

# MT VOID 03/24/23 -- Vol. 41, No. 39, Whole Number 2268



03/24/23 -- Vol. 41, No. 39, Whole Number 2268

## Table of Contents

- [Mini Reviews, Part 17 \(THREE MINUTES--A LENGTHENING, SIDNEY, HIDDEN LETTERS, ALL THE BEAUTY AND THE BLOODSHED\)](#) (film reviews by Mark R. Leeper and Evelyn C. Leeper)
- [THE WILL TO BATTLE \("Terra Ignota" Book III\) by Ada Palmer](#) (book review by Joe Karpierz)
- [This Week's Reading](#) (UNDER THE HARROW, THE VILLAGE, RUNNING OUT OF TIME, THE GLORY THAT WAS, "Thessaly" series) (book and film comments by Evelyn C. Leeper)
- [Quote of the Week](#)

Co-Editor: Mark Leeper, [mleeper@optonline.net](mailto:mleeper@optonline.net)  
Co-Editor: Evelyn Leeper, [eleeper@optonline.net](mailto:eleeper@optonline.net)  
Sending Address: [evelynchmelisleeper@gmail.com](mailto:evelynchmelisleeper@gmail.com)  
All material is copyrighted by author unless otherwise noted.  
All comments sent or posted will be assumed authorized for inclusion unless otherwise noted.

To subscribe or unsubscribe, send mail to [eleeper@optonline.net](mailto:eleeper@optonline.net)  
The latest issue is at <http://www.leepers.us/mtvoid/latest.htm>.  
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).

### Mini Reviews, Part 17 (film reviews by Mark R. Leeper and Evelyn C. Leeper):

This is the seventeenth batch of mini-reviews, all documentaries (note that one--HIDDEN LETTERS--is running on PBS in three days):

**THREE MINUTES--A LENGTHENING:** THREE MINUTES--A LENGTHENING is a feature-length documentary based on three minutes of genuine "found footage" taken in a Jewish town in Poland in 1938 by a man who has emigrated to America many years earlier. And that is (almost) all it shows, with narration and comments by the grandson of the man, a couple of survivors of the Holocaust from that town, and Helena Bonham-Carter.

One of the most interesting aspects of tracing the background of people from the town is the detective work trying to decode the people's names from the blurred images of the names on stores and elsewhere in the photographs. This is a notable detective story, as in finding who killed someone in a traditional mystery, but instead it is bringing people back to life. It is not just a documentary of old footage, but also a consideration of what the footage represents, and the varied reactions we have to it.

Released to various festivals 2022. Rating: +3 (-4 to +4) or 9/10

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt12017738/reference>

What others are saying: [https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/three\\_minutes\\_a\\_lengthening](https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/three_minutes_a_lengthening)

**SIDNEY:** SIDNEY is a fairly straightforward biography of Sidney Poitier; its interest lies in the story of Poitier's experiences and how they shaped his life and his work. His effect was felt not just within the Hollywood community, but throughout the wider society, particularly during the civil rights years.

Released on AppleTV+ streaming 23 September 2022. Rating: low +3 (-4 to +4) or 8/10

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt16977750/reference>

What others are saying: [https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/sidney\\_2022](https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/sidney_2022)

**HIDDEN LETTERS:** HIDDEN LETTERS is almost definitely going to be confused with HIDDEN FIGURES, and it is true that both focus on women of color who are marginalized by men. But HIDDEN FIGURES is a narrative film about the American space program, and HIDDEN LETTERS is a documentary about Nushu, a secret script developed by women in China several hundred years ago. Few original Nushu writings survive, and the documentary shows how attempts to preserve it fall prey to attempts to make it of interest to tourists, or to commercialize it as a brand name. Currently very few people can read or write Nushu, and they all learned it as a scholarly exercise rather than organically. And the both the Nushu Museum and the Center for Nushu Cultural and Research Administration seem to be controlled primarily by men.

The result is that we see men treating women writing Nushu as decorative objects (explicitly commenting on their looks), and men unveiling the sign for the Nushu Cultural Exchange Center (and knocking it over in the process), and men pushing the idea of having Nushu brand potatoes.

There is also a contrast between a "Princess Camp" which somehow is supposed to be celebrating Nushu and scenes of women washing clothes in the river, drawing water, carrying loads, etc. Whether these are supposed to represent the only positions open to women or not is not clear.

HIDDEN LETTERS will run on PBS on March 27, 2023.

(If you think pronouns should be straightforward, try reading a review with the main character being a woman named "He Yanxin", He being the family name, and hence how she is referred to. In other words, "He is a "she/her.")

Released theatrically 09 December 2022. Rating: low +2 (-4 to +4) or 7/10

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt15503562/reference>

What others are saying: [https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/hidden\\_letters](https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/hidden_letters)

**ALL THE BEAUTY AND THE BLOODSHED:** ALL THE BEAUTY AND THE BLOODSHED is a documentary in which the style definitely gets in the way of the content at first it claims to be about the Sackler brouhaha the Sacklers are mentioned for a little bit in the first five minutes of the film from then Nan Goldin seems to be interested only in her autobiographical accounts which are of a much lower interest value

Released theatrically 2 December 2022. Rating: high 0 (-4 to +4) or 5/10

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt16977750/reference>

What others are saying: [https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/all\\_the\\_beauty\\_and\\_the\\_bloodshed](https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/all_the_beauty_and_the_bloodshed)

[-mrl/ecl]

---

**THE WILL TO BATTLE ("Terra Ignota" Book III) by Ada Palmer** (copyright 2017, Tor, 352pp, trade paperback, ISBN 978-0-7653-7805) (book review by Joe Karpierz):

Ada Palmer's "Terra Ignota" quartet has to be one of the most fascinating, yet frustrating, series I have ever read. It is a rich and complex tale with interesting and well thought out characters--just about all of whom seem to me to be unreliable in one way or another--and the more we learn about the central character and narrator of the tale, Mycroft Canner, the more we know and understand that they are the most unreliable of the bunch. Canner has more layers than an onion, and just when you think you get to know them you find out you're wrong. The entire story is that way as well, and that is what makes the series as a whole, and THE WILL TO BATTLE in particular, one of the most frustrating reads I've ever experienced.

Palmer's world building for the Earth of 2454 is magnificent. Palmer doesn't describe the world the story takes place in. Rather, she lets the reader learn and understand the world as the story progresses, which lets the story move along without being bogged down by world building details. On the flip side, the novel is extremely dense and intricate; at least for me, THE WILL TO BATTLE was not an easy read by any means. While I like my reading to be challenging, THE WILL TO BATTLE pushed me to extremes that I'm not sure I was ready for or happy with. It took me a \*very\* long time to read this novel. But I was fascinated by it, and interested in what it was saying, so much so that I was unwilling to give up on it even though there were times I looked at it and said "nope, I'm going to turn on the TV instead". Yes, it was a very tough read, but it was a \*good\* read, and a good story.

As alluded to earlier, the story takes place in the year 2454. It takes place over the months April through September of that year, and is narrated--and documented--by Mycroft Canner. The world is preparing for a war that now seems to be inevitable. Tensions are escalating, and war could break out at any minute. The story begins not long after the end of the previous novel, SEVEN SURRENDERS, wherein we learned that the delicate balance of peace was maintained by a series of strategic assassinations, called O.S. Once the world learned that this was the case, war was inevitable. Ockham Prospero Saneer is in prison for the assassinations, and it is here that we learn what "terra ignota" means. Saneer is to plead "terra ignota", the uncertainty over whether or not the O.S. assassinations were a crime. While murders in particular, and violence in general, is against the law, are the assassinations that kept

world peace actually a crime? That's a good question, of course, and the outcome of that trial is just one thing that contributes to the tensions in society and the alliances various factions will take when the war does start.

Palmer is an historian, and teaches at the University of Chicago. Her knowledge of history is evident throughout THE WILL TO BATTLE and the "Terra Ignota" series as a whole. One of the most fascinating characters is Achilles--yes, \*that\* Achilles--brought to life from a small toy soldier after Bridger's suicide. Achilles plays a central part in war preparations, helping gather resources for both sides so they can survive the upcoming war, while at the same time paying close attention to events to determine a) who the sides are, and b) which side he will aid in the conflict. It is fascinating to watch Palmer weave her knowledge of history into the character of Achilles as well as into the preparations for war and the use of language and style in telling the story.

Where does "Terra Ignota" go from here? War, of course. THE WILL TO BATTLE ended with the world at war. There are many interesting twists that happened in the final sections of the book, but I don't want to give anything away. I've read a lot of science fiction in my life, but once again Palmer has surprised me. As I think about it, this book may really not be science fiction. It think it is more political science fiction, however even that term is ambiguous, as it could mean either a) science fiction that it is political (and THE WILL TO BATTLE is definitely that), or fiction that is about political science (and it's that too).

The most obvious place to go from here is the fourth and final book in the series, PERHAPS THE STARS. While I have admittedly struggled to read every book in the series (and even spoke with Palmer about it at a local convention), I've also liked the story and the world it is set in. I do like to be challenged by my reading, and I expect that challenge to continue in the final book in the series. I'm sure that I will not be disappointed. [-jak]

---

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

SPOILERS AHEAD!

In 2010 Mark Dunn wrote a book, UNDER THE HARROW, which had the same basic premise as the 2004 film THE VILLAGE by M. Night Shyamalan, and indeed was accused of plagiarism. But RUNNING OUT OF TIME by Margaret Peterson Haddix (Simon & Schuster, ISBN 978-0-689-81236-1) got these before either one, since it was published in 1995. The film is clearly the best known of the three, and I suspect just comparing the other two to it reveals the premise, but here goes anyway: we see a bunch of people living in a 19th century village. But there seem to be inconsistencies: the doctor dispenses pills in addition to herbal remedies, strange artifacts turn up, and so on. And then (fairly early on) we discover, surprise! this is really an enclave in the 20th (or 21st) century world, set up as an experiment of some sort.

Actually, L. Sprague de Camp got there \*seventy\* years ago, with the 1952 publication of THE GLORY THAT WAS. But no one is mentioning him. In any case, one problem is they are much of a muchness, and become all too predictable after a while. (Jo Walton's "Thessaly" series ([THE JUST CITY, THE PHILOSOPHER KINGS, and NECESSITY) is somewhat different, involving time-traveling gods and dealing more with philosophy and less with interactions with the outside world.)

[I reviewed UNDER THE HARROW in the 10/12/2012 issue of the MT VOID, and THE JUST CITY in the 09/18/15 issue. Both reviews can be found in my review archive at <http://leepers.us/evelyn/reviews/reviews.htm>.] [-ecl]

---

Mark Leeper  
mleeper@optonline.net

Quote of the Week:

A good novel tells us the truth about its hero;  
but a bad novel tells us the truth about its author.  
--Gilbert Chesterton

Go to [our home page](#) THE MT VOID