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Mt. Holz Science Fiction Society  
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### Mini Reviews, Part 6 (film reviews by Mark R. Leeper and Evelyn C. Leeper):

Here is the sixth batch of mini-reviews, with more science fiction and fantasy.

**DUNE--PART ONE:** This is the third adaptation of Frank Herbert's novel, following the movie in 1984 by David Lynch and the television mini-series in 2000 by John Harrison. This version, by Denis Villeneuve, has a stunning visual design, perhaps the best we are likely to see in film in years. The scale of the scenery and everything in it is huge. The landscape is reminiscent of Luke's planet in STAR WARS, but that is not strange--STAR WARS is reported to have gotten its inspiration for this (and for its worm carcass) from John Schoenherr's illustrations for the serialization of the novel DUNE. We see some fascinating equipment in the desert, but the viewer is left in suspense as to what a full sandworm looks like. The people on the planet are drawn with a pseudo-mysticism that adds to the images. But as impressive as the mise-en-scene is, it cannot keep the viewer entertained by itself and it isn't too long before DUNE starts testing the viewer's patience and in general bewildering them. I am not sure I could put my finger on exactly where it happened but somehow a very good film turned into a moderately bad one. Perhaps we have spent too much time in the desert.

One question: If spice is necessary for interstellar travel, and spice occurs only on Arrakis, how did the people (presumably from Earth, but clearly not from Arrakis) get to Arrakis in the first place?)

And though the studio concealed it in all its advertising, this is "DUNE--PART ONE"--it is only the first half of the story. The second half is due out in the fall of 2023.

Released theatrically and on HBO Max 10/22/21; available streaming on HBO Max. Rating: +1 (-4 to +4), or 6/10.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1160419/reference>

What others are saying: [https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/dune\\_2021](https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/dune_2021)

**MAYDAY:** In **MAYDAY**, Ana is a member of the hired help in a banquet hall, but she's treated even worse than most of the other help, verbally and physically abused by her employer. After a particularly trying day, she finds a portal to another world through an oven (possibly in an attempt to commit suicide, but also reminiscent of the passage to Narnia). She meets several other women on an uninhabited stretch of beach. This seems to be a land of the lost, but is apparently a parallel universe; several of the people she meets are counterparts of people from the world at the start of the film. The nature of what is going on is kept from the viewer for a while but turns out to be a YA-level action story. There is a war, but the women seem to be waging a war of their own, acting as sirens that lure men from either side to their death.

Released theatrically 10/01/21. Rating: +1 (-4 to +4), or 6/10.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt11271800/reference>

What others are saying: [https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/mayday\\_2021](https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/mayday_2021)

**COME TRUE:** **COME TRUE** is a horror film based on the dreams and nightmares a teenage runaway has during a sleep study of questionable ethics. It has interminably long dream sequences which both lack action and are hard to decipher. (It's possible that it is easier to interpret when seen on a big screen.)

Released theatrically 03/12/21. Rating: low +1 (-4 to +4), or 5/10.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt7026488/reference>

What others are saying: [https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/come\\_true](https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/come_true)

[-mrl/ecl]

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**PROJECT HAIL MARY** by **Andy Weir** (copyright 2021, Audible Studios, 16 hours and 10 minutes, ASIN B08GB58KD5, narrated by Ray Porter) (audio book review by Joe Karpierz):

While I wasn't around back in the early 20th century when science fiction was starting to pick up steam in the pulp magazines, I'm pretty sure I remember learning that one of the more important things about science fiction was to teach young people about science. Sure, in reality a lot of stories did not have rigorous science--after all, there \*still\* isn't faster than light travel-- but a lot of stories did have solid science in them. And to be fair, there are writers today that still provide rigorous science in their stories, and we have a whole sub-genre called "hard science fiction". Greg Egan, for example, writes such science fiction.

And then there's Andy Weir.

Weir exploded onto the scene with **THE MARTIAN**, a novel (and subsequent movie) that reveled in science, explaining every little detail of how things worked and how Mark Watley improvised his way into surviving by "sciencing the sh\*\*" out of things.

And then there's **PROJECT HAIL MARY**. After a slight detour into a heist story on the moon, Weir returns to a highly science based story in his latest novel. Ryland Grace is a junior high science teacher who gets recruited--he's not actually given a choice--to consult on a mission to the Tau Ceti system to try to save the human race. The basis of his recruitment is a discredited paper stating that water is not necessary for life to evolve and exist. An odd thing, perhaps, but it does get him a seat at the table. The problem is that a life form called "astrophage" is causing the sun to dim, which will of course adversely affect all life on the planet, eventually ending with the extinction of that life.

But that information is a flashback for Grace. He wakes up from an induced coma on a ship with two dead crewmates and a missing memory. As the novel progresses, Grace's memory returns and he remembers more and more about what went down on Earth to get him to the precarious position he is in now. While this method of storytelling is not exactly new--interweaving past events with current ones--the fact that they are returning memories as the story goes along that is while maybe not clever and also not new makes for a nice way for the reader to discover not only how Grace got into the situation but just how screwed up things were back home to get the story where it is.

Tau Ceti is a system where astrophages also exist, but they don't seem to be dimming that star. Thus, the mission is to go to Tau Ceti, discover the reason for that, and discover a way to save humanity. The thing is that it's a one-way mission, as there is only enough fuel to get the ship to Tau Ceti, but not enough to get it home. The fuel, by the way, is astrophage. Yep, the very thing that is destroying the Sun is the same thing that is powering the ship that will hopefully save humanity.

But Grace is alone, and he has no idea how to do what he needs to do. He's a science teacher. Well, there we go, right? Just like Mark Watley in **THE MARTIAN**, Grace proceeds to use science--some times in extreme detail--to solve the numerous problems that he must overcome. You know, like learning the language of an alien race who's ship is there at the same time for the exact same reason. Together Grace and "Rocky" must work against time and ever escalating problems to save their respective species.

I'll admit that as a reader with a technical degree, even I got tired of the detailed descriptions of all the science that was being done by Grace and Rocky. While the science is interesting, and it's clear that Weir did his research, I found my attention drifting at some of the explanations. Not that the science as presented was hard to understand. Most of it wasn't. It's just that there was so much of it that I started to tune out. For me, the only part that really dragged was the section where Grace and Rocky were working out each other's languages so they could communicate with one another. I found myself thinking "are they done yet". But still, the science is an integral

part of the story, and it makes it work. I think that in that respect, Weir "out-Martianed THE MARTIAN".

All in all, this was a good book, and was named Goodreads readers' nod as best SF book of the year. I actually haven't read enough 2021 books to say that just yet, but I can believe that it is among the top books of the year.

Ray Porter is the narrator for this one--R. C. Bray narrated THE MARTIAN--and does an admirable job. At this point most narrators worth their salt read in multiple voices and switch pretty easily, and Porter is no exception. As I've said elsewhere, I'm no expert on narration, but I know what I like, what I don't like, and what is serviceable. I liked Porter's narration. [-jak]

[Note: There are *two* different audiobooks of THE MARTIAN, the first one being read by R. C. Bray, and the second by Wil Wheaton. -ecl]

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**THE ANGLO-SAXONS: A HISTORY OF THE BEGINNINGS OF ENGLAND 400-1066** by Marc Morris (book review by Gregory Frederick):

This history book is a clarification of English history which adds to our knowledge of Western history

Around 1600 years ago, the Roman Empire left Britain which promptly fell into ruin. And then Britain's civil society collapsed into chaos. The old Roman cities had no one to maintain or defend them. Into this world the Anglo-Saxon people began to migrate from the continent into Britain. The Anglo-Saxon people did not want to inhabit the old Roman cities and established their own small villages. During the late 700's the Vikings began their attacks on Britain. This continued for hundreds of years. The Anglo-Saxon medieval military tactics at the time were basically offensive. When the Vikings would conduct their raids they were swift, hit-and-run affairs and the Vikings were gone by the time the English king would arrive with his army. This was especially true in the early years of Viking attacks. King Alfred in the late 800's was credited with creating many fortresses called burhs from which we get the word borough. These were sometimes rebuilt old iron age hill fortresses or restored old walled Roman cities. The Vikings did not have siege warfare methods for attacking these fortresses so the burh would provide a safe haven for the country folk when the Vikings showed up. And this delayed the Vikings, giving the English king time to raise an army and meet the Vikings at the burh. As the book continues, it covers the complex Anglo-Saxon history of conflict between rulers of various regions of England and how some would rise to a kingship that covered most of England. Eventually Harold Godwinson took over as the English king after the death of King Edward in 1066. Later in that same year of 1066, Duke William crossed the English Channel with his army and defeated Harold and his army. And so began the conquest of England by the Norman Duke William which made major changes to England's nobility, government, culture, and architecture. It also began a period of Norman castle-building.

This is a well-written and thought-provoking book which explains in detail the complex early history of England. [-gfl]

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**CYRANO** (letters of comment by Gary McGath and Kevin R):

In response to [Mark and Evelyn's review of CYRANO](#) in the 12/31/21 issue of the MT VOID, Gary McGath writes:

[Re the 1990 version of CYRANO DE BERGERAC, De Guiche, and the move away from the nose:] I'll stick with the wonderful Ferrer version until I hear there's a better one. I hated Steve Martin's take on it.

De Guiche, in the original play, isn't a total villain. He shows courage as a military leader and recognizes Cyrano's worth in the last act.

What's the point of Cyrano without the nose? I've seen a musical version of Cyrano, with Christopher Plummer in the title role. It played in Boston in the eighties; I don't know if it made it to Broadway. It's biggest mistake was rendering the dialogue in Alexandrine rhyming verse, as in the original French. It sounded ridiculous to my ears. Christian was poorly characterized, lacking not only charming words but any desire to be more than a dumb soldier. The songs mostly didn't work well.

I went with a bunch of friends. The ones who hadn't read Rostand's Cyrano gave it enthusiastic applause; the ones who had (including me; I've read it in French and in multiple translations) were unimpressed. [-gmg]

Kevin R writes:

My two favorite Cyranos: Miguel Ferrer and Quincy Magoo.

Magoo was short, but the nose references stayed in his version.

<https://youtu.be/qxUjFets8mQ>

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Famous\\_Adventures\\_of\\_Mr\\_Magoo](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Famous_Adventures_of_Mr_Magoo)

[-kr]

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**THE PAST IS RED** (letters of comment by Kevin R and Jeff Urs):

In response to [Joe Karpierz's review of THE PAST IS RED](#) in the 12/31/21 issue of the MT VOID, Kevin R writes:

[Re Tetley Abednego:] I would hope someone so-named didn't end up in hot water.

Jeff Urs responds:

I'd have thought that just such circumstances would be what it took to bring out their real strength. [-ju]

And Kevin replies:

That H2O would have to be just at the boiling point, no? [-kr]

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**Bibles** (letter of comment by Kevin R):

In response to [Evelyn's comments on Bibles](#) in the 12/31/21 issue of the MT VOID, Kevin R writes:

Not [everyone would have the King James Bible in their house] if they were part of the largest Christian denomination, in which case a translation from the Vulgate such as Douay-Rheims would have been in order, prior to Vatican II.

I had to get a Jerusalem Bible for my sophomore year high school religion class. [-kr]

Evelyn responds:

Okay, "everyone" was hyperbole on my part. [-ecl]

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

There are, confusingly, two books with insanely similar names. There is BECOMING JANE AUSTEN by Jon Spence (2003, ISBN 978-1-567-31894-4), and BECOMING JANE EYRE by Sheila Kohler (2009, ISBN 978-1-410-42494-5). This was made even more confusing by BECOMING JANE AUSTEN being part of the basis of the film titled just BECOMING JANE (2007), and then that film being released as part of a double feature on Bluray with JANE EYRE.

BECOMING JANE AUSTEN is a biography, while BECOMING JANE EYRE is a novel, but the confusion is still there.

I blame Sheila Kohler, of course, because her book came out after Spence's book \*and\* the movie, and clearly having three so similar titles about two different 19th century English women authors/characters, especially when the film title could easily refer to either, is going to be confusing.

Now I think I will go write BECOMING JANE GOODALL or BECOMING JANE ADDAMS or BEING JANE SEYMOUR (the queen, not the actress). [-ecl]

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Quote of the Week:

To his dog, every man is Napoleon; hence the constant popularity of dogs.

--Aldous Huxley

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