

MT VOID 07/21/23 -- Vol. 42, No. 3, Whole Number 2285



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Mini Reviews, Part 1 (film reviews by Mark R. Leeper and Evelyn C. Leeper):

And with the incrementing of the volume number of the MT VOID comes the re-setting of the mini-reviews sequence numbers. This is the first batch of mini-reviews for this season, all documentaries:

THEY SHALL NOT GROW OLD (2018): THEY SHALL NOT GROW OLD is a documentary done as part of the centenary commemoration of World War I, but it is different from most such documentaries in two ways. First, the film is composed entirely of actual World War I documentary footage and first-person unscripted narration. And second, the actual war footage is colorized to make it more realistic and immediate to modern audiences. The home front scenes are left in black-and-white, both as a contrast and because there is less need for the viewers to get a visceral feeling for the scenes.

Warning: The documentary footage of the war is disturbing, even more so because of the colorization. However, the disturbing scenes are all still photographs rather than live-action filming of combat deaths or injuries. Whether this is due to the nature of filming and photography at the time, or director Peter Jackson's decision not to show these scenes (possibly out of respect for the families) is unclear. [-ecl]

Released theatrically 1 February 2019. Rating: high +2 (-4 to +4), or 8/10.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt7905466/reference>

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

THE TRUFFLE HUNTERS (2020): THE TRUFFLE HUNTERS was nominated for a lot of awards, but its charm--or whatever--escaped us. It is a documentary about a few elderly truffle hunters and their dogs (I thought it was pigs) who are still hunting white Alba truffles. In 2001, they were selling for \$1000-\$2000 a pound. Since then prices have skyrocketed; some large specimens sell at auction for about \$100,000/lb. (We can't help but feel that it is more a status thing--are the large ones that much better than the small.) These truffle hunters are being pressured to reveal their best hunting grounds, having their own property "poached" by others, and just plain retiring. The documentary offers no solutions and is more just a look at them and their lifestyles, contrasted with the (IMHO) ridiculous auctions for truffles at prices the hunters will never see. [-mrl/ec]

Released theatrically 12 March 2021. Rating: +1 (-4 to +4), or 6/10.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt7905466/reference>

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

RAT FILM (2017): RAT FILM is a history of Baltimore and the Norway Brown Rat. While it does cover both Baltimore and the rat, there is no much intersection between the two. Yes, it discusses redlining, and how the environmental conditions in the Black neighborhoods are such that rats proliferate there. But much of the information about rats is not specific to Baltimore, and the Baltimore history is probably typical of other cities as well (especially the redlining and other segregationist aspects).

We do see some unusual sights. There was a guy with a blowgun stalking a rat in his backyard, leading Mark to ask, "This is the peak of civilization?"

We discover that amateurs use poison in peanut butter; professionals use a poison that coats the tunnels--it gets on the rate and the rats ingest it while grooming it off.

We see people fishing for rats--with fishing poles. This doesn't scale up very well.

Curt Richter's rat poison actually increased the rat population; it turned out that fixing the environment (more frequent garbage pickup, improved sewers, etc.) worked better. There's whole "subplot" about rats as lab animals, including for social factors The Maryland Medical Examiner's Office has a collection, "Nutshell Studies of Unexplained Death", which contains eighteen miniature crime scenes. If this sounds like C.S.I.'s "Miniature Killer", it is because they inspired C.S.I.'s writers to create the character. After the film was made, the miniatures were displayed at the Smithsonian in Washington, but the exhibit was returned to Baltimore and it is no longer open to the general public. (The C.S.I. connection and the film probably made it just too popular.)

In any case, it had nothing to do with rats. And I don't think Edgar Allan Poe gets mentioned at all, even though his was a case of unexplained death.

In short, this film was all over the map (no pun intended), with some interesting parts and others that seemed to go nowhere. [-mrl/ec]

Released streaming 03 October 2017. Rating: +1 (-4 to +4), or 6/10.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt7905466/reference>

What others are saying: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/rat_film_2017

Hugo Finalist Reviews (comments by Evelyn C. Leeper):

Joe Karpierz's review of John Scalzi's THE KAIJU PRESERVATION SOCIETY can be found at <http://leepers.us/mtvoid/2022/VOID0422.htm#kaiju>.

His review of Mary Robinette Kowal's THE SPARE MAN can be found at <http://leepers.us/mtvoid/VOID0317.htm#spareman>.

Joe says he hopes to review at least three of the remaining books.

I hope to review (or at least comment on) most of the Dramatic Presentations, Long Form. I *may* try doing the Short Stories as well, depending on availability. [-ecl]

MOBY-DICK (letter of comment by John Hertz):

In response to [Evelyn's comments on MOBY-DICK](#) in the 05/05/23 issue of the MT VOID, John Hertz writes:

Once, just once, at a Starbucks coffee shop I found a copy of MOBY-DICK on the shelf of things for sale--and it was the Northwestern-Newberry edition! I haven't compared the Norton edition with it; Evelyn, have you? [-jh]

Evelyn responds:

No, I haven't, and apologies for taking so long to get your comments included. I saw your letter was rather long, and didn't realize that most of it was not a LoC (or is it "an LoC"?) that didn't need to be typed in. [-ecl]

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

COME, TELL ME HOW YOU LIVE by Agatha Christie Mallowan (Bantam Agatha Christie Hardcover Collection, ISBN 0-553-35049-8) is not a mystery novel. The fact that this was published as "Agatha Christie Mallowan" rather than just "Agatha Christie" or "Mary Westmacott" should be a clue that this is not your ordinary work of fiction. For starters, it is non-fiction, and not just non-fiction, but autobiographical. This is Christie's account of the time from 1934 to 1938 she spent at various digs in Syria with her husband, archaeologist Max Mallowan.

It is obvious that Christie's experiences on these expeditions influenced (and provided background for) several of her novels and stories, such as APPOINTMENT WITH DEATH, MURDER ON THE ORIENT EXPRESS, "The Gate of Baghdad", "The Pearl of Price", and especially MURDER IN MESOPOTAMIA.

There is, I will note, a fair amount of (negative) stereotyping of the various local people Mallowan employed. Yes, she has some positive things to say, but then again, positive experiences are just not as interesting, literarily, as negative ones.

And while we're talking about Agatha Christie, let me add to my comments about the ITV adaption of her Poirot stories (in the 06/23/23 issue). The ITV adaptation of APPOINTMENT FOR DEATH (William Morrow, ISBN 978-0-062-07392-1) by Agatha Christie ... where to start? The victim has an entirely different backstory (as do almost all the characters), her stepchildren are now her adopted children, her son-in-law is now her stepson, her husband is still alive (and searching for the head of John the Baptist), the method of murder is entirely different, and even the killer has been changed. [-ecl]

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Quote of the Week:

Autobiography is now as common as adultery and hardly less reprehensible.

--John Griff

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