



## Lifetime Achievement Awards:

- Roger Deakins
- Spike Lee
- Rita Moreno
- Robert Redford
- Agnes Varda

## Special Achievement Awards:

- To Ryan Coogler, for BLACK PANTHER's distinctive critical and box office appeal
- To the city of Oakland, CA, for hosting 2018's most socially and artistically compelling films about racism, SORRY TO BOTHER YOU and BLINDSPOTTING.

Founded in 1997, the Online Film Critics Society () is the largest and oldest Internet-based film journalism organization. Over 250 members from 22 countries voted in this year's awards.

[Mark is a member of the OFCS.]

**Repair Needed for Something Wilde** (comments by Mark R. Leeper):

I was watching the old 1944 PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY. You remember that was the one where a handsome young man who had outsourced his aging to a portrait. He remained forever young while his image on the portrait aged. It was an object lesson of how the immoral may be punished. The book was by the gay master-writer and poet Oscar Wilde. It caused me to wonder how newer times would have to be reflected in the portrait. Many things that were considered immoral in Wilde's time would now be considered perfectly all right. When homosexuality became legal I can imagine that the painting had to somehow rush around and repair itself. [-mrl]

**More Short Takes On New Films** (comments by Mark R. Leeper):

As I mentioned two issues back, I am seeing a lot of films as I prepare for the voting for the Online Film Critics Society awards. Each year, especially at this time, I get questions of where the films I review can be found. Unfortunately, even though I review the films, I have no special knowledge of where the films will play. I have to report that while I can be helpful in tracking down a film I cannot do anything you cannot. Some of the films I review may show up at film festivals in the weeks to come. Some may play in other parts of the country. Some show up on Netflix. And there are hard cases that may never show up anywhere.

Part of the filmmaker's effort to sell a new film is to get the title and reviews in front of the public and after that to see what sort of a public reception a film gets. If there is not a good reception the film may be buried or may just show up on some marginal service. Sadly this means that there are some films I review that the reader may never get a chance to see. Caveat Emptor. There are web sites that will trace down for you some sources where a given film may be available.

In the meantime let me review three more films. I will rate each on the -4 to +4 scale.

MEN AND MONSTERS is on a theme that several different filmmakers seem to have picked up on. We have had in the news several films of black teens being victimized by police. So far the best I have seen has been THE HATE U GIVE, though I cannot be absolutely certain that if I had seen these films in a different order I might not have picked another one as the favorite of the bunch. Our main character is a high school athlete who looks like he could have a good career in sports ahead of him. Then he sees an incident on the street that leaves a black drug dealer dead. Suddenly the police and the black community are anxious about what he saw or thinks he saw. The style of the film goes all thoughtful and contemplative wending its way to a not very satisfying conclusion. Rating: high +1

MOWGLI: LEGEND OF THE JUNGLE is based on the popular character Mowgli from Kipling's THE JUNGLE BOOK. Rudyard Kipling's most popular repeating character is a feral human child raised in the jungle by wolves. The boy grows to be a member of a community of diverse animals who nonetheless can talk to each other. With MOWGLI: LEGEND OF THE JUNGLE, Kipling's oft-remade story has been adapted one more time. For decades the most familiar screen Mowgli was Sabu. The animals were filmed live action, but did not have much facial expression. Later for decades the Walt Disney animated version was the most familiar. But then it was a cartoon and that is just not satisfying. The animals had facial expression, but in an animation that is not difficult. The new version made for Netflix has CGI-animated animals. That works well. The animals were really textured and that made this a good application for the power of CGI. Once you have CGI it is not really imaginative to use it for JUNGLE BOOK, but it does enhance the story. For me this was the most successful adaptation of THE JUNGLE BOOK. Rating: high +2

BOHEMIAN RHAPSODY is a revisionist account of Freddie Mercury and the rock band Queen. It is a somewhat cliched telling of story of Queen, seen through the eyes of Freddy Mercury. Inspired by hearing music from CARMEN, they decide not to have a formula but to have many different styles and to be constantly experimenting with new styles, some invented ad hoc. I cannot comment on the accuracy of the history of Queen, though I am told it is inaccurate in many ways. (I don't know. For my part, I prefer opera to rock). And as anyone would expect the band has artistic differences and breaks up. In any case, to nobody's surprise you get a standard story of one guy's ego and how it leads to the group splitting. It may be all that events happened in the real world (or not), but then it was a living breathing cliché in the story here. Rating: high +1

[-mrl]

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**THE FAVOURITE** (film review by Mark R. Leeper):

**CAPSULE:** Early in the 18th century two members of the court of England's Queen Anne fight a secret war between them selves to be the queen's favorite. The two would-be court favorites plot and scheme against each other and perpetually get in each other's way. The film could have been called THE MADNESS OF QUEEN ANNE. The setting eventually gets claustrophobic and we rarely are more than a few feet from the Queen's bed. Some of the decisions of how to present the film might make it a little hard to follow for Americans. The history might be a little easier for English viewers. Similarly, some of the humor might go over Americans' heads. Anglophiles may find there is plenty of period detail to keep them busy while they enjoy the story. Directed by Yorgos Lanthimos; Written by Deborah Davis, Tony McNamara. Rating: +2 (-4 to +4) or 7/10

It is the time of the reign of Queen Anne (played by Olivia Colman). Perhaps it might better be said that it is the time of Queen Anne's failure to reign. Anne lets the real ruling be done by close friend Lady Sarah (Rachel Weisz) who effectively and covertly rules in Sarah's place. Sarah's cousin, Abigail (Emma Stone) is homeless and comes to Anne's estate in the hopes of finding work. The household initially makes her a kitchen maid. All the while she is suffering the cruel tricks and jokes of the current staff. It takes people a little while to realize that the new kitchen maid is not one to trifle with. She is a supreme manipulator of other people. And she does not have a forgiving manner, even for her cousin, Lady Sarah. Life at the court of the queen is less a pleasure dome and more a jungle where everyone fights for survival power games. This is a story that should appeal to fans of DANGEROUS LIAISONS.

Perhaps what makes this film most worthwhile is its images of 1708 Britain. The queen does not know if her country is at war or not and is happy just to romp with precisely 17 rabbits. The proper court sport is the racing of long neck ducks. Ducks are used like skeet for the shooting. Period detail is lavished on the film. Architecture, fashions, jewelry, room decor are intricately well recreated for the period feel.

If this were a story involving Henry VIII or George III viewers might have a better idea of who the major characters were and would recognize the historic context of the film. We Yanks may have a little trouble following the politics. It does help the viewer that the two main characters are played by familiar actresses, Stone and Weisz. Even so, the narrative draws the viewer to place the events of the film historically. Director Lanthimos takes some time to show the absurd fashions and occasionally what seems the ridicules dancing of the period. One dance seems to have been borrowed from the film TOP SECRET. Credits and chapter titles appear in a font/style appropriate to the period, but they are very hard to read. The writing on a page will be arranged to fit in two congruent side-by-side squares, one denser with letters and one less. I have seen this font and arrangement used, but I was never sure of the reason. Today it is almost unreadable.

For its period detail this film is well worth the effort to create it. I rate THE FAVOURITE +2 on the -4 to +4 scale or 7/10.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt5083738/referencek>

What others are saying: [https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/the\\_favourite\\_2018](https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/the_favourite_2018)

[-mrl]

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**AQUAMAN and MORTAL ENGINES: Or Why You Can't Trust Rotten Tomatoes** (film reviews by Dale Skran):

Rotten Tomatoes is notorious for failing to provide a reliable guide to film quality. While a high ranking on Tomatoes usually means the film is pretty good (but not always), a low ranking is not a reliable indicator of badness. Consider Peter Jackson's recent MORTAL ENGINES--rated 27% on the Tomatometer. Such a low rating suggests ENGINES is a terrible film--certainly not worth seeing in the theaters. This is just not the case. The film is a beautifully envisioned steampunk adventure, marred only near the end by an excessive similarity to the final battle in the first "Star Wars" movie. See it in a theater if you can, but ignore that silly Tomatometer.

I'm rating MORTAL ENGINES a solid +1 on the -4 to +4 scale, but it is a must-see for SF fans, with stunning visuals.

Probably too scary for little kids since there is a lot of fighting, chasing, and a major battle near the end of the movie.

AQUAMAN starring Jason Momoa (STARGATE ATLANTIS, GAME OF THRONES) is "fresh" on the Tomatometer with 67%, but if you fail to see this beautiful film on the big screen, you will be missing something. Many viewers will be unfamiliar with the comic character, but not to worry--the film is 99% self-contained, with just one minor reference to the Justice League movie, which clearly preceded this film in terms of chronology. I've seen reviewers whine that there too many quests, but it didn't feel that way to me. AQUAMAN is a great entry in the "hero's journey" genre, recalling the best of the THOR movies in its treatment of the lost civilization of Atlantis. Nicole Kidman does a great turn as Aquaman's mother, the Queen of Atlantis, as does Amber Heard as his bad-ass princess love interest, Mera. This is not a film where the hero saves the girl, or where she needs very much saving. Mera's "hard-water" powers and Atlantean strength make her more than match for most DC heroes or villains. The pirate "Black Manta" is well-rendered from the comic as well, although his motivation feels copied from that of the villain in BLACK PANTHER. And yes, in the comics Aquaman was a blond-haired, blue-eyed fellow, but the transition to Hawaii-born (native Hawaiian, German, and Native American ancestry) Momoa is seamless, and he does a great job bringing to life an imposing and formidable hero.

AQUAMAN weighs in with a +2 on the -4 to +4 scale, as it combines a solid story with outstanding special effects and professional acting. There is one scene of Aquaman drinking too much for a mortal in a bar, a great amount of fighting with tridents, and lots of menacing monsters, but no sex. I've seen complaints about the costumes Heard and Kidman wear being too form fitting, but I think it unlikely people swimming in the water would wear baggy, voluminous clothes. Kidman is covered ankle-to-neck in a rather dignified white battle suit. There may be a bit too much cleavage showing with Amber's costume, but by any standard these costumes are pretty conservative. Except for Momoa, of course, who is frequently shirtless and showing off the results of a really large amount of weight-lifting. [-dls]

Mark responds:

Dale, let's keep in mind what Rotten Tomatoes is and does. It does NOT make any artistic judgments. It collects and republishes film reviews. Each reviewer gives the review he/she is submitting a rating what is basically a thumbs up or thumbs down. Rotten Tomatose publishes the reviews it is given and most importantly, it gives the statistics it used to tell what percentage of the reviews it received were thumbs-up. In the case of MORTAL ENGINES it received 112 reviews of which 42 were from writers who gave the movie a thumbs-up and 70 were from writers who did not. It is a one-reviewer-one-vote system. Your disagreement with Rotten Tomatoes comes down saying that majority-rules systems are notorious for making bad choices. I just do not know how to have a more accurate rating system without limiting yourself to reading just my reviews. [-mrl]

#### **THE ADVOCATES and Median Income** (letter of comment by Fred Lerner):

In response to [Mark's review of THE ADVOCATES](#) in the 12/28/18 issue of the MT VOID, Fred Lerner writes:

What does Mark mean when he writes "[Los Angeles is the home of many large and profitable corporations. But in some ways it has more poverty than any other big city in the United States.] When adjusted for the cost of living the median income is \$1300 a month"? Is this per capita (including children), per adult, per household? Without knowing this I can't evaluate the significance of this figure. [-fl]

Mark responds:

It was from a quote that appeared on the TV screen. Then when I copied it later I missed the fact that it made no sense. I apologize and withdraw the statement. I am sorry for the error and any confusion it might have caused. [-mrl]

Evelyn writes:

It appears this is a per-capita figure, based on what I can find through Google regarding income in Los Angeles. The figure was probably given in the documentary. [-ecl]

#### **Super Powers** (letter of comment by Kip Williams):

In response to [comments on super powers](#) in the 12/28/18 issue of the MT VOID, Kip Williams writes:

When I took my first radio electronics class, the equipment included a battery of soldering guns with heat shielded caddies. All but one of these had grounded plugs. I discovered one day that touching the heat shield of a grounded soldering iron and that of a non-grounded iron resulted in a 117V shock. I quickly set my sights on a fellow student and expressed mystification that one had been plugged in for five minutes and the other was just plugged in, but they felt the same. He judiciously tested them, one after the other. I suggested touching both, and he did, with the expected effect. Then wackiness ensued as we

proceeded to reel in the rest of the class. By the time we got the teacher, everybody was watching discreetly. ("Rich kids," he muttered.) [-kw]

Mark replies:

In the words of that great 20th century poet, James Bond, "Shocking. Shocking." [-mrl]

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### **SPARTACUS, RED MOON, and Super Powers** (letter of comment by John Purcell):

In response to various comments in the [12/28/18 issue of the MT VOID](#), John Purcell writes:

Happy New Year, Mark and Evelyn! I hope 2019 will be prosperous for you both, and full of good health. With that salutation out of the way, some quick comments.

I have always enjoyed the movie SPARTACUS (1960). Besides being a Stanley Kubrick movie that definitely is still relevant nearly sixty years later, it followed up an earlier pairing of Kirk Douglas and Tony Curtis, THE VIKINGS (1958), directed by Richard Fleischer, that I also have always enjoyed. Granted, this 1958 movie was a greatly romanticized vision of the Norse invaders' world, but I just like the movie because of its sweeping scale (as does SPARTACUS) and well-choreographed battle scenes, which is again a highlight of SPARTACUS. In fact, all of these upcoming Thursday night lineups sound really good. Thank you for the listings.

Kim Stanley Robinson is one of my favorite hard-science fiction writers these days, and he has never disappointed me in any of his stories or novels. He is one of those genre story-tellers who does his absolute best to get the science right while telling an entertaining story. Robinson definitely, in my mind, deserves more awards than he has. In fact, at the 2013 Worldcon in San Antonio, I was upset that his novel 2312 did not win the Best Novel Hugo; it went to John Scalzi's RED SHIRTS, which was fun, but not as sweeping nor interesting to me as 2312. Oh, well. The review of RED MOON sounds like another winner to me. Thank you for the heads up. Looks like I will be making another trip to Barnes & Noble before the next semester begins.

My wife definitely has superpowers, notably impressing the heck out of our grandchildren by knowing what they are doing not only behind her back, but two or three rooms removed. My superpower is the ability to nap at any time, any place, in practically any position. It's a gift.

With that, I think I am done here. Thank you again for the issue, and have a splendid Happy New Year. [-jp]

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

BOOK GIRL by Sarah Clarkson (ISBN 978-1-4964-2580-5) is to some extent yet another book about the joys of reading. It differs in being aimed specifically at girls (and their mothers), and written from and with a specifically Christian perspective. The former manifests itself in the majority of the books recommended having female protagonists, the latter, in almost all the biographies being about missionaries or other religious figures.

For what it's worth, she recommends THE LORD OF THE RINGS in multiple chapters. Oddly, she also recommends the "Narnia" books, although the disposition of Susan in THE LAST BATTLE is considered problematic by many current critics. (She is excluded from Narnia when all her siblings are accepted, because she became interested in "nylons and lipstick and invitations." Whether the problem is her interest in these things, or her \*exclusive\* interest in these things to the detriment of the "correct" spiritual life is much debated.)

Anyway, for Christian mothers of young girls (or girls old enough to choose their own books), this contains a lot of book recommendations, many of which are considered classics by people across religious and gender lines (e.g., CHARLOTTE'S WEB, MIDDLEMARCH, THE ODYSSEY). But its narrow focus makes it less useful to others. [-ecl]

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Quote of the Week:

Politics are not my concern... they impressed me as  
a dog's life without a dog's decencies.  
--Rudyard Kipling

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