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Mt. Holz Science Fiction Society
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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.

Mini Reviews, Part 13 (film reviews by Mark R. Leeper and Evelyn C. Leeper):

Here is the thirteenth batch of mini-reviews, with movies featuring crime.

HOUSE OF GUCCI: Fashion seems to be a new interest to filmmakers: there was Daniel Day Lewis in PHANTOM THREAD, LAST NIGHT IN SOHO is about fashion designing, and now we have Adam Driver as Maurizio Gucci in HOUSE OF GUCCI. But this is more than a film about fashion; this film is an Italian family epic in much the same style as THE GODFATHER, but based on a true story. There is conspicuous wealth, scheming, betrayal and yes, even murder. The cast includes Lady Gaga as Patrizia Reggiani (Maurizio's wife), Jeremy Irons as Maurizio's father, Al Pacino as Maurizio's uncle, and Jared Leto as Maurizio's inept cousin (think Fredo from THE GODFATHER).

Released theatrically 11/24/21; available on DVD from Netflix and on various streaming services. Rating: +3 (-4 to +4), or 9/10.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt11214590/reference>

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

PIG: This sounds like a story about the touching relationship between a man and his pig. Truffle-hunting pigs can rarely be found, but the truffle makes it worth it. In fact, it involves a truffle-hunting pig and at the market price of truffles his talent makes extremely valuable. This would not be a very original situation for a thriller, but you will probably not find a thriller with the same MacGuffin. If the prize were a diamond necklace, it would be a dull cliched story. But you just do not see many pig stories. If the film were CHARLOTTE'S WEB or BABE it would be a different story.

Released theatrically 07/16/21; available on DVD from Netflix and on various streaming services. Rating: +2 (-4 to +4), or 7/10.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt11003218/reference>

What others are saying: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/pig_2021

THE MANY SAINTS OF NEWARK: This is a prequel to the HBO series "The Sopranos" which tells the story of the childhood and youth of Tony Soprano, and of the family and other characters around him with whom we are familiar from that series. It is narrated (rather minimally) by the character of Tony's nephew, Christopher Moltisanti, who gives away some key plot points from the series. And that makes it obvious that this film is for those who have seen the series. Apparently, we're supposed to like this because it's about characters we know. If it were about people we didn't know, it would not get much attention, and be just another crime film.

Released on HBO Max 10/01/21; available on DVD from Netflix and on various streaming services. Rating: +1 (-4 to +4), or 6/10.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt8110232/reference>

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

[-mrl/ec1]

CRACOW MONSTERS (television review by Dale Skran):

There is a new Polish supernatural horror series on Netflix titled CRACOW MONSTERS. Cracow, the second largest and one of the oldest cities in Poland, lies on the Vistula River, and provides a haunting backdrop for this complex series. CRACOW MONSTERS most reminds me of Mike Mignola's "Hell Boy" series, which derives from Eastern European legends, and evinces a much darker tone than much of Western horror. It is not so much the sheer violence or horrific nature of the film, as the sense of desperation and hopelessness that pervades the atmosphere of this fictional Cracow.

The strength of CRACOW MONSTERS lies in the unfamiliar nature of the Slavic mythology it rests on. I found pretty much everything fresh and interesting. Unless you are a student of the arcane, nothing about the background will seem familiar. In Cracow, you will find yourself far from home indeed. There are eight episodes, so some investment of time is required, but there are significant rewards.

Although the mythology is new, some may complain that the general plot, which revolves around a professor and a special group of students who all have supernatural powers, starts to sound like the X-men, but the tale of a band of heroes fighting the gods dates back to the Odyssey. The dramatic strength of CRACOW MONSTERS grows in large part from the fact that the characters are not all that powerful, although as a team they can accomplish quite a bit. The professor appears to have no powers at all, and the exact capabilities of the main character [Alex] are never fully explained, possibly since she is a relatively complex invention. The other eight students possess the following powers:

1. The ability to see and converse with the spirits of the dead [Lucky]
2. The ability to catch glimpses of the future
3. Telepathy/lie detection [there are twin girls, Hania and Basia, who either have the same power, or who only exercise their power working together]
4. Telekinesis, or perhaps just the ability to unlock locks
5. The ability to see the origin of something by touching it [Birdy]
6. It is never clear what the power of one of the students might be [Gigi]
7. There is supposed to be an eighth student, but I can't recall who they were or what their power was

Nine people are required for major rituals, so that idea is that eight students plus Alex equals nine, but I wonder if there were really only seven students plus Alex plus the Professor to total nine. I note that in the final episode the Professor does participate in a major ritual.

In any case, the Professor and his students are going up against Slavic gods, so they are overmatched, even with their powers. However, the students have mastered a considerable amount of ancient Slavic magic, and as it turns out Alex has an "ace" up her metaphorical sleeve. This is not a story with big "superhero" type battles. Action is scary but small scale, and it appears the "gods" are more like powerful demons who are geographically bound to Cracow. Still - the "gods" hold the power of life and death, and are perhaps most dangerous in regard to what they can offer to convince followers to join them.

There is a lot of sex, drugs, violence, suicide, and general nastiness in CRACOW MONSTERS. The students are all damaged to one degree or another, and the Professor may be more dangerous than the Hollowshees. Given how generally wacked things in Cracow appear, it is not surprising the students feel the need to self-medicate. The series gives a good sense of the hermetic live of the students, who converse with the dead, see the future, and battle demons and gods. They are totally cut off from everyday reality, and it wears on them. Having said all that, CRACOW MONSTERS is not as grim to me as things like THE BOYS, INVINCIBLE, or THE UMBRELLA ACADEMY although it does spotlight a lot more sex, drugs, and rock and roll.

I am rating CRACOW MONSTERS a +1 at least, but a strong recommendation for fantasy horror fans or fans of Mike Mignola comics like "Hell Boy" or "BPRD", or other comics like Justice League Dark. Not for kids under 14 at all, and older teens only if they up for some strong brew. If you don't like creepy supernatural horror/fantasy stay far away, and keep the lights on. Also, this is a complex story with new fantasy concepts that you need to have some patience to follow. Don't expect to understand things right away, and don't let the slow start of the first episode throw you off the trail. I'll probably watch it again at some point to catch the details I missed on the first pass. [-dls]

Brandon Sanderson's Kickstarter (comments by Evelyn C. Leeper):

So two weeks ago I wrote about Brandon Sanderson's Kickstarter campaign, which had even by that point become the most funded Kickstarter campaign ever. Well, it ended a few days ago, topping off at \$41,754,153 (more than double the previous top campaign), with 185,341 backers.

As I noted, Sanderson's expectations seemed to be much lower, and he ended up with about forty times as many backers as he expected. Assuming my arithmetic is correct, the result of this is that he has to send out 79,000 audiobooks, 81,000 ebooks, and 93,000 physical books every quarter. Actually he theoretically has to ship those in a single, since the plan was to ship books in four months and swag in the other eight. (The swag totals are 34,000 per month, and cannot really span multiple months, because the next month's shipments are coming up.)

The audiobooks and ebooks are not really a problem--Sanderson just needs to send a link in email and backers will download the items themselves. This works out to about two per minute, even if all the backers download in the month, and it is all spaced evenly. Presumably each backer will get a unique login or password, and these may be spread out over the month.

It's the 93,000 books that are the problem. That works out to about 3000 a day, or about two per minute round the clock. Given that in the non-book months they still have 34,000 boxes of swag to send, it might be difficult to do the packaging, etc., before the given month.

As they say, "Be careful what you wish for." Sanderson does have a publishing and distribution company, but I'm guessing if anyone is looking for a job, he may be hiring extra help in 2023.

As an aside, Kickstarter has made about \$2,000,000 in fees from this campaign. And since Sanderson did a marathon when he backed every publishing campaign, and even totally funded a few, many more projects got funded. In particular, Sanderson featured several of these other campaigns on a video on his YouTube channel, and all of these seem to have been fully funded (well, except for the campaign that was a parody of Sanderson's, #1757184383).

But as happy as Sanderson may be about the success of the campaign, he is probably happiest that he offered the hardcover books as "unsigned". Had he specified "signed", he would have had to sign almost 400,000 books. [-ecl]

Hugo Award Finalists:

There were 1368 valid nominating ballots (1366 electronic and 2 paper) received and counted from the members of the 2021 and 2022 World Science Fiction Conventions for the 2022 Hugo Awards.

[There are too many categories and long lists of editors and contributors for me to format everything, so I will list the major ones (IMHO), and you can access the full list at <https://chicon.org/home/whats-happening/hugo-awards/>.]

- Best Novel
 - A DESOLATION CALLED PEACE, by Arkady Martine (Tor)
 - THE GALAXY, AND THE GROUND WITHIN, by Becky Chambers (Harper Voyager / Hodder & Stoughton)
 - LIGHT FROM UNCOMMON STARS, by Ryka Aoki (Tor / St Martin's Press)
 - A MASTER OF DJINN, by P. Djeli Clark (Tordotcom / Orbit UK)
 - PROJECT HAIL MARY, by Andy Weir (Ballantine / Del Rey)
 - SHE WHO BECAME THE SUN, by Shelley Parker-Chan (Tor / Mantle)
- Best Novella
 - "Across the Green Grass Fields", by Seanan McGuire (Tordotcom)
 - "Elder Race", by Adrian Tchaikovsky (Tordotcom)
 - "Fireheart Tiger", by Aliette de Bodard (Tordotcom)
 - "The Past Is Red", by Catherynne M. Valente (Tordotcom)
 - "A Psalm for the Wild-Built", by Becky Chambers (Tordotcom)
 - "A Spindle Splintered", by Alix E. Harrow (Tordotcom)
- Best Novelette
 - "Bots of the Lost Ark", by Suzanne Palmer (Clarkesworld, Jun 2021)
 - "Colors of the Immortal Palette", by Caroline M. Yoachim (Uncanny Magazine, Mar/Apr 2021)
 - "L'Esprit de L'Escalier", by Catherynne M. Valente (Tordotcom)
 - "O2 Arena", by Oghenechovwe Donald Ekpeki (Galaxy's Edge, Nov 2021)
 - "That Story Isn't the Story", by John Wiswell (Uncanny Magazine, Nov/Dec 2021)
 - "Unseelie Brothers, Ltd.", by Fran Wilde (Uncanny Magazine, May/Jun 2021)
- Best Short Story
 - "Mr. Death", by Alix E. Harrow (Apex Magazine, Feb 2021)
 - "Proof by Induction", by José Pablo Iriarte (Uncanny Magazine, May/Jun 2021)
 - "The Sin of America", by Catherynne M. Valente (Uncanny Magazine, Mar/Apr 2021)
 - "Tangles", by Seanan McGuire (Magicthegathering.com: Magic Story, Sep 2021)

- "Unknown Number", by Blue Neustifter (Twitter, Jul 2021)
- "Where Oaken Hearts Do Gather", by Sarah Pinsker (Uncanny Magazine, Mar/Apr 2021)
- Best Dramatic Presentation, Long Form
 - DUNE (Warner Bros / Legendary Entertainment)
 - ENCANTO (Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures)
 - THE GREEN KNIGHT (BRON Studios/A24)
 - SHANG-CHI AND THE LEGEND OF THE TEN RINGS (Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures)
 - SPACE SWEEPERS (Bidangil Pictures)
 - WANDAVISION (Disney+)
- Best Dramatic Presentation, Short Form
 - The Wheel of Time: "The Flame of Tar Valon" (Amazon Studios)
 - For All Mankind: "The Grey" (Tall Ship Productions / Sony Pictures Television)
 - Arcane: "The Monster You Created" (Netflix)
 - The Expanse: "Nemesis Games" (Amazon Studios)
 - Loki: "The Nexus Event" (Disney+)
 - Star Trek: Lower Decks: "wej Duj" (CBS Eye Animation Productions)
- Lodestar Award for Best Young Adult Book (not a Hugo)
 - CHAOS ON CATNET, by Naomi Kritzer (Tor Teen)
 - IRON WIDOW, by Xiran Jay Zhao (Penguin Teen / Rock the Boat)
 - THE LAST GRADUATE, by Naomi Novik (Del Rey Books)
 - REDEMPTOR, by Jordan Ifueko (Amulet Books / Hot Key Books)
 - A SNAKE FALLS TO EARTH, by Darcie Little Badger (Levine Querido)
 - VICTORIES GREATER THAN DEATH, by Charlie Jane Anders (Tor Teen / Titan)
- Astounding Award for Best New Writer, sponsored by Dell Magazines (not a Hugo)
 - Tracy Deonn (2nd year of eligibility)
 - Micaiah Johnson (2nd year of eligibility)
 - A.K. Larkwood (2nd year of eligibility)
 - Everina Maxwell (1st year of eligibility)
 - Shelley Parker-Chan (1st year of eligibility)
 - Xiran Jay Zhao (1st year of eligibility)

Mark Twain (letter of comment by Kip Williams):

In response to [Evelyn's comments on collecting Mark Twain](#) in the 04/01/22 issue of the MT VOID, Kip Williams writes:

Just to pass along a recommendation on complete things of Twain, the two volumes of Library of America that collect his short pieces are outstanding, going all the way back to newspaper days (I've no doubt more of that awaits finding).

This is the most concentrated, heady draught of Twain that I know of--ideal vacation reading, too. It's my opinion that any dozen pages of his short work is more interesting than a dozen pages of his book-length material, and that's no slight on the long stuff. [-kw]

MANDIBLES, DANGEROUS VISIONS, and Jorge Luis Borges (letter of comment by John Purcell):

In response to [Mark and Evelyn's review of MANDIBLES](#) in the 04/01/22 issue of the MT VOID, John Purcell writes:

I am not fond of movies with subtitles, but MANDIBLES sounds suitably strange enough to warrant a viewing. After living in Texas for over two decades, seeing larger than normal insects and other creepy crawlies doesn't surprise me much any more, but "a giant fly the size of a cocker spaniel" would definitely freak me out. No, thank you! So it's in French? Interesting. I am glad you said that the subtitles are readable, and this brief plot synopsis sounds like this could be a fun thing to watch. Many thanks.

In response to [Joe Karpierz's review of DANGEROUS VISIONS](#) in the same issue, John writes:

Well, there are science fiction readers who have yet to read DANGEROUS VISIONS, so Joe Karpierz's review of this landmark tome doesn't surprise me. In fact, it is good to see a relatively unbiased modern reader's take on this collection of stories. It definitely broke new ground, and I agree with Joe that some of the stories left me cold and indifferent. However, there were so many excellent stories included that the head-scratchers receded into the background. It has been years since I have read the two DANGEROUS VISIONS collections, so maybe, just maybe, I will give those aforementioned "qua?" stories another chance one of these years. We shall see.

And in response to [Evelyn's comments on collecting Jorge Luis Borges's short stories](#) in the same issue, John writes:

Jorge Luis Borges is an author I have read very little of, which is a sad admission to make for a college English professor. What I have read, though, has been entertaining and enlightening. Borges is a fine writer, and I really should read more of his work.

That will work for now. Take care, and thank you once again for this weekly zine. [-jp]

Evelyn notes:

Well, of course, Borges is not an author who wrote in English (or rather, he only wrote a limited amount of non-fiction in English). It has always been strange to me that we have classes labeled as "English classes" which teach a whole bunch of stuff in translation. Even when they are called "World Literature" they seem to be taught out of the English department. Or is this something that is no longer true? [-ecl]

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

PARADOXES by R. M. Sainsbury (Cambridge University Press, ISBN 978-0-521-48347-6) covers such paradoxes as Zeno's paradoxes, the barber paradox, and the paradox of the heap. The last deals with the question, "If a pile of 10,000 grains of sand is a heap, and you take one grain away, is it still a heap? If so, and you keep doing this, when does it stop being a heap?" Sainsbury addresses the paradox and says there are similar paradoxes about hairs and baldness. In trying to resolve the paradox, he discusses the concepts of vagueness and definiteness (e.g., there is a range that is definitely a heap, a range that is definitely **not** a heap, and a range in between that may or may not be a heap). So far, Sainsbury is in his area of expertise. But he then steps out of that area, and as often happens when someone steps out of their area of expertise, he stumbles badly: he says, "However it is absurd to suggest that "Yul Brynner is bald" is anything other than **definitely** true." [Emphasis his.] Alas, "Yul Brynner is bald" is just the sort of statement that is **not** definitely true, **nor** definitely **not** true, because Yul Brynner appeared bald because he shaved his head. He began doing this for THE KING AND I in 1956, and liked the way it made him look. So if by "bald" you mean "has no hairs growing on his head" he was not bald. If my "bald" you mean "doesn't seem to have any hairs on his head", he was bald right after shaving, but not bald a few hours later (and also depending on how close the observer was). The whole situation is a lot more vague than Sainsbury thinks. (Telly Savalas was also "artificially" bald; he first shaved his head for THE GREATEST STORY EVER TOLD in 1965. Patrick Stewart, on the other hand, is naturally bald.)

Sainsbury makes a more critical error later, though. Or rather, neither he nor his copy editor caught a slip of the typewriter.

He starts with the hypotheses R1, "All ravens are black" (or, "There are no ravens that are not-black"), and also R2, "Everything non-black is a non-raven". He then writes, "Any two of these three hypotheses are equivalent, and this can be shown simply by reflection, with appeal to experience; so the equivalence can be known a priori. For example, suppose R1 is true: all ravens are black. Then clearly, any non-black thing is not a raven, or, as R2 puts it, is a non-raven. So if R1 is true, so is R2. Now suppose that R1 is false; then some ravens are not black. However, this means that some things that are not black are not ravens, so R2 is false, too. Thus R1 and R2 are equivalent, and this can be known a priori."

But "some ravens are not black" does **not** mean that "some things that are not black are not ravens." "Some A are not B" is not the same as "Some not B are not A, specifically in the case that some B and all not B are A. [-ecl]

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Quote of the Week:

There's nothing wrong with being shallow as long as
you're insightful about it.

--Dennis Miller

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