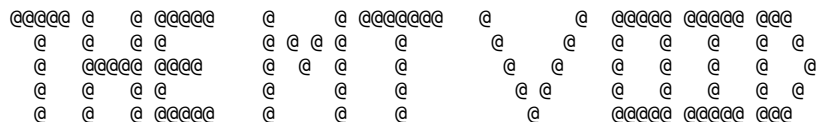


MT VOID 04/15/22 -- Vol. 40, No. 42, Whole Number 2219



Mt. Holz Science Fiction Society
04/15/22 -- Vol. 40, No. 42, Whole Number 2219

Table of Contents

- [Mini Reviews, Part 14 \(FOUND; ACASA, MY HOME; NO MAN OF GOD\)](#)
(film reviews by Mark R. Leeper and Evelyn C. Leeper)
- [Nigel Kneale Centenary](#) (comments by Evelyn C. Leeper)
- [BEYOND: OUR FUTURE IN SPACE by Chris Impey](#) (book review by Gregory Frederick)
- [MOTHERLAND: FORT SALEM](#) (television review by Dale Skran)
- [Fundraisers](#) (letter of comment by Gary McGath)
- [Baldness](#) (letter of comment by Paul Dormer)
- [This Week's Reading](#) (Hugo Award finalists) (book and film comments
by Evelyn C. Leeper)
- [Quote of the Week](#)

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Mini Reviews, Part 14 (film reviews by Mark R. Leeper and Evelyn C. Leeper):

Here is the fourteenth batch of mini-reviews, of documentaries and biopics:

FOUND: FOUND is the real-life story of three adopted teenage Chinese-American girls who start out independently trying to find the families who abandoned them in China. The first thing they find is each other, when they use 23andme to begin their searches. Although they have very different lives in the United States--in fact, one is Jewish, one is Protestant, and one is Catholic--they immediately feel a connection and continue their search together, although they are not all as eager to find their biological parents. If this sounds a little like the 2018 documentary THREE IDENTICAL STRANGERS, you're not the only one. (I would think that being cousins should be a big clue in helping to narrow down possibilities, but that does not seem to enter into it.) Telling who or what they find would be a spoiler of sorts, but let me just note that the title "Found", could apply to the girls finding their biological parents, or to the fact that the girls themselves were found when they were abandoned as babies.

Released theatrically 10/13/21; available on Netflix streaming. Rating: low +2 (-4 to +4), or 7/10.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt13622146/reference>

What others are saying: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/found_2021

ACASA, MY HOME: ACASA, MY HOME is a documentary about a family which has been living in the Bucharest delta for twenty years, in a shack with few modern conveniences. (They do seem to have a generator, and cell phones, and they buy some items with money from selling fish in Bucharest.) They keep pigs and chickens, but also supplement their food with frogs, fish, and other animals. (Eating snake is a lot like eating fish but with more bones.) Then the government decides to turn the delta into a nature preserve, and the two cultures clash when the family must leave the delta and live in the city. (Actually, they have clashed before, and the children

are adept at hiding from family services personnel in the high grass that is taller than the children.)

At times the viewer may question whether scenes has been staged. Some scenes (such as a warning telephone call and subsequent interactions with family services) seem like they must have been staged, especially given how they are edited with apparently multiple POVs. This is because the filming covers a very long period of time, and these scenes were probably not so much staged as pieced together from several incidents.

We are meant, I think, to sympathize somewhat with the patriarch, Gica, although he is not very likable, claiming in fact that he is the ruler of his children and can kill them if he wants to. But one of his sons says at one point that Gica fathered twenty children. Currently, only nine are alive. If this is not also hyperbole, then it is clear that this "idyllic" lifestyle is incredibly unhealthy and dangerous for his children.

Released 03/15/21 on various streaming services. Rating: +1 (-4 to +4), or 6/10.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt11364376/reference>

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

NO MAN OF GOD: NO MAN OF GOD is basically a two-person film with Luke Kirby playing Theodore Bundy and Elijah Wood playing FBI profiler Bill Hagmaier, and is based on tapes of their interviews. (There is also a good performance by Christian Clemenson as Dr. James Dobson, who is completely taken in by Bundy's "story" of how he became a killer, and then reneges on his promises to Bundy.) Ever since Thomas Harris presented the idea that the police go after psychopaths by putting themselves inside the minds of the psychopaths to think like they do, this concept has shown up in fiction frequently. I wonder if this is really true or is an invention of Harris. It is true, I believe, that the FBI has a department of "profilers", but is it as widespread as we are led to believe in the fictional media?

Released streaming 08/27/21. Rating: high +2 (-4 to +4), or 8/10.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt13507778/reference>

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

[-mrl/ecl]

Nigel Kneale Centenary (comments by Evelyn C. Leeper): Monday, April 18, is the 100th anniversary of Nigel Kneale's birth. Turner Classic Movies apparently doesn't think him worthy of a centenary celebration, but you can construct your own. Recommended are the "Quatermass" films, of course, but also THE ABOMINABLE SNOWMAN OF THE HIMALAYAS (1957), FIRST MEN IN THE MOON (1964), DAMN THE DEFIANT! (1962), THE WITCHES (1966), THE WOMAN IN BLACK (1989), and the extremely peculiar SHARPE'S GOLD (1995). [-ecl]

BEYOND: OUR FUTURE IN SPACE by Chris Impey (book review by Gregory Frederick):

This science book is a quick look into the future of humanity as it considers space travel and usage of space based materials and habitats. But this being a 2015 book made it a bit dated since what is happening now in terms of commercial space travel and NASA missions has changed from some of his forecasting. But interesting points in the book include items like radiation exposure of astronauts on a two-year mission to Mars, and physiological body changes after long-term weightless space missions. Astronauts on a two-year mission would get 200 times greater radiation than an Earth dweller. But that exposure only increases the astronaut's lifetime risk of cancer from 21 to 24 percent. A Russian cosmonaut who was in space for 14 months was found not to have major detrimental effects from his prolonged weightlessness. But bone loss and changes to the eye have been occurring with long terms in the weightless environment of space. This book was also interesting in providing a short continuing science fiction story before certain chapters of the non-fiction contains. Overall this book is well written but a bit dated. [-gf]

MOTHERLAND: FORT SALEM (two seasons of ten episodes/for pay on Amazon) (television review by Dale Skran):

It's not that easy to see MOTHERLAND. It is only "free" on something called Freeform (this seems like an online version of ABC/Disney and is an update of the old ABC Family channel, but to some degree defies easy characterization), and you can also pay for it on Amazon prime. As a result, this pretty amazing series will get only a small audience, and will probably never win any awards simply because the SF viewing public does not know it exists, just like the fantastic COUNTERPART is essentially unknown, or the nearly as excellent THE ROOK. And so on. All people are watching what is on Disney, Netflix, and Amazon prime. Some of this--like THE WITCHER and CRACOW MONSTERS--are pretty good, but a lot of it, e.g., THE WHEEL OF TIME, SHADOW AND BONE, etc. is of a lesser quality.

Imagine STARSHIP TROOPERS with witches instead of powered suits, and you have a pretty good one sentence description of MOTHERLAND. The "military cadet" story so commonplace in the 20th century has fallen out of favor as the military has declined in popularity. In this genre, a young person [almost always a man] joins the military, and goes through basic training with a few friends. There is always one friend who is the son of a big-shot general, another from the tough streets or rural byways, and finally one who is gung-ho to fight, but soon discovers the reality of war. As the story proceeds, the protagonist and his friends get pressed into battles before they are fully trained, encounter clever spies and saboteurs, and eventually rise in the ranks with distinction.

Well, that is what MOTHERLAND is all about with one itsy-bitsy difference. A long time ago in Salem a powerful witch, Sarah Alder, made a deal with the US government: Witches would fight the wars of the United States, as long as they were allowed, in this context, to be free to be witches. Fast forward to modern times, and we find a world upside-down from our own. Everyone knows women are tougher, braver, and stronger than men. Civilians both fear and depend on the witch soldiers. The witches have used magic for centuries to mate with many men, and to create the best possible offspring. Their power, while not unlimited, makes them superhuman.

The witch army is not organized in platoons, but in groups of three. It appears that one of the group is a "fixer" who can heal wounds, one has the "sight", and the third is a weather witch. But they all possess varying degrees of certain "canon" powers, namely:

- A shield that can shatter a spear, and presumably stop bullets
- A kinetic hammer that can punch through steel. A group of witches can create a hammer/shield so strong that it protects them from a truck loaded with explosives (mostly).
- To put someone to sleep by touch, and for the more powerful witches, a roomful of people w/o touch
- A magical chemical patch, which when applied to the skin, allows the witch to fly for a limited period of time. Thus, the troops apply the patch and jump out of aircraft to attack, but they can also fly up to an aircraft as well. The patch is risky to use since it only lasts for a limited period of time.

The fixers can heal most military wounds so that the witch army is relatively less impacted by injury than our real-world armies. At one point a senior witch slits the throat of a trainee to create a wound to practice healing. It is fairly obvious that without magic the wound would be fatal. The "weather witches" have powers similar to "Storm" of the X-men, with varying degrees of strength. The "sight" can be used to detect hidden dangers, both physical and magical.

The combination of all these abilities creates a formidable combat unit, but in some cases, witches find themselves unable to use their powers, and for these situations they carry the "scourge"--a whip with a metal weight on the end. The weighted chain is said to be the martial arts weapon that is the hardest to learn, the most dangerous to the practitioner, and the most effective in combat. The "scourge" is in effect a weighted chain with the weakness that you can cut it. Each witch is trained extensively in combat with the "scourge" and when they settle matters of honor amongst themselves, it is with the scourge. Additionally, they are trained extensively in hand-to-hand combat and knife fighting.

Although our heroines are a girly bunch, they are the heirs to a harsh tradition, trained by tough drill sergeants, and pitted against the most ruthless and clever foes. Having said the above, you might think MOTHERLAND is mostly about tactical combat like a David Drake novel, but it is much more character driven. Our plucky three heroines are:

- Abigail Bellweather, a weather witch whose mother is the General in charge of Intelligence, and who comes from a long line of decorated weather witches.
- Raelle Collar, a "fixer" who hails from the "Cession" a "free" land along the Mississippi where Native Americans and witches live in harmony, and "dodgers"--witches who are avoiding the draft--hide out. She is cynical and expects to die soon as her mother before her died in the Liberia campaign. She goes "off-canon" now and then in how she "fixes" people.
- Tally Craven, a gung-ho idealist, enlists in spite of the opposition of her parents. She is gifted with very powerful "sight".

As you might suspect, at first, they do not get along, but over two seasons, a lot of arguments, and quite a number of life and death battles they become loyal friends and a deadly combat team. This is a richly imagined world. The witches have their own traditions and practices which seem odd to the civilians. There are male witches, but only female witches "breed true"--the sons/daughters of a witch are always witches. A male witch who marries a normal may or may not have witch children. [-dls]

Fundraisers (letter of comment by Gary McGath):

In response to [Evelyn's comments on Brandon Sanderson's Kickstarter](#) in the 04/08/22 issue of the MT VOID, Gary McGath writes:

Fundraisers are strange things. Recently I encountered one where the author let people pay for the privilege of doing beta reading. It seemed to be doing fairly well, though I don't know how many people paid for that "perk." [-gmg]

Baldness (letter of comment by Paul Dormer):

In response to [Evelyn's comments on references to baldness in PARADOXES](#) in the 04/08/22 issue of the MT VOID, Paul Dormer writes:

As an aside, there was a landmark TV series made by the BBC in the late Sixties called CIVILISATION, written and fronted by Kenneth Clark the art historian. In the episode on the Elizabethan age, he got members of the Royal Shakespeare Company of the time to perform scenes from Shakespeare. One of the scenes was the gravedigger scene from HAMLET. Ian Richardson was Hamlet and Patrick Stewart was Horatio. He had hair. But when I mentioned this to a friend who often goes to RSC productions, she pointed out he was actually already bald by then. [-pd]

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

My comments on the Hugo Award finalists:

I don't know if Joe Karpierz is doing the novels this year, but I am *not* doing all the short fiction. I may do all the novellas, since my library has four of them with a fifth on order, and the sixth is available through inter-library loan.

I will probably read all the short stories since they are available free on-line, but not review them. In a first for the Hugo Awards, one of the finalists is a Twitter thread, or as some overly-precise fans have said, one of the finalists was published in a Twitter thread. (I wonder if they also insist that such-and-such a book wasn't nominated, but that such-and-such was a finalist published as a book.) In any case, I don't expect to review all the short stories, or the novelettes.

I might have read the finalists for the Lodestar Award (for young adult books), because I have found young adult books more like the classic science fiction I liked as, well, as a young adult. And they tend to be shorter than the finalists for the Best Novel Hugo. But five of the six are part of series, and only one is under 300 pages, so that's not going to happen.

Of the Dramatic Presentation, Long Form, I have seen three of them (DUNE, THE GREEN KNIGHT, SHANG-CHI AND THE LEGEND OF THE TEN RINGS, a fourth (SPACE SWEEPERS) is available on Netflix streaming, a fifth (ENCANTO) is on our Netflix DVD queue, and the sixth (WANDA VISION) is a mini-series on Disney+. While I have a friend who gets Disney+, asking to watch a six-hour mini-series on their television might be pushing it, though we will watch the first hour this weekend. I will comment on these in a column at some point after I see all of them, or as much of WANDA VISION as is reasonable. [-ecl]

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Quote of the Week:

Progress is impossible without change, and those who
cannot change their minds cannot change anything.
--G. B. Shaw

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