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My First Sneak Preview (comments by Mark R. Leeper):

I think I am scarred for life. Well. Perhaps scarred is not the right word. It is just that I am some sort of psychologically conditioned. Conditioned may be a better word. But every time I hear Aaron Copland's "Fanfare for the Common Man" I picture warriors from ancient Greece having sword fights. I admit it is a strange connection to have. And I would love to be rid of it. But it is all the fault of the music and of comics and the monster magazines.

Back in 1963 I knew something big was coming. Literally. Big. months I think I had looked forward to the upcoming release of the film JASON AND THE ARGONAUTS. This was the screen version of Apollonius' story of the quest for the Golden Fleece. It included a metal giant.

I had a comic book of the film. I read that comic over and over. The cover showed the mighty ship Argo ducking under the hairy armpit of some god---Poseidon, I think--holding open the way through a splashy waterway between two smashing rocks. That thirteen-year-old me had been excited by anything I could find out about the movie. This was going to have visual effects by the same guy who did the visual effects for THE 7TH VOYAGE OF SINBAD, Ray Harryhausen. Ya can't do better than that. Not then ya couldn't.

Before the film came to the local theatre it came to TV. Well, sort of to TV. But there was something special about how this film was being distributed in a new way. At the time if you went to see a film you saw it in a theater. But for the first time we had an alternate way to see the film. I was living in Longmeadow, Massachusetts about a thirty-minute drive from Hartford. In Hartford there was experiment going on. It was called PAY TV. And, wow! they were using JASON as their test film. And I got to see it right in my own home.

I think it was TV station WTIC that was sponsoring the experiment. It encrypted the signal and then just sent the movie to a common TV station. You could almost watch it except for a few small technical pains. The engineers scrambled the soundtrack chortling it out and making a noise like a jukebox being ground in a dishwasher. You could make out what characters were saying, at least if you were willing to put up with a few of the little intentional technically enhanced inconveniences. A voice sounded like a cross between a human voice and the ringing of a bell--weird! They did something similar to scramble the picture. They shuffled the scan lines

alternately with ten indented and then ten not. With a little effort you could follow the story and I did have the comic book as a guide.

But none of this deterred me from my watching my special preview. I followed along in the comic. And I enjoyed it. In the trailer they had claimed the story of "gods like men and men like gods." To a young teenage Mark this was potent stuff. The scrambled TV version apparently did not want to use the Bernard Herrmann score, so played light classical music before and after the film. They played Aaron Copland's "Fanfare for the Common Man". Somehow all this just made the film better when I saw it in a real movie theater. The film used the Harryhausen score, but the trailer in Hartford used the Copland score.

Now I just have to hear the Copland and I am back in ancient Greece with Jason and Argus and the rest of those fun guys. [-mrl]

The Animals Are at It Again (comments by Evelyn C. Leeper):

<https://www.axios.com/local/washington-dc/2022/03/09/giant-joro-spiders-east-coast-may>

Giant spiders expected to drop from sky across the East Coast this spring

An invasive species of spider the size of a child's hand is expected to "colonize" the entire East Coast this spring by parachuting down from the sky, researchers at the University of Georgia announced last week.

Why it matters: Large Joro spiders--millions of them--are expected to begin "ballooning" up and down the East Coast as early as May. Researchers have determined that the spiders can tolerate cold weather, but are harmless to humans as their fangs are too small to break human skin.

And even long-dead animals are getting into the act:

<https://thehill.com/homenews/state-watch/597554-fossilized-vampire-squid-named-after-biden>

Fossilized vampire squid named after Biden

A vampire squid that died more than 300 million years ago has been named after President Biden by a group of paleontologists who discovered the new species, The Guardian reported.

[This is apparently a tribute to Biden:]

The researchers decided to name the fossilized sea creature after the president because they were "encouraged by his plans to address climate change and to fund scientific research," The Guardian reported.

[-ecl]

2021 Nebula Award Finalists:

- Novel
 - The Unbroken, C.L. Clark (Orbit US; Orbit UK)
 - A Master of Djinn, P. Djèlí Clark (Tordotcom; Orbit UK)
 - Machinehood, S.B. Divya (Saga)
 - A Desolation Called Peace, Arkady Martine (Tor; Tor UK)
 - Plague Birds, Jason Sanford (Apex)
- Novella
 - A Psalm for the Wild-Built, Becky Chambers (Tordotcom)
 - Fireheart Tiger, Aliette de Bodard (Tordotcom)
 - And What Can We Offer You Tonight, Premee Mohamed (Neon Hemlock)
 - Sun-Daughters, Sea-Daughters, Aimee Ogden (Tordotcom)
 - Flowers for the Sea, Zin E. Rocklyn (Tordotcom)
 - The Necessity of Stars, E. Catherine Tobler (Neon Hemlock)
 - "The Giants of the Violet Sea," Eugenia Triantafyllou (Uncanny 9-10/21)
- Novelette
 - "O2 Arena," Oghenechovwe Donald Ekpeki (Galaxy's Edge 11/21)
 - "Just Enough Rain," PH Lee (Giganotosaurus 5/21)
 - "(emet)," Lauren Ring (F&SF 7-8/21)
 - "That Story Isn't the Story," John Wiswell (Uncanny 11-12/21)
 - "Colors of the Immortal Palette," Caroline M. Yoachim (Uncanny 3-4/21)
- Short Story
 - "Mr. Death," Alix E. Harrow (Apex 2/21)
 - "Proof by Induction," Jose Pablo Iriarte (Uncanny 5-6/21)
 - "Let All the Children Boogie," Sam J. Miller (Tor.com 1/6/21)

- "Laughter Among the Trees," Suzan Palumbo (The Dark 2/21)
- "Where Oaken Hearts Do Gather," Sarah Pinsker (Uncanny 3-4/21)
- "For Lack of a Bed," John Wiswell (Diabolical Plots 4/21)
- Andre Norton Nebula Award for Middle Grade and Young Adult Fiction
 - Victories Greater Than Death, Charlie Jane Anders (Tor Teen; Titan)
 - Thornwood, Leah Cypess (Delacorte)
 - Redemptor, Jordan Ifueko (Amulet; Hot Key)
 - A Snake Falls to Earth, Darcie Little Badger (Levine Querido)
 - Root Magic, Eden Royce (Walden Pond)
 - Iron Widow, Xiran Jay Zhao (Penguin Teen; Rock the Boat)
- Ray Bradbury Nebula Award for Outstanding Dramatic Presentation
 - Encanto (Walt Disney Animation Studios, Walt Disney Pictures)
 - The Green Knight (Sailor Bear, BRON Studios, A24)
 - Loki: Season 1 (Marvel Studios)
 - Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings (Walt Disney Pictures, Marvel Studios)
 - Space Sweepers (Bidangil Pictures)
 - WandaVision: Season 1 (Marvel Studios)
 - What We Do in the Shadows: Season 3 (FX Productions, Two Canoes Pictures, 343 Incorporated, FX Network)
- Game Writing
 - Coyote & Crow, Connor Alexander, William McKay, Weyodi Oldbear, Derek Pounds, Nico Albert, Riana Elliott, Diogo Nogueira, William Thompson (Coyote & Crow, LLC.)
 - Granma's Hand, Balogun Ojetade (Balogun Ojetade, Roaring Lion Productions)
 - Thirsty Sword Lesbians, April Kit Walsh, Whitney Delagio, Dominique Dickey, Jonaya Kemper, Alexis Sara, Rae Nedjadi (Evil Hat Games)
 - Wanderhome, Jay Dragon (Possum Creek Games)
 - Wildermyth, Nate Austin, Anne Austin (Worldwalker Games, LLC, Whisper Games)

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

I finally got to the library to get some inter-library loan books, as well as local books (and the \$5-a-bag binge I discussed earlier). There was *OUT OF THE RUINS: THE APOCALYPTIC ANTHOLOGY* edited by Preston Grassmann (Titan, ISBN 978-1-789-09739-9), an anthology of both new and reprint post-apocalyptic stories. The stories were all well-written, but reading an entire book of stories about the end of the world (at least as we know it) can be a bit of a downer.

THE TIME TRAVELER'S ALMANAC edited by Ann & Jeff VanderMeer (Tor, ISBN 978-0-7653-7424-0) is yet another of their thousand-page anthologies (okay, 948 pages). The biggest problem is the size, although this at least is the standard width of a hardback book rather than oversized. Still a trade paperback in this size is unwieldy; the copy I checked out has a cover that has a stiff plastic coating which keeps it from flopping around, but I have no idea if that is original, or something the library did. The stories date back to before H. G. Wells's *THE TIME MACHINE*, including "The Clock That Went Backward" (1881) by Edward Page Mitchell, which the VanderMeers claim is the first time travel story ever published. It certainly predates *A CONNECTICUT YANKEE IN KING ARTHUR'S COURT* (1889), although legends and folk tales of time travel through suspended animation (e.g., the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus, and Rip Van Winkle) definitely precede it. Anyway, this is up to the Vanermeers' usual high standards, and worth reading.

Our book and movie group read *UNDER THE SKIN* by Michel Faber (Harvest, ISBN 978-0-156-01160-0). The movie is fairly strange, an also fairly different from the book. The book is pretty much a classic science fiction story (though marketed as mainstream). ****SPOILERS**** The main character is an alien who has been surgically modified from a furry four-legged form to appear human, and sent to Earth to harvest humans as gourmet food. (However, the book is told from her point of view, so when it says "human" it means what we would call "alien", and when it says "vodsel" it means "Homo sapiens". There are also other alien terms, and there is no glossary.) Writing from the alien's point of view lets the reader observe our species from the outside, and also to convey the feelings of someone who is an outsider. I can't recommend the movie, but the book is worth reading. (Not surprisingly, it was not on the Hugo ballot in 2001; it was not even in the top twenty nominees. It is certainly more worthy than *HARRY POTTER AND THE GOBLET OF FIRE*, which won that year, and better than at least a couple of the other finalists.) [-ecl]

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Quote of the Week:

Nature loves a burst of energy.

--Bob Lightman

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