01/28/22 issue of the MT VOID, Paul Dormer writes:

I only know the Britten operatic version, written for the Festival of Britain in 1951. Still often performed. Both Britten and E. M. Forster, the librettist, were gay but I'm told they toned down the homo-erotic elements from the novella. [-pd]

Mark replies:

I have never heard the opera. I do like the film score. [-mrl]

FREE GUY (letter of comment by Dorothy J. Heydt):

In response to [Evelyn's review of FREE GUY](#) in the 01/28/22 issue of the MT VOID, Dorothy J. Heydt writes:

[Evelyn writes,] "FREE GUY: FREE GUY seems to crib a lot from STRANGER THAN FICTION, and I'm sure if I knew more about video games it would be clearer what is going on. I mean, I understand NPCs, but what are skins?" [-ecl]

A skin, in an online RPG, is a character's appearance, whether face, body shape, costume, or some or all of the above.

The game I play, Lord of the Rings Online, has a choice between two faces per species/gender. I've looked at the choices of faces available to many of my characters, and I can't for the life of me tell the difference, but many players vehemently assert that they can.

Player characters can also go to a barber NPC and change their hairstyle.

Finally, there are lots and lots of clothing choices. A character can be equipped with the highest-level armor or clothing they can wear, with more armor value and other buffs; but they can also wear "cosmetic" armor or clothing that will be seen by other players. This also works for weaponry.

[Evelyn writes,] "It's got some clever ideas particular to video games, and even with my inexperience with video games it was enjoyable enough, if not up to many of the 'this is not the real world' movies." [-ecl]

I liked it a lot. My daughter warned me that a lot of the magicalish weaponry would be borrowed from other properties that Disney has absorbed, and so it was. [-djh]

Bibles (letter of comment by Jim Susky):

In response to the comments on Bibles in the last several issues of the MT VOID, Jim Susky writes:

Thanks for publishing McGath's, Dormer's, and Kerr-Mudd's responses re: Bibles

A follow up may be of interest.

Mr. Combs also recommended Kingdom of the Cults that summer (1976), much of which was interesting to my young self, and which was my sole reference for a paper I wrote the following spring about the LDS church (the teacher was a "lapsed-Mormon").

Kingdom seems to be a perennial best-seller which has outlived its author (Walter Martin). Few years back I got another copy and gave it to my sister who was then actively recruited by a Jehovah's Witness. Thus inoculated she steered clear.

To close the loop: I commented to Mr. Combs that the Christian God seemed not so compassionate--in that He would subject a man to Eternal Suffering for a seventy-year error--this was greeted by silence. [-js]

Latin, SIR GAWAIN AND THE GREEN KNIGHT, and SHIVA BABY (letter of comment by John Hertz):

In correction to [Evelyn's typing of John Hertz's comments on Latin](#) in the 11/05/21 issue of the MT VOID, John writes:

Thanks for printing my pome [sic] about Latin (MT VOID 2196, 11/05/21)--but alas--with two garbles.

I said it was "acrostic, in unrhymed 5-7-5-7-7-syllable lines like Japanese tanka." You misquoted that as "acrostic, like Japanese tanka." Tanka are in 5-7-5-7-7-syllable lines*. Only some are acrostic.

You misquoted my pome as

Later it would fall,
Although its power, beauty,
Took evil no turn.
In its day our minds, our speech,
Nourished, seemed universal.

transposing two words in the third line, making nonsense (and a nonsentence). The pome is

Later it would fall,
Although its power, beauty,
Took no evil turn.
In its day our minds, our speech,
Nourished, seemed universal.

In response to [Evelyn's comments on SIR GAWAIN AND THE GREEN KNIGHT](#) in the 12/24/21 issue of the MT VOID, John writes:

More happily, applause for E's comments on Simon Armitage's 2009 rendition of SIR GAWAIN AND THE GREEN KNIGHT: both E's faultfinding and her praise. Too many folks make "criticism" the same as "look how bad this is".

I single out E's "This is like comparing William Faulkner and Ernest Hemingway (or Gabriel Garcia Marquez and Jorge Luis Borges). Just because two works are in the same

language does not make them equally accessible.", a fine response to Touchstone's "Instance, briefly; come, instance" (Shakespeare, AS YOU LIKE IT, Act III, Scene 2).

In response to [Mark and Evelyn's review of SHIVA BABY](#) in the 11/12/21 issue of the MT VOID, John writes:

In MT VOID 2197 (11/12/21) when you started reviewing a movie called SHIVA BABY, I for a moment thought it might be about Ganesha. At the end of that issue you attribute to Ben Franklin "A full belly makes a dull brain." I've also seen attributed to him "Hunger never drove a good bargain." My 14th ed'n BARTLETT'S has "Necessity never made a good bargain" (p. 421) but not "a full belly"; it cites "A hungry stomach cannot hear" to La Fontaine (p. 359).

*Actually, in Japanese they're often written as a single line; the nature of the Japanese language shows the 5-7-5-7-7-syllable elements (they aren't really syllables either, but this glossing of glosses begins to resemble GILES GOAT-BOY ([J. Barth, 1966--oh, dear, I'm doing it again]) [-jh])

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

I am currently reading DISCURSO E HISTORIA EN LA OBRA NARRATIVA DE JORGE LUIS BORGES by Nicholas Emelio Alvarez (Society of Spanish and Spanish-American Studies, ISBN 0892950927) and naturally this entails reading FICCIONES and LABYRINTHS by Borges. There is a lot of overlap between the two collections, but though the same story may be in both books, they were translated by two different people. (And both books were published in 1962, which makes them one of the more peculiar pairs of the publishing world.)

Anyway, the story "Funes the Memorious"/"Funes, His Memory" is in both of these, and in COLLECTED FICTIONS (with yet a third translator). And of the three translations, Anthony Kerrigan's (in FICCIONES) is by far the worst, and makes me suspicious of all his other translations. ("Death and the Compass" also has three translations, though none by Kerrigan.)

What first made me suspicious was the phrase "a rectangular triangle." Was this a reference to some sort of Borgesian "impossible object", like a Penrose triangle or something? I decided to double-check this. (Why hadn't I one this before? Or had I, and had just forgotten?) The Spanish is "un triángulo rectángulo" (which has a nice rhythm to it in Spanish). It *seems* like "a rectangular triangle" would be the obvious translation, but as the maxim goes, "Ropa isn't rope and sopa isn't soap." The correct translation is "a right triangle."

Then Funes says, "Mi memoria ... es como vaciadero de basuras." Kerrigan translates the last phrase as "garbage disposal," which conjures up the image of a machine grinding up Funes's memories in the sink. James E. Irby and Andrew Hurley both translate it more accurately as "garbage heap," implying the accumulation of memories rather than their disposal.

I didn't do a thorough comparison of all three translations with the original Spanish and each other. But I think I will either read the Spanish, or a translation other Kerrigan's. [-ecl]

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Quote of the Week:

... Thus mathematics may be defined as the subject
in which we never know what we are talking about,
nor whether what we are saying is true.
--Bertrand Russell

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