

MT VOID 12/14/18 -- Vol. 37, No. 24, Whole Number 2045



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Mt. Holz Science Fiction Society
12/14/18 -- Vol. 37, No. 24, Whole Number 2045

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Of Magic Swords and Xombie Dogs (comments by Mark R. Leeper):

I have mentioned the following previously in this column. Some of you long time members might remember this and might find this familiar.

I was talking to Evelyn about a piece she had seen in a local newspaper. A local dog, a dachshund by the way, apparently had died, was buried, and had some time later came back scratching at the door.

Her family had had a little funeral for the dog. The kids were crying, not I blame them. But Pixie the dachshund supposedly had gone off to join the Choir Invisible. In any case Pixie was supposedly off and gone. And then Pixie after an absence of a few days showed up asking to be re-admitted to the house. That was about all it said in the newspaper. I just told Evelyn that it is not uncommon for dachshunds to return from the dead. Evelyn asked me if I was serious. But how could I be? She said she assumed I was joking, but I was perfectly serious.

It seems that dachshunds were originally bred as a hunting dog. In fact nobody is really sure if they are descended from hounds or terriers, but there is probably bloodlines from each. They have the skill to be really good burrowing dogs.

Now veterinarians may be hired to put dogs peacefully to sleep. (Hopefully to avoid a worse medical condition.) But some vets are better than others. Suffice it to say some dogs are thought to be dead while they are still alive. It happens to humans still. And it is like something out of Edgar Allan Poe. But there the dog has the edge over the human. Did I mention that dachshunds are really good a burrowing? The dog may regain consciousness and understand she was in a hell of a pickle. Now Ms. Dachshund knows she likes tunneling, but she has never had a challenge like this before. I cannot imagine what is going through the dog's head. Is she confident in her skills? Who can say? But she clearly had her work cut out for her.

Somehow she manages to dig her way to oxygen out and, as another canine super power the dog can figure her way home. I don't know if science knows how the dog can do it, but the dog knows how to get home. It was a heck of a surprise for the owners who were bidding a fond farewell.

Sure as there were magic swords there are zombie dogs who return from the grave and who find their way home. It is still an

impressive and almost supernatural feat that dogs sometimes can do.

Wait! What was that about magic swords? Back in Medieval times people fought with swords. A lot of swords did not come with lifetime guarantees. And some of the swords made at that time could cut their way through iron armor and still be unbroken. There were a few really hard and strong swords. What was going on?

Well, their method for extracting iron from the ground was less than ideal. Maybe the metal forged was good iron. Sometimes they got unnoticed more carbon than they usually got. Then the iron comes out spoiled. They made something that even isn't really iron. You call that steel. You end up with a steel sword. You find the sword you made a lot stronger than iron. Then you don't want the rumor that you have a really strong sword to get around. If you brag about it someone might want to take it away from you. But still you would have had a magic sword for a while. It would be strong enough to hold off a for-real zombie dog. You see it all fits together. [-mrl]

SUSPIRIA (2018) (film review by Mark R. Leeper):

CAPSULE: An American girl from Ohio gets an opportunity to study at a prestigious dance academy in Germany. She jumps at the prospect in spite of being told that the women who run the school are actually witches. This is a remake of the 1977 classic horror film directed by Dario Argento. This version, directed by Luca Guadagnino, expands on the original offering generous slices of performance of modern (well, 1977) dance. Some sequences offer beautiful art while others are ponderous and slow. There is a good deal of nudity. Dakota Johnson plays the main character, Susie Bannion. Tilda Swinton co-stars and Jessica Harper, the star of *SUSPIRIA* (1977), is somewhere in the new film. Rating: +2 (-4 to +4) or 7/10

The original 1977 version of *SUSPIRIA* had quite a decent response from American horror film fans, though I myself was ambivalent. In this film an American dance student is barely in the doors of her new dance academy when she starts hearing strange rumors that the women who run the school are actually witches. She of course is skeptical but that is just one of several lines of conflict occurring at the school and outside. The teaching 1977 is the time of the Baader Meinhof terrorists and inside the school. The filmmakers let us in on some competing theories of dance. And saved for the last part of the film, the discussion shifts to the Holocaust. It does create a feeling of menace that hangs over the viewer. Both versions of the film have much the same surreal quality.

The new film is bigger and more colorful than was the original film. Director Guadagnino spends the time to show the audience a nice sample of Damien Jalet's brand of choreography. And that is a plus which elevates the film. It also shows that somebody in the production cared about a little more than just shocking the viewer. Meanwhile the story is told in frequently long and tedious takes. Not all of the plot makes sense. Some of the scenes go past faster than the eye can parse them. Overall at over two and a half hours the story does drag.

I rate it a +2 on the -4 to +4 scale or 7/10. *SUSPIRIA* (2018) was released by Amazon Studios last October in the US.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1034415/reference>

What others are saying: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/suspiria_2018

[-mrl]

THE HATE U GIVE (film review by Mark R. Leeper):

***** SPOILER WARNING ***

A few pieces of the arc of the story are revealed in this review.

CAPSULE: Spike Lee showed one possible scenario for a spark that starts a race riot with his *DO THE RIGHT THING*. Director George Tillman gives us a very different genesis but one that also leads to a riot. While the film is a bit hard-bitten it seems a little too anxious to have a positive ending. Several racially-charged and involved issues are brought together in an effective story. Director: George Tillman, Jr.; Writers: Audrey Wells, Angie Thomas. Rating: +3 (-4 to +4) or 9/10

Starr Carter (played by Amandla Stenberg) is a 16-year-old African- American girl and her father has given her "The Talk." The Talk may not be what the viewer is expecting. The Talk is not about how to handle boy friends getting too amorous. It is about how to NOT be shot and killed when stopped by police. It seems African-American teens live life under the shadow and constant threat of death from the frequent and lethal encounters with the police who kill with near impunity.

Starr lives a double life. When she is near her high school, which is in a white neighborhood, she works at assimilating into the mostly white and affluent neighborhood. Outside of the affluent surroundings she returns to her home poverty-stricken neighborhood.

One night Starr is given a ride home from a party by her friend since childhood, Khalid, who is also black. Starr knows the right things to do having been coached by her father. Khalid, however, does not know the rules and intentionally provokes the police officer. The policeman reacts from fear and shoots Khalid three times in the chest, killing him on the spot. The only witness to the shooting is Starr. She agrees to help the police investigating the shooting under the condition that her name is kept out of the affair. What starts as a bad situation just gets worse.

The writing gives the audience a many faceted look at multiple communities' looking at a story that grabs national headlines. The film's biggest problem is that it is tied up a little too neatly toward the end.

The film has its worst faults at its conclusion. The last moments of the film are unrealistically optimistic. That may be from its source material. The film is based on young adult novel written for teenagers. Perhaps it avoids being too bleak. At 132 minutes the film takes its time to give a view of a complex social problem. But then it ties things up a little too neatly at the end. Still the film is intelligently planned out. I rate the film a +3 on the -4 to +4 scale or /10.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt5580266/reference>

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

[-mrl]

Super Powers (letters of comment by Paul Dormer, Kevin R, and Dorothy J. Heydt):

In response to [Mark's comments on super powers](#) in the 12/07/18 issue of the MT VOID, Paul Dormer writes:

There was a time in the nineties when I wondered if I had a superpower. Again, not a very useful one. I seemed to be able to cause street lights to go off as I walked past them. I can't remember all the details now, but I think there was a light between my office and the station in London that went off every night in winter when I walked past, and there was a light on the approach road to the station where I lived that went off whenever I left the station.

Even when I was attending Intersection in Glasgow in 1995, I used to walk back to my hotel along the bank of the Clyde and there was a light under a bridge that went off several times.

And just after Intersection, when I was still in Glasgow, I saw an article in the paper about someone who was reporting the same phenomenon. He'd actually set up a website about it and I clipped the article to investigate later. Unfortunately, I moved house a few days after getting back from Glasgow and the clipping got lost in the move.

Even when I moved to Guildford, there was a light on the way from my house to the station, not on a light pole but on the wall of an old persons' residence, that seemed to go out every time I walked past.

My working hypothesis was that these lights were faulty and were going on and off all the time and it was just a coincidence that it happened when I was walking past. I never had time to test this by standing by one of these lights to see if it did go off and on repeatedly, and I couldn't work out how to test if it still went on and off when I wasn't there.

In the last twenty years or so, this seems to have stopped happening. Either I've lost the power or they've improved the reliability of street lights. [-pd]

Mark responds:

I have also noted me seeming to burn out streetlights. I think that the explanation was that they tend to periodically turn off and come back in later. We notice when one does shut off and it never registers when one turns on. It may be that a light calls attention to itself when it inexplicably turns off, but not when it slowly turns on. But one of us would commonly point out we had burned out another one. Since then that kind of light stopped being used. [-mrl]

Kevin R writes:

I broke both of my wrists in elementary school. One when I was ten years old, and the other two years later. Cold weather would make the bones ache where they had healed. It wasn't much of a problem when I was living on Long Island, but when I went off to college in Milwaukee, I got an education in the difference between coastal "cold" and mid-continental cold. I was able to "predict" whether we'd get snow from the aches in my wrists. My "wild talent" evaporated as I got older and the bones presumably knit fully.

I imagine I was absorbing weather reports from the media and funneling the info through my bones.

In my area we have motion sensitive lights in our company parking lot. I've turned them on by waving my arms, when I've stood still too long and they wink out. [-kr]

Paul responds:

The house opposite mine has one of those, but it seems to have been glitching lately. I got up one morning and noticed the light opposite was on. Then it went off. Then it came on again. There was no-one around. [-pd]

And Dorothy Heydt responds to Kevin:

More likely, the cold front was accompanied by a drop in atmospheric pressure. I have a pair of "weather toes" that complain whenever that happens.*

(*The second toe on each foot, which are slightly longer than the big toes, and hence get stubbed--and, in extreme cases, broken-- oftener than the big toes.)

I have two fairly-recently-broken wrists too, one from 2008 and one from 2009. They ache betimes, but not in harmony with the weather that I've ever noticed. [-djh]

And to Paul:

My neighbors used to have a back porch light that did [what Paul describes], some years ago. Now it stays on all night. [-djh]

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

[This is part one of three parts.]

Someplace recently I read a recommendation for *INSIDE THE THIRD REICH* by Albert Speer (ISBN 978-0-684-82949-4) as perhaps the best analysis of World War II. Certainly Speer addresses a lot of the strategic and tactical mistakes on both sides. For example, he says that the bombing raids against the ball-bearing factories in 1943 did potentially damage to the entire war effort, ball bearings being critical to many types of machinery, but then the Allies failed to follow up and completely destroy the factories. (They also failed to follow up on the raids against the Ruhr Valley dams.) But the Germans also failed to bomb strategic factories in the Soviet Union, wasting their bombs on railroads that were rapidly repaired. Tactically, Hitler insisted on troop movements that were completely uncoordinated with anything else. A lot of the tactical errors were probably due to "fighting the last war: "In the table talk much weight was given to experiences in the First World War. Most of the guests had served during the war."

Speer also felt that a contributing factor to the rise of Hitler was the lack of any training or practice in schools of the art of critical thinking, but rather an emphasis on rote learning: "It seems to me essential to point out these lacks, as a result of which a whole generation was without defenses when exposed to the new techniques for influencing opinion."

So much of what Speer says sounds depressingly (or even frighteningly) current.

For example, he talks early on about creating scapegoats:

"To compensate for misery, insecurity, unemployment, and hopelessness, this anonymous assemblage wallowed for hours at a time in obsessions, savagery, license. This was no ardent nationalism. Rather, for a few short hours the personal unhappiness caused by the breakdown of the economy was replaced by a frenzy that demanded victims. And Hitler and Goebbels threw them the victims. By lashing out at their opponents and villifying the Jews they gave expression and direction to fierce, primal passions."

There was also a yearning for "the good old days":

"We were also escaping from the demands of a world growing increasingly complicated. We felt that the world around us was out of balance. In nature, in the mountains and the river valleys, the harmony of Creation could still be felt. The more virginal the mountains, the lonelier the river valleys, the more they drew us."

"The crucial fact appeared to me to be that I personally had to choose between a future Communist Germany or a future National Socialist Germany since the political center between these antipodes had melted away. Moreover, in 1931, I had some reason to feel that Hitler was moving in a moderate direction. I did not realize that there were opportunistic reasons for this. Hitler was trying to appear respectable in order to seem qualified to enter the government. The party at that time was confining itself--as far as I can recall today--to denouncing what it called the excessive influence of the Jews upon various

spheres of cultural and economic life. It was demanding that their participation in these various areas be reduced to a level consonant with their percentage of the population. Moreover, Hitler's alliance with the old-style nationalists of the Harzburg Front led me to think that a contradiction could be detected between his statements at public meetings and his political views. I regarded this contradiction as highly promising. In actuality Hitler only wanted to thrust his way to power by whatever means he could.

"Such remarks [as referred to in Speer's previous paragraph] were usually followed by comments on the way the Austrian central government had crushed all independent cultural impulses on the part of cities like Graz, Linz, or Innsbruck. Hitler could say these things apparently without being aware that he was imposing the same kind of forcible regimentation upon whole countries."

[to be continued]

[-ecl]

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Quote of the Week:

A barking dog is more useful than a sleeping lion.
--Washington Irving

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