

MT VOID 08/18/17 -- Vol. 36, No. 7, Whole Number 1976

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Mt. Holz Science Fiction Society
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Co-Editor: Mark Leeper, mleeper@optonline.net
 Co-Editor: Evelyn Leeper, eleeper@optonline.net
 Back issues at http://leepers.us/mtvoid/back_issues.htm
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Hugo Award Winners 2017 and Worldcon 75:

- Best Novel: THE OBELISK GATE, by N. K. Jemisin
- Best Novella: EVERY HEART A DOORWAY, by Seanan McGuire
- Best Novelette: "The Tomato Thief", by Ursula Vernon
- Best Short Story: "Seasons of Glass and Iron", by Amal El-Mohtar
- Best Related Work: Words Are My Matter: Writings About Life and Books, 2000-2016, by Ursula K. Le Guin
- Best Graphic Story: Monstress, Volume 1: Awakening, written by Marjorie Liu, illustrated by Sana Takeda
- Best Dramatic Presentation, Long Form: ARRIVAL
- Best Dramatic Presentation, Short Form: THE EXPANSE: "Leviathan Wakes"
- Best Editor, Short Form: Ellen Datlow
- Best Editor, Long Form: Liz Gorinsky
- Best Professional Artist: Julie Dillon
- Best Semiprozine: Uncanny Magazine
- Best Fanzine: Lady Business
- Best Fan Writer: Abigail Nussbaum
- Best Fan Artist: Elizabeth Leggett
- Best Series: The Vorkosigan Saga, by Lois McMaster Bujold
- The John W. Campbell Award for Best New Writer: Ada Palmer

Video recordings were made of many of the events and panels at Worldcon 75 in Helsinki and can be found at https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCT_U7RhKFr-I4pusZY6g8A/videos.

Insurance Catch-17 (comments by Mark R. Leeper):

You should not get insurance against reincarnation in New Jersey. When you go to collect having past lives is automatically considered a pre-existing condition. [-mrl]

What is Happening to the Mainstream Film Industry? (comments by Mark R. Leeper):

As is probably not very surprising, this year has a disappointing one for the major studios. They continue to follow the same pattern of making chapters in major franchises and spending more and more on visual effects. Then they expect they can draw on a big domestic and a big foreign market. It is easy to make a chapter of a franchise. Most of the creative work can be done for the producer. You write a story that is different but not too different from the previous films in the franchise. You outsource the creation of special effects. Maybe you even get the same writers. But you need only limited creativity. People will come for your visual effects, but only for so many chapters. But franchises only draw on just so many people. Eventually you probably have more people jumping off than jumping on.

China is a big market for American film for now, but they have their own culture. They grew up with Sun Wukong, not Spider-Man. Spider-Man does have exotic appeal in some markets like China, but that goes only so far. Just like African Americans wanted to see more of their own people, the Chinese probably want to see people they can identify with on the screen.

Meanwhile Disney has bought the Marvel Comics set of franchises and the Lucasfilm "Star Wars" films. (Well, George Lucas used to claim that when he made the first "Star Wars" film he "wanted to make a children's movie, to go the Disney route." It looks like he finally did in a roundabout way.) These films are written in their own universe. There is a "Star Wars" universe. There is also a Godzilla "Monsterverse" universe.

The oddest entry in this race is Universal turning its 1930s and 1940s horror films into some kind of universe where the monsters become superheroes together. It will not be just all the monsters appear in one place like HOUSE OF FRANKENSIEIN. It will go beyond that, but I am not sure where. This is the strangest of film franchises. What are they going to do? Will they turn Dracula and Lawrence Talbot into crime fighters? And as their flagship film they have made THE MUMMY as an action film starring Tom Cruise. It sounds like they were out of good ideas before they even got started. They intended to build a loyal audience for the their series of films with a film that got a 15% critical approval on Rotten Tomatoes. That is not a very good start. For those who know the ratings systems the IMDB's aggregate rating was 5.7/10 and Rotten Tomatoes saw it get a fast 16 percent. That is not the most auspicious start.

The American film industry, which is the most powerful film industry in the world, is having serious problems. Their budgets keep growing and they need new international markets. A franchise is just does not stay a good way to go. Once you have seen how the Incredible Hulk smashes things seven different ways, do you really have some desire to see the new film where he does it an eighth way?

You have a younger generation who is living on their iPhones and who do not have the patience to watch a comic book on the screen. And you have an older generation who are getting too old to have much interest in comic book films. And tying them together there is a weak economy. It used to be that a special effects extravaganza would bring in crowds. That has been going on since the days of silent films or KING KONG (1933). But budgets today are outpacing grosses. And the one thing that will really improve a film, good writing, is getting harder for the studios to recognize or harder to trust. Studios do not want to be too demanding on audiences. The good writers are abandoning the studios and going to video of one form or another.

So what is to be done? I love cinema too much to declare that it is a dying medium. But the film industry has been ready for several years for a big shake up. It may be that video or some new medium will steal their audience. Cinema had a similar problem in 1969. Then Hollywood had to re-discover the small film. That year the small film that led the way was EASY RIDER. I am hoping that Hollywood will come to respect small films with good writing. Otherwise we will have a bunch of empty theaters with passersby watching video off their iPhones. [-mrl]

Hugo Award Rules Changes (comments by Evelyn C. Leeper):

A summary of the changes; I did not try to explain the items that failed.

- C.1. Best Series (as amended by C.1.1. RATIFIED, 51-39.
- C.2. December is Good Enough: RATIFIED. [You must be a member by December 31 of the previous year to nominate.]
- C.3. Two Years is Enough: RATIFIED (but includes grandfather clause that effectively means it does not apply until 2019 Worldcon. [Only members of the current or previous Worldcons are eligible to nominate for the Hugo. This

- removes nominating privileges for members of the succeeding Worldcon.]
- C.4. Three Stage Voting (3SV): FAILED, 45-41.
 - C.5. Motion to Suspend E Pluribus Hugo for one year: FAILED
 - C.6. EPH+: FAILED
 - C.7. Defining North America: RATIFIED
 - C.8. Retrospective Improvement Pt. 1. RATIFIED [detail on Retro Hugos]
 - C.9. Retrospective Improvement Pt. 2. RATIFIED [detail on Retro Hugos]
 - C.10. Universal Suffrage. RATIFIED [A Worldcon cannot sell an Attending Membership without voting rights, or any membership with voting rights for less than a Supporting Membership.]
 - C.11. Young Adult Award. Blank award name and provision related to it struck out of the proposal. The new award RATIFIED 65-27 and will be first presented (as the "Award for Best Young Adult Book" without a further specific name) in 2018. Naming the YA Award. "Lodestar Award for Best Young Adult Book" PASSED and sent to 2018 for ratification. The new YA category is not currently named "Lodestar." If this proposal is ratified next year, future YA Awards will be called "Lodestar.")

HIDDEN FIGURES and Hugo Eligibility (comments by Evelyn C. Leeper):

The Hugo Administrators issued the following statement as part of the Hugo Awards press release:

"The eligibility of HIDDEN FIGURES in this category was queried; it was suggested that as "non-fiction", it belonged rather to Best Related Work. We determined that this is, frankly, ridiculous.

In the first place, HIDDEN FIGURES is not a non-fictional documentary, but a dramatised reconstruction of historical events, as have been many other Best Dramatic Presentation finalists through the years-most recently, two finalists for Short Form in 2014 were about the production of "Doctor Who", one of them similarly a dramatised reconstruction of historical events (the other briefly featuring this year 's Hugo Administrator in a crowd scene).

In the second place, even if HIDDEN FIGURES had been a non-fictional documentary, it would still have been eligible in this category. A non-fiction finalist won the Hugo for Best Dramatic Presentation in 1970 (the TV coverage of Apollo 11) and there was a non-fiction finalist in Best Dramatic Presentation, Short Form as recently as 2012 (The Drink Tank 's Hugo acceptance speech).

We noticed some references to "the Apollo 13 exception", as if some special allowance had been made in that and other cases. There was and is no special allowance, just implementation of the rules as they are written"

[In my opinion, they made the right decision for the wrong reason. The description of eligibility is "Any theatrical feature or other production, with a complete running time of more than 90 minutes, in any medium of dramatized science fiction, fantasy or related subjects ..." Space travel/exploration is clearly a related subject. The whole purpose of amending the definition to include related subjects was make films such as THE RIGHT STUFF, APOLLO 13, and HIDDEN FIGURES explicitly eligible. -ecl]

Relativity (comments by Gregory Frederick):

As you probably know; Einstein became world famous in the early 1900's due to observations made by an astronomer during a solar eclipse proving that light from a star was deflected by the gravitational well of the Sun. This was only possible because you can only see stars near the Sun's edge during a solar eclipse. Astronomers in this country plan to repeat that type of observation during the upcoming eclipse. They want to use the modern equipment of today to get the best accuracy possible of this deflection. But an even more extreme version of was studied recently by European astronomers who observed this happening to three stars near the immense gravity well of a black hole. The link to this recent study on space.com is . [-gf]

AN INCONVENIENT SEQUEL (film review by Art Stadlin):

Yesterday we went to the movie house to see AN INCONVENIENT SEQUEL: TRUTH TO POWER. Let me start with the obvious: If you saw Al Gore's first movie, and hated it, you won't like this one either. If you liked the first movie, you may like this one better.

The production qualities, such as the beautiful outdoor shots in Greenland, the camera angles, music, and so forth were very well done. This is not some jerky-camera home movie.

The story is very easy to follow, with fewer graphs and charts than I remember in the first movie. In some ways this is a

movie as much about Al Gore the man as it is about global warming and climate change. There's Al Gore the Senator's son. Al Gore the college kid. Al Gore the Congressman. Al Gore the Presidential candidate. And Al Gore the climate activist.

It was interesting, I thought, that this movie is *not* overtly political. It's much more about the reality of the impact of global warming. Yet, politics creeps in. After all, climate change is a political hot potato, regardless of what consensus there is in scientific circles. A prime point of this movie is the question, Why? Why so much push back on the data that the earth is warming, and sea levels are rising?

As Gore points out, the victims worldwide are primarily the poor. The poor have no big money to support their cause. Big money has warped the political process in Washington.

I won't spoil anything that might surprise you. There was one particular event during the W. Bush years that surprised me. And then there's Trump. To those who deeply believe in the cause of saving the planet, there is nothing flattering in this movie about Bush and Trump. Enough said.

Al Gore is 71. (My wife looked it up.) I got the feeling this movie could be his capstone or tribute for generations to remember him by. Despite the Bush and Trump set-backs, the movie portrays Gore as an even-tempered man-with-a-mission who takes each setback as a challenge to do more than before for the cause.

As documentary-style movies go, I'd rate this one very high. [-as]

THE HOLY ROMAN EMPIRE by James Bryce (book review by Gregory Frederick):

This book delves into the history of Germany and Italy from the fall of the Western Roman Empire to the early 20th Century. The author originally wrote this book in 1864 and it was reprinted with corrections in 1906. Later reprintings occurred as recently as 1968. Therefore, the author's viewpoint is from the past. The details of why Germany and Italy did not become nation states until the late 1800's is examined. England, France and Spain were nation states long before Germany and Italy gained this national status. The Holy Roman Empire is responsible in large part for the late emergence of Germany and Italy as nations. After the Roman Empire in the West fell in the late 400's Rome was plagued by frequent attacks by the Lombards. The Pope in Rome could not get any military assistance from the Eastern Roman Empire also known as the Byzantine Empire so he turned to Charlemagne, king of the Franks in Germany for help. Charlemagne defeated the Lombards and was crowned by the Pope as the first Holy Roman Emperor. The Holy Roman Empire territory at the time of Charlemagne and for some years after consisted roughly of present day Germany and the northern part of present day Italy. This Holy Roman Empire existed from 800 to 1806 but as time progressed its emperors eventually lost real power over their territory as rebellions in Italy and other parts of Germany kept them occupied. Also, the emperors were chosen by a group of electors who tended to select weak rulers. The electors were seeking more power and control of their own local territories in Germany and preferred weaker candidates for the role as emperor. The continual fracturing of the Empire and weakness of the emperors allowed for the princes and dukes to divide Germany and Italy into small domains that would not easily coalesce into a nation state. Additionally, the Pope in Rome created his own papal states. Interesting and valuable information about the formation of modern day Europe is provided in this book but it is not an easy read. The author uses some words from a bygone era and therefore it takes a real effort to understand the text. [-gf]

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

We recently watched THE MARTIAN and read THE MARTIAN by Andy Weir (ISBN 978-0-553-41802-6) for our book-and-film group. While I have commented before on the book several times now, I found interesting some of the questions about the film from people who had not read the book.

For example: Rich Purnell (who develops a new strategy for saving Mark Watney). In the book, he is developed enough as a character that we understand that he is on the autism spectrum. His behavior in the film makes sense if you know this, but without foreknowledge of it (or unless you are a good guesser), his character makes no sense.

There was also some discussion of the ethnic backgrounds of the characters. Venkat Kapoor (definitely an Indian name) became Vincent Kapoor (and half Indian and half African, because he was played by Chiwetel Ejiofor). Mindy Park was read by most people (including Weir) as Korean, but definitely was not Korean in the film. Weir himself says he never specified their ethnicities.

Annie Montrose is also considerably less strident in the film version (probably because the filmmakers had to clean up the language to get a PG-13). And a lot was omitted from the film: the second dust storm (and indeed most of the journey), the loss of communications, the equipping of the rovers, etc. The rover (singular) in the film had no airlock, and instead of a second rover, there seemed to be something more like a flatbed trailer. The hab airlock is much larger than in the book, in which Watney complained about how little dirt he could bring in at any one time, and also described as the size of a phone

booth. (How does Watney even know what a phone booth is by the time THE MARTIAN takes place.) His shovels are also larger, and the mission goes a few days longer on Mars before they abort (for no reason I can tell).

The retrieval plays out differently, and the film adds a final sequence taking place several years after the rest of the story.
[-ecl]

Mark Leeper
mleeper@optonline.net

Quote of the Week:

Well, Art is Art, isn't it? Still, on the other hand,
water is water. And east is east and west is west and
if you take cranberries and stew them like applesauce
they taste much more like prunes than rhubarb does.
Now you tell me what you know.

--Groucho Marx

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