

<http://nemaloknig.info/read-23349/>

January 12: THE IMITATION GAME (2014), Middletown (NJ) Public Library, 12N
 January 25: OLD MAN'S WAR by John Scalzi, Old Bridge (NJ) Public Library, 7PM
 March 22: THE LEFT HAND OF DARKNESS by Ursula K. Le Guin, Old Bridge (NJ) Public Library, 7PM
 May 24: TIME TRADERS by Andre Norton, Old Bridge (NJ) Public Library, 7PM (available in Project Gutenberg)
 July 26: FIRE WATCH by Connie Willis, Old Bridge (NJ) Public Library, 7PM
 September 27: TBD (probably a Hugo-nominated novella), Old Bridge (NJ) Public Library, 7PM

Northern New Jersey events are listed at:

<http://www.sfsnnj.com/news.html>

My Picks for Turner Classic Movies for December (comments by Mark R. Leeper):

I will concentrate this month on one very good film. TCM ran this film for the first time in 2016 and is running it for the second time in spite of the fact that it is more recent than most films it runs. It is in fact recent enough that I reviewed it directly after seeing it in a theater. Rather than write an entire new description I will just take my old review and re-print it. Information as to what when it will run is, as usual, at the end of the write-up.

APOLLO 13 (1995): There were two important events in James Lovell's life in 1965. He flew the Gemini 7 with Frank Borman, rendezvousing with Gemini 6. That event got worldwide attention. There was, however, a more important event that even Lovell did not know about. That was the year that the design team on the Apollo program decided to increase the voltage on the fuel cell oxygen tank heaters from 28 to 65 volts. Only a handful of people knew about that decision and James Lovell was not one of them. It was not a bad decision in itself, but it required replacing the thermostatic switches in the tanks with ones that could handle the extra load. But that replacement was one detail that got forgotten amongst the millions and millions of details necessary in building a lunar rocket. Under the right conditions the wiring could run hot and the Teflon insulation fail, then the wiring could short, the switches could fuse open, the oxygen could ignite, and the tank could explode. It was an unlikely chain of events, however, and it did not happen to the first Apollo missions. Five missions went into space with what was essentially a bomb in their service module and each returned safely. Ron Howard brings to the screen the story of the sixth Apollo mission into space, Apollo 13.

When I go to see a historical film I like to get more than two hours worth of entertainment. I try to read all I can about the events of the film and try to picture them myself. I enjoy knowing that in BRAVEHEART what they called the Battle of Stirling was really the Battle of Stirling Bridge and Wallace won the battle because the English army was half on each side of the bridge when he attacked. Then if I write about the film I like to tell about what it got wrong. However, I will not be pointing out much in the way of historical flaws in APOLLO 13 because I have little to say. In 1970 it was Swigert saying "Houston, we had a problem," and I think in the film it was Lovell saying it in the present tense. Big deal. At one point an astronaut develops a fever. It is a detail that could have been missed in the accounts I read. There may be two or three other minor distortions. Only GETTYSBURG has been as accurate an historical dramatization in recent years. Watching the film after reading accounts of the flight I had fewer reactions of "Hey, they did that wrong," and than of "Oh, that's what the book meant." (The book, incidentally, is A HISTORY OF MANNED SPACEFLIGHT by David Baker, a book that is fairly detailed and authoritative. NASA also has an account of the mission on the World-Wide Web and which is included below.) The film does a remarkable job of making the technical concepts comprehensible. But where it comes to a choice between understandable or accurate, the film chooses accuracy. It was the right choice. The film takes the risk of not underestimating the intelligence of its audience, and as of this writing seems to be playing to sell-out crowds. It may not have more thrills than a Sylvester Stallone film, but they are authentic.

The spirit of the film as well as the subject matter makes it a logical successor to THE RIGHT STUFF. The tone could well have been a pessimistic account about the dangers of space exploration. Instead, Howard chooses to give us a much-needed reminder that the problems of space are soluble, and they would continue to be so even under incredibly short time constraints. Like DIE HARD WITH A VENGEANCE, this is a film about people solving problem quickly under extreme pressure. But the reason is not nearly so contrived and is far more believable. This is the story of the incredible no-excuses-no-failure engineering feat of taking a wrecked spacecraft that had fifteen minutes of life left in it and turning it into a lifeboat capable of bringing three men 200,000 miles to a safe landing on Earth.

The film begins with the Apollo 1 fire in 1967, a preparation for a sub-theme of the fear with which the families of all the

Apollo astronauts live all the time but particularly during missions. Jim Lovell (Tom Hanks) tries to reassure his family, but still makes clear to his wife (Kathleen Quinlan) that he is going to walk on the moon. The film shows something of the training and the tricks of fate that determine the crew who will go on the ill-fated voyage. Much of this part may be interpolated and the matter of guesswork. But once the flight begins--with what is probably the most breathtaking rocket launch in any film fact or fiction--from there the NASA accounts of the flight are pretty much the scenario of the film.

Future films depicting the weightlessness of free-fall will have APOLLO 13 as a standard to live up to. There are no rotated camera effects or floating objects on wires. The weightless shots were filmed in genuine weightlessness within the atmosphere. The scenes were shot in short segments aboard Air Force KC-135s flying parabolic courses to create in actuality a zero-G set. Some roles call for actors to make special sacrifices, but having to actually act in freefall must have been particularly difficult as well as unique. It also must have made it impossible to film any one long shot.

Having to go through this particularly difficult form of acting is Tom Hanks who is no doubt learned that a real lunar mission can have more surprises than a box of chocolates. His James Lovell, Jr., is played with a sort of quiet professional dignity that is a first for him. Kevin Bacon plays the hot shot pilot John Swigert, Jr. Playing the third Junior of the three on board, Fred Haise, Jr., is Bill Paxton. None of these are particularly flashy roles. After letting Tom Cruise over-act just a little in FAR AND AWAY, Howard has much more subdued performances in this film. Kathleen Quinlan is losing some of the fragility of her earlier roles, but what she still has is useful here. And of course there is a role for Howard's favorite character actor, his brother Clint, here playing a nerdy technician. There is even a semi-comic role for Ron Howard's mother as Lovell's slightly confused mother. Howard was reluctant to cast Ed Harris as nervous, go-getting flight director Gene Krantz, since Harris is known best as John Glenn in THE RIGHT STUFF. However, the character is written thinly and the audience needs the previous characterization to flesh out the character.

James Horner provides a score lending a quiet dignity to the scientific pursuit supplemented by just a little too much rock music that really does not do all that much to capture the feel of the period. More is done by the clothing and set design, especially the occasional slide rule, which at least for a technical type (nerd) like me did much more to create an early 1970s feel. Also slightly overdone was the emphasis on urine and vomit. Special effects are first-rate and flawless.

This film is a paean to the power of perseverance to solve even the most impossible problems.

[Friday, December 29, 10:00 PM]

Incidentally, TCM is also running THE RIGHT STUFF (1983). Also very good.

[Wednesday, December 6, 9:00 PM]

-[mrl]

THE WHEEL OF TIME by **Robert Jordan and Brandon Sanderson** (copyright 1990-2013, Tor and other publishers, 11,731pp) (excerpt from the *Duel Fish Codices*: a book review by Gwendolyn Karpierz):

In 2014, the entirety of the series THE WHEEL OF TIME, by Robert Jordan--and, in the end, Brandon Sanderson--was nominated for a Hugo Award. Since I was doing reviews of Hugo Nominees at the time, a part of me jumped immediately into CHALLENGE ACCEPTED mode. I quickly gave that up; it was ridiculous to believe I could read all fourteen books (fifteen if you count the prequel) of THE WHEEL OF TIME in one summer.

I was right. It took me almost two years.

I didn't start them that summer. My mom had read the first one or two before and had only bad things to say about them, so I was already put off. They were fourteen books (I didn't learn about the fifteenth until later) of 600+ pages each, and I had absolutely no desire to read them. My best friend, however, holds them in high regard; and after hearing him talk about them, after him writing me texts full of compelling quotes, after painting him an elaborately detailed map of the world without ever having read one of the books, I gave in during early 2016 and decided to give it a try.

"If you can get past problematic gender politics....," he said, it's worth the read.

THE WHEEL OF TIME, starting with THE EYE OF THE WORLD and running all the way to A MEMORY OF LIGHT, follows primarily Rand al'Thor, a farmboy who is told by a mysterious magic-user (an Aes Sedai) that he is the prophesied Dragon Reborn, foretold to both break and save the world. He doesn't want to believe it. Boy oh boy does he not want to believe it. Luckily, since Rand spends several books being whinier than a doorhinge in serious need of some grease, the series also follows a veritable horde of other characters--including but not limited to his childhood best friends, his nearly-betrothed, his lovers, the Aes Sedai, queens, villains, conquerors, generals, and petty, quibbling minor nobles as they try to aid or prevent the Dark One from destroying the Pattern which governs the universe, ending the Wheel that is time, and turning the

world either into an eternal miasma of despair or into nothing at all.

I've not been terribly complimentary so far, so let me start.

While Rand (the main character, in spite of the hundreds of both memorable and forgettable other characters) spends much of the first few books being insufferable, there are enough characters and stories weaving around him to carry you through the first book, if you're willing. It is slow to take off, but I was intrigued enough by Egwene, Perrin, Nynaeve, Lan (and eventually Mat, but he has some dire straits to weather before he's enjoyable to watch) that I was compelled to continue. Book two, THE GREAT HUNT, is still slow, until the last third or so, when it becomes quite exciting.

At this point in time, I had only promised my friend that I would read the first three, threatening to give up after that if it didn't catch my attention. I didn't want to commit myself to all fourteen (right, fifteen) books.

The trouble is, book three (THE DRAGON REBORN) was excellent.

Better news, so were books four and five (THE SHADOW RISING and THE FIRES OF HEAVEN).

Another friend had mentioned to me that it was best after book five to just "wander off and make your own ending." I think part of this stemmed from the long wait for future books while he was reading it, but in some ways, he was right.

Books six through ten (LORD OF CHAOS, A CROWN OF SWORDS, THE PATH OF DAGGERS, WINTER'S HEART, CROSSROADS OF TWILIGHT) are terrible.

I can't say much in detail about the first few books because I read them *so* long ago. (It's worth noting that I read two or three other novels between each WHEEL OF TIME installment; I needed a break.) I do know that I enjoyed the first five. Somewhere, possibly around book three (perhaps later), Rand graduated from excruciatingly whiny to compelling, intricate, and sympathetic.

Unfortunately, even as Rand became my favorite character, others took his place as insufferable, petty, and/or useless. Nynaeve and Elayne made me want to stab someone. Perrin eventually grew static and dull. (Only Egwene, Min, and Lan managed to maintain consistently interesting and appealing personalities--and how. That sounds like a lot of people, but compared to the vast cast of characters, they are but drops in the ocean.)

I think I've probably put you off at this point, but hear me out.

Books six through ten are exceedingly dull. Most of them have an exciting last 50-100 pages, as if Robert Jordan had some great ideas but didn't know how to reach them without pages and pages (and pages and pages and pages and--) of agonizingly repetitive skirt smoothing, hair tugging, petty bickering, and more things you've read a hundred times throughout the books. Every woman is introduced by the shape and cut of her neckline, and half the men by how much embroidery is on their sleeves. (This is often supposed to indicate their personality, and is equally often the only thing we know about a person besides their name, which is exactly the same as three others' names in the same book.)

No, really, hear me out.

The first five books: worth it.

And if you can get past six through ten: It picks up again.

Amazingly, I could barely put down eleven (KNIFE OF DREAMS). Maybe it was just coming off ten (arguably the worst), but Jordan really picked up his stride again. Several characters had been ruined by their thoroughly-too-long exploits in the previous books, but their activities began to gain momentum once more.

Somewhere in here, Rand developed into a dark and deeply hurt character. It was tragic to watch--a real change from the unbearable whiner in the beginner, he accepted his role as the Dragon Reborn and fought to save the world without saving himself. The story followed not only him, but the people around him who loved him despite his depression-like condition, and who were determined to see him alive and happy at the end of his trials, despite the prophecies proclaiming that he would die.

Unfortunately, just as Robert Jordan gathered steam once again, he passed away. He had left copious notes, and asked his wife to find someone to take over the series after him.

Brandon Sanderson stepped into the fold.

Picking up with book twelve (THE GATHERING STORM), I can only say that Sanderson did an excellent job. Though there are some small discrepancies in writing style, he adhered closely and lovingly to Jordan's mode while avoiding all the pitfalls

of repetitious skirt smoothing (I can't tell you how many times a nervous woman smoothed her skirts) or skirts divided for riding (you can tell I read that phrase a lot). The plots were engaging again, and Sanderson clearly had a devoted fondness for these characters, some of whom he managed to bring back from the brink of being unsalvageably irritating. (Hooray for liking Nynaeve again! Finally.) Egwene went from enjoyable to incredible, Lan to epic.

I do wish the stakes had been higher: very few characters died reliably throughout the series. But as my friend told me: "Remember, the danger is real."

I read books twelve and thirteen (TOWERS OF MIDNIGHT and A MEMORY OF LIGHT) back to back. They were the only things I could get excited about. I read 600 of A MEMORY OF LIGHT's 900 pages *in one day*. Was it worth it?

That's the question, isn't it? Was it worth the slog, the downfall of good characters' personalities, the "problematic gender politics"....?

Here's the thing. I think it was.

Yes, the middle of the series is mind-numbingly boring. Yes, the gender divide is inexhaustibly frustrating, with everyone insisting on pointlessly stereotyping everyone else in ways that quickly cease to be amusing and ultimately make me want to yell at everyone. But if you can survive all that, Jordan created an incredibly rich tapestry of diverse cultures, an innovative magic system, and a vast and vital cast of characters (too many, some might say). THE WHEEL OF TIME really is an important series-- somehow it seems iconic, even if it doesn't have the widespread readership of THE LORD OF THE RINGS or HARRY POTTER. It certainly is not as concise as those other series, and the fifteen books is prohibitive. I wouldn't recommend it to everyone. It's not going to *be* for everyone. If you're not interested in character over plot, you might not get through book one. Even the plot--farmboy chosen one to save the world from the nebulously-defined Dark One-- seems a little underwhelming. But it's the exploration of these things, how they affect each other and the future that's important. (The future--I haven't even talked about the turning of the Wheel, but let's just say that the past isn't what you think.) Are you going to notice all the nuances throughout the books? No, because when it takes you two years to read a series, you forget a lot about it as you go. But they're there. And they matter. You'll notice some of them, and you won't forget the important things. Because THE WHEEL OF TIME matters.

If nothing else, the final two books, in the midst of my lack of interest toward anything I was reading, riled me up again. They made me *care*. A MEMORY OF LIGHT, despite being full of battles (and making me cry) had a kind of peace to it. A kind of peace that comes from completing a great achievement. Epic, maybe.

Is THE WHEEL OF TIME for everyone? Absolutely not. Maybe you read only the first three. Maybe you read the first five. But if you have a little (okay--a lot of) patience and an interest in fantasy, the series will take you some places you didn't expect to go.

And I sincerely hope that whatever TV show follows will be really well done, so that the intricacies of the Pattern can be made accessible to more people.

I'm glad I made it.

P.S. I didn't talk at all about the fifteenth book, "number zero" (NEW SPRING). That's because there isn't much to say about it. It's much shorter--only about 300 pages--and tells the back story of two important characters from the main series. Some of it is quite poignant. Some of it is literally clerical work. You win some, you lose some.

[-gmk]

How Great Science Fiction Works by Gary K. Wolfe (copyright 2016, The Great Courses, www.thegreatcourses.com, approximately 12 hours, 30 minutes) (audio course review by Joe Karpierz):

Gary K. Wolfe is probably best known in the science fiction field for two things: his reviews of science fiction and fantasy novels in Locus Magazine and for being one half of the duo that brings us The Coode Street Podcast (along with Jonathan Strahan). Until his recent retirement, he was a professor at Roosevelt University's Evelyn T. Stone College of Professional Studies in Chicago. He also periodically writes short reviews that appear in the Chicago Tribune. I've been listening to the podcast for several years now and have been reading his reviews for much longer than that. I became interested in this course when it was mentioned on the podcast, and jumped at the chance to get it when it was an Audible Deal of the Day a while back. It's been clear to me that Wolfe is extremely knowledgeable and is well read in the field. Little did I know just how knowledgeable or well read he is.

While the title of the course is "How Great Science Fiction Works", it feels more like an overview of the history of the field, a survey course which attempts to cover as much territory as possible in its 12+ hours of running time. But it's not just a history

of the field, it's an exploration of the themes and subject matter that have intrigued readers and critics for centuries. It begins with what is generally considered to be the very first science fiction novel, Mary Shelley's FRANKENSTEIN, which Wolfe uses as an example of what defines science fiction: that which is possible (well, yes, there's more to it than that, but for the purposes of FRANKENSTEIN let's go with it). Previous stories about monsters were considered fantasy because typically the monsters were created by magic or they occurred in myth and legend. Frankenstein's monster was created by science--and that's the difference.

As the listener--or viewer, if you want to actually see the lectures--proceeds through the course, what becomes apparent is just how large the field is in terms of breadth and scope, in terms of how it explores the affects of science and technologies on the societies it explores. Take a look at some of the topics that are covered in the 24 lectures: Evolution and Deep Time in Science Fiction, Utopian Dreams and Dystopian Nightmares, Environmentalism in Science Fiction, Gender Questions and Feminist Science Fiction, Religion in Science Fiction, Science Fiction Treatments of History, and Encounters with the Alien Other, just to name a few. It becomes obvious as Wolfe proceeds through the course that the field that we all know and love is vast, ever changing, and influential. It explores the relationship between science, man, and society, and tells us more about ourselves than we thought it would.

As I said earlier, the course demonstrates the wealth of knowledge Wolfe has of the field, and he does a marvelous job of not only presenting that knowledge to the listener, but also in relating the subject matter to our society and our everyday lives. He presents the subject matter in a clear and concise manner and in an engaging style. It's clear that he knows his stuff.

"How Great Science Fiction Works" is a great course for longtime fans of the field, newcomers who want to learn about the history of the field, and really anyone who wants to find out more about science fiction. I can tell you that I enjoyed the science fiction course I took in college, but this is the one I really would have wanted to take back in those days. I'm glad I got to experience it now. [-jak]

JANE (film review by Mark R. Leeper):

CAPSULE: This biography of Jane Goodall shows us how she has changed our definition of what is and is not human by her in-depth (and continuing) study of chimpanzee behavior. The film is a feast for the eye with its beautiful animal photography. Just how these images became part of the film is actually part of the story. This is certainly one of the year's best documentaries. Rating: +3 (-4 to +4) or 9/10

JANE is a biographical documentary about the life of Jane Goodall and her study of chimpanzee behavior in the wild. Perhaps the first real wonder of the film is that it could be made like this at all. There must have been somewhere a tremendous trove of film of Goodall in the wild. My first reaction on seeing the film was that it had been cast with a woman who looked just very like Goodall herself. It took a moment to realize this was the original footage of her days in Africa. The picture is so sharp for most of the footage it looks like it has to be re-enactment, but this is the original photography.

As a child Jane Goodall read the stories of Edgar Rice Burroughs, and she wanted to live like Tarzan's Jane in Africa surrounded by animals. Sadly, she could not afford college and ended up a secretary. In spite of her not having the necessary schooling to be sent to observe animals in the wild, Louis Leakey--yes, *that* Louis Leakey--chose her to go to Gombe in Africa to study chimpanzee behavior. Leakey considered that education was not nearly as important as an open mind, a passion for knowledge, a love of animals, and a monumental patience. These were virtues that the neophyte Goodall had in abundance. The last of these virtues, the patience, would be badly needed as chimpanzees are very unhappy with the presence of these strange tall white apes who cover themselves up and who make these funny noises with their mouths. And so began Goodall's first great challenge, winning over the chimps, in what has become the longest study of any animal in its natural habitat--going on fifty years and still continuing.

The animal photography in this film is absolutely stunning. It was shot by Hugo van Lawick, considered to be one of the greatest animal photographers of all time. He plays a major part in the life of Goodall, as the film relates. Director Brett Morgen reconstructed much of the photography from what was thought to be long-lost footage, but restored and digitally enhanced for this film. All this is flavored by a score by Philip Glass and one of his few scores without repetitious minimalism.

To this point the film has played only at film festivals and has not had a general release. A faint criticism of the film: at times it shows too much of Goodall's private life when the viewer (perhaps just this viewer) is anxious to get back to insights of chimpanzee behavior. Goodall has a battle in convincing the general population that a chimpanzee is a thinking and reasoning individual. Note: If the viewer is expecting a candy-coated, Disney view of chimpanzees it should be noted that apes are more like humans than that and Goodall discovers some not very nice aspects of chimpanzee behavior. Toward the end of the film there are some dark touches.

Goodall's choices sometimes seem to be questionable. She bribes the apes to come into her camp, an environment very different from their wild habitat. We do see some very negative aspects of contact between humans and apes. I rate the film a

+3 on the -4 to +4 scale or 9/10.

Film Credits: <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt7207238/combined>

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

[-mrl]

FIRST THEY KILLED MY FATHER (film review by Mark R. Leeper):

CAPSULE: This is an epic yet personal story, a memoir of one very young girl. Loung Ung, who survived in Cambodia when the violently militant Khmer Rouge controlled much of the populace. The narrative is just as vicious and painful as the title suggests it to be. Angelina Jolie directs from a script by she herself coauthored with the real Loung Ung. Rating: +3 (-4 to +4) or 9/10

FIRST THEY KILLED MY FATHER begins with the American armed forces invading Cambodia in the name of "helping the Cambodians help themselves" as Richard Nixon put it in documentary footage. The film quickly jumps to the day that the Americans pulled out of Southeast Asia, both Vietnam and Cambodia.

There is momentary jubilation in Cambodia that the Americans are gone but almost immediately the Khmer Rouge, communist guerillas in red scarves, take control and abolish any private property and private life. The Khmer Rouge was the Cambodian Communist guerrilla organization that controlled much of the country and killed the opposition. In the name of the people they enslaved the people with murderous unrestrained brutality.

Loung Ung's family loses their home and all their private possessions. Everything is owned communally but young Loung sees these things being taken from her family and only the barest necessities of life coming back. Guns are confiscated and held so the Khmer Rouge are the only ones armed. Ung's family is driven from the city, Phnom Penh, to the country side where they are expected to farm the dry ground if they want to eat. Worse is to come. We see all this through the eyes of Ung who tells her memories of life under the rule of the Khmer Rouge. Ung is played by Sareum Srey Moch behind a passive face that helps to make the emotion all the more poignant.

The film was made for Netflix Streaming and is already in release. It is reminiscent of the film BEASTS OF NO NATION of a year ago. Both are about threats to and hardship of the innocent-- particularly of the young--in times of war. Netflix distributed both films. Because the film shows the barbarity of the Khmer Rouge in the lives of the innocent it might also be compared to THE KILLING FIELDS (1985). The story of THE KILLING FIELDS' Dith Pran and of this film's Loung Ung start to converge as both use the same image to inform the character that the ordeal is over. Because the film is long-ish and covers a lot of geography it gives the film something of an epic feel.

If the title is foreboding you will find the story no less so, though the horrors are spread wider but no thinner. I rate FIRST THEY KILLED MY FATHER a +3 on the -4 to +4 scale or 9/10.

Film Credits: <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt4882376/combined>

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

[-mrl]

Just Eleven Light Years Away (comments by Gregory Frederick):

Greg Frederick writes:

One of the closest to our solar system Earth-like planets has been discovered. This one is eleven light years away and orbits a red dwarf star. This red dwarf star does not have sudden outbursts of solar radiation that some red dwarfs have. So this planet has a more hospitable environment for life and its temperatures are also compatible with life as we have here. Details below from CNN:

<https://tinyurl.com/void-eleven-light-years>

[-gf]

Mark replies:

Only eleven light-years? Piece of cake. [-mrl]

Greg responds:

It is a long distance away but it's still in our neighborhood (in terms of our galaxy). I admit that would be a rather long walk to stroll around this neighborhood, but project Star Shot plans to send a very small probe on a solar sail powered by a Gigawatt set of lasers to Proxima Centauri (4.2 light years away) in about twenty years. [-gf]

Mark answers:

I think we humans just are not made for interstellar travel. This planet may be in our neighborhood, but we cannot do much visiting in our neighborhood. We have to just sit at the doorway and stare out like my dog used to do. [-mrl]

Greg responds:

You may be right. But to send a robotic probe for interstellar investigation could be possible (like Star Shot). We are exploring Mars and the outer planets with robotic probes at this time. Did your dog have a telescope (I bet he liked the dog star)? [-gf]

Mark answers:

Sam had no telescope. He knew his neighborhood by sound and smell. That made for a very small neighborhood, but he was content to keep an eye on things without going places he would see. I guess that is a lot like we are limited in doing. [-mrl]

Convention Reports (letter of comment by Charles S. Harris):

In response to [Evelyn's comments on convention reports](#) in the 11/10/17 issue of the MT VOID, Charles Harris writes:

You wrote, "I have gotten several years behind in my Philcon reports and rather than give up altogether, I have decided to transcribe my notes without turning them into real sentences, paragraphs, etc. Maybe someday I will flesh them out, but I would not bet on it."

You therefore posted your Philcon 2015 and 2016 notes, in lieu of complete reports.

Only a couple of years behind? That's nothing: I still haven't gotten around to writing up my notes from the NYcon II 1956 WorldCon. Don't hold your breath. [-csh]

THOR: RAGNAROK (letter of comment by Andre Kuzniarek):

In response to [Dale Skran's review of THOR: RAGNAROK](#) in the 11/17/17 issue of the MT VOID, Andre Kuzniarek writes:

I particularly enjoyed the way THOR: RAGNAROK brings Jack Kirby's aesthetic to life on screen. Much like Moebius and Jean-Claude Mezieres were direct inspirations for THE FIFTH ELEMENT, or Leon Benett's engravings for Karel Zeman's THE FABULOUS WORLD OF JULES VERNE. Having grown up with and being a fan of Kirby's work, I can happily rest easy never seeing another comics-based movie, but Black Panther sure looks good and that series was also a favorite in the 70s. I understand the sentiment that there are too many superhero movies, but I can't help enjoying the heck out of the Marvel installments. [-ak]

UNDENIABLE (letter of comment by Tom Russell):

In response to [Greg Frederick's review of UNDENIABLE](#) in the 11/17/17 issue of the MT VOID, Tom Russell writes:

Thanks to Greg Frederick for his review of UNDENIABLE by Bill Nye in the recent MT VOID.

I will read it after I finish FUTURE CRIMES, excellent book (science fiction?) by Marc Goodman which I am in the middle of now- just getting to the "future" part. (Did you know that a gang of bank robbers in London used Uber for their get-away?)

UNDENIABLE must contain a lot of thought-provoking material. Perhaps Bill Nye explains why life has evolved only once on Earth? Or do the "four domains" mean life *has* appeared more than once? Some jellyfish are immortal--is immortality a dead end for evolution?

By the way, if life on other planets is immortal, why be in a hurry to do anything--evolve?--colonize or explore other planets? (via flying saucers or panspermia?)--even just contact us? (This is probably beyond the scope of Nye's book...) [-tlr]

Evelyn replies:

I thought it was three domains (Archaea, Bacteria, and Eukarya) or five dominions (as suggested in Luketa S. (2012). "New views on the megaclassification of life" (PDF). *Protistology*. 7 (4): 218-237.). [-ecl]

WONDER WOMAN (letter of comment by Peter Trei):

In response to [Mark's comments on Wonder Woman](#) in the 11/17/17 issue of the MT VOID, Peter Trei writes:

You might want to look into the origins of The Wonder Woman. She was created by Professor William Marston in 1941, explicitly as a feminist example for young women.

There's a recent movie 'Professor Marston and the Wonder Woman', which explores his life (and his wife, and their girlfriend). It's on Netflix, but I haven't seen it yet. [-pt]

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

In *BEOWULF ON THE BEACH: WHAT TO LOVE AND WHAT TO SKIP IN LITERATURE'S GREATEST HITS* by Jack Murnighan (ISBN 978-0-307-40957) one can certainly quibble with his fifty choices. On a technical level, one can ask why he lists Dante's "Inferno" and "Paradiso" as two separate works, but "Faust I" and "Faust II" as one work, and similarly for the two books of *DON QUIXOTE*. On a literary level, why include *THE MAN WITHOUT QUALITIES* by Robert Musil or *BLOOD MERIDIAN* by Cormac McCarthy, while omitting Walt Whitman and George Orwell and Aldous Huxley and Joseph Heller?

Murnighan also seems to think that one important topic for each book, along with "Best Line", "Quirky Fact", and "What to Skip", is "What's Sexy". Well, I suppose that might get people to read some of these, but even so ...

Murnighan also makes a common mistake with Cervantes and Shakespeare. He says, "Cervantes and Shakespeare died on the same day: April 23, 1616." They died on the same *date*, but not the same day. Spain had already converted to the Gregorian calendar, while England was still on the Julian one, so Shakespeare actually died eleven days later than Cervantes. (And isn't it a good thing that it was Pope Gregory XIII who instituted the calendar reform in 1582 rather than Pope Julius III thirty years earlier?)

But Murnighan's sense of time is strange in other ways as well. He writes, "For a few centuries now, Emma Bovary has been understood ...," but Gustave Flaubert published *EMMA BOVARY* in 1856--usually "few" implies more than one and a half. And his sense of place--he claims Queequeg is African, while it is clear he is from the South Seas. (It is true that Ishmael refers to Queequeg's idol as a "Congo doll", but it is clear from Chapter 12 that Ishmael knows Queequeg's true origins.)

And he puts an apostrophe in *FINNEGANS WAKE*, which should not have one. (This could be sloppy proofreading, but it is a common error.)

If you like reading books about books, this is at least written for a slightly different audience than that of Harold Bloom or even Michael Dirda. But as the title might suggest, it is more a beach read than a serious look at these works.

Apropos of my comments last week on *THE FOREVER WAR* by Joe Haldeman, the following quote from *THUS SPOKE ZARATHUSTRA* by Friedrich Nietzsche appeared in *THE FOUR HORSEMEN OF THE APOCALYPSE* (1921) which we watched this past week: "Man shall be trained for war and women for the recreation of the warrior; all else is folly."

Actually, I have also found the original quote rendered as, "Man shall be trained for war and women for the recreation of the warrior; all else is folly." I realize both are translations, but surely the words for "procreation" and "recreation" are different in German.

So I looked up the original, which is, "Der Mann soll sum Kriege ergozen werden und das Weib zur Erholung des Kriegers: alles Andre is Thorheit." "Erholung" is "recreation"; "Zeugung" is "procreation". I have two possible theories as to why it is mis-translated. One is that Nietzsche intended to refer to procreation, but felt that was too coarse; then later translations restored his original meaning. This seems unlikely. The other is that translators wanted to make Nietzsche describe women not as enjoyable, but as mere "baby machines," thereby dehumanizing them. This one gets my vote. [-ecl]

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Quote of the Week:

Every day you may make progress. Every step may be fruitful. Yet there will stretch out before you an ever-lengthening, ever-ascending, ever-improving path. You know you will never get to the end of the journey. But this, so far from discouraging, only adds to the joy and glory of the climb.

--Sir Winston Churchill

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