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### **My Picks for Turner Classic Movies for April** (comments by Mark R. Leeper):

I find it ironic that in some ways movies and television programs have traded places for respectability. When I was growing up, if a producer wanted to tell a serious story the best venue was the movies. Television writing was not going through a very good period. It had programs like "Gilligan's Island" and "The Man from U.N.C.L.E." If a storyteller wanted to say something serious, the proper medium was the theatrical film. That is why I like TCM. It has the best drama of the period. But starting with "The Sopranos" the better story telling moved to television. Now if you want to see longer and better developed stories like "Mad Men" and "House of Cards" they require more time to develop and you cannot really make a film that long. So theaters have ended up the venue for super-hero films. Television has the best writing these days.

Well, here are my picks for April.

**THE BAD AND THE BEAUTIFUL** (1952) Let me begin with two very good, but somewhat different films about the profession of making movies. **THE BAD AND THE BEAUTIFUL** gives a behind the camera view of the business by focusing on one producer. It tells the story of one of the most hated men in Hollywood. Jonathan Shields, played by Kirk Douglas, lies and cheats his way and is ready to betray any friend to get to the top. The account is fictional with a load of real anecdotes mixed in. This film is plenty entertaining even if a lot of the allusions will go over most viewers' heads. Those more knowledgeable will see a lot that is familiar. Horror fans will see a fictionalized account of how Val Lewton got his horror style. This film is a favorite of cinema podcasters like Terry Frost. (The final scene makes a strong point, but still is something of a cop out.) Vincente Minnelli directs. The film won five Academy Awards, proving that one of the film industry's greatest fascinations is the movie industry itself. [Friday, April 7, 3:45 PM]

**DAY FOR NIGHT** (1973) Francois Truffaut has his own expose of the film industry with a focus on the making of a single--not very good--film. **DAY FOR NIGHT** (1973) is all about a single film's production and all the exasperation and chaos and a bit of joy the director goes through to make what will ultimately be a forgettable family film called **MEET PAMELA**. Again there are lots of allusions to actual incidents. Our director has to mold a film out of the performances of drunk actors, backstage romances, animals that are uncooperative, strangers on the set, etc. etc. etc. The film is really a collection of anecdotes about being a film director. Some of what happens on the set will actually be a learning experience for film buffs. [Monday, April 3, 4:00 AM]

**THE MIND BENDERS** (1961) It has been several decades since the last time I saw this film being shown, probably in part because it is in black and white. I have seen it on DVD but otherwise I thought it was lost. It is sort of a science fiction film and sort of a spy film though very low key in both realms. Basil Dearden (**KHARTOUM**) directs a screenplay by James Kennaway based on Kennaway's cold war novel. A scientist is working in the field of sensory deprivation and what does it do to test subjects. (This is the same field that was studied in **ALTERED STATES**). The scientist commits suicide and is found to have a briefcase with large sums of money. It looks a lot like he was spying for the soviets. Military Intelligence thinks that sensory deprivation might have softened the scientist's mind to be brainwashed. They want to test the hypothesis on another scientist (played by Dirk Bogarde). What happens was certainly chilling when the film was first shown. I think it will still be effective. [Sunday, April 2, 10:30 PM]

I guess by general agreement of the "experts" the best film on TCM this month is what has been voted the best film ever made. It is Alfred Hitchcock's **VERTIGO** (1958). I find some serious logic flaws in the film, but then I have been told that Hitchcock freely admitted that there are logic flaws in his films. He didn't care. Well, it is a good film in any case. [Saturday, April 1, 1:45 PM]

Hey, a side note: By some sort of coincidence that I really cannot account for my recommendations are frequently films shown early in the month. All four of these films will be shown the first week of April. I really do not have a good explanation why that happens.

[-mrl]

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### **Video of Mars** (comments by Greg Frederick):

It may not be H. G. Well's vision of Mars but this recent video of Mars is amazing:

<http://tinyurl.com/void-mars-video>

[I cannot get this to play in my version of Firefox, but it may be some setting I have for that--it works fine in Safari and

Chrome. -ecl]

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**BETHANY** (film review by Mark R. Leeper):

**CAPSULE:** This is a film of psychological and paranormal horror. A woman who had a painful childhood years before and who suffers from scary visions returns to live in the house she grew up in. She starts having increasingly violent hallucinations. While the film is tightly and tensely shot with some disturbing imagery, the script by actor Zack Ward and by James Cullen Bressack is not up to James Cullen Bressack's directing. Rating: high +1 (-4 to +4) or 6/10

Claire (Stefanie Estes) had a particularly painful childhood dominated by her self-obsessed mother and with few friends. Her best friends were stuffed animals, some dolls, and her imaginary friend Bethany. She lived years in a big, dark, deadening house. Claire's mother treated her as a possession. What happiness she had was playing with Bethany. But Claire broke free of her mother and of the house when Claire was eighteen.

In the following years Claire married Aaron (Zack Ward). She buried her past until her mother died. Claire inherited her childhood home and decides to try to forget the past and return to living in the old house. When she feels depressed, which happens increasingly often, she can talk about it with the imaginary Bethany who still lives or perhaps lives again in the walls of the house. Bethany takes the form of whispers coming from the walls. But this sort of friendship does not always work as fans of horror film know. Either Bethany or Claire has taken to arranging and causing accidents for Claire. Most fans of the horror film will have seen a lot of the ideas and mechanisms previously appearing in other films. For example this film is being released just two weeks after Ed Gass-Donnelly's horror film LAVENDER, a film with which it has many plot parallels.

Bressack knows how to shoot the film without a reliance on false jump scenes or other "turn the crank" ways to get a reaction from the audience. Bressack as director knows better than squander his viewers' trust. He does have an eye for mood and color. While the real world shown in naturalistic color, the hallucinations are often reduced to heavy use of primary colors to give a dreamlike effect. In general the film is well executed, but just lacks the creativity it needed from Bressack the writer to set itself apart from so many similar nightmare fests. I rate it a high +1 on the -4 to +4 scale or 6/10.

Film Credits: <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt4516352/combined>

What others are saying: <https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/bethany>

[-mrl]

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**THE BLACKCOAT'S DAUGHTER** (film review by Mark R. Leeper):

**CAPSULE:** Mysterious goings-on go on at an all-girl Catholic school over winter break. The film is shot with an excess of style that got in the way of the coherence. The freezing setting of upstate New York reaches into the tone of the entire film and even the spirit of the viewer. The ambience is certainly creepy, but the story seems to take forever to get to where it is going and too much is obscured by unclear voices and darkly photographed, often rear-lit, scenes. The film is written and directed by Oz Perkins who went on to write and direct the similarly indistinct I AM THE PRETTY THING THAT LIVES IN THE HOUSE. Rating: low +1 (-4 to +4) or 5/10

Watching this film is like stepping into a large freezer. In cold and icy upstate New York is Bramford, a prestigious Catholic school for girls. The school is decorated in a color scheme of metallic blue and gray, symbolizing complete rejection anything warm and human. Director (and writer) Oz Perkins clearly wants to take even more humanity from its characters and show them as silhouettes against the blue light coming off the fields of snow outside. Sadly, this makes the main characters look too similar and even with a small cast it is hard for the viewer to keep track who each one is.

It is the beginning of the February winter break. (In fact, the film was originally titled FEBRUARY.) The parents should have collected the girls to take home. At least that was the plan. Rose (played by Lucy Boynton) and Kat (Kiernan Shipka) were not picked up and the headmaster of the school has to make special arrangement for them to stay in the building. A third girl, Joan (Emma Roberts) ends sitting at a bus stop late at night. We do not know how she fits in or why. We do know that Rose has arranged to miss winter break so she will not have to face her parents and tell them that she and her boyfriend have on the way a little problem together.

That is still early in the movie and there is a lot more to go before the horror of the film kicks in. Director Perkins knows how to shoot his scenes to build tension. Oddly, we know not why this part of the story has us on edge, but it foreshadows what is to come. Still we may not be sure who, if anyone, will be menacing whom. When the violence occurs--and yes, it is coming--it is kept out of sight of the camera. There is no gore distastefully shaken in the face of the viewer.

The photography is good, but it is at odds with the story telling. It is hard to tell the school girls apart in half-light. It is even hard to tell a blonde from a girl with darker hair when they are both lit from behind. The film uses darkness and slow pacing much as German Expressionism did. The musical score in the main body of the film is mostly electronic music so it does not feel organic. I missed what the title referred to. THE BLACKCOAT'S DAUGHTER takes a long time to get where it is going, and where it is going is familiar territory. I rate the film a low +1 on the -4 to +4 scale or 5/10. THE BLACKCOAT'S DAUGHTER has played at film festivals and was released to theaters March 31.

Film Credits: <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt3286052/combined>

What others are saying: [https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/the\\_blackcoats\\_daughter](https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/the_blackcoats_daughter)

[-mrl]

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**BOKEH** (film review by Mark R. Leeper):

**CAPSULE:** Bringing up memories of the more engaging THE QUIET EARTH (1985), this film concerns a young (American?) couple Jenai and Riley, vacationing in Iceland when nearly everybody in the world mysteriously disappears. The two people are the inheritors of Iceland with its beautiful natural scenery and without any Icelanders anywhere. In fact, they are without any other humans to be found. Jenai and Riley struggle to make sense of what has happened to them. The team of Andrew Sullivan and Geoffrey Orthwein write and direct an enigmatic film about the apparent end of most of the world. Rating: low +1 (-4 to +4) or 5/10

A young couple, Jenai and Riley (played by Maika Monroe and Matt O'Leary) goes to Iceland for the spectacular scenery. The first night Jenai wakes up at 3:24 in the morning. She admires the scenery out her hotel window, lit by the very early morning sun. There is a strange flash of white light. She goes back to sleep. When she wakes up in the morning all is very quiet. She and Reilly go down to breakfast and find it has not been laid. In fact there is nobody to serve them. They go out on the street and find it totally empty. At least if there were corpses lying around, it would explain what happened to everyone. But all others have been removed without a trace. Whatever happened was targeted at humans. We see cats and horses and hear birds, and they seem not distressed. One wonders how pets were or will be faring.

With nobody left Jenai and Riley find nothing to keep them in this town and with the world outside being theirs for the taking, they go out on a journey. They want to find answers and along the way to appreciate the natural beauty of Iceland and to look for more humans along the way. The film serves as both a science fiction film and a travelogue to show off Iceland as a tourist destination of rare beauty. The film is more successful in the latter pursuit. The scenery becomes of greater interest and even perhaps more of a character than the two principal leads.

While at the start of the film the two come off as vacuous tourists, the travel broadens them. Riley is an empiricist who is looking for physical answers for what has happened. Jenai's mind is more spiritual and poetic. She feels the apocalypse has brought her closer to God. Or, she wonders, has God forsaken them. God remains silent. This does not mean that the two cannot take time off now and then to clown around or go skinny-dipping, and that might be a welcome relief for the viewer. Much of the film is taken up with chit-chat. It is mostly just a look at two people in an intolerable situation.

Never explained is the fact that there are systems that require human maintenance and without them cities would start breaking down. There is no acknowledgement in the story that things are starting to go away beyond the faucet water stopping. In fact, answers seem impossible to get from the story.

The viewer should not expect all questions will be answered by the end of the story. We are never even told what Bokeh is. (Wikipedia defines it, "In photography, bokeh is the aesthetic quality of the blur produced in the out-of-focus parts of an image produced by a lens.") This is a film for the patient and that patience goes largely unrewarded. I rate it a low +1 on the -4 to +4 scale or 5/10. BOKEH will go into limited release on March 24.

Film Credits: <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt3722062/combined>

What others are saying: [https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/bokeh\\_2017](https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/bokeh_2017)

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**INTO THE FIRE: SAMANTHA KANE #1, by Patrick Hester** (copyright 2017, WordFire Press, \$17.99, Trade Paperback, 339 pp., ISBN 978-1-61475-492-3) (excerpt from the Duel Fish Codices: a book review by Joe Karpierz):

I came to know of Patrick Hester a couple of years ago, when he and John Anealio, who together give the world The

Functional Nerds podcast, were Media Guests of Honor at Capricon 35. He is a two-time Hugo Award winner for his work on the SFSignal Podcast and SFSignal.com. He's written several pieces of self-published sf and fantasy, and INTO THE FIRE: SAMANTHA KANE #1 is his first published novel.

Samantha Kane (we'll call her Sam--that's what she would want us to do) is a cop. To be specific, a detective in what we presume is the Denver police department. As the book opens, Sam is in trouble with her captain. It seems she had rushed in to a place she should have gone following a lead she shouldn't have followed because she and her partner Jorge had been reassigned. Now Jorge is in the hospital hanging on for dear life and Sam is getting read the riot act by her captain when a fellow by the name of Jack Mayfair walks in and announces that Sam has been reassigned--to him. There is the usual amount of discussion, hemming and hawing, but in the end, Sam goes with Jack. And that's just the beginning of Sam's worklife issues.

And then there's her family. Sam's father, a retired cop, is in the hospital in a coma. Her younger teenage brother is acting like, well, a teenager. And mom isn't too happy about any of this, and she's certainly not happy with Sam, who she feels has been shirking her familial duties.

Indeed, Sam's life is a bit of a mess--and then she finds out she may be a cop, but she's really a Wizard (as is her new boss, Jack Mayfair). And that Vampires, Werewolves, Golems, Elves, and all sorts of other creatures exist. Worse yet, most of them are not happy that Sam is alive. Finally, because we really need to have a story to support all the weirdness is Sam's life, there are a bunch of big, bad, Evil Eudes out there trying to Take Over, and Sam is heavily involved in the attempt to Stop It From Happening.

I put all that stuff in capital letters because this is, above all, and urban fantasy where the bad guys are trying to take over and our hero--or in this case heroine--is in the middle of the fray trying to stop the world from ending. But I used the caps to emphasize that this is a fun novel and a terrific read on many levels.

While we've seen these kinds of stories before, what sets this apart, I like to think (and again, urban fantasy isn't my thing), is the breadth and depth of characterization. Hester gives the reader a great deal of background about Sam, about Sam's family, how the family affects her actions, and how the family has been involved in this since Sam was a small child. We see Sam's best friend Jenni getting involved because she's a nerd and loves this type of stuff, and above all, she loves Sam as a friend. It's clear that Sam loves Jenni just as much, and cares for her to the point that she doesn't want Jenni involved. We also learn about Sam's most recent ex, and how he has, and still is, affecting her life.

Sam's discovery that she is really a Wizard is a turning point in her life, and Hester guides her through the transformation from someone how doesn't want to be a Wizard to someone who accepts her role and eventually relishes it with gusto. Hester wants the reader to root for her, but also wants the reader to know that this is really a tough thing that Sam is trying to do--and on the way shows us the parallels between Sam and our own real lives when we have to make transformations that we are neither ready, willing, nor necessarily able to make, but we're sure going to try.

It's been said that an author should write about what one knows. Hester lives in Colorado, and liberally sprinkles pop culture and Colorado references into the story (as I've visited the other half of the Duel Fish Codices who lives in Colorado numerous times and am thus somewhat familiar with the area, it was fun to recognize a few of the places Hester referred to in the story) in a fashion similar to the way Robert J. Sawyer includes Canadian references in his stories. Yes, I've been up and down I-25 a number of times and recognize a number of places that are referenced in the novel.

It's clear that Hester has done a great deal of world building behind the scenes, and that there is a lot more for the reader to learn. He starts out slowly introducing the complex society of supernatural beings, but as the story goes on we are given more of the background and we realize that it's a lot more complex than we first thought. I'm a sucker for this kind of stuff, so Hester succeeded in drawing me in, wanting to know what's happening next and what more there is in the Wizarding World (yeah, I went there, and I'm not sorry about it either).

All in all, INTO THE FIRE is a good first novel and a very fun read. If you like urban fantasy, I believe you'll enjoy this one. I know I did. I'm looking forward to the second book (as I understand it, the book is being written but has not yet been purchased by Word Fire Press). I recommend you all run out to your favorite purveyor of books, pick it up, and give it a read.

[-jak]

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**THE MAN FROM MARS** (letters of comment by Allan Maurer and Tim Bateman):

In response to [Evelyn's review of THE MAN FROM MARS](#) in the 03/24/17 issue of the MT VOID, Allan Maurer writes:

One thing you did not mention is that Ray Palmer was instrumental in turning the post-WWII flying saucer craze into a national phenomenon via his promotion of the Kenneth Arnold sighting, his flying saucer focus in FATE and FLYING

SAUCER mags. He apparently believed they came from within the Earth rather than from outer space. He planted the seeds that grew into much of the nuttiness around UFOs that persists today. [-am]

And Tim Bateman writes:

Thanks for this, Evelyn. Till now Ray Palmer was little more than a name to me. Mind you, I now recall the stuff about the Shaver mystery and Fate magazine... [-tb]

Mark adds:

I seem to remember reading about it in second-hand science fiction magazines back when I was a little shaver. [-mrl]

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### Selecting Words (letters of comment by Peter Trei and David Goldfarb):

First, a correction: it was Peter Trei, not Philip Chee, who wrote (in response to [Mark's comments on selecting words](#) in the 03/17/17 issue of the MT VOID):

The best Twain quote on the subject is probably in an 1888 letter to George Bainton:

"The difference between the \*almost\* right word and the \*right\* word is really a large matter. 'tis the difference between the lightning bug and the lightning." [-pt]

In response to [that comment](#), David Goldfarb writes:

[Mark Twain is quoted as having said,] "The difference between the \*almost\* right word and the \*right\* word is really a large matter. 'tis the difference between the lightning bug and the lightning."

A nice quote. But I've always thought it would be better expressed as "lightning bolt" rather than just "lightning". [-dg]

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

In the introduction to his 1976 collection DOWN HERE IN THE DREAM QUARTER, Barry N. Malzberg (ISBN 978-0-385-12268-9) writes, "Therefore, therefore, in this introduction to this sixth and possibly last of my short-story collections (there may be more but they will include work no later than this in point of time since I have ceased like a drunk pounding helplessly at a luncheonette window in the cold to write science fiction) ..."

It seems to be an immutable law of science fiction or something that when an author declares he has given up writing science fiction, you should believe him only if he says it in his last will and testament, and even then it's not a sure thing. Malzberg "retired" at the beginning of 1976, having written 142 stories and had five collections published. \*Since\* 1976 he has written 200 more stories and had seven more collections published (not counting those in German, Italian, or French).

(There must have been something in the air in 1975. Robert Silverberg, who Malzberg said had only been wrong twice in his life, made two more mistakes: he claimed he was not going to write any more science fiction, and he claimed that the idea that James Tiptree, Jr., was a woman was absurd, because Tiptree was "ineluctably masculine.")

Anyway, Malzberg's announcement to the contrary, these twenty-two stories and three essays (counting the introduction) are examples of his early work. That all of them are from a five-year period would be surprising enough in terms of today's writers' outputs, but what is more astonishing is that they represent less than 20% of his total output (20 stories in 1972, 30 in 1973, 37 (!) in 1974, and 17 in 1975). And many of his colleagues of the time were equally prolific--or more so. There were giants in the earth in those days...

Of course, this productivity comes at a price--it is unlikely anyone will ever issue "The Complete Short Fiction of Barry N. Malzberg"--although with e-books ... At any rate, for now, one will have to hope that what has been collected in his dozen collections represents "The Best of Barry N. Malzberg". (There was a collection titled that, but it was back in 1976, presumably because of Malzberg's announced retirement from the field. There was also a 2013 collection, THE VERY BEST OF BARRY N. MALZBERG.) [-ecl]

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Mark Leeper  
mleeper@optonline.net

Quote of the Week:

You kind of alluded to it in your introduction. I mean, for the last 300 or so years, the exact sciences have been dominated by what is really a good idea, which is the idea that one can describe the natural world using

mathematical equations.

--Stephen Wolfram

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