

MT VOID 05/13/22 -- Vol. 40, No. 46, Whole Number 2223



Mt. Holz Science Fiction Society
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An index with links to the issues of the MT VOID since 1986 is at http://leepers.us/mtvoid/back_issues.htm.

This Is Like Star Trek's Next Generation Holo-deck (pointer from Greg Frederick):

Station:

<https://www.yahoo.com/news/sci-fi-becomes-real-life-181518521.html>

[Does that make him a holo-doc? -ecl]

Mini Reviews, Part 17 (film reviews by Mark R. Leeper and Evelyn C. Leeper):

Here is the seventeenth batch of mini-reviews, more films of the fantastique:

THE HOUSE: THE HOUSE is listed as a three-part series by Netflix, but it is really just a three-part anthology film. It is three stories about a peculiar house, in the past, present, and future, though the stories are not really consistent with each other. For example, the first is populated by humans, but the second is populated by anthropomorphic mice. The film uses stop-motion dolls, similar to Will Vinton ("Closed Mondays", THE ADVENTURES OF MARK TWAIN, and the California Raisins commercials), and more recently to Wes Anderson (FANTASTIC MR. FOX and ISLE OF DOGS). The three-dimensional animation provides a lot of opportunity for personality and expressiveness in the characters, and there is an intense tension below the surface of these stories.

Released on Netflix streaming 01/14/22. Rating: high +2, or 8/10.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt11703050/reference>

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

ENCOUNTER: ENCOUNTER starts out with hints of an alien invasion, and the main character (played by Riz Ahmed of SOUND OF METAL) seems to be driven by this, but he also is suffering from PTSD and is paranoid as well. As a result, this is more a story of a mentally disturbed father kidnapping his sons, with the science fiction it claims playing little if any part in it.

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

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt12800524/reference>

What others are saying: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/encounter_2021

NIGHTMARE ALLEY: NIGHTMARE ALLEY is described by its makers as a new adaptation of the book by William Lindsay Gresham, not a remake of the 1947 classic film noir version. The production design by Tamara Deverell, the art direction by Brandt Gordon, and the set decoration by Shane Vieau are stunning. The carnival grounds are a world all their own thanks to these artists' work, and scenes of Stanton Carlisle's old home are reminiscent of Andrew Wyeth and Edward Hopper. The costume design by Bonnie Cashin is also note-worthy, with a lot of work on the accuracy of the styles for the precise year, and specifically with Molly's bright red dress making her figure stand out from the blue-gray background of the train station. This film has a star-studded cast, with Bradley Cooper as Carlisle and Cate Blanchett as Dr. Lilith Ritter, and supporting actors Toni Collette, Willem Dafoe, Richard Jenkins, Rooney Mara, Ron Perlman, Mary Steenburgen, and David Strathairn. (This is the ninth movie on which director Guillermo del Toro and actor Ron Perlman have worked together.)

Released theatrically 12/17/21; available on various streaming services and on DVD. Rating: +3 (-4 to +4), or 9/10.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0039661/reference>

What others are saying: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/nightmare_alley_2021

THE TRAGEDY OF MACBETH: THE TRAGEDY OF MACBETH is the first solo directorial effort by Joel Coen. I believe this is the first time Macbeth has been played by an African-American (Denzel Washington), but it is not a token casting--several other roles are also played by Black actors. Washington was also cast in a previous Shakespeare film, MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING. Clearly Black actors are no longer limited to playing Othello. On the other hand this is just be a very small sample.

Unfortunately, I found the production not up to other Shakespeare films. The dialogue was delivered in a theatrical rather than a realistic style (for the latter, see Ian McKellen's RICHARD III), and the result was that the meaning was not always clear. (In fairness, I should say that I have seen many of the film and television versions and none really stand up to some of the Bard's other plays. Then again, MACBETH is the shortest of his tragedies, and the fourth-shortest of his plays.)

I will commend the striking set design by production designer Stefan Dechant, art director Jason T. Clark, and set decorator Nancy Haigh. Filmed entirely on sound stages (except for the final scene), it reminds one of the set design in Carl Theodor Dreyer's THE PASSION OF JOAN OF ARC. And Kathryn Hunter as (all three) witches was spectacular.

Released theatrically 12/25/21; available streaming on Apple TV+. Rating: high +1 (-4 to +4), or 6/10.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt10095582/reference>

What others are saying: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/the_tragedy_of_macbeth_2021

[-mrl/ecl]

Reforming the Short Form Hugo (comments by Dale Skran):

For a long time, I've felt the Short Form Hugo for Best Dramatic Presentation was not properly organized to give an award to the best "Television" SF of the previous year. My critique was three-fold:

- Requiring a particular episode to be nominated "by name" made it very difficult for a program to receive the award. Fans often love the show, but prefer different episodes. A great series might get many nominations for different episodes, but lose out to a single episode from a lesser series being pushed by an organized fan campaign. This characteristic also gives an unfair advantage to long-running series like "Dr. Who" with an large fandom that can run a campaign for a particular episode.
- Allowing short-shorts that are not regular "TV" shows to be nominated has the effect of diminishing the short-form Hugo as an award for series SF.
- The requirement to nominate a single episode also tilts the playing field in favor of anthology series or highly episodic television. This may have been appropriate the 1950s/60s when some of the best SF shows were TWIGHT ZONE and OUTER LIMITS, and virtually all series programming was rigidly episodic, but is a much worse match to series performances of the modern age that feature long story arcs and tight ties between long sequences of "episodes."

As the world of "television" has expanded to included Internet shows and has taken on a globalized character, a new problem has

arisen. It may be years before a great SF series makes it to a venue such as Netflix where it has a wide audience such that it might get enough attention to be nominated for the short form Hugo. Thus, we live in a time in which the short form Hugo simply ignores the best series SF, and is given out to whatever happens to be on BBC, Amazon Prime, Disney, HBO, or Netflix in the previous year. As an example, consider the 2021 short form nominees and winner:

- The Good Place: Whenever You're Ready, written and directed by Michael Schur (Fremulon / 3 Arts Entertainment / Universal Television, a division of Universal Studio Group) [WINNER] [you can watch on Netflix]
- The Expanse: Gaugamela, written by Dan Nowak, directed by Nick Gomez (Alcon Entertainment / Alcon Television Group / Amazon Studios / Hivemind / Just So)
- The Mandalorian: Chapter 16: The Rescue, written by Jon Favreau, directed by Peyton Reed (Golem Creations / Lucasfilm / Disney+)
- The Mandalorian: Chapter 13: The Jedi, written and directed by Dave Filoni (Golem Creations / Lucasfilm / Disney+)
- She-Ra and the Princesses of Power: Heart (parts 1 and 2), written by Josie Campbell and ND Stevenson, directed by Jen Bennett and Kiki Manrique (DreamWorks Animation Television / Netflix)
- Doctor Who: Fugitive of the Judoon, written by Vinay Patel and Chris Chibnall, directed by Nida Manzoor (BBC)

As can be readily seen, these programs all appeared on a small number of the most widely viewed net "channels." The impact of this phenomenon is that anything that takes a few years to make it to the bigger venues can never win a short form Hugo no matter how excellent it might be. One example is fantastic COUNTERPART, which ran for two years on the cable network Starz from 2017 to 2019. I watched it much later on Amazon Prime. It is also available for purchase on various other services to buy. Right now, I am watching MOTHERLAND: FORT SALEM by purchase on Amazon. It is "free" only on Freeform. This series has the best fantasy SF/world-building I've seen since COUNTERPART, but not enough of an audience will ever see it to allow it to be nominated for a short form Hugo--ever.

Since the 2022 nominees are just out, let's take a look at them as well:

- The Wheel of Time: "The Flame of Tar Valon," written by Justine Juel Gillmer, directed by Salli Richardson-Whitfield, based on The Wheel of Time series by Robert Jordan (Amazon Studios)
- For All Mankind: "The Grey," written by Matt Wolpert and Ben Nedivi; directed by Sergio Mimica-Gezzan (Tall Ship Productions/Sony Pictures Television)
- Arcane: "The Monster You Created," written by Christian Linke and Alex Yee; story by Christian Linke, Alex Yee, Conor Sheehy, and Ash Brannon; directed by Pascal Charrue and Arnaud Delord (Netflix)
- The Expanse: "Nemesis Games," written by Daniel Abraham, Ty Franck, and Naren Shankar; directed by Breck Eisner (Amazon Studios)
- Loki: "The Nexus Event," written by Eric Martin, directed by Kate Herron, created for television by Michael Waldron (Disney+)
- Star Trek: Lower Decks: "wej Duj," written by Kathryn Lyn, directed by Bob Suarez (CBS Eye Animation Productions)

The good news is that mercifully we don't see yet another Dr. Who episode being nominated. The bad news is that with the exception of Star Trek: Lower Decks [Paramount+] and For All Mankind [Apple+] everything is on one of the major "net" channels--Amazon Prime, Netflix, or Disney+. At least some of these certainly deserve the nomination, like "The Expanse," and even "Arcane," which is surprisingly good. "For All Mankind" is said to be excellent, but Apple TV+ has such a small subscriber base that it will probably get less support than it deserves. But it is hard to escape the feeling that "The Wheel of Time" is riding on a vast fan base, and "Loki" on the shoulders of Disney. Another 2022 strangeness is that "WandaVision"[Disney+] has been nominated for the Long Form although it appears in six 30 minute episodes. There are two ways forward. The Saturn Awards do a much better job of rewarding good SF series work, so perhaps we should just retire the short form Hugo as irrelevant to the modern age. Somehow, I don't think this is going to happen, so I offer instead the following reforms:

- The short form dramatic presentation Hugo should be retitled "Dramatic series Hugo" and the definition changed to exclude "single event" dramatic presentations. If we want a Hugo for single events, including plays, a new award, or more likely a special occasional award, should be created.
- The definition of the "Dramatic series Hugo" should be such that the nomination is for the series, not for particular episodes.
- A minimum number of episodes should be required--I suggest three episodes of at least 40 minutes each, or six episodes of at least 20 minutes. An open issue is whether to exclude or allow a series of theatrical films such as TWILIGHT, but I lean toward excluding them.
- The eligibility period should be changed from the previous year to at least the two previous years, and preferably the five previous years. This would allow time for new works to migrate to the larger platforms where they might actually be seen by a larger audience.
- No series could win the award twice. This would work against the domination of the award by a single series [Dr. Who] that has a large, organized fandom, or a single very popular series like GAME OF THRONES. This raises the question of how to handle a "rebooted" series or something like Dr. Who, which is periodically restarted with a new actor playing the title character. Fairness suggests that a "rebooted" version of a series should once again be eligible to win even if a previous version of the show had already won the short form series Hugo.

It should be noted that anthology or highly episodic series might still win, but only by being consistently excellent. So, there you have it--my plan to make the world a better place, one Hugo award at a time! [-dls]

COMFORT ME WITH APPLES (letter of comment by R. Looney):

In response to [Heath Row's comments on COMFORT ME WITH APPLES](#) in the 04/29/22 issue of the MT VOID, R. Looney writes:

...'cause I'm so much in Love!

Sorry, more favorite Bible quotes. News to me that this is a different book, "a terrifying new thriller from bestseller Catherynne M. Valente"--no, it's actually a 1956 book I found (in the enormous Acres Of Books in Long Beach), by Peter DeVries, which I eventually read and found completely unremarkable and forgettable. Does anybody remember Peter DeVries anymore? [-rl]

CRUELLA (letter of comment by Gary McGath):

In response to [Mark and Evelyn's review of CRUELLA](#) in the 05/06/22 issue of the MT VOID, Gary McGath writes:

[Evelyn writes,] "CRUELLA is a prequel to 101 DALMATIANS (1996), or ONE HUNDRED AND ONE DALMATIANS (1996), or both. It gives the back story of Cruella DeVil, but not the back story you expect. It seems to be following in the genre of story in which everything you thought you knew turns out to be wrong, and the first one of these I can recall is Gregory Maguire's novel WICKED. All the acting seems to be over the top, but it's probably amusing enough for an undemanding audience." [-ecl]

Roger's writing and publishing a song to mock Cruella struck me as a nasty thing to do, especially since at the point where he writes it, she hadn't done much to deserve it. Maybe she deserves a little sympathy at that. What kind of parents stick a kid with a name like "Cruella"?

Did you mean both dates to be 1996? The animated movie was much earlier. [-gmg]

Evelyn responds:

Arggh! No, the first film was 1961. [-ecl]

HIDDEN FIGURES and the "Lady Astronaut" Series (letter of comment by Doug Drummond):

Regarding [letters of comment by Gary McGath, Dorothy J. Heydt, and Paul Dormer on romper-noir](#) in the 07/09/21 issue of the MT VOID, Doug Drummond writes:

My wife Helen is very much into genealogy and history. When we visited an old settlement, we heard the "thread measuring" version of "Pop goes the weasel." I follow technological history: steam locomotives, 19th Century use of electricity, early computers (Babbage, Turing's Pilot ACE, Bendix G-25, LGP-30, etc.) and so on.

In response to [John Purcell's comments on THE CALCULATING STARS](#) in the same issue, Doug writes:

I especially liked the movie HIDDEN FIGURES and the "Lady Astronaut" book series. With respect to the "Lady Astronaut" series, NACA had IBM 704s and 709s in the 1950s before the 7090 depicted in HIDDEN FIGURES. These were the vacuum tube versions with the same logic as the transistorized 7090/7094 series. Of course, those machines were enormous, and certainly would not fit into a spacecraft even with Saturn-V tech. For that matter, the transistorized 7090 is a pretty big bunch of boxes, and we know that the APOLLO flight computers were primitive even when compared to a flip-phone or cheap digital watch.

My key takeaway from movie HIDDEN FIGURES was that the computer room was *perfectly* correct. I did quite a bit of programming on Purdue's 7094, which has a fancier console with even more flashing lights than the 7090. The movie had the correct 7090 console, and the rest of the installation looked correct. When do movie makers ever get the 'tech' correct? I was very impressed.

The "lady astronaut" mathematicians would have needed to create nomographs, special slide rules, and other short cuts for astrogation while flying. In Heinlein's YA novel ROCKET SHIP GALILEO, he described mechanical technology like he used in the pre-WW-II Navy. We saw those computers when we visited the USS Missouri in Pearl Harbor. Since I am a flying club pilot, I possess an "E6-B" "flight computer" that is a specialized slide rule for air navigation. I flew a club airplane to the Winnipeg Worldcon and many regional cons.

The characterization of the pilots in the "Lady Astronaut" series was also correct, another thing that is often overlooked. I did a panel on that subject at a regional con with the help of a fannish psychologist who studied First Responders with similar personalities. [-dd]

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

I love THE MARTIAN by Andy Weir, although I have often nit-picked various details (e.g., at one time he claims he can't make the hab cooler, but at another he drops the temperature to one degree centigrade).

But I just saw RED PLANET for the first time since its initial release in 2000, and was surprised to see how much Weir took as inspiration. One of the most obvious is that the crew in RED PLANET travels to the Pathfinder rover site, takes the radio from Pathfinder and repairs it in order to communicate with the ship in orbit. On the ship Bowman is told to tune to the old, no-longer-used frequency because Earth can see what Watney ... I mean Gallagher, is doing. (In THE MARTIAN, Watney uses the camera and later text to communicate, while in the film it's voice communication from the start.) And Gallagher returns to the ship in a craft never

intended for that purpose, and is brought to the ship by Bowman going out on a tether and manually grabbing his craft.

There is also a powerful storm with sustained winds over 100 miles an hour which is very dangerous. In RED PLANET, there is at least the excuse that algae have been generating oxygen, which would presumably increase the air pressure (and temperature) somewhat (though not enough to let the astronauts open their helmets and breathe the air directly, as they do).

Weir published THE MARTIAN in 2011. It is not unreasonable to think that he had seen RED PLANET ten years earlier, and some of the ideas stuck with him. [-ecl]

Mark Leeper
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Quote of the Week:

The only kind of suggestive material some people want in movies is, "Wouldn't an ice cream cone taste good now?"
--Mark R. Leeper

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