

MT VOID 03/31/23 -- Vol. 41, No. 40, Whole Number 2269



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Co-Editor: Mark Leeper, mleeper@optonline.net

Co-Editor: Evelyn Leeper, eleeper@optonline.net

Sending Address: evelynchimelisleeper@gmail.com

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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.

Science Fiction (and Other) Discussion Groups, Films, Lectures, etc. (NJ):

All meetings are currently planned as in-person. The best way to get the latest information is to be on the mailing lists for them.

May 4, 2023 (MTPL), 5:30PM: BEYOND THE INFINITE TWO MINUTES (2021) & THE 7TH VOYAGE OF EGON TICHY (2020) & story by Stanislaw Lem (1957)

<https://tinyurl.com/LemTichy7th>

June 1, 2023 (MTPL), 5:30PM ALTERED STATES (1980) & novel by Paddy Chayefsky

May 25, 2023 (OBPL), 7:00PM: ATTACK SURFACE by Cory Doctorow

My Picks for Turner Classic Movies for April (comments by Mark R. Leeper):

In January, while I was recommending THE CROWDED SKY, based on a Hank Searls novel, I wrote about the another Searls novel, THE PILGRIM PROJECT, and the surprisingly credible film COUNTDOWN inspired by it. Sadly, I could not say where the latter film could be found. Probably, in the back of my mind I expected it would show up the following month or so, and sure enough COUNTDOWN is scheduled to play on TCM in April. As I noted, "Fans of Michael Crichton's techno-thrillers should take a good look at Hank Searls stories. Both author wrote novels with a near-future science fictional premise. His 1960 THE PILGRIM PROJECT was about a 1960 government program to put the first man on the moon."

[COUNTDOWN (1968), Tuesday, April 25, 4:15 AM]

And another recommendation, this time from Mark's mother: AMERICA, AMERICA.

[AMERICA, AMERICA (1963), Friday, April 14, 12:15 AM]

Films of interest (with a heavy emphasis on the fantastic):

04/04	10:15 AM	The Maltese Falcon (1931) [not the Bogart version, but rather the first version filmed]
04/05	8:00 AM	Svengali (1931)
04/07	7:15 AM	Moby Dick (1930) [has to be seen to be believed]
04/07	12:15 PM	When Dinosaurs Ruled the Earth (1971)
04/09	7:00 AM	The Green Pastures (1936)
04/09	6:00 PM	Oh, God! (1977)
04/10	1:15 PM	The Curse of Frankenstein (1957)
04/10	2:45 PM	Frankenstein Must Be Destroyed (1970)
04/10	6:15 PM	Taste the Blood of Dracula (1970)
04/15	2:15 AM	House of Wax (1953)
04/15	5:30 AM	Doctor X (1932)
04/15	7:00 AM	Mystery of the Wax Museum (1933)
04/15	9:00 AM	Them! (1954)
04/15	11:00 AM	The Bad Seed (1956)
04/15	3:30 PM	What Ever Happened to Baby Jane? (1962)
04/16	4:15 AM	Camelot (1967)
04/17	8:45 AM	Treasure Island (1973)
04/17	10:30 AM	The Incredible Mr. Limpet (1964)
04/19	3:45 PM	Between Two Worlds (1944)
04/20	4:30 AM	The Beast with Five Fingers (1946)
04/21	6:45 AM	Finian's Rainbow (1968)
04/22	2:45 PM	Around the World in 80 Days (1956)
04/22	6:00 PM	Time After Time (1979)
04/23	6:30 AM	A Midsummer Night's Dream (1935)
04/24	8:00 AM	The Swarm (1978)
04/24	4:15 PM	It's Alive (1974)
04/24	6:00 PM	The Omega Man (1971)
04/25	4:15 AM	Countdown (1968)
04/29	8:00 AM	The Horn Blows at Midnight (1945)

[-mrl]

Audio/Video Parodies of Science Fiction (letter of comment by Garth Spencer):

Garth Spencer writes (from Vancouver, Canada):

I have a very difficult time finding things to comment on in the MT VOID, so instead I'm going to pull a comment out of left field: do fans in your area produce any audio or video parodies of science fiction? Without thinking too hard I came up with three such parodies from SF groups in Canada--"Dawn of the Living Socks", "Beavra", and "Cattlefarm Galactica"--but they all date to the early 1980s.

[-gs]

Ivar the Boneless, Florence Pugh (PUSS IN BOOTS--THE LAST WISH, DON'T WORRY DARLING), AMSTERDAM, LONGBOURNE, ORPHANS OF THE SKY and Heinlein's Attitudes about Women, THE WOMAN KING, and the Chengdu Worldcon (letter of comment by Taras Wolansky):

In response to several comments in several issues of the MT VOID, Taras Wolansky writes:

Thanks for many great issues of the VOID.

It's remarkable that we know the name, Ivar the Boneless, but we don't know why he was called "boneless". Historians have suggested he was crippled in some way; but I speculate that it came from showing unusual flexibility in dodging a blow in a fight. We are also unsure why his father, Ragnar Lodbrok (or Lothbrok), the main character in the VIKINGS TV series, was called Lodbrok ("hairy breeches"). I like to imagine it comes from an incident in which his camp was ambushed at night, and he went into battle without his pants!

Filmwise, I will follow the great Florence Pugh anywhere. She's in both the entertaining new PUSS IN BOOTS, as Goldilocks, leader of the Three Bears gang; and she's the "darling" who had better start worrying, in DONT WORRY DARLING. In Zach Braff's A GOOD PERSON she not only acts up a storm, but sings several songs of her own composition, accompanying herself on the piano.

I see a lot of movies in the theater--about 124 last year--and I always write a thumbnail review for myself, in case I forget what they're about. Here's part of my thumbnail for AMSTERDAM: "The rather melodramatic and clichéd ending is dragged out to an excruciating degree, trying the patience of the entire audience (me). First time I ever yelled, 'editor' in a movie theater."

I enjoy Jane Austen spin-offs, and I looked at Jo Baker's *LONGBOURNE*, but decided it was too anachronistic. A job in the "big house" might look like terrible drudgery to us, but for a poor English farm girl ca. 1800, it was highly prized. Basically, she would do much the same work she did at home, but get paid for it, which would enable her to save for a dowry. Also, she had the rare privilege, in an agricultural society, of working indoors, out of the sun and rain and snow. The scene Evelyn describes, in which the girl resents getting a cast-off dress as a present, also strikes me as very 21st Century: the dress would, of course, become her "Sunday best".

Joe K. is probably wrong to judge Robert Heinlein's real attitudes about women in the Forties based on what a backward character says in *ORPHANS OF THE SKY*. Off the top of my head: In "Let There Be Light" (1940), Heinlein gives us a male engineer and a brilliant woman biophysicist who collaborate to create a solar cell that revolutionizes the world. In "Delilah and the Space Rigger" (1949), a woman engineer conceals her sex to get a job building a space station, and proves herself indispensable to the misogynistic construction chief.

I gave *THE WOMAN KING* a go by precisely for the reason others have cited, its faulty (dare I say, tendentious) account of the African slave trade.

Interestingly, we can find a truer account in Zora Neale Hurston's *BARRACOOON*, first published in 1918 but written in 1931. It is based on her interview with the last surviving African-born slave in the U.S., illegally smuggled into the country just before the Civil War. (A death penalty offense at the time: a slave ship captain was hanged a few years later.) The man's village had refused to pay tribute to the King of Dahomey, so the King sent his soldiers, including the famous women warriors, to punish the village and take tribute in human flesh. Then the man had the good luck to be transported to the U.S.; instead of Latin America, where slaves tended to be "used up" and replaced; or the Islamic world, where he probably would have been castrated. And in the U.S., of course, Abraham Lincoln would bring slavery to an end in just a few years.

Finally, the idea of holding a literary convention in a country that recognizes no freedom of speech or press is absurd, but unfortunately a lot of people in fandom are more concerned about the rights of house elves than the absence of civil rights in China. At this point, I guess all we can do is make sure that the event is deemed useless as propaganda, by the Chinese Communist Party. [-tw]

Evelyn responds:

If by "fandom" you mean people who have gone to Worldcons or other similar conventions, then from what I've seen and heard characterizing "a lot of people in fandom [being] more concerned about the rights of house elves than the absence of civil rights in China" is inaccurate. [-ecl]

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

LINCOLN'S CITADEL: THE CIVIL WAR IN WASHINGTON, DC by Kenneth J. Winkle (Norton, ISBN 978-0-393-34942-9) focuses on a part of the Civil War that is not usually covered: how it affected life in Washington, DC, and how life in Washington, DC, affected it.

For example, I don't think that the Compensated Emancipation Act of 1862 is covered in most books about the Civil War, although arguably it had a greater immediate effect than the later, and far more famous, Emancipation Proclamation. And while the genesis of Liberia is moderately well-known, that of the Ile a Vache colony in Haiti never gets any coverage. (Ironically, the desire to have freed African-Americans emigrate to Haiti was what finally triggered the United States recognizing Haiti, which had revolted from France in 1804. Even more ironically, France herself had recognized Haiti as independent in 1825. None of this is ever covered in schools either. For a good coverage of the Haitian Revolution, Mike Duncan has a nineteen-episode section on it in his "Revolutions" podcast series.)

Anyway, back to Washington, DC (also known as Washington City--I cannot find any information on when that name was phased out). One example of the details that are often overlooked in books about the Civil War is the conflict over nursing. Women began pouring in to Washington as a way for them to support the war effort, but many were clearly incapable of the task. (Dorothea Dix finally said to "send none that were unable to turn a full grown man round in bed, and could do the most menial work.")

And so a three-way struggle began.

Elizabeth Blackwell (the first first formally trained woman physician in the United States) created the Women's Central Association of Relief to try to organize the entire country in one association which would work with the Army to meet specific needs, and to select and train nurses. She also wanted nurses to be paid a real salary rather than a token amount as volunteers.

Dorothea Dix organized the Society for the Relief of Volunteer Soldiers. Dix was more concerned with women's moral qualities and reputations than their medical training, and preferred "matronly" nurses. (Soldiers, on the other hand, preferred the nurses to be "full of hopefulness and cheerfulness, ... sensible, and ... young, and pretty.") Dix had a romantic notion of a nurturing, home-like atmosphere, with mothering women doing the nursing of the heroic male patients.

Because Dix was in Washington, she prevailed over Blackwell, and the United States Sanitary Commission appointed her as superintendent of women nurses. But the USSC also said that "the first sanitary law in camp and among soldiers was military discipline." Dix felt affronted by this and started distancing herself from the USSC. The end result was that the nurses she appointed (only about 15% of the total) earned half what the USSC appointees did. And the "matronly" nurses tended to ignore orders or respect authority, which resulted in USSC nurses required to submit letters of reference from two physicians and two clergymen.

Clara Barton (the best known of the three) came late to the nursing conflict and was primarily involved in field hospitals rather than those in Washington, though she worked with Army departments such as the Quartermaster's Department in Washington.

But ultimately in the three-way battle, the fourth "contestant", the Army itself, won out, concentrating more on male nurses who were soldiers in the army, female volunteers rather than paid female nurses, and Catholic nuns (who worked without pay, and were used to following orders).

This is one example of an aspect of the Civil War not usually covered. The closest I can recall is in GONE WITH THE WIND, both when Belle Watling and her co-workers are turned away from the hospital when they volunteer, and Scarlett O'Hara's brief stint as a volunteer nurse. But it turns out that the history of nursing in the Civil War in the South was similar: they started with male nurses, then allowed women volunteers, and finally started paying women nurses.

(And while we're at it, did you know that the Statue of Liberty includes broken chains and shackles at its feet, because it was intended to celebrate the abolition of slavery?) [-ecl]

Mark Leeper
mleeper@optonline.net

Quote of the Week:

The man who is denied the opportunity of taking
decisions of importance begins to regard as important
the decisions he is allowed to take.
--C. Northcote Parkinson

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