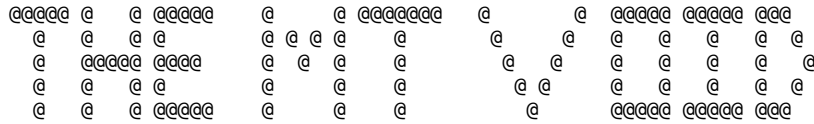


# MT VOID 12/24/21 -- Vol. 40, No. 26, Whole Number 2203



Mt. Holz Science Fiction Society  
12/24/21 -- Vol. 40, No. 26, Whole Number 2203

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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](http://leepers.us/mtvoid/back_issues.htm).

### Our Christmas Issue? (comments by Evelyn C. Leeper):

This seems to be a Christmas issue, with reviews of Connie Willis's Christmas stories, her Christmas movie (SNOW WONDER), and several versions of "Sir Gawain and the Green Knight", which takes place during two Christmases. [-ecl]

### Hugo Awards/Lodestar Award/Astounding Award Winners

- Best Novel: NETWORK EFFECT, Martha Wells (Tor.com)
- Best Novella: "The Empress of Salt and Fortune", Nghi Vo (Tor.com)
- Best Novelette: "Two Truths and a Lie", Sarah Pinsker (Tor.com)
- Best Short Story: "Metal Like Blood in the Dark", T. Kingfisher (Uncanny Magazine, September/October 2020)
- Best Series: "The Murderbot Diaries", Martha Wells (Tor.com)
- Best Related Work: BEOWULF: A NEW TRANSLATION, Maria Dahvana Headley (FSG)
- Best Graphic Story or Comic: Parable of the Sower: A Graphic Novel Adaptation, written by Octavia Butler, adapted by Damian Duffy, illustrated by John Jennings (Harry N. Abrams)
- Best Dramatic Presentation, Long Form: THE OLD GUARD
- Best Dramatic Presentation, Short Form: "The Good Place: Whenever You're Ready"
- Best Editor, Short Form: Ellen Datlow
- Best Editor, Long Form: Diana M. Pho
- Best Professional Artist: Rovina Cai
- Best Semiprozine: FIYAH Magazine of Black Speculative Fiction

- Best Fanzine: nerds of a feather, flock together
- Best Fancast: The Coode Street Podcast
- Best Fan Writer: Elsa Sjunneson
- Best Fan Artist: Sara Felix
- Best Video Game: Hades
- Lodestar Award for Best Young Adult Book (presented by the World Science Fiction Society): A WIZARD'S GUIDE TO DEFENSIVE BAKING, T. Kingfisher (Argyll Productions)
- Astounding Award for Best New Writer (presented by Dell Magazines): Emily Tesh (2nd year of eligibility)

Chengdu (China) won the bid for Worldcon in 2023.

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### Mini Reviews, Part 5 (film reviews by Mark R. Leeper and Evelyn C. Leeper):

Here is the fifth batch of mini-reviews, this time of films centered around music.

**FALLING FOR FIGARO:** At the beginning of *FALLING FOR FIGARO*, at least one member of the audience has fallen asleep on a performance of an opera. Worse, it is the boyfriend of our main character, Millie Cantwell (played by Danielle Macdonald), who loves opera and dreams of becoming an opera singer. (It is unusual, and a bit refreshing, to see a lead actress in a film who is not thin.) Though the film takes place entirely in Britain, our main character (Millie) is an American. At one time the British would make sure the main character has appeal for Americans. I hope this is not a return to that requirement. Millie decides to go after her dream, quits her job as a London fund manager, and travels to Scotland to study under a tyrannical teacher (played by Joanna Lumley). Millie wants to compete in the "Singer of Renown" contest. (There actually was a "Singers of Renown" contest for many years, but it took place in Australia. Its use may be due to the writer/director Ben Lewin being Australian, and the film being an Australian film.) The film has a nice selection of operatic arias, with the ones "sung" by the two leads actually voiced by Stacey Alleaume and Nathan Lay.

Released theatrically 10/01/21. Rating: low +1 or 5/10.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt7392014/reference>

What others are saying: [https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/falling\\_for\\_figaro](https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/falling_for_figaro)

**THE NOWHERE INN:** (\*\*SPOILERS\*\*) A bit of background here: Alice Clark is a real actress and musician, whose stage name is St. Vincent. Carrie Brownstein is a writer and actress. This film, co-written by them, is semi-autobiographical. I will refer to the internal documentary that is being made as "the documentary" and the film itself as *THE NOWHERE INN*.

*THE NOWHERE INN* begins with a chaotic rock song, which is somewhat indicative of the film. In fact, all the songs in this concert mockumentary have nonsensical lyrics. The main character, singer Annie Clark/St. Vincent (played by Annie Clark) asks a friend (Carrie Brownstein, played by Carrie Brownstein) to write and direct a documentary about her for her fans. But while the stage persona of St. Vincent is dynamic and exciting, the reality of Annie Clark is boring. *THE NOWHERE INN* shows a parade of miscalculations, mistakes, and personal conflicts along the tour, like a low-key *THIS IS SPINAL TAP*. The problem, Brownstein says, is that Annie/St. Vincent is "nerdy and normal in real life." *THE NOWHERE INN* examines the difference between on- and off-stage personae; the documentary's director wants the off-screen world to be more interesting, but things go awry, and things get even more uncomfortable when two of the women go for salacious images. Annie keeps trying to control and then stage the documentary, complete with planned break-up with girlfriend, and a fake family and back story, and not just for herself. Annie doesn't want grit and dirt (and jail), she wants a different kind of film and imagines herself in a sophisticated party scene instead. Meanwhile, the director of the documentary is always reaching for an inappropriate tone or an inappropriate color. Annie and Carrie have profound differences in their interpretation of film and eventually it tears their relationship apart.

There are certainly some striking images in *THE NOWHERE INN*. There are the inappropriate color choices mentioned above. In one scene, we see only the back of someone's head and straight black hair, even as she turns around, like a image from a Japanese horror movie. There are aspects of this reminiscent of *SYNECDOCHE* and of *THE TRUMAN SHOW*. As noted, this is semi-autobiographical; it is also somewhat self-referential. (For what it's worth, it also seems to fail a reverse Bechdel test--there do not seem to be any conversations between two named male characters.)

Released theatrically 09/17/21; available on Apple TV+. Rating: low +1 (-4 to +4), or 5/10.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt10441822/reference>

What others are saying: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt10441822/reference>

**THE VILLAGE DETECTIVE--A SONG CYCLE:** *THE VILLAGE DETECTIVE--A SONG CYCLE* is a documentary about several reels of a 1969 film (*THE VILLAGE DETECTIVE* ["Derevenskiy detektiv"]) from the Soviet Union that were pulled up in 2016 in an Icelandic fishing trawler's net (so yet another film this year with underwater photography!). The film introduces itself with a song sung/recited by someone who looks to be a Russian peasant in militaristic uniform--the "village detective" of the movie. The movie starred Mikhail Ivanovich Zharov, and the documentary is apparently called a song cycle because many of the films shown have Zharov singing. The documentary is more a history of Soviet film and Zharov's career as a terrifically popular Soviet film star than about the ocean find, but it does begin with an explanation of how the film was preserved underwater for many decades. Unfortunately, there are too many extended shots of damaged film with no sound or explanation. For those interested in popular Soviet film, it is probably worth seeing, but it is not of general interest. (On the plus side, the subtitling is quite legible, avoiding the "white-on-white" problem.)

Released theatrically and on Apple TV+ 09/22/21. Rating: 0 (-4 to +4), or 4/10.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt9463622/reference>

What others are saying: [https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/the\\_village\\_detective\\_a\\_song\\_cycle](https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/the_village_detective_a_song_cycle)

[-mrl/ecl]

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**SNOW WONDER** (film review by Evelyn C. Leeper):

I \*finally\* got to see SNOW WONDER. When it was first scheduled in 2005, we set up to record, but as had happened before, some sports game ran over, and the movie was either joined in progress or delayed and we did not record the whole thing. It was never re-run, and never showed up on home video, and only now did I think to check YouTube. (I suspect that is an illegal upload, but who knows? Willis actually mentions it on her blog page, so \*she\* doesn't mind.)

The movie is based on the novella "Just Like the Ones We Used To Know", which first appeared in the December 2003 issue of ASIMOV'S SCIENCE FICTION. It has several stories: a wedding in Kentucky, a young writer in New York cooking for his first time ever, a divorced family in Los Angeles, a straying husband in Baltimore, an inept weatherman also in Baltimore, and a grieving widow in Virginia--all experience a freakish worldwide snowstorm in different ways. Most of this comes from the original novella, but there are some changes. Some of the stories take place in different locations (e.g., the widow goes to a Virginia plantation rather than to Santa Fe), and some have additional fleshing out (e.g., the young cook and his Aunt Lulla). I particularly liked the additions to the story of the husband in Baltimore. As with most of Willis's Christmas stories, this is fairly schmaltzy (as one review dubbed it). Indeed, her objection to IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE is that it does not really have a happy ending: Potter gets to keep the money and keep abusing people, George remains a person who is constantly sacrificing for others, etc. She prefers MIRACLE ON 34TH STREET. If you like Willis's Christmas stories, you'll probably want to see this. [-ecl]

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**THE GREEN KNIGHT (and Other Arthurian Films)** (film comments by Evelyn C. Leeper):

I recently watched THE GREEN KNIGHT and that brought to mind comparisons with other Arthurian films, so here are comments on some of those, as well as on THE GREEN KNIGHT.

The best-known Arthurian movie is probably CAMELOT (1967), but it also may be the worst, and not just on a historical basis. Yes, everything is too clean, and the make-up and hairdos are all wrong, and where on earth did Guenevere (this movie's spelling) get that ridiculous-looking carriage?, but go a \*little\* deeper and there is even more wrong.

What an ego Arthur has, that he thinks \*everyone\* is thinking, "I wonder what the king is doing tonight?" In fact, he's pretty obnoxious throughout the film--but then, everyone is.

Clearly this is Christian England, but it must be somewhere between when the Romans left and before the Normans arrived. On the other hand, chivalry seems to have been invented already. Pellinore makes a reference to Charlemagne, putting this at least in the 9th century. So we're pretty much between 800 and 1000.

When her entourage stops to rest, Guenevere asks for tea. There was no tea in England then.

"By 9PM the moonlight must appear." How exactly is this managed when the moon is new? Or for that matter, in general? This seems astronomically questionable.

There is no way Guenevere's wedding train could be splayed so perfectly if she walked unattended.

The English Channel is labeled as such on Arthur's map, but was not called that in England until the 18th century.

"The knights will whack only for good. Might for right." But who is defining what is good or right? I mean, I suspect the knights thought that having the peasants grovel to them was good and right. (Later Pellinore reinforces this theory when he is having a Socratic dialogue with Arthur about trial by jury.)

The Queen won the May Day footrace--what a surprise! Her requests to the knights before the joust also seem quite bloodthirsty.

"I'll barbecue him." The word was first used in English in 1661.

There is THE SWORD OF LANCELOT (1963) with Cornel Wilde, which may be more accurate, but the dialogue and the music are both a bit over-ripe.

GAWAIN AND THE GREEN KNIGHT (1973) was basically a children's film which had very little to do with the actual Gawain legend. Yes, the Green Knight shows up with his challenge, but the film concentrates on Gawain's adventures during the following year rather than his temptations by the lady of the castle at the end, although the green scarf and Gawain's flinching do make an appearance. And there is also SWORD OF THE VALIANT (1984) with Sean Connery, but that got even worse reviews than GAWAIN AND THE GREEN KNIGHT, so I watched only part of it.

EXCALIBUR (1981) claims to take place during "the Dark Ages", but the armor, stirrups, and so on are basically those of the 15th century.

Merlin makes Arthur a king upon whom the health of the land depends (the Fisher King), rather than any sort of Christian king. (There are echoes of this sort of king/leader in THE WICKER MAN.)

EXCALIBUR certainly shows more of the dirt and blood of the time (either time) than CAMELOT.

The scene where the callow youth (Perceval) wants to serve Lancelot, is rejected, catches and cooks dinner for Lancelot, and then is accepted seems inspired by a similar sequence in THE MAGNIFICENT SEVEN. The sword between Lancelot and Guinevere is taken from the legend of Tristan and Iseult.

THE MISTS OF AVALON (2001) was based on Marion Zimmer Bradley's book of the same name. It is much more focused on the women of the story, and much more centered on "the religion of the Goddess" and its power. (The priestesses of the Goddess must have special powers: their cloaks always drag at least a foot on the ground, yet remain completely clean, with no trace or dirt or mud.) It's not very accurate to Malory et al, yet it is not wildly divergent either, and certainly better than a lot of more traditional Arthurian films.

Then there's A CONNECTICUT YANKEE IN KING ARTHUR'S COURT (1948), a musical comedy that has both Sir Thomas Malory and Mark Twain spinning in their graves.

The movie doesn't even have Hank Martin get hit on the head in Britain; he goes unconscious in Connecticut in 1912 and wakes up in England in 528--a very clean England, by the way. The filmmakers seem to have decided that Pendragon Castle is in Cornwall, although the name "Pendragon" is Welsh. For reasons unknown, everyone calls Hank "Monster".

The date being 528, there are anachronisms galore: stirrups, battlements on castles, full armor, a telescope, and slave markets. The language is a totally mangled version of Early Modern English.

In reality, London was basically abandoned in 528, and there is no way the characters could have walked from any reasonable location for Pendragon Castle to London in the time shown. And finally we have the latest film, THE GREEN KNIGHT (2021).

[My first comment is that it was a mistake to try to watch this right after I got home from a cataract operation. Between one eye being partially covered by the tape holding the shield on, the distortion caused by the shield itself, the pain in the eye which made me want to keep it closed, and the falling asleep that happened when I closed my eye, my first viewing was less than ideal. So I watched it again the next day under more normal conditions.]

There are quite a few changes in this version from the canonical poem. In this version, for example, that the "game" involves a beheading is not explicitly known before Gawain accepts the challenge, so Gawain has no reason to think there will be any sort of real reckoning in a year. It becomes, therefore, a different sort of test--he had the option to show mercy and \*not\* behead the Green Knight. The Gawain of this film also tries to avoid seeking out the Green Knight, and there seem to be multiple green sashes. The ending, much discussed, is also different from the poem's (and I won't reveal it here). The film was worth watching, and better as a film than either of the two earlier versions I watched.

(Apparently Dev Patel is considered quintessentially English, having now played both David Copperfield and Sir Gawain. Still, when I picture him, it is in his roles as Sonny in THE BEST EXOTIC MARIGOLD HOTEL and as Ramanujan in THE MAN WHO KNEW INFINITY.) [-ecl]

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### Mini-Reviews, CRYPTOZOO, and DESIGNER GENES (letter of comment by John Purcell):

In response to various comments in [the 12/17/21 issue of the MT VOID](#), John Purcell writes:

Well, it has been very, very long since I last wrote a letter of comment to you two, but now that the semester is over I can start in the next issue of ASKANCE (gonna try to get it done before the year runs out) and write some letters of comment, and finish an article for Justin Busch's fanzine. Wish me luck, but truly feels wonderful to not be grading essays and such from dawn to dusk for a change.

The mini-film reviews are a nice touch, and of these three the one that I'm interested in watching is CRYPTOZOO. The premise sounds like fun, and thanks to my eight-year-old grandson, the Japanese anime shows he enjoys watching end up catching my eyes whenever he and his little sister are in our care. There is always something on Netflix, Hulu, or Amazon Prime that he likes, so once in a while we succumb to his pleading and put one on our large-screen television. The artwork style is what interests me, not so much the storylines and dialogue, so I suspect he will want to watch this at some point, that is, if it is offered on a streaming service we get. We shall see.

Hmm. I am not much for e-books, but I do understand their attraction both in terms of saving shelf-space and costs. Brian Stableford is an author who I have not read very much of, and DESIGNER GENES: TALES OF THE BIOTECH REVOLUTION does sound interesting. In fact, the only book of his I have in severely trimmed down collection is THE EMPIRE OF FEAR (1991), and even that book sits unread on the shelf. \*sigh\* Some year.

Well, I think I shall do a little fanzine work and maybe enjoy some light reading for a change. It will be a challenge to not grade it, though. [-jp]

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

After I watched SNOW WONDER, I wanted to re-read the original story to compare it. The story, "Just Like the Ones We Used to

Know", is in a collection of Willis's Christmas stories, but other than that has not been anthologized more than once or twice.

The collection, A LOT LIKE CHRISTMAS by Connie Willis (Del Rey, ISBN 978-0-399-18234-1) is an expanded edition of MIRACLE AND OTHER CHRISTMAS STORIES and contains a dozen stories. (It also drops "The Pony", which is annoying for completists.)

"Miracles" (1991) is dated, not just by its mentions of videotapes

and such, but by a corporation that is so intensely Christmas- focused (Christmas parties, Secret Santas, Christmas gifts etc.). Maybe I've been influenced by being in a fairly diverse corporate environment, but these days I suspect the "Christmas" element is scaled back and the "holiday aspect promoted. And employees are probably more likely to get bonuses than useless presents from the company.

"All About Emily" (2011) is just completely unlikely. I like all the classic film references and the basic premise/conflict. I just think the resolution is completely unrealistic, and as evidence I will point out that you don't see American farm workers picketing and signing petitions to allow illegal immigrants to take jobs here--and the illegal immigrants are actually human. The idea that we would see such support for non-humans strikes me as being impossibly Pollyana-ish. In other words, this is your typical Connie Willis Christmas story.

"Inn" (1993) is one of the more overtly religious of Willis's Christmas stories. There is some humor, but it is not at the level of, say, "Now Showing". It is also only the second of her Christmas stories, so that might be the reason.

"All Seated on the Ground" (2007) is a typical sentimental Christmas story from Willis. This one appeals to me even less than some of her earlier ones--the notion that a single line from a Christmas carol is the key to inter-species communication leaves me cold. (Surely one can find similar lines in popular songs--why not those?)

"In Coppelius's Toyshop" (1996) reminds me of Thomas M. Disch's "Descending" and is more a Christmas horror story than the more cheerful Willis offerings.

"Adaptation" (1994) is a fantasy updating of Charles Dickens's "A CHRISTMAS CAROL".

"deck.halls@boughs/holly" (2001) drives me crazy with the totally scrambled syntax of the title. The plot revolves around people hiring decorators/planners for Christmas events, but implies this is a product of the Internet age. The Internet may have nurtured it, but it was around long before then.

"Cat's Paw" (1999) seems patterned after Agatha Christie's ADVENTURE OF THE CHRISTMAS PUDDING in set-up and setting, and is a bit predictable and barely a Christmas story.

"Now Showing" (2014) has an interesting premise (regarding the current trend in movies and movie theaters), but goes on way too long.

"Newsletter" (1997), not surprisingly is about Christmas newsletters. (My observation: One can argue that they are too impersonal, but in fact, now that they are generated on your computer, the ability to produce subtle variations for various people can make them \*more\* personal. You can add a line about teaching flower arranging to your aunt who loves flowers, and take out the line about Jimmy's football success from the one to your cousin, who just broke his leg playing hockey.) "Epiphany" (1999) is another updating, this time of the story of the Three Magi.

"Just Like the Ones We Used to Know" (2003) is the basis of the film SNOW WONDER, which I reviewed above.

For a full list of Willis's Christmas stories, see her blog page on them at [http://azsf.net/cwblog/?page\\_id=223](http://azsf.net/cwblog/?page_id=223). [-ecl]

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Quote of the Week:

The bitterest tears shed over graves are for words  
left unsaid and deeds left undone.  
--Harriet Beecher Stowe

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