

as if it were one more object. You watch for changes in the cat's facial expression. If the cat reacts to hearing its name spoken more than it reacts to hearing a toy's name, it has recognized it. Otherwise it won't.

I didn't have a cat, but I did have Sam, a very bright dachshund. My brother has had a sequence of Schnauzers. They were nice dogs but none of them was the sharpest cheddar in the cheese shop, if you know what I mean. No offense, brother. The first of these would find he wanted something and would sit in the middle of the kitchen floor howling until whatever he wanted came by or until it didn't come by.

Sam could convey abstract ideas. If Sam woke up in the middle of the night and discovered he could not wait, he knew Mark would help him. He would climb a flight of stairs, come to my room. Now how does he express the idea that outside is where he wants to go? He would scratch on the outside wall, knowing that if he could pass through that wall he would fall down and hurt himself. He did have a bugaboo about heights so he did not want to go in that direction. But he knew where the outside was and he knew he was anxious to go in that general direction. He mastered the ideas of inside and outside. He probably knew much more than that about what was happening. He was fed every day at 5PM. About 4:55 he would walk over to the cupboard where the cans were stored. He would knock a cupboard door open and swing it back and forth with his nose. When he saw someone had seen him he would take out a can--always dog food--knock it over so it would roll, and rolled it to the feet of the human responding to his call. None of us had the heart to keep him waiting any more. But did he know Sam was his name?

Once when my aunt and uncle, Sadie and Sam, were visiting Sadie sat on the couch. She wanted Sam (the uncle) to sit down show she said, "C'mon, Sam. Sit by me." Sam (the dog) was so excited to be included in the proceedings he bounded up onto the couch and nestled between her leg and the couch top. He did not know what he was called for, but someone was including him in the activity. He would do his part.

Decades after his death I realized what Sam was saying. He was bored. I wish I had realized it decades ago. [-mrl]

SOBIBOR (film review by Mark R. Leeper):

CAPSULE: there were many death camps in the network run by the Nazi SS. There was only one that had an escape of any size. On October 14, 1943 there were 400 prisoners who attempted a mass escape from Sobibor. About 100 died in the attempt to leave the camp but 300 escaped, running literally for their lives away to freedom. This is the story of that escape. It is both a document of the barbarity to which the captives are subjected and at the same time it is an escape thriller. Directed by Konstantin Khabenskiy; written by Anna Chernakova, Michael Edelstein, Ilya Vasiliev; languages: Russian, German, Polish, English subtitles. Rating: +3 (-4 to +4) or 9/10

By 1943 the Nazi SS had built and was operating a network of extermination camps to efficiently murder Jews and other captives. Victims were brought to Chelmno, Belzec, Sobibor, Treblinka, Majdanek, Auschwitz-Birkenau, and other camps. They were shipped from Germany and other captive countries, including France, Poland, the Netherlands, Czechoslovakia, and the Soviet Union, and were sent by railroad car, transported under barbaric conditions only to be murdered a short time after their arrival at the death camps. Of the death camps only camps Belzec, Treblinka, and Auschwitz could boast (if that is the word) of greater numbers of murders than the camp Sobibor.

The story follows the arrival of one batch of prisoners through ten days to their escape.

The new arrivals are asked if they know a craft. A prisoner warns one that she must immediately get a job--any job--just to stay alive. Those who cannot claim skill in some useful craft are murdered within minutes. The murder of the unskilled women is dramatized for the viewer. This is just one of the first barbarities visited on the women prisoners. The men could expect an even more painful end.

Director Konstantin Khabenskiy shows us a powerful view of the horrific, but the style remains a little reserved. Women are brought silently to gas chambers. Other dramatizations have shown a good deal more screaming. I cannot say which is the more historically accurate. After one escape attempt a group of prisoners are literally decimated. SOBIBOR is more disturbing than is Steven Spielberg's SCHINDLER'S LIST (1994). Each tends to be not so much about the murder of Jews as it is about the lucky few who would be survivors.

The director tantalizes the viewer by showing us scenes that would be repeated during the actual escape attempt. The prisoners invite a Nazi officer to take an expensive leather coat (stolen property) as a gift. We see bits of the escape plan that pay off (in more ways than one) during the actual escape. Then the tone of the film jumps from dour into a higher tempo with more action. While the entire film has been downbeat (to say the least) the film turns itself into a paean to freedom. It is strong change of tone. [Historical information from Wikipedia's article "Sobibor"]

I rate SOBIBOR a +3 on the -4 to +4 scale or 9/10.

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

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

[My historical sources for this review were Wikipedia and the Yad Vashem Holocaust Remembrance web site. I will freely include facts from those two sources the history of the event. There are multiple dramatizations of the Sobibor escape and they much agree with each other on the precedence of events. I will trust them for accuracy.]

[-mrl]

MUNCHHAUSEN (letter of comment by Paul Dormer):

In response to [Mark's comments on MUNCHHAUSEN](#) in the 04/19/19 issue of the MT VOID, Paul Dormer writes:

[Mark writes,] "This may be an odd usage of the word "lucky" as the film is stodgy and slow and offers little humor, in spite of the subject matter.

I actually rather liked it. It turned up on the BBC many years ago, possibly about the time the Gilliam version came out, and some years later I found and bought a DVD release. Maybe I like stodgy and slow.

There's a great misdirect in the opening scenes that really surprised me when I first saw it:

Gur bcravat fparf ner ng n onyy, crbcyr va rvtugrragu praghel pbfghzr qnapvat gb fhvgnoyr zhfvp. Gura fbzrobql fnlf fur unf gb yrnir, tbrf bhg bs gur ebbz. Lbh fr ure fjvgpu ba na ryrpgevp yvtug naq trg vagb n zbgbe pne naq qevir bss. Gheaf bhg vg unf orra n pbfghzr onyy va gur "cerfrag" qnl. [-pd]

Agatha Christie, Art, and ON THE STEEL BREEZE (letter of comment by John Purcell):

In response to [Mark's riddle](#) in the 04/19/19 issue of the MT VOID, John Purcell writes:

First off--Agatha Crispy?? How dare you! Her name and writings are sacrosanct around here, you know. for this awful pun I should force you to read Nancy Drew mysteries as punishment.

In response to [Mark's comments on art](#) in the same issue, John writes:

When my wife and I were in Paris during my TAFF trip not quite two years ago, we went to as many art museums that we could fit into our cramped itinerary, which was a good half-dozen. One of them was the Espace Dali on Montmartre. Salvadore Dali is one of my wife's favorite artists, and I have to admit that some of his work is truly brilliant and mind-bending at the same time. There is no doubt in my mind that Dali's work is a good example of modern art-- specifically, surrealism--that at first gained the reaction of "Qua?" from most art aficionados. Now, of course, Dali is a recognized master of 20th century art.

But then you get artists like Jackson Pollack, whose work Valerie and I despise. Why did he get so many showings and recognition? He had a wealthy sponsor. So did Andy Warhol. If you're an artist with a deep-pocket investor to bankroll your art shows and promote you, then you are all set. Oh, and don't get Valerie started on "public taste" in modern art. You might be in for an hours-long harangue as a result.

In response to [Joe Karpierz's review of ON THE STEEL BREEZE](#) in the same issue, John writes:

Thanks for the word about Alastair Reynolds' novel, ON THE STEEL BREEZE. That is one I have not yet read mainly because I don't have a copy. I do have BLUE REMEMBERED EARTH, and really enjoyed that novel. Off in search I go for the sequel.

Many thanks for the issue, and take care. [-jp]

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

Once again, it's Retro Hugo time; I will start with the novels, or at least some of them.

CONJURE WIFE by Fritz Leiber, Jr. (ISBN 978-0-765-32406-1) was made into the film BURN, WITCH, BURN, and the 1962 Berkley edition has the latter title in bigger letters on the cover than the book's actual title. (In Britain, it was titled NIGHT OF THE EAGLE.) The idea that witchcraft works, and that basically all women use it, put CONJURE WIFE clearly in the fantasy realm in 1943. Only much later did we start seeing witchcraft in "mainstream" novels such as ROSEMARY'S

BABY. As noted below, this is the better-written of Leiber's two finalists in this category, with more attention to prose style than GATHER, DARKNESS!

GATHER, DARKNESS! by Fritz Leiber, Jr. (ISBN 978-1-497-60808-5) has a lot of familiar tropes: the post-apocalyptic society with a religion and priesthood that is really just a way to sell science to the superstitious masses, an underground movement, mind control, ... The thing to remember, of course, is that 75 years ago these were not the cliches they seem now. Taken as written in its time, this is a fairly decent book, not as manic as THE WEAPON MAKERS, but not as well-written as Leiber other finalist in this category, CONJURE WIFE.

DAS GLASPERLENSPIEL [THE GLASS BEAD GAME] by Hermann Hesse (ISBN 978-0-312-27849-6) has perhaps the most complicated history of any of the finalists in this category. Published in German in Switzerland in 1943 as DAS GLASPERLENSPIEL, it was translated into English by M. Savill and published in 1949 as MAGISTER LUDI. It was then re-translated by Richard and Clara Winston and published in 1969 as THE GLASS BEAD GAME: (MAGISTER LUDI). The latter is apparently the preferred translation, but it is worth pointing out that it is the original German-language novel that was nominated. And I'll wrap up my comments by saying that this is the second time I've tried to read this, and I might as well be trying to read the German. Okay, that's a bit of an overstatement, but this is way too dense for me.

THE WEAPON MAKERS by A. E. van Vogt (no ISBN) is a short book (186 pages), but I still couldn't force myself to finish it. I gave up after van Vogt had postulated a weapon that could be used only defensively, a gun that could be materialized from an invisible plane and fire a death ray and then vanish, an immortal, a process that could instantly enlarge an ordinary rat to one twenty feet tall, and a monarchy that has lasted (apparently without any breaks) several thousand years. And I had gotten to only page 45.

And then I discovered that I wasn't even reading the nominated work! According to the "Prospero's Isle" website, the book version was a "heavily rewritten and reorganized version in which the two leading protagonists are essentially merged into the one person of the super-hero Robert Hedrock, a rewrite that necessitated some far-out twists as body transfers and mind-reading that make it a very different and, we feel, considerably less satisfactory tale indeed."

Well!

As with DAS GLASPERLENSPIEL, I suspect that most (if not all) voters will be reading a work that differs from the actual finalist. In one case, it will be a translation, which presumably is accurate as to plot, characters, etc., but in this case it seems to be a very different work--sort of like voting on the 1943 film version of PHANTOM OF THE OPERA on the basis of having seen the 1962 version.

Anyway, luckily I discovered my error and switched to reading the actual finalist instead. It still has a weapon that could be used only defensively, a gun that could be materialized from an invisible plane and fire a death ray and then vanish, an immortal, a process that could instantly enlarge an ordinary rat to one twenty feet tall, and a monarchy that has lasted (apparently without any breaks) several thousand years. I got further this time--halfway through--before deciding that life was too short to read bad books.

Next week, I will finish the novels. [-ecl]

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Quote of the Week:

The Bible tells us to love our neighbors, and also to love our enemies; probably because they are generally the same people.

--G.K. Chesterton

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