

MT VOID 06/16/17 -- Vol. 35, No. 51, Whole Number 1967



```

e e e e e   e   e e e e e   e   e   e e e e e e   e   e   e e e e e e e e
e   e   e   e   e   e   e   e   e   e   e   e   e   e   e   e   e   e   e
e   e e e e e e e e e   e   e   e   e   e   e   e   e   e   e   e   e   e
e   e   e   e   e   e   e   e   e   e   e   e   e   e   e   e   e   e   e
e   e   e e e e e   e   e   e   e   e   e   e e e e e e e e e e e e e e e
  
```

Mt. Holz Science Fiction Society
06/16/17 -- Vol. 35, No. 51, Whole Number 1967

Table of Contents

[Adam West, R. I. P.](#)
[The Val Lewton Story](#) (comments by Mark R. Leeper)
[When Mona Lisa Went Missing](#) (comments by Mark R. Leeper)
[AARON'S BLOOD](#) (film review by Mark R. Leeper)
[WONDER WOMAN](#) (film review by Dale Skran)
[Agatha Christie](#) (letter of comment by Joseph T. Major)
[Generation Ships, Greece, AFTERIMAGE, Matt Helm, Geography and Martians, THE WARRIOR'S APPRENTICE, HIDDEN FIGURES, DEADPOOL, and Hugo Finalists](#)
 (letter of comment by Taras Wolansky)
[This Week's Reading](#) (POSTERN OF FATE) (book comments by Evelyn C. Leeper)
[Quote of the Week](#)

Co-Editor: Mark Leeper, mleeper@optonline.net
 Co-Editor: Evelyn Leeper, eleeper@optonline.net
 Back issues at http://lepers.us/mtvoid/back_issues.htm
 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, send mail to mtvoid-subscribe@yahoogroups.com
 To unsubscribe, send mail to mtvoid-unsubscribe@yahoogroups.com

Adam West, R. I. P.:

Adam West, television's Batman, died June 9, 2017.

On Twitter, Bryan Miller suggests, "All the other Batmen should go to Adam West's funeral, like when a former president dies."

The Val Lewton Story (comments by Mark R. Leeper):

Some of you may remember that some months back I informed people that "The Secret History of Hollywood" podcast was doing a series of programs entitled "Universal Horrors". As the title suggests it was a (highly entertaining and highly detailed) history of classic horror films from Universal Pictures. It was a great series. The same people went on to do a history of James Cagney and Warner Brothers Studios. Now they have returned to horror with "Shadows: The Boy from the Black Sea". This is a biography of horror filmmaker Val Lewton. So far they have done only the first chapter. (That will take you from Lewton's grandparents to his just starting to work on CAT PEOPLE.) The chapters come out irregularly, maybe once a month, but they probably take a lot of work. If you subscribe you can probably get the new chapters as they come out.

I am not sure where all it is available, but you can go into the iTunes store and just look for "The Secret History of Hollywood". No charge.

See <http://www.attaboyclarence.com/the-secret-history-of-hollywood/>. [-mrl]

When Mona Lisa Went Missing (comments by Mark R. Leeper):

We were at a friend's house and our hostess mentioned that she had read a book about the 1911 theft of the "Mona Lisa" from the Louvre in Paris. I never knew it was ever stolen. My first question was how anybody could hope to fence a painting as famous as Leonardo da Vinci's "Mona Lisa". This is arguably the most famous painting in the world. (Possible contenders are da Vinci's "The Last Supper" and Michelangelo's ceiling of the Sistine Chapel.) But it could not be fenced like some minor Monet. Perhaps some billionaire might want to have it hidden away in his attic where only he could see it. Or more likely the painting could have been held for ransom. But neither proved to be true. Well, it turned out the motive made more sense than I would have thought.

First, the "Mona Lisa" was stolen in 1911. Before it was stolen it was not nearly so famous as it would be two years later when the theft and attempts to get the painting back had given the painting worldwide publicity. It turns out that the "Mona Lisa" was not stolen for profit. Apparently it was stolen by someone who was the 1911 equivalent of what we would call a hacker. The thief apparently wanted the excitement and challenge of seeing if it really could be stolen. But his strongest motive was to make a political point. The thief it seems was not a glamorous scoundrel like Cary Grant in *TO CATCH A THIEF*. He was a mustachioed Italian handyman named Vincenzo Peruggia.

So if the thief was not so impressive, the painting was not the icon of the art world that it is today. In 1910 the painting had very little recognition value. It was the theft and the resulting publicity that made the "Mona Lisa" famous. Newspapers around the world had coverage of the theft of a genuine da Vinci painting. And the newspapers enhanced the reputation of the painting by educating their readers why this painting was great. The theft made the painting. After all, it did not make a very good news story if the reader did not know why this particular painting was exceptional.

So how did Peruggia steal the painting? In 1911 art theft was not a major concern of art museums including the Louvre where the "Mona Lisa" was kept and displayed. The major concern was vandalism. To protect the most valuable paintings the Louvre had glass cases made. A team of workmen would remove a painting from the wall and take it away to have a protective glass shell built for it.

Peruggia was one of these craftsmen. He knew that with paintings being moved to have cases made, people in the museum would not be surprised to see blank spaces on the wall. He planned to take the painting, and one night he did. He knew the museum was closed Mondays, so the morning of Monday, August 21, 1911, Peruggia removed the "Mona Lisa" from the wall in the Louvre and hid it under his workman's smock.

Some versions of the story say that he found himself locked in the Louvre and needed the help of a plumber to escape.

Peruggia hid the painting in his room, but would take it out to admire it. Also, da Vinci's painting focused Peruggio's anger at the French people. What anger? It seems that under the protection of Napoleon, the French allegedly had stolen Italian art, much as the Nazis would later do and they took it back to France. Peruggia assumed that this had happened to the "Mona Lisa" because da Vinci was Italian, therefore the painting must have been stolen from Italy, he reasoned.

The museum knew the line of provenance of the "Mona Lisa" and was able to prove they had proper ownership. But Peruggia wanted to be the man who returned the "Mona Lisa" to what he was convinced was its proper place in Italy.

Peruggia did take the painting to Italy and offered to sell the painting for half a million lire and a guarantee that the painting would always be hung in Italy's Uffizi Gallery. A little unbalanced, he expected to be treated as a national hero of Italy. Except the painting had not been stolen by the French and the Louvre had proper ownership.

Instead he was arrested and tried in Florence, Italy, by fellow Italians. He was completely uncontrollable during his trial and probably deserved a stiff sentence. But the fact that he claimed his motive was extreme patriotism for his native Italy he ended up spending only six months in prison. But the "Mona Lisa" was again hung at the Louvre.

Perhaps.

It has been claimed that Peruggia had a secondary motive in the theft and that a friend of his had been attempting to forge counterfeit copies of the painting. People have claimed that the "Mona Lisa" hanging at the Louvre might actually not be the true original painting. The authorities at the Louvre consider these allegations absurd. But they refuse to have the "Mona Lisa" examined and verified. Just in case. [-mrl]

[Many historians believe the painting is a portrait of Madam Lisa Giocondo, wife of a wealthy Florentine. It is from Giorgio Vasari that the painting received the name "Mona Lisa", also known as "La Gioconda" in Italian or "La Joconde" in French. -ecl]

AARON'S BLOOD (film review by Mark R. Leeper):

CAPSULE: What is a father to do when his beloved son is becoming a vampire? A father has to choose the lesser evil of betraying his son or allowing his son to kill. Writer-director Tommy Stovall gives us a complex vampire film that delves more deeply into its characters than most modern horror pieces. Rating: high +1 (-4 to +4) or 6/10

The year 2011 saw the release of a pleasant New-Age-ish comedy, *SEDONA*, directed and with a screenplay by Tommy Stovall. The film had a breezy, New Age style and was shot in and around beautiful Sedona, Arizona. The writing had some nice character-based comedy. I had not heard his name again for more than six years. But Stovall was hardly someone I expected to come back with a vampire film. His new film trades the light New Age feel for a more somber world with supernatural creatures. But this film does not have the atmosphere a George Romero or a John Carpenter would give it. *AARON'S BLOOD* is about human values and a father's responsibility to his son. Where does his responsibility lie when he knows his son will cause evil?

Our central character is Aaron (played by James Martinez) who as a phlebotomist draws blood for medical tests. That means that he has some technical knowledge about drawing blood and that knowledge will be useful later. He has had a big share of bad luck. His wife died a year earlier in a traffic accident leaving Aaron with irrational feelings of guilt. Aaron lives with his son Tate, played by Trevor Stovall. (Trevor is the son of director Tommy, but he turns out to be a good choice to play Tate. Trevor seems very natural in the part, with a sort of half hang-dog look of someone who has been bullied it is what the part needs and most films would not have gotten that right.)

Young Tate is an easy mark for school bullies. Until recently Tate has been a well-behaved, serious student, but now he is fighting back against a bully. This is particularly dangerous to Tate himself because he is a hemophiliac and fighting puts Tate near death in the hospital to get a blood transfusion. Tate not only unexpectedly recovers but quickly returns to his old strength and then surpasses it. But he also cannot eat anything but blood. Aaron slowly realizes his son may be becoming a vampire and Aaron tries to find how his son might have contracted this malady. Must he betray his son to prevent killings? The same dilemma is faced by a character in *LET THE RIGHT ONE IN*, but here it is the focus of *AARON'S BLOOD*.

By today's standards the horror is kept light--at least lighter than most horror films would be. Much of the film is about issues that I have not seen covered before in any depth in vampire films. This is a film about the father of a boy twelve years old (and who will never get older). The father has to decide if he should side with his son or with the wider world that a vampire would likely victimize.

There is one technical problem. In one scene we see blood flowing. But the film stock shows the blood as being black. At this point the color of the blood could have plot implications. Stovall also gives the viewer multiple false starts. One would have been acceptable, I suppose but more than one seems excessive.

I would not call *AARON'S BLOOD* a creepy classic, but it is a fairly intelligent low-budget vampire film. I rate it a high +1 on the -4 to +4 scale or 6/10.

AARON'S BLOOD was released to theaters June 2.

Film Credits: <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt3898776/combined>

What others are saying: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/aarons_blood_2017

[-mrl]

WONDER WOMAN (film revieww by Dale Skran):

There can be little doubt that *WONDER WOMAN* (henceforth *WW*) is the best comic-book movie yet with a female lead. Not that this is a very tight contest--we have *CATWOMAN* and *ELEKTRA*--and that is about it for movies with lead female superheroes. I enjoyed both of them, but they were not all that great as movies, or even as comic adaptations. Perhaps the best prior to *WW* are the movie adaptation of *KICKASS* (Hitgirl) and the CW TV show *iZOMBIE*. *WW* is both a great movie and a great evocation of a classic DC character. Gal Godot is simply wonderful in this role--a deadly fighter and a devastating bombshell, a font of ancient wisdom and a naive idealist, a stranger in a strange land and an everywoman. Her Israeli accent and exotic looks combined with real military training in the Israeli armed forces make her perfect for the role. Plus, she can act! I found her alternation from callow enthusiasm for her mission and a cynical fear that she has been betrayed by the world convincing. She is extremely intelligent, possessed of a vast array of talents, yet somewhat adrift in a world she knows that she does not understand.

WW delights as a pure comic-book action story. There is a deadly battle between the Amazons and German troops early in the movie where Diana gets her first taste of the reality of war. This is followed by an extended action sequence where Diana crosses no- man's land (note the irony) to attack the Germans and rescue a village in some of the best super-hero action ever

put on film. The movie concludes with a goddess-vs-god smackdown as Wonder Woman takes on Ares himself in a brutal display of pure power. This Wonder Woman is ready to go toe-to-toe with any DC hero, including Superman. The fight choreography stuns, as Wonder Woman smoothly shifts from acrobatic martial arts to deadly sword thrust to offensive use of a shield and attacks of overwhelming power such as throwing a tank. And her use of the golden lasso as a kind of weighted chain/whip is amazing.

The bisexual subtext (and there can be little doubt Diana is bisexual) is handled via some subtle dialog and a conversation in a boat with Steve Trevor that is both realistic and great fun. Wonder Woman in the comics has varied a bit over the years in terms of power level and what she can do, but WW the movie goes to the "daughter of Zeus" idea and adds to this the notion that Diana is a weapon forged by Zeus to kill Ares. This makes her more like Thor in terms of raw strength, and as the daughter of Zeus she is the mistress of lightning, as well as flight, super-speed, and a considerable invulnerability. To all this she adds years of Amazon military training and the ability to speak (apparently) any language.

In a movie that could easily have become a tedious feminist tract, men are allowed to shine alongside Wonder Woman. Chris Pine completely fills the shoes of Steve Trevor from the comics, and is as heroic a soldier as we have seen in quite a while. Trevor's team of assistants--a Turkish would-be actor, a lonely American Indian smuggler, and a white sniper with PTSD--are a bit too politically correct and obvious to ring entirely true, and in many ways are the weakest part of the film. The main villain is Ares, a traditional Wonder Woman foe from the four-color pages, but Diana also faces Dr. Poison, a much less well known female character from the comics.

I'm rating WW a high +2 on the -4 to +4 scale, which puts it on the same level as the Christopher Nolan Batman trilogy, and the best of the Marvel movies, i.e. CAPTAIN AMERICA: CIVIL WAR. Scenes of Dr. Poison testing gas on prisoners and battlefield suffering may make this PG-13 movie too much for those under 13, but it depends on the child. There is no explicit sex, although there is an implied sexual encounter. There is a good bit of old-fashioned romance. Feminists may delight at the portrayal of the all-female Paradise Island, but conservatives will not be upset by much in this movie. In WW, good is good, evil is evil, and there is never any doubt that Wonder Woman will triumph!! [-dls]

Agatha Christie (letter of comment by Joseph T. Major):

In response to [Evelyn's comments on A CARIBBEAN MYSTERY](#) in the 06/09/17 issue of the MT VOID, Joseph Major writes:

You comment on the unlikely coincidences that power the plot of Agatha Christie's A CARIBBEAN MYSTERY. I remember, long ago, reading a review in TRUMPET of her POSTERN OF FATE (1973) that pointed out similar problems.

For example, to take the last first, the mystery was only solvable because there had been a census the day before of the house where the killing had taken place and Tommy and Tuppence had everybody's names. And the murderer was a character who had never been introduced before. Also, they had seen a key element of the investigation, noted it was worth investigating, ignored it, and only went back to it because of a random and almost irrelevant comment.

Though the murder had been fifty years ago, no one there remembered it; everyone had been told about it by their parents or other elders. And they all babbled, and for some reason felt it necessary to quote Flecker's "The Golden Road to Samarkand". (The reviewer wasn't sure it was a real work but it is.)

And finally, the investigation had begun because they had found a note written by a boy saying that he didn't think the death of the victim was natural. They ask about him and are told that he just died--no reason given. This doesn't seem to register with them.

The reviewer also wondered if Christie was getting others to write works under her name, as the book was copyrighted in someone else's name. This was a way she had of avoiding death duties; the heirs owned the copyright and would get royalties, while she still had the advance. [-jtm]

Evelyn replies:

My review of POSTERN OF FATE is below, but as for solving the mystery by having some random comment by someone give T&T the clue, Christie used this a lot. In one book, it was someone saying, "Same man, different hat." In another, it was someone saying they were going to a dress rehearsal. In another, it was an earlier observation about people lying on a beach.

I doubt someone else wrote the novel; it is more likely that the poor quality is evidence that Christie herself wrote it. Alison Flood (<https://tinyurl.com/void-christie>, 03 Apr 2009) reported that a study of fifteen of Christie's novels shows "statistically significant drops in vocabulary, and increases in repeated phrases and indefinite nouns" that are symptomatic of Alzheimer's. [-ecl]

Generation Ships, Greece, AFTERIMAGE, Matt Helm, Geography and Martians, THE WARRIOR'S APPRENTICE, HIDDEN FIGURES, DEADPOOL, and Hugo Finalists (letter of comment by Taras Wolansky):

In response to various comments in several issues of the MT VOID, Taras Wolansky writes:

#1966: "Strange that it took this long for it [SF] to get around to the ethics of generation ships." Actually, in one of the first SF novels I ever read, Brian Aldiss' STARSHIP (NON-STOP in Britain), the highly ethical (in the author's judgment) society to which the ship has returned does not believe in sending out such ships any more.

Having said that, children born and raised on a starship will, of course, see their environment as perfectly normal, and will not feel the lack of what they never had.

#1965: I've read that it was sentimentality about the Cradle of Democracy that led to Greece being treated as if it were ready to join the EU, instead of the Balkan slum it really was.

Andrzej Wayda's film, AFTERIMAGE, points out the danger of a society in which the government controls all the jobs. There was a Cuban baseball pitcher who got on the wrong side of the Castro regime, so the only job he could get was mopping a floor.

[Evelyn adds: And Jorge Luis Borges ended up as a chicken inspector under Peron. -ecl]

#1964: A quick way to understand what Donald Hamilton's "Matt Helm" books are really like is that the character should have been played, not by Dean Martin, but Clint Eastwood.

#1959: Mark on "Geography and Martians": In 1897, when THE WAR OF THE WORLDS was written, that "postage stamp area of England"--which included London--was in a sense the center of the world. We might imagine that the Martians thought if they defeated the most powerful country on Earth in its heartland, all other countries would surrender without a fight.

Joe K.'s review of Bujold's THE WARRIOR'S APPRENTICE: Wonderful book but, no kidding, "the fun has gone out of the series". The latest installment, GENTLEMAN JOLE AND THE RED QUEEN, was so lame I tried to give it back to the store, something I'd never done before. (Wisely, Barnes and Noble refused to take it back.) It's as if Heinlein took the most boring episodes of TIME ENOUGH FOR LOVE and expanded them into a novel.

#1958: Hugo Nominees I mean Finalists: Jerry Ryan asks, "What is Science Fictional about HIDDEN FIGURES?" Well, it appears that the entire US space program took place in Virginia, so let's call it alternate history!

Though it didn't give the great Mahershala Ali much to do, I liked HIDDEN FIGURES a lot. Sometimes I chuckled in the wrong places: I was constantly thinking of John Lovitz in HOW HANUKKAH HARRY SAVED CHRISTMAS, SNL's sly parody of a well-meaning, wholesome propaganda film. Call it HOW THREE BEAUTIFUL BLACK WOMEN SAVED JOHN GLENN AND THE SPACE PROGRAM. The book presents them more accurately, I gather.

[Evelyn adds: As I noted, the Hugo eligibility is for "any television program or other production ... in any medium of dramatized science fiction, fantasy or related subjects." -ecl]

DEADPOOL is fun, but bogus: the hero is supposed to be a former Navy Seal. I've read a lot about them. They're all conservative Republican super-patriots who were annoyed when they realized their heroics would get Barack Obama re-elected.

Then again, physically Ryan Reynolds is a more plausible Seal than spindly Jamie Alexander in the TV show, BLINDSPOT. (N.B.: There are no female Navy Seals.)

"3/4 of the fiction finalists are works by women. ... None of the novel finalists are by white men." I heard a rumor that they fiddled the rules to keep out the Puppies. Maybe they went too far. (Conspiracy theorists will be interested to learn that I received my paper nomination ballot about 10 days after the nomination deadline.)

But seriously: I have encountered a feminist who says she nominates and votes only for women in all categories--to make up for "historical injustices", she says. [-tw]

[Evelyn adds: They changed the rules to try to prevent any single voting block from completely dominating the ballot. One big change was having six finalists, but still limiting each member to five nomination slots. There were also changes to prevent a work being on the ballot in multiple categories, and limiting the number of works one author or series can be finalists in a single category. -ecl]

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

Joseph Major's letter of comment led me to re-read POSTERN OF FATE by Agatha Christie (ISBN 978-0-062-07434-8).

John Curran, in AGATHA CHRISTIE'S SECRET NOTEBOOKS, says that one of Christie's greatest gifts was her readability, and that "this facility deserted her only in the very closing chapter of her writing career, POSTERN OF FATE being the most challenging example."

I love the first chapter, which is all about Tuppence reminiscing about the books she read as a child as they unpack their books after moving to a new house.

However, I am unconvinced by her argument against the rehabilitation of Richard III. She writes, "Though nowadays they all write books saying he was really wonderful. Not a villain at all. But I don't believe that. Shakespeare didn't either. After all, he started his play by making Richard say, 'I am determined to prove a villain.'" POSTERN OF FATE was published about twenty years after Josephine Tey's DAUGHTER OF TIME, which somewhat demolished this excuse by pointing out that Shakespeare wrote under the Tudors, who overthrew Richard III and the Plantagenets, and based his play on historians who wrote under the Tudors, and were hardly likely to take Richard's side.

The biggest problems of POSTERN OF FATE are the repetitions and the vagueness. Some of the repetitions are distributed, e.g., the characters talk or think at least a half dozen separate times about how electricians never finish their jobs, but leave holes in the floors for the unwary to fall into. Others are more "compact," apparently because either Christie or Tuppence was having a short-term memory problem. For example, Tuppence says to Gwenda, "Beatrice told me that you knew someone once living here called Mary Jordan," and Gwenda says, "I didn't know her, but I have heard her mentioned." Then only a page later, Tuppence says, "It was someone called Mary Jordan I was asking about. Beatrice said you knew about her," to which Gwenda replies, "Not really--i just heard her mentioned once or twice." These are basically the same exchange, and this happens a couple of more times as well. Apparently Agatha Christie had achieved the "goal" of not having editors change anything she wrote, or even suggest there might be a problem. (A statistical study of word use and grammatical construction in Christie's novels indicates that it was likely that she had Alzheimer's towards the end of her career.)

The vagueness comes in when people talk about the past in circumlocutions, with references to "some people" saying it was about submarines, but really it was about "something else", and you have to see where the money was coming from and going to, and so on.

Someone claimed that the mystery was solved by having some random comment by someone give T & T the clue. Christie used this a lot. In one book, it was someone saying, "Same man, different hat." In another, it was someone saying they were going to a dress rehearsal. In another, it was an earlier observation about people lying on a beach. [-ecl]

Mark Leeper
mleeper@optonline.net

Quote of the Week:
Electricity is really just organized lightning.
--George Carlin

[Tweet](#)

Go to [our home page](#)