

SF especially but the major classics. One film I never could find--probably because it was an old--silent film was "Le Voyage dans la Lune" (a.k.a. "A Voyage to the Moon", a.k.a. "A Trip to the Moon") created by Georges Melies. It was the only silent film on my bucket list. It finally showed up--well most of it did--in the introduction to the 1950s version of AROUND THE WORLD IN 80 DAYS. VOYAGE was created by Melies also wrote, directed, starred in, was the art director. It was as solidly-packed with as much fun as you could pack into a 1902 film. It has one of the most iconic images of silent films, a joke at the expense of the moon. The story itself is a mash-up of FROM THE EARTH TO THE MOON and FIRST MEN IN THE MOON. It will be shown in April.

["A Trip to the Moon" (1902), April 18, 1:00AM]

Also, for those in the New York/New Jersey area, I can recommend a film on Channel Thirteen (the New York PBS station), AWAY FROM HER (2007). In it, a woman develops a new personality in her twilight years as Alzheimer's Disease robs her of her memories and her former nature, but has not yet robbed her of mechanical function. Her affectionate husband is bewildered by the initial loss, by the new personality, and by choices she is making. Based on the story "The Bear Came Over the Mountain" by Alice Munro, this very personal film is a deeply affecting work from Sarah Polley, a good actress who became an even better writer and director. Julie Christie is excellent, but veteran Canadian actor Gordon Pinsett is even better.

[AWAY FROM HER (2007), April 9, 10:55PM, Channel Thirteen] [-mrl]

Mini Reviews by Evelyn, Part 3 (film reviews by Evelyn C. Leeper):

BUG OUT: This is a four-part IMDB documentary about a \$40,000 "bug heist" from the Philadelphia Insectarium and Butterfly Pavilion.

I should note that there is a certain level of inaccuracy in this documentary. The museum is called an "insectarium" even though it also includes spiders and other arachnids, which are in an entirely different phylum from insects. And almost everyone calls all of the insects and arachnids "bugs", even though bugs are technically only members of the order Hemiptera of insects. For example, flies and beetles are not true bugs, and certainly spiders are not.

Each of the first three episodes ends with a "twist" or a hint that things are going to take a different turn. It reminded me of FORBIDDEN LIES in its structure, but was a bit harder to follow, with more "major" players, and ultimately was disappointing, leaving the viewer with either a feeling of uncertainty, or a feeling of dissatisfaction.

Released on 03/04/22.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt14599882/reference>

What others are saying: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/bug_out

THE 355: THE 355 is a pretty standard spy movie; its "gimmick" is that the team of spies are multi-national and all female (played by Jessica Chastain, Penelope Cruz, Fan Bingbing, Diane Kruger, and Lupita Nyong'o). It's not a bad way to spend an evening, but nothing special. Released theatrically 01/07/22; available on DVD.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt8356942/reference>

What others are saying: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/the_355

AGAINST THE ICE: This "man against nature" film is based on the real-life journey of Ejnar Mikkelsen and Iver Iversen, who from 1909 through 1912 traveled through East Greenland looking for the records of the lost Denmark expedition. At stake was the United States's claim that a large piece of Greenland was physically separated from it by a strait, and therefore was open to being claimed by the United States. With only two explorers on screen for most of the film there is little opportunity for complex interactions. Instead, the film concentrates on the realities of Arctic (and Antarctic) exploration. It is an interesting coincidence that this film was released only a few days before Sir Ernest Shackleton's ship, Endurance, was discovered in the Weddell Sea.

Released on Netflix streaming 03/02/22.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt13873302/reference>

What others are saying: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/against_the_ice

Four distressingly topical older films are A FACE IN THE CROWD, NETWORK, THE DEAD ZONE, and CONTAGION. Everyone has been talking about CONTAGION for the last two years and how it nailed the pandemic. And a lot of people have compared Lonesome Rhodes in A FACE IN THE CROWD to a recent President. But I have seen less comment on the similarities between that President and the Presidential candidate in THE DEAD ZONE. My only complaint is that both A FACE IN THE CROWD and THE DEAD ZONE seem to assume a higher level of intelligence in the voter than we are seeing in reality. On the other hand, NETWORK seems to predict with more accuracy the intelligence, attention span, and general attitude of the average television viewer.

We had a free HBO weekend, so I watched Season 1 of HIS DARK MATERIALS. The series format is obviously better for getting more details from the series, with eight hours per book instead of two, but somehow it failed to engage me to a level where I actively wanted to see the next season.

We got GREASE in the \$5-a-bag sale I mentioned a couple of weeks ago. Yes, the songs are catchy, but my Lord! the message it sends

to young girls: Dress like a hooker so you can keep your boyfriend, d because then he won't have to change his super-macho image with his friends. [-ecl]

Let's Go, Sanderson! (Because ... GOP) (comments by Evelyn C. Leeper):

[I mean, normally, one would use his first name here, but clearly that's not on.]

So if you have been following Brandon Sanderson kickstarter, you know that it is the biggest kickstarter ever. It did not just beat the previous champion, the Pebble Time Smartwatch, it blew past it and will probably end up at least 50% bigger.

How big is big?

Try \$32,500,000 (and it still has six days to go out of the original thirty).

Brian Sanderson is a fantasy writer, and was chosen by Robert Jordan to finish his "Wheel of Time" series when Jordan knew he was going to die. From everything I've heard, Sanderson's fans love his own writing (which includes eight series with translations into a dozen languages), and his fans love him, and he loves them, and treats them with respect, and goes to conventions, and undoubtedly deserves his success. He also has decided since the kickstarter was so successful, to add some additional goodies (customs and fees for backers outside the United States--though not the shipping fees--and some additional swag.

But my question is: can he deliver what the kickstarter promises?

Yes, he has a team of (I believe) 28 people doing fulfillment on his current mailings, and swag, and such. But he started this kickstarter with a goal of \$1,000,000, and is going to end up with more than thirty-five times that, which means fulfilling more than thirty times as much "stuff" in 2023. This stuff varies from four e-books and/or audiobooks, which should not be too difficult to scale up, to four hardcover books, which obviously requires more labor to package and ship, to the top tiers, which include the four books in some of, or all, three formats *plus* swag boxes for the other eight months. I don't know which of the 140,000-plus backers chose physical items, but the average pledge would indicate that a lot of them did. Sanderson may have thought he could ship to 4,000 backers, but 140,000?

I wish him luck. He managed to write these four novels over and above his commitments to his regular publishers, so maybe he can pull this off as well. [-ecl]

WHERE THE DROWNED GIRLS GO by **Seanan McGuire** (copyright 2022, Macmillan Audio, 4 hours and 31 minutes, ASIN: B093CKLDWQ, narrated by Whitney Johnson) (audio book review by Joe Karpierz):

The problem with being a completist is that you don't know when to stop. You keep right on going, long past the point of where you get anything out of what you're being a completist about. That's not true all the time, of course. There are any number of book series, TV series, and albums by groups that are good to the last drop, through and through. The "Expanse" series of novels comes to mind as something that is so good that I never got tired of it. But on the opposite end of the spectrum are things that just won't end, or end long after they should have. Yes, I bought Emerson, Lake and Palmer's "Love Beach". I'm still buying the endless series of "Dune" novels, although at this point I'm five behind and may never catch up. And I did see all--what was it, five?--"Transformer" movies. Well, six I guess if you count BUMBLEBEE, but that one was good, and honestly, I may have misremembered how many movies there actually are in that franchise (oh yeah, I saw all the "Pirates of the Caribbean" movies, too). And for Pete's sake, I'm still listening to the podcast "Welcome to Nightvale", long after it ceased to be spooky and somewhat intense and creepy. It's played more for laughs now than anything else.

Which brings us around to Seanan McGuire and the "Wayward Children" series (to tie everything together, Seanan at one point loved "Welcome to Nightvale"; I don't know if she listens to it these days). To quickly recap, the series revolves around Eleanor West's School for Wayward Children. These children come home from fantasy worlds they've entered through doors that appear to them. When the children return, they have a difficult time adjusting to life in the "real world". Eleanor West takes them into her boarding school. Sometimes the children do adjust to life in the real world, but more often than the doors to those fantasy lands re-open and the children go back to the places where they feel most comfortable.

In **WHERE THE DROWNED GIRLS GO**, Cora ended up in two fantasy worlds--the Trenches and the Moors--and the Drowned Gods of the Moors attempted to keep her here and haunt her even back in the real world. She chooses to leave Eleanor West's and enroll in the Whitethorn Institute. Whitethorn is a place for students who can't be helped by Eleanor go to try to put their fantasy past behind them. Students also go there because their parents send them there hoping the kids will come to their senses. But while Eleanor West's is nurturing, loving place, accepting of all, Whitethorn is a place where, Cora finds out, the point is to break the kids' spirits and mold them into the type of person that can live in the real world (there's that term again), leaving their fantasy worlds behind.

The problem, really, is that the message overwhelms the story. McGuire, as she does in all the "Wayward Children" books, tells us that everyone is an individual, and differences should be respected and celebrated, and that physical traits are not failures, but part of who that person is. However, there is so much more to be explored about the history and workings of the Whitethorn Institute; *that* part of the story, the part that many readers would probably find interesting, was buried under the message.

Granted, genre stories have essentially, been "message fiction" ever since Mary Shelley wrote Frankenstein, although I'm sure that particular novel wasn't the first. The difference is that the message of something like Frankenstein doesn't overwhelm the story itself, as it does here. On the other hand, McGuire's writing is terrific, and everything I've read by her has been such, whether it's as McGuire or as Mira Grant, although I will admit to not have read significant amounts of either one. I'm basically tired of the message--which, by

the way, is essential to get out in to the world and one that I wholehearted agree with and believe in--and wish she'd write more *story*. However, she's getting repetitive, and not really breaking any new ground. But hey, I'm a completist, and with only two more of these stories to go I guess I'll hang on for dear life. After that, I'll try to get to those "Dune" novels. Oh, who am I kidding?

The hardest thing about reviewing an audio book is reviewing the narration itself. I'm still learning that process, and may never get it right. I know what I like in a narrator, and I know what I don't like, and really the narrator must mesh with the material for the narration to be good. Whitney Johnson is a fine narrator for WHERE THE DROWNED GIRLS GO; there's not much else to say about her or the narration itself. [-jak]

Library Books (letter of comment by Jim Susky):

In response to [Evelyn's comments on library books](#) in the 03/18/22 issue of the MT VOID, Jim Susky writes:

Today (2020MAR18) Evelyn wrote that a large unwieldy trade paperback:

"...is the standard width of a hardback book rather than oversized.... 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."

As a young teenager I estimate that I read something like 50,000 words per day (about 3.5 hours at 300 wpm)--not that I burned through DUNE at anything like that pace. There is therefore little doubt that by the time I got the coveted driver's license I had read something like 10-100X the words for pleasure than that I read in "formal education".

I have often held that "a good way to spoil a book is to assign it for a class". Still, I am grateful for those I was "forced" to read.

In a similar way "checking out" a book (from a library) not only put undue pressure on me--but often was the first step toward an estranged relationship--as I often forgot to return it.

I have reformed.

Not only do I avoid libraries, whenever available I purchase "ex-library" copies--which have "something the library did". This is not only a fine value-added feature, but the "ex" part keeps the library happy as well. [-js]

ENCANTO (letter of comment by Gary McGath):

In response to [the list of Nebula Award finalists](#) in the 03/18/22 issue of the MT VOID, Gary McGath writes:

I watched ENCANTO for the first time a couple of days ago. The music is great, full of rhythmic complexities. Some reviewers claimed the songs sound just like the ones from any other Disney movie. If so, I've been watching the wrong Disney movies.

The story, though, felt forced. The introductory explanation demanded too much suspension of disbelief at once. Characters shifted abruptly rather than developing. It's not a bad movie, but not great either. [-gmg]

Pay Television (letter of comment by Kevin R):

In response to [Mark's comments on pay television](#) in the 03/18/22 issue of the MT VOID, Kevin R writes:

This would appear to be the system used for the scrambled signal:

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phonevision>

[quote]

The Phonevision system was operational on station WHCT* in Hartford, CT for at least two years, ending in 1969. The station would run conventional (non-subscription) entertainment programming during the day, and then switch to Phonevision-encoded programming in the evening.

[/quote]

<https://www.earlytelevision.org/phonevision.html>

* Today's WUVN []

In Milwaukee, from 1981-1984, there was:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SelectTV_\(American_TV_channel\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SelectTV_(American_TV_channel))

[-kr]

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

My claim that the Old Bridge Friends of the Library \$5-a-bag sale would satisfy my craving for book sales so I wouldn't have to go to the Bryn Mawr book sale turned out to be totally incorrect. For one thing, I do not want to end up permanently limiting what I do, and the fact that the book sale was in a large space with very high ceilings (two gymnasias) and required that everyone be masked made it one of the safer destinations.

So here's my report.

The sale moved from the Princeton Day School to the Stuart County Day School, and will be at the latter for the foreseeable future. The layout is better: two adjacent gymnasias rather than one gymnasium, and several smaller rooms, one a fair ways away and one requiring stairs. But the parking is worse--it is uphill from the entrance, meaning that after you buy your books you have to carry them about a block uphill, with a couple of steps as well unless you walk a long way around.

The selection this year was smaller, but part of this was due to the extreme popularity of the preview day with dealers who were desperate to replenish their badly depleted stocks. Two years of sales, with no walk-ins who want to sell their books, or book sales like this one, resulted in a huge number showing up here. When we arrived early on the first "public" day, two of the seven tables labeled "British History" were empty, and other areas had similar gaps.

Between this, and our attempt not to buy more books than we need (whatever that means!), we spent only \$26. But for this we got four Great Courses/Teaching Company courses: "The Other Side of History: Daily Life in the Ancient World", "How to Listen to and Understand Opera", "Great Ancient Civilizations of Ancient Minor", and "The American Mind".

I picked up a copy of David Bellos's *IS THAT A FISH IN YOUR EAR?*, a book I reviewed in the 01/20/12 issue and again in the 07/12/19 issue, but did not own a copy yet, which was an annoyance several times when I wanted to refer to it. I was planning on watching *WAITING FOR GODOT*, so when I saw a copy of the play, I added that to the stack, as well as Isabella Bird's 1878 diary of her trip to Japan, and a book on paradoxes.

One other book was not what I had thought it was, but still worthwhile. *THE ATLANTA CENTURY 1860-1865* *appeared* to be a collection of front pages of a weekly newspaper during the Civil War years, but was in fact a mock-up of a *hypothetical* weekly newspaper, and was actually written and assembled by the staff of the Atlanta Journal-Constitution one hundred years later. It is still fascinating, and the 12" by 22" book is certainly worth the \$4 we paid for it.

Writing about book sales, and book stores, and books I find there, made me think about how while a lot of my reading is planned, after a book sale I end up with a bunch of books that, while not random, are totally unplanned and very dependent on what people donated (and others haven't grabbed first).

On the other hand, even my planned reading is driven by books mentioned on podcasts I listen to, or in articles that show up on websites I read, or other "random" events. So maybe the book sale reading is not all that different from the rest of my reading after all. [-ecl]

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Quote of the Week:

Tragedy is when I cut my finger. Comedy is when you fall
into an open sewer and die.

--Mel Brooks

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