



Mt. Holz Science Fiction Society
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Mini Reviews, Part 4 (GETTYSBURG, WESTWORLD; I, TARZAN) (film reviews by Mark R. Leeper and Evelyn C. Leeper):

This is the fourth batch of mini-reviews:

GETTYSBURG (1994): I have just watched the Director's Cut of GETTYSBURG. The bottom line is that it is seventeen minutes longer than the theatrical cut, but there seem to be no additional scenes of any length, but rather just longer scenes. There is a bit more of Buford holding the high ground. The scene near the beginning where Lee and his adjutant are discussing why to invade Pennsylvania adds the comment that there is a cache of shoes there. The scene of General Stewart's return has a few more preliminary lines. There may be a couple of inserted scenes of thirty seconds or so, but on the whole this restores what was originally intended but cut for reasons of length. (I know that hard to believe when the theatrical cut was four hours and fourteen minutes.)

There is a lot that is the same: the commentary and two of the featurettes. "On Location" is new.

The Director's Cut came on a Bluray as part of a two-disc set. The second disc is not a Bluray, but a DVD with the extras, and there is also a 48-page booklet, all in a "hardback" folder.

If you already have the DVD theatrical version, this may still be worth it to you for the extended scenes and the one new extra (plus booklet), plus the fact that is is a Bluray. Two additional "sweeteners": This is all on one side of one disc--no need to get up to flip the disc in the middle. And you can get rid of the snapper case the DVD version came in (at least originally) that is so hard to shelve with regular DVD cases. [-ecl]

Released theatrically 09 October 1993 [theatrical cut]. Rating: +3 (-4 to +4), or 9/10.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0107007/reference>

What others are saying: <https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/1046038-gettysburg>

WESTWORLD (1974): In WESTWORLD, Delos is clearly patterned after Disney's Magic Kingdom: the former is partitioned into Frontierland, Adventureland, Fantasyland, and Tomorrowland; the latter is partitioned into Medievalworld, Romanworld, and Westworld (and later Futureland).

How can there be no way to get hurt? What if another guest thinks you are a robot and punches you?

Just as with A.I. today, Delos's robots can be detected by the fact that the manufacturing process doesn't do the hands perfectly.

The technicians say that the malfunctions are spreading like a disease; management seems skeptical of a disease of machinery. The year before the movie came out, a paper was published that postulated that a Von Neumann (self-replicating) computer program could spread just like a biological virus. Even before that, in 1970, Gregory Benford wrote "The Scared Man" about just such a computer program named VIRUS, and that was quickly followed by WHEN HARLIE WAS ONE by David Gerrold, and THE TERMINAL MAN by Michael Crichton. [-ecl]

Released theatrically 21 November 1973.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0070909/reference>

What others are saying: <https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/westworld>

I, TARZAN (2017): I, TARZAN (a.k.a. "I, TARZAN": A TRUE STORY, a.k.a. I, TARZAN: WHAT IF IT WERE TRUE?) is an hour-long "mockumentary" which starts with the assumption that Tarzan was real. (This is not an original approach; Sherlock Holmes fans have been doing this for decades.) Various Tarzan scholars and fans show off their collections and talk about Tarzan's origins and life. For example, Philip Jose Farmer says that Edgar Rice Burroughs purposely concealed the true location of Tarzan's home. Burroughs says it is 1500 miles north of Capetown, but there are no gorillas that far south. Farmer somehow determines where the actual location was.

Through it all, though, the film also covers Tarzan's appearances in print and film (including clips from various movies), so there is a factual element as well. Still, probably of interest only to Burroughs fans.

I can find very little information on this film; neither the IMDb nor Rotten Tomatoes includes it. I find out what year it is from only by enlarging the PJEG of the DVD cover on one of the sites below. It is currently running on Kanopy. [-ecl]

What others are saying:
<https://videolibrarian.com/reviews/documentary/i-tarzan/>
<https://letterboxd.com/film/i-tarzan-what-if-it-were-true/>

THE SIRENS OF MARS by Sarah Stewart Johnson (book review by Gregory Frederick):

In THE SIRENS OF MARS, Sarah Stewart Johnson takes readers on an enthralling journey through the enigmatic landscapes of the Red Planet, blending science, history, and personal narrative into a compelling exploration of our fascination with Mars. Johnson, a planetary scientist and astro-biologist, brings her expertise to the forefront, crafting a narrative that is both informative and deeply reflective.

The book is structured around the dual themes of exploration and the human spirit's relentless quest for knowledge. Johnson weaves together the stories of past missions to Mars, the scientists behind them, and her own experiences in the field. This personal touch adds a layer of intimacy to the narrative, allowing readers to connect with the author on a human level as she grapples with the mysteries of the universe.

One of the standout features of THE SIRENS OF MARS is Johnson's ability to make complex scientific concepts accessible to a general audience. She skillfully explains the intricacies of planetary science, the challenges of space exploration, and the potential for life beyond Earth without overwhelming the reader with jargon. The author for example, states that searching the hardened and imperious mud stones at a past delta of an ancient river on Mars is a good way to find ancient remains of life or molecules that could indicate the past presence of life.

Johnson also delves into the philosophical implications of our quest to understand Mars. She raises thought-provoking questions about what it means to explore, the ethical considerations of colonization, and the impact of our discoveries on our understanding of life itself. These reflections elevate the book beyond a mere scientific account, inviting readers to ponder their place in the cosmos.

The prose is lyrical and evocative, painting vivid images of the Martian landscape and the awe-inspiring nature of space. Johnson's storytelling is interspersed with historical anecdotes and insights from notable figures in the field, enriching the narrative and providing context for the ongoing exploration of Mars.

Overall, THE SIRENS OF MARS is a captivating read that appeals to both science enthusiasts and casual readers alike. Johnson's blend of personal narrative, scientific exploration, and philosophical inquiry creates a multifaceted portrait of Mars that is as inspiring as it is informative. This book is a must-read for anyone curious about the Red Planet and the human spirit's unyielding desire to explore the unknown. [-gf]

Hugo Awards (letters of comment by Dale L. Skran and Richie Bielak):

In response to [the list of Hugo Award winners](#) in the 08/16/24 issue of the MT VOID, Dale L. Skran writes:

Wow! Looking at the 2024 nominees, this seems like a terribly weak set of nominees. HONOR AMONG THIEVES was fun, but I am shocked to see it actually win. More shocked that it may well be the best of the nominees. I looked at a couple of "Best SF films of 2023" lists and was hard put to find even one I might want to watch. Some of this can be blamed on covid. Some on the decline of Marvel. But it seems like something else is going on--perhaps a shift of talent and creativity away from movies toward the series format. Or audiences tiring of the 1.5-2 hour movie format. Personally I am finding it harder and harder to watch movies due to their inconvenient length. Additionally, a good series can be so much deeper and better developed.

- DUNGEONS & DRAGONS: HONOR AMONG THIEVES
- BARBIE
- NIMONA
- POOR THINGS
- SPIDER-MAN: ACROSS THE SPIDER-VERSE
- THE WANDERING EARTH II

[-dls]

Richie Bielak writes:

Just listened to the "Better Living Through Algorithm" story--what a lovely story! [-rb]

ARRIVAL (letter of comment by Norman Salt):

In response to [Evelyn's comments on ARRIVAL](#) in the 08/16/24 issue of the MT VOID, Norman Salt writes:

Did you read Andy Weir's PROJECT HAIL MARY? There is an interesting part where he figures out how to communicate with an intelligent turtle-like creature from a different star system. [-ns]

Evelyn responds:

Yes, I have. But the acquisition of language is way too easy in PROJECT HAIL MARY. It's probably too easy in ARRIVAL as well, but at least Dr. Banks went through the problems with the many assumptions that a simple question makes (like whether the alien even understands what a question is). See <https://arstechnica.com/gaming/2021/05/andy-weirs-project-hail-mary-and-the-soft-squishy-science-of-language/> for a discussion of this. [-ecl]

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

ORIENTATIONS by W. Somerset Maugham (Project Gutenberg and other publishers) is Maugham's first book of short stories. I mentioned a couple of weeks ago that I had been binging Somerset Maugham, and I that I had previously reviewed the four-volume Penguin edition of Maugham's "Collected Stories", which was the American reprint of the three-volume 1951 Heinemann edition, and was implied to be complete (and explicitly described as such on at least one web site). But it turns out that this did not include twenty-one stories that were not reprinted until after Maugham's death in 1965. Seventeen, including those from ORIENTATIONS, were reprinted in SEVENTEEN LOST STORIES (1969) and four in TRAVELLER IN ROMANCE (1984). These, added to the ninety-one stories in the COLLECTED STORIES, form the complete set of Maugham's short fiction.

The six short stories in ORIENTATIONS are:

- "The Punctiliousness of Don Sebastian": a story of a wife's infidelity and a husband's revenge
- "A Bad Example": a somewhat obvious parable
- "De Amicitia": a tale of a female English art student and a male American poet who decide to travel as just friends one summer
- "Faith": Maugham examines how exactly faith works
- "The Choice of Amyntas": it's all in a name
- "Daisy": a look at Victorian attitudes towards sex, and towards women

SEVENTEEN LOST STORIES and TRAVELLER IN ROMANCE are available cheaply from various used booksellers, being relatively modern editions. (And I suppose I will have to do so.) SEVENTEEN LOST STORIES is also available from archive.org, but only for on-line reading, and check-outs of one hour (apparently renewable). Frankly, that's not my preferred way to read a book. ORIENTATIONS (contained in SEVENTEEN LOST STORIES) is old enough to be in the public domain, so you can read those stories free. There are also cheap copies available, but one problem with those is that it's the Wild West out there in public-domain-land: this is described by one publisher as "W. Somerset Maugham's Reflections on Life and Art", but the fuller description has every appearance of being written by an A.I., and the book is *not* "Reflections on Life and Art". [-ecl]

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Quote of the Week:

It's tempting to believe that computers will be neutral
and objective, but algorithms are nothing more than
opinions embedded in mathematics.
--Cathy O'Neil

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