

MT VOID 06/09/23 -- Vol. 41, No. 50, Whole Number 2279



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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 24 (film reviews by Mark R. Leeper and Evelyn C. Leeper):

This is the twenty-fourth batch of mini-reviews, all documentaries:

HOLLYWOOD DREAMS & NIGHTMARES: THE ROBERT ENGLUND STORY (2023): A lot of people these days on the Internet and elsewhere seem to have an unquenchable thirst for celebrity biographies. A large number of DVDs come with special features that are biographies of the actors in the film. One most often sees these celebrity documentaries about actors such as Henry Fonda or Audrey Hepburn.

In this regard, HOLLYWOOD DREAMS & NIGHTMARES is just feeding that appetite. Here the biographer is telling the history of Robert Englund, who in his fifty-year career is best known for the role of Freddy Krueger. Englund is not so glamorous a star as Fonda or Hepburn, but he comes from an impressive background of horror films, and his hand with knives has become an icon of the horror genre. (Although, as Peter Atkins observes, a monster character is made iconic not by the writer or the director or even the make-up artist, but by the actor himself.)

In telling the story of Englund's long acting career, one sees not just him but dozens of actors who are much better known to us today. Also included is a collection of anecdotes about how it is to work with Englund and to be in the community of actors about the same age, as well as a lot about advice and praise he got early on. (There is maybe a bit too much of the "everyone is wonderful" sort of clips.) We get both Englund's reactions to other people and other people's reactions to him. And there are people from the horror film genre discussing the dynamics of the stories in the films as well.

Three-dimensional monsters have been done very little since Universal Studios, but Englund manages to bring this depth to his characters (not just Freddy, but all of them). [-mrl/ecl]

Released streaming on Screambox 6 June 2023. Rating: high +1 (-4 to +4), or 6/10.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt10172168/reference>

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

THE ACT OF READING (2021): THE ACT OF READING is a documentary about MOBY-DICK. Director Mark Blumberg flunked his high school English class junior year because he didn't read MOBY-DICK or do any of the papers assigned. The monologue/dialogue seems to imply he had not yet read it when he started this project, but does that mean he never passed English and never graduated from high school?

Blumberg observes and talks to several teachers about MOBY-DICK, including Janet Werner, the teacher who flunked him. The teacher whose class seems to have the most screen time, Vicki Hebert, I found the most annoying: she addresses her students as "my babies" and "my sweeties", and teaches class one day with her face marked up in South-Seas-style tattoos. (Her students are ... unimpressed.)

I *love* MOBY-DICK, and certainly some of the ideas expressed and discussed are worthwhile. I'm not sure a tour of Melville's Great Barrington home with his middle-aged great-great-grandson Peter Whittemore in shorts really conveys much (except perhaps how different everything is now from them--and I suppose that is worth something).

In my opinion, this is a movie for people who already love MOBY-DICK. Showing it to a group of uninterested students is *not* going to *get* them interested. [-ecl]

Released streaming 22 February 2021. Rating: +1 (-4 to +4), or 6/10.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt10813062/reference>

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

TRUMAN & TENNESSEE: AN INTIMATE CONVERSATION (2020): TRUMAN & TENNESSEE is a documentary about/by Truman Capote and Tennessee Williams. It consists of readings from letters, diaries, interviews, and articles by the two authors. They were contemporaries and close friends, but most of the documentary focuses on one or the other, with only a few points of intersection when they talk about each other. They both shed a lot of light on their lives, their work, and their reputations. I suspect that director Lisa Immordino Vreeland thought that their connection would provide a way to take two relatively short documentaries and create a feature-length film, possibly with a stronger merging than was actually achieved.

The result is a bit choppy, but for people who want more insight into the work of these two authors, it provides such a view. [-ecl]

Released theatrically 18 June 2021. Rating: +2 (-4 to +4), or 7/10.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt13016030/reference>

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

The MT VOID, THE RISE AND THE REIGN OF THE MAMMALS, and UNTHINKING THINKING (letter of comment by Garth Spencer):

In response to various reviews in the MT VOID, Garth Spencer writes:

Apart from presenting club meetings, film nights, and some interesting reviews of fiction and nonfiction, I see MT VOID has started running an interesting loc column. I was amused and engrossed by your review of THE RISE AND THE REIGN OF THE MAMMALS in the April 21st issue, the review of UNTHINKING THINKING in the April 28th issue, and the things I learned from letters you received. Evidently you are well aware of past art in film and in literature alike. [-gs]

THE TRUMAN SHOW (letter of comment by John Purcell):

In response to [Mark's review of THE TRUMAN SHOW](#) in the 06/02/23 issue of the MT VOID, John Purcell writes:

Mark's review of THE TRUMAN SHOW was very good, reminding me how much I enjoyed that movie. I agree that knowing the premise before watching was not exactly smart marketing, but the movie is definitely worth watching. To me, it's definitely an allegory about our media-drenched and media-controlled society. The film makes a very good point about the human condition and how we use and abuse technology for a specific goal.

Is THE TRUMAN SHOW entertainment or an eerie self referential mock-documentary about American society, or is this movie a warning about where we are heading? Looking back at THE TRUMAN SHOW twenty-five years later, I see many of these issues coalescing around us. This is a movie worth rewatching.

All in all, we here in SouthCentralEastern Texas are dealing with life fairly well. It's hot, of course, with still hotter weather forthcoming. Summer is basically Easter to Thanksgiving here. So it goes. [-jp]

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

I skipped both major used book sales this spring (Bryn Mawr and East Brunswick Friends of the Library) because I have concluded that my book buying philosophy has changed. In part this is a by-product of no used book sales for a couple of years during the pandemic, and in part a by-product of the \$5-a-bag sales at my own library.

During the pandemic, I started buying more books on-line. Not a lot, but where in the past I would often see a book on-line I was interested in, reasonably priced, but decide it was too extravagant, because it would be cheaper at a used book sale. Somehow the used book sale price was fixed in my head as the "proper" price. A couple of years of not having books available at that price (\$2 a book, or even less), made me adjust my perceptions.

The other change is realizing that having my reading determined by what was randomly available at used book sales might have been okay twenty years ago, but increasingly made less sense. Twenty years ago, I might have expected to be able to read another five or six thousand books. But now that number has decreased considerably and I need to be more selective in my reading.

And the \$5-a-bag sale? Well, that is more DVDs than books. I would basically fill a bag with any DVDs that looked either possibly interesting to watch or likely to be salable. But with many of the "possibly interesting to watch," "possibly" turned out to be "not". This reinforced my idea that random selection was not the way to go. (And my latest visit indicated that if the goal of the \$5-a-bag sale was to thoroughly deplete the stock, it has succeeded. Many of the sale shelves are half-empty and the DVD selection is about two dozen Russian films, two dozen Indian films, and a half a shelf of totally uninteresting DVDs.) [-ecl]

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Quote of the Week:

Two things are infinite: the universe and human stupidity; and I'm not sure about the universe.
--Albert Einstein

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