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

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

This is the fourteenth batch of mini-reviews, all character studies:

A MAN CALLED OTTO: A MAN CALLED OTTO is a remake of the 2016 Swedish film A MAN CALLED OVE, itself based on the book of the same name by Fredrick Backman. This seems a change of pace for Tom Hanks; somehow this is just not the way the public pictures usually him. (Then again, neither THE ROAD TO PERDITION nor NEWS OF THE WORLD were "stereotypical" Tom Hanks roles. Nor, for that matter, was his other 2022 role of Colonel Tom Parker in ELVIS.) In A MAN CALLED OTTO, Hanks plays a flaming misanthrope. (He denies this, leading another character to say sarcastically, "No, every word you say is like a warm cuddle.")

This is a gentle story though entirely predictable in the spirit of A CHRISTMAS CAROL, LAST HOLIDAY, and IN AMERICA, among others.

Some random thoughts: Interestingly, while CASTAWAY seemed to champion FedEx, in this film UPS gets the nod. Otto as a younger man is played by Tom Hanks's son, Truman Hanks. (Colin Hanks, the better-known son of Tom, is twenty years older, and would have been too old for the role. So if they wanted family resemblance, Truman was a good choice.) And there did seem to be a bit of adding current topicality a bit clumsily.

Released theatrically 30 December 2022. Rating: +2 (-4 to +4) or 7/10

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt7405458/reference>

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

MY POLICEMAN: MY POLICEMAN is primarily set in a 1950s Britain where "the love that dare not speak its name" is still "the love that dare not speak its name." It begins in the present, when three people who were friends then are re-united in spite of, and because of, their hidden secrets.

Films used to have a film score, music that went with what was in the film. It is a pity that that custom has gone away. Too many films are assemblies of popular songs, which is a great loss for film fans.

Released theatrically 21 October 2022. Rating: high +1 (-4 to +4) or 6/10

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt13139228/reference>

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

GOOD LUCK TO YOU, LEO GRANDE: GOOD LUCK TO YOU, LEO GRANDE is a two-hander featuring Emma Thompson and Daryl McCormack, but it is clearly Emma Thompson's film. McCormack is there mostly to react and respond to Thompson (both as a character and as an actor). This is certainly a necessary role, but not a flashy one.

The basic plot has widowed schoolteacher Thompson hiring sex worker McCormack so as to explore what she has missed in her very mundane marriage. The film is quite explicit in its language, but much less than might be expected in terms of what is shown (which is not to say that this is appropriate for everyone).

This is yet another film that focuses on women, and in this case older women, as characters in their own right, not just adjuncts to men.

Released on Hulu streaming 17 June 2022. Rating: +3 (-4 to +4) or 9/10

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt13352968/reference>

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

[-mrl/ecl]

QUEENS OF AN ALIEN SUN by **Peter F. Hamilton** (copyright 2022, Tantor Audio, 9 hours and 54 minutes, ASIN: B0BH6Q73L6, narrated by Elizabeth Klett) (audio book review by Joe Karpierz):

It's fairly evident by the lack of reaction to the final book in the "Arkship Trilogy" by Peter F. Hamilton, **QUEENS OF AN ALIEN SUN**, that if it's not a "widescreen Space Opera" with all the trappings of that subgenre of science fiction (Well, to be fair, "widescreen Space Opera" is a subgenre of Space Opera, which itself is a subgenre of science fiction, so maybe it's a sub-subgenre?), not many people care enough to read it. The "Arkship Trilogy" is Hamilton's first (and maybe only) foray into the YA market, and the rest of his oeuvre is adult in nature, so it seems that his fans aren't into this thing he did. That's okay, of course, because not everything is for everyone. I'm still not sure that YA is something I'd normally pick up to read as a conscious choice (after all, I still haven't read Alastair Reynolds' YA trilogy, and he is a favorite author of mine), but the "Arkship Trilogy" as a whole, and **QUEENS OF AN ALIEN SUN** in particular, is a fine piece of writing, the result of which is that I'll be more open to reading YA in the future.

Hazel and the gang have temporarily beaten back the Yi, the alien creatures that have taken over the arkship Daedalus. There are two tasks ahead of her and her companions: get the ship turned around and headed back toward the planet they were heading toward so they can finish the journey and begin a new life, and rid the ship of the remaining Yi. And definitely not in that order.

The good news for Hazel is that it's not a one-woman show (I want to say one-*girl* show, because she is a teenager, but at the same time she is the captain of the ship, so my brain is going for woman in this case). As she gathers up people throughout the arkship to lead them to safety away from the Yi, she picks up leaders of the small communities that believe in her and her quest. A task like what she is attempting is really too large for one person, be she a teenager or an adult. The bad news is that the Yi are persistent and relentless. Again, she has the help, and she needs all of it.

The novel shows our young protagonists growing up, learning to make very tough decisions as well as learning to deal with the losses that come with making those decisions. Oh, she's still a teenager at heart, learning (there's that word again) to deal with personal relationships with both the adults that are helping her and the people who are her age who will be an important part of her life going forward, especially once they reach the new planet.

There's really nothing extraordinary about this novel. It tells a straightforward story that results in a typical ending which, in reality, the listener can hear coming from a mile away. And really, there's nothing wrong with that. I'm not familiar with what YA readers' (and by that I mean readers who are the target audience of the book, not adults who read YA) expectations are in terms of complexity and themes, but it *seems* right. If a listener wants complexity in their Hamilton, there are plenty of other novels of his to choose from.

The title of the book comes from the Yi brain queen proposing that the Yi and the humans co-exist on the planet together. Of course, Hazel was having none of that. I'm reminded of Ripley battling the alien queen in *Aliens* - not just in the climactic scene at the end, but all throughout the movie. Hazel and the brain queen were in conflict throughout the novel, down to the bitter end. I also wonder whether Hamilton was influenced by Heinlein's *ORPHANS OF THE SKY*, arguably the first generational starship story, in which the

inhabitants of the Vanguard have regressed to the point of becoming farmers after a mutiny on the ship.

With regard to Elizabeth Klett, she once again did a fine job narrating the story. I think the choice of using a female narrator for a female led story was the right one; I find it difficult to imagine what the listening experience would have been like had John Lee, Hamilton's usual narrator, had been reading this book.

All in all, QUEENS OF AN ALIEN SUN is a fine ending to a good trilogy. If you like YA and you like Peter F. Hamilton, I think you'll find the "Arkship Trilogy" satisfying. [-jak]

"Flooded with AI-Created Content, A Sci-Fi Magazine Suspends Submissions"

"A slice of dystopian fiction became reality for one of sci-fi publishing's bigger names this week, when submissions generated by artificial intelligence flooded the literary magazine Clarkesworld, leading it to temporarily stop accepting new work.

'Submissions are currently closed. It shouldn't be hard to guess why,' editor Neil Clarke wrote in a tweet thread, joining the sometimes-heated discourse about the promises, perils and literary potential of AI."

Full article at <https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2023/02/22/scifi-magazine-clarkesworld-artificial-intelligence/>

GALAXY QUEST (comments by Evelyn C. Leeper):

I just re-watched GALAXY QUEST for the fifteenth time, and every time I watch it now, I get double enjoyment. The movie is a lot of fun, but I am also reminded of the fact that of all the Hugo-winning dramatic presentation, the director and the writer of this were among the few creators who actually showed up for the ceremony, and what's more, participated in other events at the convention and seemed genuinely to be enjoying themselves. [-ecl]

FLESH GORDON (letters of comment by Scott Dorsey, Kip Williams, and Peter Trei):

In response to [various comments on FLESH GORDON](#) in the 02/24/23 issue of the MT VOID, Scott Dorsey writes:

The print we ran at Arisia a few years ago was definitely the R-rated cut. We tried to find the hardcore version on 35mm and never was able to.

Likewise we never could get a 35mm print of "Wham, Bam, Thank you Spaceman" even though it also was widely distributed for a short time period. [-sd]

Kip Williams writes:

Another bit of FLESH GORDON trivia is that David Mattingly got his start at Disney because of the matte work he had done for the never-completed sequel to FLESH GORDON. After THE BLACK HOLE, he said fans would ask excitedly what he was working on now, and he'd say "HERBIE THE LOVE BUG GOES TO MONTE CARLO." (This was *before* a lot of things.) [-kw]

Peter Trei notes:

There's similarly an X-rated ALICE IN WONDERLAND, but FLESH GORDON is a much better film. [-pt]

TCM Picks and Oscars (letter of comment by Jim Susky):

In response to [Mark and Evelyn's comments on TCM picks for March](#) in the 02/24/23 issue of the MT VOID, Jim Susky writes:

Thank you yet again for your monthly TCM picks.

This one got my attention because any short list that has two by Kubrick is a notable list.

"Oscar" lost me some time in the nineties. I don't recall the trigger, but a more formative "event" was when my wife moved in with her film collection. I must have been receptive, because it only took a handful of films to cause me to greatly narrow (and refocus) my taste for cinema.

Another "event" was a friend deriding FORREST GUMP due to its protagonist. It wasn't until much later that I discovered that the Academy deemed it Best Picture (and *why* is that not on your list?) [-js]

Evelyn responds:

I am the one who comes up with the list of films and times, and I tend to limit it to films of the fantastic (science fiction, fantasy, and horror). I probably should say something to this effect. The Oscars, just like the more recent Hugos, don't always age well. The idea that SHAKESPEARE IN LOVE won the Oscar over SAVING PRIVATE RYAN, for example, seems ludicrous in retrospect, and similarly DANCES WITH WOLVES over GOODFELLAS. For a long time, the greatest mis-step was considered to be THE GREATEST SHOW ON EARTH over HIGH NOON. [-ecl]

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

IMAGINARY LIVES by Marcel Schwob (translated by Chris Clarke) (Wakefield Press, ISBN 978-1-607-10635-7) was apparently one of the influences for Jorge Luis Borges's A UNIVERSAL HISTORY OF INFAMY, which in turn was the inspiration for Rhys Hughes's A NEW UNIVERSAL HISTORY OF INFAMY. The latter two are reviewed at <http://leepers.us/evelyn/reviews/infamy.htm>, but I was not aware of Schwob until recently.

As with the later books, this consists of brief chapters telling fictional biographies of (mostly) real people. Most are either ancient or French, and so will not be as familiar to Anglophone readers as they would have been to Schwob's original audience. But Schwob includes Pocahontas, Captain Kidd (and two other pirates), and Burke and Hare. As far as I can tell, the story of Pocahontas follows the facts (as we know them) and the legends (as we've heard them).

The inclusion of such fictional characters as the sorcerer from the story of Aladdin and a woman from a novel by Francois Villon could be considered clues that much of the rest is fictional as well, although the fact that most of the chapters had appeared individually in the newspaper LE JOURNAL. Even so, I suspect readers recognized the fictional nature of the stories.

As I said, most of the characters will be unfamiliar to readers of this English translation, but given they are fictional, one can still appreciate them as stories. [-ecl]

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Quote of the Week:

The Compleat Angler is acknowledged to be one of the world's books. Only the trouble is that the world doesn't read its books, it borrows a detective story instead.

--Stephen Leacock

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