

MT VOID 05/25/18 -- Vol. 36, No. 47, Whole Number 2016

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Mt. Holz Science Fiction Society
05/25/18 -- Vol. 36, No. 47, Whole Number 2016

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Nebula Award Winners:

Novel: THE STONE SKY, N.K. Jemisin (Orbit US; Orbit UK)

Novella: ALL SYSTEMS RED, Martha Wells (Tor.com Publishing)

Novelette: "A Human Stain", Kelly Robson (Tor.com 1/4/17)

Short Story: "Welcome to Your Authentic Indian Experience™", Rebecca Roanhorse (Apex 8/17)

The Ray Bradbury Award for Outstanding Dramatic Presentation: GET OUT

The Andre Norton Award for Outstanding Young Adult Science Fiction or Fantasy Book: THE ART OF STARVING, Sam J. Miller (HarperTeen)

Science Fiction (and Other) Discussion Groups, Films, Lectures, etc. (NJ):

June 14: EL INCIDENTE (2014) & TIME OUT OF JOINT by Philip K. Dick

<https://www.hoopladigital.com/title/12016997>

<https://openlibrary.org/search?q=title%3A+time+out+of+joint>

https://openlibrary.org/books/OL2852215M/Time_out_of_joint/borrow

<http://www.rulit.me/books/time-out-of-joint-download-free-67621.html>

July 26: "Fire Watch" by Connie Willis, Old Bridge (NJ) Public Library, 7PM

September 27: Nebula winners for short fiction:

Novella: ALL SYSTEMS RED, Martha Wells (Tor.com Publishing)

Novelette: "A Human Stain", Kelly Robson (Tor.com 1/4/17)

<https://www.tor.com/2017/01/04/a-human-stain/>

Short Story: "Welcome to Your Authentic Indian Experience™", Rebecca Roanhorse (Apex 8/17)

<https://www.apex-magazine.com/welcome-to-your-authentic-indian-experience/>, 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 June (comments by Mark R. Leeper):`

Years ago the Universal horror films showed up on TV Saturday nights in my own home. There were not a lot of them I had not seen, because Universal's horror distributor rented them out in packages to local stations. But many of Peter Lorre's films were not rented out the same way. Pretty much all of the major Universal horror films showed up at one time or another. On the other hand some major Peter Lorre films did not show up ever because whoever owned the copyright did not rent them out. These impossible to find films became legendary and a prize to watch for in TV Guide. As the years went by these two films became celebrated in the pages of Famous Monsters. They were prizes on the pages of monster magazines and of Lorre's. I hoped some station would show MAD LOVE (1935) and THE BEAST WITH FIVE FINGERS (1946). I remember I still could not find and see MAD LOVE until I was 27.

MAD LOVE was MGM's remake of the classic German horror film, THE HANDS OF ORLAC. Stephen Orlac is a great concert pianist and his extremely beautiful wife Yvonne is the queen of the Grand Guignol stage. She has one fan who is consumed by his obsession with her. This fan is Dr. Gogol, perhaps the world's greatest surgeon.

Then Orlac is in a train collision. He survives but loses both his hands. Orlac is inconsolable and on the point of suicide but Gogol offers to graft hands onto Orlac's arms in return for Yvonne's love. It proves to be a Faustian bargain. Lorre plays Gogol as short, and hairless and totally crazy. He is probably the craziest character Lorre has ever played. [Friday, June 29, 12:30 PM]

In 1946 Warner Brothers made their first (and last) horror film of the 1940s. It is dark and reserved by comparison to MAD LOVE. It is at heart just the sort of film in which a man is dying and his relatives and associates are all gathered around secretly wishing to get a piece of the of the departed's fortune. One of the hopefuls is played Peter Lorre who is not looking for money but for the old man's superbly complete library. Lorre's character is a student of astrology and the occult. He thinks he can get what he wants to know if he can have free reign of the old man's library .

The film's title comes from the story the film is based on, "The Beast with Five Fingers" by W. F. Harvey. Ironically it was adapted to the screen by Curt Siodmak who wrote so many competing horror films for Universal. [Friday, June 29, 6:30 PM]

I do not have a great choice for best film of the month. I will stick with MAD LOVE.

Evelyn thought you might like a listing of the short film festivals in June.

6 Friday
6:15 AM Green Slime, The (1969)
8:00 AM Satellite in the Sky (1956)
9:30 AM From The Earth To The Moon (1958)
11:30 AM Forbidden Planet (1956)
1:15 PM Countdown (1968)
3:15 PM 2001: A Space Odyssey (1968)
6:00 PM 2010 (1984)

13 Friday
6:15 AM Dead Men Walk (1943)
7:30 AM Mysterious Doctor, The (1943)
8:30 AM Disembodied, The (1957)
9:45 AM Plague of the Zombies, The (1966)
11:30 AM Devil's Own, The (1966)
1:15 PM I Walked With A Zombie (1943)
2:30 PM Black Magic (1949)
4:30 PM Hypnotic Eye, The (1960)
6:00 PM Two On A Guillotine (1965)

20 Friday
8:30 AM Gorilla Man, The (1942)
11:30 AM Body Snatcher, The (1945)
2:30 PM Doctor X (1932)
4:00 PM Return of Doctor X, The (1939)

23 Monday
6:00 AM Godzilla (1954)
7:45 AM Godzilla, King of the Monsters! (1956)
9:15 AM Bowery Boys Meet The Monsters, The (1954)
10:30 AM Spook Chasers (1957)
11:45 AM Phantom of the Rue Morgue (1954)
1:15 PM Black Scorpion, The (1957)
2:45 PM Beast From Haunted Cave (1959)
4:00 PM Bucket of Blood, A (1959)
5:15 PM House on Haunted Hill (1958)
6:45 PM Killer Shrews, The (1959)

30 Monday
7:30 AM Seventh Victim, The (1943)

8:45 AM Ghost Ship, The (1943)
 10:00 AM Bedlam (1946)
 11:30 AM Isle of the Dead (1945)
 1:00 PM Leopard Man, The (1943)
 5:00 PM Cat People (1942)
 6:30 PM Val Lewton: The Man in the Shadows (2007)
 8:00 PM Them! (1954)

[-mrl]

SIX WAKES by **Mur Lafferty** (copyright 2017, Orbit, 400pp, trade paperback, ISBN-10: 0316389684, ISBN-13: 978-0316389686, ASIN: B01CDDAETS) (excerpt from the *Duel Fish Codices*: a book review by Joe Karpierz) :

SIX WAKES, both a Hugo and Nebula finalist for Best Novel in 2018 combines two genres--science fiction and murder mystery--in an interesting tale in which almost all of the characters in the book are clones. So, what we have is a murder mystery in a space ship where clones are the only suspects (well, I suppose that's not exactly true, but we'll get to it). In a time-honored tradition, it **must** be one of them because they are the only ones awake.

The setting is the starship Dormire, which is carrying thousands of colonists from Earth to the planet Artemis in the Tau Ceti system. The crew is made up of six clones and an AI computer. One of the clones wakes up in a cloning vat (more on that in a bit as well) to find that her most recent self, as well as the rest of the recent selves of the crew, have been murdered. What also is evident is that everyone's memories of the trip so far have been wiped and the ship itself is slowly veering off course. To complete the mystery, the AI, IAN, is also malfunctioning. Whoever is responsible for the murder actually has the blood of six murders on their hands.

And thus we have the following problems: who committed the murders, why is IAN malfunctioning, why is the ship off course, and what is the motive behind all of this?

The novel starts out with the statement of the "International Law Regarding the Codicils to Govern the Existence of Clones". While essentially an infodump, and one to start off the novel rather than it appearing later on, the Codicils are important to the story and it's a good thing to have them right up front, as clones, cloning, and the ethics and morality of cloning are key elements in the story. Lafferty has done a nice bit of world building with these Codicils. It's not just the Codicils themselves, but how they came about that fits into the story.

It really is somewhat difficult to talk about a murder mystery without giving much away. The interesting thing about all clone crew members is that they are former criminals, and have been given their positions on the ship as a way of atoning for their crimes and, at the end of the journey, will get a fresh start on Artemis. The novel interweaves the present dilemma that the clones are attempting to solve with flashbacks for each character--sometimes multiple flashbacks--which gives the foundation for each character's behavior as well as providing clues as to What The Heck Is Going On and Why. We learn about each character's crime, what their motivations are, and how they got to be on the crew of the Dormire. Pile on top of that the fact that everyone is a clone--and that there are rules governing a clone's existence (which comes into play with one of the clones)--and you have quite the engaging and entertaining story.

I liked SIX WAKES, of that there is no doubt. It's a fast-paced and complex murder mystery, made all the more interesting by the fact that not one of the characters on the ship is a standard human. Even IAN, the AI running the ship, has a very interesting story and background that plays an integral part of the story.

However ... I'm not on the bandwagon that says this is an award-worthy book. I've said a lot of nice things about it over the course of the last few paragraphs, but it didn't strike that resonance with me that wants to give it an award. I've written many times of the last several years how I measure Hugo-worthiness, so I won't get into that here. I wouldn't mind if it won the Hugo--or Nebula, but as I write this it didn't win that award--it's just not what I'd put at the top (or near the top) of my list.

There are a ton of science fiction murder mysteries that have been written over the decades, and this will go down as one of the better ones and one of the more inventive ones. I do recommend it. [-jak]

A. E. van Vogt and the Weapon Shops, BEYOND THIS HORIZON, ANNIHILATION, WAR FOR THE PLANET OF THE APES, and THE SHAPE OF WATER (letter of comment by Taras Wolansky):

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

My loccing MT VOID is a process not unlike Harlan Ellison's editing of THE LAST DANGEROUS VISIONS. That is, another issue comes in with another slew of comment hooks, so I never actually get anything done.

Retro-Hugo recommendations:

I believe that the thought process that led A. E. van Vogt to write his "Weapon Shop" stories began with the idea that, to prevent war, a world government would be necessary. With World War II raging at the time, this would have seemed a plausible viewpoint.

But then the next question is, how do you prevent a world government from becoming a world tyranny? There's no place to run to, no place to build a resistance, no place to find allies.

This is where the Weapon Shops come in. They sell weapons, weapons that can only be used defensively, with which individuals can defend their rights. Incidentally, I always thought the idea of guns that can only be used in defense was hard to swallow; but guns that can only be fired by their proper owners already exist and, for the rest, who knows what a couple of thousand years of AI development will achieve.

This isn't the first time I didn't believe van Vogt but he turned out to be right. In SLAN, the telepaths' tendrils are due to reappear after a certain number of generations. I didn't think heredity like that can work, but it turns out Huntington's disease is inherited that way: it gets worse from generation to generation.

Incidentally, some years ago, Isaac Asimov penned an editorial in his magazine advocating a world government. My response, that history suggested the result would be millennial stagnation as in ancient Egypt, was published in the magazine. Asimov found my argument very depressing!

I reread Heinlein's BEYOND THIS HORIZON relatively recently, when I picked up the Gregg Press hardcover, edited by David Hartwell and with an intriguing introduction by Norman Spinrad, which argues that the book's apparently disjoint structure was intentional and served the author's purpose.

I found the book fascinating and strange. For one thing, it's a sort of living fossil, of a time when progressives enthusiastically supported eugenics (which was swept under the rug after World War II for painfully obvious reasons). Heinlein, simultaneously a progressive and a libertarian, sought to bridge the two ideologies with a society based on eugenics but without coercion. (Just as, years later, he put a libertarian spin on the draft, in STARSHIP TROOPERS.)

When you look at that historical period, you realize that while Hitler was out of the mainstream, he was not very far out of the mainstream. He just took things a step or two farther. Consider that Sweden, which we consider an advanced and enlightened society, was still practicing eugenic sterilization as late as the 1970s. This came out in the 1990s, as I recall, when women tried to find out why they couldn't have children: because, when they were little girls, somebody had decided they were defective or inferior.

Another fascinating part of the book is the portrait of the protagonist's nerdy friend, Monroe-Alpha, a basically benign but weak character who is seduced by the book's version of Nazism. He tries and fails to kill a woman he's falling in love with, because he's been taught she is genetically inferior; and then he tries to drive his flying car into a mountain, but safety features (of the kind currently being implemented in automobiles) don't let him kill himself. Heinlein's wisecrack, that it's a good thing women are forgiving or the human race would have died out long ago, may be considered politically incorrect today.

Of course, the book's hero, Hamilton Felix, might not care if the human race does die out. Frustrating genetic planners, he refuses to reproduce, until he has some proof that death is not the end. They bribe him with a research program on the subject. It succeeds, though in an unexpected way. It's clear, at least to the reader, that Hamilton's little boy has an instant antipathy to his new baby sister because she is the reincarnation of an elderly and powerful woman Senator from Brazil that he had met and disliked.

The line, "an armed society is a polite society", is a reference to the Code Duello. As both history and common sense suggest, rudeness tends to be avoided in societies where rudeness can lead to death.

Going several issues back in time:

Even setting aside all the problems with the premise, the movie, ANNIHILATION, struck me as a mess. It makes heavy use of the horror movie trope that people, especially women, will do stupid things to get themselves eaten by monsters--because, I guess, it's easier on the screenwriters if the characters behave like idiots. The women have some military experience, we're told, but they sure don't act like it.

The worst example of this is when the women have found a nice, safe tower to sleep in. Their leader decides to take the first watch, but instead of watching from on high she goes down to the surface, some distance from the tower, and turns on lights which destroy her night vision. When they hear noises in the dark, the women all rush down to the ground so that a mutant bear can carry off one of their number.

Another funny one is when they just barely survive a battle with a giant, mutant crocodile. Almost immediately afterward we see them paddling on the stream in little tiny boats, just as if the screenwriter had let them know there's only one crocodile so they don't have to worry.

Their goal is a lighthouse occupied by some kind of alien force. But it's on the coast: why are they spending a week slogging through the jungle, instead of getting there in two hours by boat?

The review of the latest "Planet of the Apes" movie made me think about whether there can be said to exist a "cinema of treason": movies that encourage the viewer to root against the human race, in sci-fi films like AVATAR or the aforementioned ape movies, or merely against the United States (or for its enemies) in mundane films like DANCES WITH WOLVES and THE LAST SAMURAI

and HOPSCOTCH (with its cuddly KGB agent).

THE SHAPE OF WATER may fall in both subcategories, with human evil specifically identified with the US military (and with Christianity) while the Stalinist traitor/spy is presented as benevolent and heroic.

I'm an old-fashioned, patriotic, human chauvinist, so movies like this rub me the wrong way. [-tw]

Mark responds:

It is interesting how time alters the boundaries of what is or is not science fiction. A more accurate title for I, ROBOT today would be "ADVENTURES IN SOFTWARE DE-BUGGING" [-mrl]

Evelyn adds:

I also commented at the time on how the turning on of the lights in ANNIHILATION was really stupid. [-ecl]

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

Here are my comments and ranking for "Best Short Story" for the Retro Hugo Awards for works published in 1942:

"Etaoin Shrdlu", by Fredric Brown (Unknown Worlds, February 1942): This is a typical Fredric Brown story, with a bit of humor and a punchline ending. It has been said that no one really writes stories like Frederic Brown, and that is probably true. There are other "possessed linotype" stories around ("Printer's Devil" from the original "Twilight Zone" series comes to mind), but this has its own approach, and one which is very topical today.

"Mimic", by Martin Pearson (Donald A. Wollheim): (Astonishing Stories, December 1942): This is a story that does not show its age at all. While it is definitely science fiction, the science being biology and specifically evolution, it is primarily a horror story, and it could very well be that horror stories are more timeless. Obviously, a story can be so full of outmoded stereotypes and such that the underlying theme cannot save it, but this story could be set today. In fact, it was made into a film in 1997, 55 years after it was written, without much change. (Ironically, the main change was in the science, and it probably was not necessary.)

"Proof", by Hal Clement (Astounding Science Fiction, June 1942): "They had evolved far down near the solar core, where pressures and temperatures were such that matter existed in the "collapsed" state characteristic of the entire mass of white dwarf stars. Their bodies were simply constructed: a matrix of close-packed electrons--really an unimaginably dense electrostatic field, possessing quasi-solid properties--surrounded a core of neutrons, compacted to the ultimate degree. Radiation of sufficient energy, falling on the "skin," was stabilized, altered to the pattern and structure of neutrons; the tiny particles of neutronium which resulted were borne along a circulatory system--of magnetic fields, instead of blood--to the nucleus, where it was stored."

If this is your cup of tea, then this is your cup of tea. Otherwise, this will read like a physics book about physics that you never run into in your daily life. People who complain that Clement's MISSION OF GRAVITY has no real characters should read this--by comparison, MISSION OF GRAVITY is a novel of deep psychological analysis.

"Runaround", by Isaac Asimov (Astounding Science Fiction, March 1942): This is one of the stories that make up the linked collection I, ROBOT, and like many of those stories, it is a puzzle piece. A robot is acting strangely, and the protagonists have to figure out why. In this case, the explanation is a bit of a cheat on the Three Laws of Robotics, although the solution still depends on them. The rest of the story--setting, characters, and so on--are there merely to pad the puzzle out into a story. At the time, it may have seemed clever, with the very science-fictional setting of Mercury, but now it shows its age.

"The Sunken Land", by Fritz Leiber (Unknown Worlds, February 1942): This is the sort of "sword and sorcery" fiction that was very popular back in the 1930s and 1940s, had a revival in the 1960s, but which is not seen much of these days, or if so, it is in venues with which I am unfamiliar. This is part of the "Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser" series of stories, re-issued in the 1970s in five volumes from Ace Books, but not readily available in anthologies. It's a pity, because there is a certain atmosphere to them (at least to this one) that is missing from most short stories today. I am sure knowing more of the series would give the characters more depth, but it is perfectly fine on its own.

"The Twonky", by C. L. Moore and Henry Kuttner (Astounding Science Fiction, September 1942): This is another story that does not show its age. Oh, the setting is clearly the 1940s, but it is not full of outdated science, or sentences or phrasing that make it seem antiquated, or grotesquely sexist attitudes. And it is proof that the current concerns about A.I. controlling us are not new at all.

Ratings: "Mimic", "The Sunken Land", "The Twonky", "Etaoin Shrdlu", no award, "Runaround", "Proof"

[-ecl]

Quote of the Week:

Prediction is very difficult, especially about the future.

--Niels Bohr (1885-1962)

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