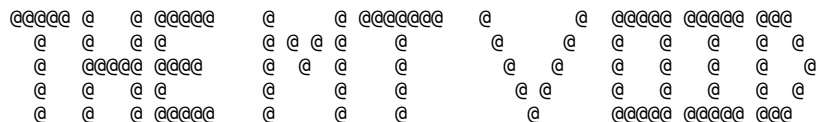


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Mt. Holz Science Fiction Society
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http://leepers.us/mtvoid/back_issues.htm.

Mini Reviews, Part 11 (film reviews by Mark R. Leeper and Evelyn C. Leeper):

Here is the eleventh batch of mini-reviews--four this time--all about robots and androids.

FINCH: FINCH is a post-apocalypse (solar flare/gamma burst) story, with many nods to earlier science fiction stories: a low-slung robot named Dewey, an opening sequence reminiscent of THE MARTIAN, and a humanoid robot built for companionship. There is also a scene in which Finch (played by Tom Hanks) talks about the four directives (I don't recall the exact word), which are basically the Three Laws of Robotics--except after giving the First, Finch skips directly to the Fourth; screenwriters Craig Luck and Ivor Powell assume the audience knows the Second and Third.

Hanks is alone again, as in CAST AWAY, but his psychological state is different--in CAST AWAY, he knows everyone else is alive, while in FINCH everyone (or at least 99.999% of the people) are dead. Hanks has been busy lately, with five movies in the previous two years: NEWS OF THE WORLD, BORAT SUBSEQUENT MOVIEFILM, GREYHOUND, A BEAUTIFUL DAY IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD, and TOY STORY 4. This one, however, he has to carry basically alone (Caleb Landry Jones provides the voice and probably the motion capture for Jeff). However, even with human, director Miguel Sapochnik manages to include "the slo-mo march" of the heroes abreast towards the camera, along in this case it's Finch, his dog Goodyear, Jeff, and Dewey. Not a lot of new ground is broken here, but it is enjoyable in a classic science fiction sort of way.

Released 11/05/21 on Apple TV+. Rating: high +2 (-4 to +4), or 8/10.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt3420504/reference>

What others are saying: <https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/finch>

SWAN SONG: Remember how when I reviewed SWAN SONG with Udo Keir in the 12/10/21 issue of the MT VOID, and I said,

"There are two 2021 films titled SWAN SONG. One is a science fiction film with Mahershala Ali. This is not that film. This is a drama film with Udo Kier."? Well, now I'm reviewing the other one. In other words:

There are two 2021 films titled SWAN SONG. One is a drama film with Udo Kier. This is not that film. This is a science fiction film with Mahershala Ali." (And if that seems backward, in the sense that one expects Keir to be doing the science fiction one, and Ali the drama, well, that just makes it more confusing.)

Cameron (played by Ali) is dying, and to save his family from grief, he agrees to a new technique that will duplicate him completely, with all his memories except the ones that would tell him he is a duplicate. (This is using cloning technique rather than robotics.) The plot has similar ideas to FRANKENSTEIN MUST BE DESTROYED, and also MOON.

The story moves a little slowly, as it has long contemplative sequences. And the main thrust of the film is on the emotional, psychological, and moral aspects of this very unusual situation, rather than the science fictional aspects. For example, Cameron's wife is expecting their second child and says, "This baby is going to be good for us." Similarly, the creation of Cameron's duplicate is for the purpose of "being good" for Cameron's family. But in both cases this is treating a human being as a means to an end for other human beings, rather than as a separate individual. (This is why biological duplication is important; creating a robot might not be considered creating a human being.)

Released theatrically 12/17/21; available on Apple TV+. Rating: high +1 (-4 to +4), or 6/10.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt13207508/reference>

What others are saying: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/swan_song_2021_2

I'M YOUR MAN: I'M YOUR MAN is a familiar story, the type that might even have been in Isaac Asimov's I, ROBOT collection. In fact, this is very like the "Twilight Zone" episode "The Lonely", in which a convict marooned on an asteroid is given a companion that is a robot. In I'M YOUR MAN, the recipient of a robot (actually an android) designed to be a perfect companion first resists accepting it to test for three weeks but finally gives in. This is the sort of thing that is often Hugo-worthy but hasn't a chance of being nominated, because it lacks special effects or big names.

Released 10/24/21 on Amazon Prime; available on various streaming services. Rating: high +1 (-4 to +4) or 6/10.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt13087796/reference>

What others are saying: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/im_your_man_2021

MOTHER/ANDROID: MOTHER/ANDROID is a standard robot apocalypse story done on a low budget. Georgia (played by Chloe Grace Moretz, the star of KICK-ASS, LET ME IN, and the 2013 version of CARRIE) is a pregnant woman trying to escape the androids and reach the supposed safety of Boston. There are a number of flying-through-trees scenes seemingly borrowed from RETURN OF THE JEDI, and the villains of the piece are effectively "Battlestar Galactica"'s Cylons.

Released 12/17/21 on Hulu. Rating: low +1 or 5/10.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt13029044/reference>

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

[-mrl/ecl]

THE SHARDS OF EARTH by **Adrian Tchaikovsky** (copyright 2021, Orbit, Audible.com, 18 hours and 43 minutes, ASIN: B093CM9Y44, narrated by Sophie Aldred) (audio book review by Joe Karpierz):

I like to think I follow the science fiction field reasonably well. While it's impossible to know all the authors and all the books being published, one would think that I would be able to stay abreast of authors who have won major awards in the field. Like Adrian Tchaikovsky having won the Arthur C. Clarke Award in 2016, the British Fantasy Award in 2017, the BSFA Award in 2019, and the Sidewise Award in 2020. Me? I started becoming aware of him in 2021. I picked up CHILDREN OF TIME, the Clarke award winner, at Harvey's Tales, a local independent bookstore when they were featuring it on a table with a sign that said "if you like X, you'll like Y". Then his latest, THE SHARDS OF EARTH, was receiving a lot of attention last year, so I figured I might as well pick it up and give it a try. I'm glad I did.

The novel opens decades after a war with a group of aliens called The Architects that has obliterated the Earth and other planets within the galaxy. The war eventually ended when the Architects left. The readers learns, in the opening portion of the book, that the Architects were turned away by Idris Telemmier who is an Intermediary, an individual who has been altered to be able to pilot through unspace, Tchaikovsky's way of getting around the FTL problem. The other character we meet in the opening sequence is Myrmidon Solace, a soldier in a cloned all female military society. The Partheni and Idris are part of a multis-species alliance that banded together to stop the Architects. No one knows exactly why the Architects left, but one thing is clear: Idris was there at the final battle (as was Solace), and he was instrumental in turning away the Architects.

In the time of the novel, Intermediaries are in demand as pilots who can navigate through unspace. The Partheni need them, so they send Solace to try to convince him to come back and join the Partheni as a pilot and as a potential weapon should the Architects ever return. She finds him as part of a spacer crew on the salvages ship Vulture God. He is their pilot, and the crew take on jobs and

contracts to earn enough money to keep going, as one would expect a salvage ship to do. The crew of the Vulture God does not trust Solace. The stories about the Partheni are that they are an all female clone army hell bent on destroying everyone that is not like them. Yet, Solace gets sucked into an adventure when the Vulture God discovers a ship that looks like it has been destroyed by the Architects.

So, the questions now are "are the Architects coming back?" and "are they already back?" The crew of the Vulture God, a diverse cast made up of individuals with various talents, is caught up in a game of politics and intrigue, with various factions vying for their services, and in particular the services of Idris, to either cover up the possibility of the return of the Architects or help with the battle with the Architects that is sure to come.

THE SHARDS OF EARTH is a story in the grand tradition of space opera. There are space battles, aliens, unknown artifacts, and political intrigue. While the space battles aren't on the scale of those found in any Peter F. Hamilton novel --they are more personal and intimate (which is weird, all things considered) - they are still worthy of battles in the space opera tradition. Can we call this "wide-screen" space opera, as Hamilton's books have been called? I don't think so. In some sense, this is a more human space opera than what Hamilton writes, but each have their place in the pantheon of space opera writers, and they complement each other quite well.

Sophie Aldred is an interesting choice of narrators for this book. Long time Doctor Who fans will recognize her as the actress who played Ace, the companion to Sylvester McCoy's seventh Doctor. It took me a long time to get used to her narrating this book. Not because she wasn't good at it; to the contrary, she was quite good at it. I don't know what it was, but eventually I came around to her voice and style of narration.

THE SHARDS OF EARTH is a pretty good novel, and I do recommend it. Now it's time to get on the Tchaikovsky bandwagon and find out what I've been missing over the last several years. [-jak]

The "Little Boss, Big Man, Old Man" Series (story reviews by Dale Skran):

A while back I found an interesting story in Asimov's, "Helping Take Down the Old Man," by William Preston, and noted that it was part of a series of related tales. Recently, I decided to re-read the series in time order [not order of publication], and review them, so here goes. The stories concern a person whose name is never actually mentioned, but who goes by a variety of nicknames and monikers, and who is obviously based on the pulp hero, Doc Savage. The stories are far more literary than those by "Kenneth Robeson," but not the sort of pastiche one often sees. Instead, they delve into deeper questions about what such a hero might have been like were he a real person. At their best, these are powerful, imaginative tales.

"Unearthed", Asimov's September 2012 [Novella]

This is the weakest of the four stories. It deals with an early period in the career of our hero, when he apparently is working for his father as a global troubleshooter, and is assigned to investigate a mysterious mining disaster in South America. The "man of bronze" is referred to as the "Little Boss" since he works for his father, the "Big Boss," one assumes. The menace is suitably pulpish, and a Mohawk female writer tells the story in first person. Later in the series it appears that she became a "chronicler" of his adventures, and perhaps one of his many "assistants." One purpose of the story is to introduce the obscure language the "Little Boss" uses in his diaries. Another is to introduce the fairly obvious but little noted observation that the "Man of Bronze" is almost certainly not a Northern European. Either his unusual coloration is a side-effect of genetic tampering, or more probably, his mother was a person of color that his father met during his global adventures. I've long thought that Dwayne Johnson would be the perfect person to cast as Doc Savage. Johnson is Samoan on his mother's side, and Black Nova Scotian on his father's side. In addition to having the right skin tone, Johnson possesses the massive physique associated with Doc Savage, and is more than capable as an actor of portraying the original super-hero.

"Clockworks," Asimov's April/May 2011 [Novelette]

Told first person from the viewpoint of someone who was clearly a very dangerous villain, but after the "Big Man" has performed the miraculous surgery that allows an evil person to become a good person, this story is powerful. Much of the story takes place inside the "Big Man's" secret arctic base, and is of great interest to fans of Doc Savage. Although the menace is, again, a pulpish triumph, and we meet avatars for many of the old Doc Savage crew, the main focus of the story lies in what it might mean for an evil person to choose to do good.

"Helping Them Take the Old Man Down," March 2010 [Novelette]

This is the first story published, and the one that initially caught my attention. Told first person by one of the "Old Man's" assistants, it explores what might motivate a loyal follower of a good and heroic person to assist the federal government in capturing a pulp hero in the aftermath of 9/11. This is a strong story with a fully realized character and many clever ideas. One oddity is that at various points two different female assistants of the "Old Man" commit suicide. In one case, this happens after the Old Man is captured by the government, and is reasonably plausible. In the earlier case it makes less sense, and causes the reader to wonder what the author might be trying to communicate.

"Each in His Prison, Thinking of the Key," April/May 2014 [Novelette]

The only story that gets cover art, it is perhaps the best in the series. The "Old Man" has been held for many years in a special high-security prison. Told first person by "Jimmy," an interrogator brought in as a last-ditch effort to break the "Old Man," it details an interesting approach to interrogation, and a character, Jimmy, who, in his own way, is as much a superman as the "Old Man." But, as Jimmy finally realizes, "He's too good." It should come as no surprise that the "Old Man" contrives to escape and rejoin his aides, rising to battle a new pulpish menace. The story suggests that the greatest power the "Old Man" wields is not his numerous Phds, vast

martial arts prowess, apparent agelessness, or many brilliant inventions, but an unbending will and loving heart. Also, as Jimmy learns, just because someone is in a prison does not mean the jailors are in charge.

You can find all four of the stores on Amazon as ebooks for a modest price, or free as part of kindle unlimited. A 5th story is promised to conclude the series, but it appears from Preston's really out of date blog that he never quite finished the story. Preston has written a few other stories, mostly for Asimov's, a few earlier than the "Old Man" series and a few after, but he is not very prolific.

It is hard to find details about Preston on the web, almost like he doesn't really exist except as a writer telling tales of the "real Doc Savage." Makes you think. Anyway, highly recommended series to any SF reader, and especially to fans of Doc Savage. The stories combine pulp action, good writing, strong characterization, clever ideas, and solid speculation into something you will want to read more than once. [-dls]

Those Pesky Pronouns (letters of comment by Jim Susky, Gary McGath, Peter Trei, Kevin R, Keith F. Lynch, Paul Dormer, and Steve Coltrin):

In response to [various comments on pronouns](#) in the 03/04/22 issue of the MT VOID, Jim Susky writes:

Evelyn wrote, "There is ample historical evidence for the use of the 'plural' pronouns as indefinite singulars (e.g., Jane Austen). For that matter, 'you' used to refer to only the plural, and 'thee' and 'thou' were the singular. There was also a ruckus over the change to 'you' as a singular.

As a whelp, with no knowledge of Jane Austen (who was *not* closely related to a famous Texan) and a dim awareness of England and that Americans were once Englishmen, I was at the mercy of my Michigan-educated mother regards "automatic grammar" (and not the esteemed Madam Austen).

Thee and Thou were the province of the KJV. One site cites (!) 3,881 instances of the latter and 2,736 of the former.

In SHOGUN, James Clavell used those terms to indicate discourse in Japanese--mainly between Mariko and Blackthorne,

And:

"while generations of English teachers insisted (and maybe still insist, AFAIK) that 'everyone' et al are singular and hence should take singular pronouns, I doubt that any of that impressive assemblage would accept the correctness of the sentence 'Everyone I knew was there, and he had a good time.' "

Collective nouns still grieve me--for instance:

"The Olympics *is* a great sports spectacle (or *was*)"--this (automatically) sounds okay to me--though I realize I am nearly alone in this. [-js]

Evelyn notes:

Of course Jane Austen is not related to Stephen Austin.

And while in the United States we say, "Corporation X sponsors this program," in Britain they would say, "Corporation X sponsor this program." [-ecl]

Gary McGath elaborates:

More precisely, "you" was used as more respectful, formal pronoun than "thou," analogous to the "tu/vous" distinction in French and "du/Sie" in German. This seems to have arisen in late Middle or early Modern English. While I don't know Old English, it appears that it made a consistent distinction between single and plural second person, regardless of social relationships.

The Quakers pushed for the abolition of social distinctions in pronouns by using "thou" and "thee" for everyone. The language accomplished the same thing by going in the opposite direction, with "you" for everyone. The accusative "ye" disappeared around the same time, further simplifying the language.

Perhaps because of the King James Bible, the use of "thou" for God hung on after other uses of the pronoun became rare, giving the impression it's a more formal pronoun, when the reverse was originally true. [-gmg]

And later corrects himself:

I got it backwards. As explained there, "ye" is the nominative and "you" the dative or accusative, which are rarely distinguished in modern English.

"Ye" survives in some expressions, such as "Hear ye, hear ye." [-gmg]

Kevin R adds:

Also used to ID certain bipolar rappers. [-kr]

Evelyn adds:

And "God rest ye merry, gentlemen." [-ecl]

Peter Trei asks:

So, it's like 'youse' , or 'you all'? [-pt]

Keith F. Lynch asks:

Was there ever really such a word as "ye," or was it just a misreading of "the" spelled with a thorn in place of "th"? The letter thorn looks a lot like a "y." [-kfl]

Paul Dormer answers:

Chambers says there were two different words "ye":

ye[1] /ye or yi/ (now archaic, dialect or poetic)
pronoun
The second person plural (sometimes singular) pronoun
Cf you. Formerly, eg in the Authorized Version of the English Bible, ye was always used as a nominative, and you as a dative or accusative
Later ye was sometimes used for all these cases
ORIGIN: ME ye, nominative; your, genitive; you, yow, dative and accusative pl, from OE ge, nominative; eower, genitive; eow, dative and accusative

ye[2] /the, thi or (reflecting the spelling) ye/
demonstrative adj
An archaic spelling for 'the', arising from printers' use of y for the letter thorn, . See Y (n)

Paul also notes:

I was certainly taught--primary school, north of England, early Sixties--that they and them were to be used for singular persons of unknown gender:

There's someone at the door.

Ask them what they want.

[-pd]

Steve Coltrin adds:

That's unremarkable in my experience too.

A thing I've noticed I do is use singular they for persons of known (to me) presenting gender when they're highly distal to the person I'm talking to. [-sc]

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

SINOPTICON: A CELEBRATION OF CHINESE SCIENCE FICTION translated and edited by Xueting Christine Ni (Solaris, ISBN 978-1-78108-852-4) is a collection of thirteen stories written between 1991 and 2019. The longest is A Que's "Flower of the Other Shore", which I estimate at about 26,000 words, or novella-length; the rest are considerably shorter.

All the stories are good, but I'll comment on just two of them. I am a big fan of Bao Shu (a.k.a. Baoshu, in both cases a pseudonym for Li Jun), so it should come as no surprise that I liked his story, "The Absolution Experiment". (**SPOILER** I am sure I read a somewhat similar story years ago in Asimov's, but with re-animation instead of immortality. **END SPOILER**)

The other story that also rang a bell was "The Tide of Moon City" by Regina Kanyu Wang. Even if I had not just read Ursula K. LeGuin's THE DISPOSSESSED, I would see a lot of similarities: a double planet, one of them inhabited by colonists from the other, with conflicting economic/social systems, and engaged in a stand-off that prevents people from traveling freely between them. Scientific research on one of them promises to be extremely valuable ... to the other one. And so on. Was this in response to LeGuin? Or was this inspired more by tensions between China and Taiwan, or China and Hong Kong, or some other aspect of Chinese politics that I don't even recognize?

There have been quite a few anthologies of Chinese science fiction ("kehuan") recently, this is distinguished (according to the introduction by Xia Jia) by focusing "more on young writers and the relatively later works of female writers, putting more emphasis on the diversity of style and subject matter." [-ecl]

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Quote of the Week:

There cannot be a crisis next week. My schedule is
already full.

--Henry A. Kissinger

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