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Table of Contents

- [Mini Reviews, Part 8 \(THE MOST REMOTE RESTAURANT IN THE WORLD; SORRY, WE'RE CLOSED\)](#) (film reviews by Mark R. Leeper and Evelyn C. Leeper)
- [10 Greatest Sci-Fi Movies You've Probably Never Seen](#)
- [NETTLE AND BONE by T. Kingfisher](#) (audio book review by Joe Karpierz)
- [WINGS--A HISTORY OF AVIATION FROM KITES TO THE SPACE AGE](#) by Tom D. Crouch (book review by Greg Frederick)
- [This Week's Reading](#) (THE SECOND MURDERER) (book comments by Evelyn C. Leeper)
- [Quote of the Week](#)

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Mini Reviews, Part 8 (film reviews by Mark R. Leeper and Evelyn C. Leeper):

This is the eighth batch of mini-reviews for this season, two documentaries about restaurants.

THE MOST REMOTE RESTAURANT IN THE WORLD (2023): THE MOST REMOTE RESTAURANT IN THE WORLD is about the opening of the two-star Michelin restaurant KOKS in Ilimanaq, Greenland, relocating from the Faroe Islands. Ilimanaq has a population of 53, at least before the restaurant staff of 21 move there. (It does have a school; eight children attend first through ninth grade there.)

KOKS serves a 17- to 22-course tasting meal (the number seemed to fluctuate) for 3200 DKK (US\$455), and had about 1800 reservations before they even opened, for a restaurant that seats 30. People can arrive on their own, but the meal is also included in some high-end tours.

Part of the pressure to open on time in spite of all the problems was that the people who had booked the first night included a man coming from Hong Kong just for this, a couple celebrating their anniversary on opening day. Chef Poul Andrias said at one point that

people were spending 10,000 DKK (roughly US\$1500), which probably only includes travel from nearby airports such as Denmark or Iceland, plus boat fare.

The film covers the problems of opening a restaurant, exacerbated by the remote location, the lack of infrastructure, and the attempt to serve only seasonal, locally sourced food. For example, when they first turned on the oven, the entire village lost power. It turned out that seal is not as easy to source locally as they thought, and since the Greenland whale harvest is limited to two per year, that is also problematic.

Andrias described it at one point as, "everything that could go wrong is going wrong, and everything that couldn't go wrong is also going wrong."

They did not give the entire menu (which presumably has some variations because of supply problems), but what they did mention were mattak (whale skin); shrimp in a chamomile-kombucha sauce; Arctic ptarmigan with tumak (reindeer fat), cream, and a berry salsa; grilled seal ribs; Arctic char; whale with a blue mussel glaze with beetroot; tartlet of seal blood and seaweed; fried shrimp head; scallop; halibut; salmon skin; braised musk ox in a glaze of burnt crab shell; a lovage dessert; and petit fours of caramelised onion and fermented garlic.

What makes it more complicated is that apparently the meals/dishes are staggered, i.e., they are not starting everyone at the same time. So for example, they may be serving Table 1 the musk ox while they are serving Table 2 the seal ribs.

[WARNING: The film shows a whale being cut up. It also has a lot of profanity.]

[-ecl]

Released on Viaplay streaming 31 October 2023. Rating: high +1 (-4 to +4), or 6/10.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt27494797/reference>

SORRY, WE'RE CLOSED (2023): SORRY, WE'RE CLOSED is billed as a look at how the pandemic affected the restaurant industry. But a lot of it is how the pandemic affected people in general, even if all the people xyz is interviewing are in the restaurant business. And what is specific to the restaurant industry is almost entirely "fine dining". Comments about the fast food segment, or even "family dining" are mostly critical of how some of the pandemic funds went to them instead of individually owned restaurants. I will note that a lot of this segment consists of franchises, rather than corporate owned, and the staff who worked in them also have families to feed and mortgages to pay.

And that's where I have a problem. Yes, it's sad that someone who spent two million dollars to "build out" a restaurant that barely had a chance to open, before it had to close permanently. But it is my personal opinion that the "fine dining" segment in particular was built on a booming economy for enough well-off people. (And the other end--fast food and family dining--is built on very low wages and cost-cutting in order to keep prices unreasonably low.)

And for those restaurants that have come back, the labor force marketplace has changed. Many restaurant workers who were laid off found other jobs and don't want to go back to hard labor for low wages. (This is true in other service industries as well.)

(Do we really need a Chinese restaurant in *every* strip mall? How did they all survive even before the pandemic?)

The film did conclude that people will have to pay more for their food in restaurants, and for food in general. And I suppose the pandemic showed how shaky the business model was for more restaurants--though how to construct a business model that allows for a yearlong shutdown is not clear to me.

Maybe we had a "restaurant bubble" and the pandemic popped it. [-ecl]

Released streaming 08 August 2023. Rating: +1 (-4 to +4), or 6/10.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt22060684/reference>

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

10 Greatest Sci-Fi Movies You've Probably Never Seen

<https://movieweb.com/greatest-sci-fi-movies-youve-probably-never-seen>

[In case you're wondering, we've seen all ten. -ecl]

NETTLE AND BONE by **T. Kingfisher** (copyright 2022, Macmillan Audio, 9 hours and 3 minutes, ASIN: B08TYT2GZZ, narrated by Amara Jasper) (audio book review by Joe Karpierz):

I've not read much T. Kingfisher. My only familiarity with her is as a result of two Hugo-nominated short stories, 2018's "The Rose MacGregor Drinking and Admiration Society" and 2020's Hugo-winning story "Metal Like Blood in the Dark", which I remember as being a story that I did like quite a bit. But that's it. Once again, she shows up on the Hugo ballot in two categories, one of them being NETTLE AND BONE. T. Kingfisher has something of a reputation as a horror writer, or maybe at least dark fantasy, and I really didn't know what to expect.

What I got was a fairy tale, but certainly not the kind with heroic and handsome prince, the beautiful young girl protagonist, and all the happiness and joy that goes along with that kind of story. We have the prince, although he a cruel and abusive man; we have three sisters, one who is a focal point of the story (Marra), raised in a convent so that she can be sheltered from that evil prince; a dust witch, with her demon-possessed chicken; a godmother with a cursed chick (no, I'm not making that up); a bone dog, which was created by Marra as one of her three impossible tasks before the dust witch would agree to help her with her quest (we'll get to that); and a disgraced knight, who Marra found with the aid of the chick (no, I'm still not making that up) in a sort of magical market.

Marra has discovered that her sisters, who have married the prince (not at the same time, mind you, but in a serial fashion) in order to form an alliance with his kingdom, are being abused and tortured by the prince. The first sister died, and the second is living a miserable life as the prince's wife, with her only crime being that she has not provided the prince an heir (because what is a kingdom without a line of succession anyway?). So, Marra decides she has to go to his kingdom and kill him. Along the way, starting with the dust witch, she forms her band of companions in an effort to put together a team that will help her carry out her goal. The problem is, she has a starting point and an ending point, but no plan to actually make it from point A to point B.

It should be obvious by now that this is a quest story, a fairy tale that doesn't read like a traditional fairy tale. It certainly is a dark fantasy. It starts out like a horror novel, as the opening chapter finds Marra creating the bone dog, and turns a bit more gruesome when she has to make a cloak out of nettle. And whether you call a story about what seems to be something of an insane prince who tortures his wives when he doesn't get what he wants a dark fantasy--which does include a scene where Marra gets to go to the underground catacombs where all the kings are entombed to try to get a curse lifted--or a horror story, NETTLE AND BONE is unnerving in spots. And it really is a fine story, well written and crafted, with nicely developed characters.

What it is not (and stop me if you've read this from me in another review recently) is a Hugo worthy novel.

Please don't get me wrong here. I *liked* NETTLE AND BONE. It's an enjoyable read (well, listen, in my case). While it's not a book that I would pick up on my own to read, I certainly don't feel like I wasted my time listening to it (unlike Greg Egan's DIASPORA, for example, which I felt was a waste of my time), nor do I regret having listened to it. But what it is, ultimately, is a quest fairy tale, although to be sure it is just a bit different because of its darker tones and themes. It's got a princess, a godmother, a witch, a handsome man, an evil prince, and three enchanted creatures. And they all go on a quest to kill someone, which I admit causes it to deviate from your standard fairy tale. But it really doesn't do anything new here. I'm being harsh on NETTLE AND BONE because I'm reviewing it as a candidate for science fiction and fantasy's highest award, and as a candidate for that award I think it is out of place. It is a good book. It just doesn't belong here--in my apparently not so humble opinion. I'd certainly recommend that people read the book. But it's not, well, fill in the blank with any one of your favorite Hugo winners here.

As far as the obligatory mention of the narrator, I will have to admit that while Amara Jasper's narration of NETTLE AND BONE did not throw me out of the story, neither did it stand out in any other way. Which, I guess, is good. It was a solid performance, but to be honest I don't remember that much about it. [-jak]

WINGS--A HISTORY OF AVIATION FROM KITES TO THE SPACE AGE by **Tom D. Crouch** (book review by Greg Frederick):

WINGS--A HISTORY OF AVIATION FROM KITES TO THE SPACE AGE is a book written by Tom D. Crouch. This book provides a comprehensive and detailed history of aviation, starting from the early days of kites and moving through the development of airplanes and rockets into the space age. It covers the major milestones, key figures, and technological advancements in the field of

aviation and aerospace.

Crouch is a noted historian and curator at the National Air and Space Museum of the Smithsonian Institution. His expertise in aviation history and his access to the museum's extensive collection of aircraft and artifacts make WINGS a well-researched and authoritative resource on the subject.

The book offers a rich exploration of the evolution of flight, from the Wright brothers' first powered flight to the achievements of space exploration. It is a valuable resource for anyone interested in the history of aviation and the incredible progress made in this field over the years. [-gf]

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

THE SECOND MURDERER by Denise Mina (Mulholland Books, ISBN 978-0-316-26564-5) is the latest of the new Philip Marlowe novels. Two weeks ago I talked about THE BIG SLEEP, Raymond Chandler's first Marlowe novel. Last week I reviewed ONLY TO SLEEP (by Lawrence Osborne), one of the post-Chandler Marlowe novels. (And next week, if USPS comes through, I hope to cover TEN PERCENT OF LIFE, a translation of Hiber Conteris's EL DIEZ POR CIENTO DE VIDA, a Spanish Marlowe novel.)

As should be clear is that the Chandler estate has not done what the Ian Fleming estate did, and settle on a single author to continue the series. For Bond, (the British) John Gardner wrote fourteen novels. When he retired, Raymond Benson was chosen and wrote six more novels. The Robert B. Parker estate did the same with both Jesse Stone and Spenser. Whether this is because Chandler's estate hasn't found the "perfect" author yet, or doesn't want any one author to overshadow Chandler, or what, isn't clear.

In any case, of the seven post-Chandler novels, only POODLE SPRINGS and PERCHANCE TO DREAM have the same author, Robert B. Parker. The first of these had been partially written by Chandler when Parker took over, and the second is a sequel to THE BIG SLEEP (hence set in an already created world with already created characters). The next, THE BLACK-EYED BLONDE by John Banville, is a sequel to THE LONG GOODBYE. Then came ONLY TO SLEEP by Lawrence Osborne, set in 1988 Mexico, and THE GOODBYE COAST by Joe Ide, a "re-imagining" of Marlowe in 2022 Los Angeles.

Mina returns to the original time of Marlowe, and to Los Angeles. Marlowe starts out with a missing person case, but of course it ends up with murder, because what is a Philip Marlowe novel without Marlowe finding a body? The plot is complicated, with various twists and turns, because what is a Philip Marlowe novel ... Well, you get the idea. Mina even has a character for FAREWELL, MY LOVELY, though one could not really call this a sequel.

Mina has added some elements missing from Chandler's novels, reflecting more of the diversity of the Los Angeles of the time. Chandler tended to show that diversity only in his minor characters (even the one major Mexican character turns out to be an Anglo); Mina brings them out of the shadows. This is not to say Marlowe (or anyone else) is "woke", but they do have to deal with these people rather than just dismiss them.

All in all, I found this more satisfying than ONLY TO SLEEP. [-ecl]

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Quote of the Week:

Books are the blessed chloroform of the mind.
--Robert Chambers

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