

The stories cover augmented reality, floating cities, gene editing, and underwater habitats, among many other sci-fi subjects.

The Natural History of Naturalized Food, Part 2 (comments by Mark R. Leeper):

When I was in Wales I noticed that some Indian restaurants had a dish whose name I did not recognize. It was called a Balti. I had never heard of it served in US Indian restaurants. And it is for good reason. Balti is not really an Indian dish; it is British. But it tastes a lot like Indian curry.

I will tell you some things that even most British do not know about this popular dish. The Balti started showing up in Northern England in the mid-1980s. Some restaurant created it and when it got popular other restaurants started copying it. I do not think anybody knows who invented the dish. It probably was a Pakistani restaurant since Balti is prepared much like a traditional way of cooking for Multani Pakistani communities in Britain. Balti food is cooked in a utensil called a Karahi and is quite similar traditional Multani Karahi cuisine.

Now Balti cooking has spread all over Britain and Ireland and is even found in India. It was so popular that it started squeezing out strictly traditional Indian cuisine in some British restaurants. Some restaurants discovered that if they did not serve Baltis, they just did not get the business. Now just like a lot of our Chinese restaurants have some American dishes on the menu, most Indian restaurants in Britain have a Balti menu. They will serve many different kinds of Balti dishes. Meanwhile back in India, British tourists are desperately looking for Balti restaurants and to keep up with the demand Indian restaurants are starting to include Balti dishes in their menu. It may well end up being a standard dish in India even though it was invented in Britain.

Next week I intend to get to Five-Way Chili. [-mrl]

I AM MOTHER (film review by Mark R. Leeper):

CAPSULE: A young woman (played by Clara Rugaard) has lived her whole life in a huge cyber-controlled-hard metal environment/bunker. This environment is the only refuge from some unspecified sort of holocaust that has killed off the human race. Meanwhile the machinery tries to use the natural mechanics of the girl to re-cultivate a new human race through use of the woman. She is to be both the last of the first human race and also to be the first of the new race of human scientists are creating. Directed by: Grant Sputore; written by: Michael Lloyd Green. Rating: low +2 (-4 to +4) or 7/10

The characters on the screen are referred to only as their generic roles. The main character is known as "Daughter;" the robot who lovingly cares for the daughter is "Mother". The depth but artificiality of a mother's love are provided by a sugary musical quote from Disney's DUMBO.

Mother has been designed to be the ideal loving mother. Mother and Daughter are kept apart emotionally by the formality of their situation, but still love each other. The girl has been told that the world outside their environment and bunker has been destroyed in an unexplained (at least for the viewer) environmental apocalypse. The machine mother is part of a plan to nurture daughter, and to comfort and to do her part in the reboot the human race, whatever that turns out to be. So the girl is to be both the last of the dead Earth and the first member of the new human race

But everything the girl knows is called into question when a human (Hilary Swank) from outside the machine arrives--badly wounded--at the door of the bunker. How is this possible if the entire human race has been obliterated? So far this is reminiscent of two or three different episodes of the old "Twilight Zone" or perhaps 10 CLOVERFIELD LANE.

I AM MOTHER is an Australian-US co-production. The plot is fairly familiar and bits are clichéd. While it has some fresh ideas, sometimes catching the viewer off-guard, the production design could have used a little more work to make it believable. The walls of the bunker were pieced-together units in a style that may go back to ALIEN. Most of the new SF films bad action films on a on a tech-looking background. Here the story is better and the fungible sets are about par. There are some ideas but not enough to make the trip fully worthwhile. I rate it a low +2 on the -4 to +4 scale or 7/10.

Release date: June 7, 2019.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt6292852/reference>

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

[-mrl]

TRAIL OF LIGHTNING by Rebecca Roanhorse (copyright 2018, Saga Press, ASIN: B075RWTMLY, ISBN:

1534413499, ISBN13: 9781534413498, 305pp) (book review by Joe Karpierz):

It's been a good twelve months (give or take) for Rebecca Roanhorse. Her short story "Welcome to Your Authentic Indian Experience™" won the Hugo in 2018 for Best Short story, and at the same ceremony she won the John W. Campbell Award for Best New Writer. She has followed up that success with her first novel, TRAIL OF LIGHTNING, book one of "The Sixth World".

The setting is what appears to be a not too distant future America, which has been ravaged by a climate apocalypse which has manifested itself in the form of rising waters. The Navajo reservation, renamed Dinetah, has been walled off from the rest of the country. Within the walls the gods and legends of the Dinetah people have been reborn, but so have the monsters of the past. While the walls keep out the external enemies of the Dinetah people, the same walls keep in the terrifying monsters of legend.

The protagonist of the novel is Maggie Hoskie, a monster hunter with supernatural clan powers. She's good at her job, but she's a loner living off on her own after being abandoned by Neizghani, who is a god and a legendary monster hunter. The novel starts with Maggie being called upon by the people of a small town who are looking for a missing girl. It's not much of a spoiler to say that she not only finds the missing girl, but the monster who abducted her. The monster's actions are abhorrent, as you might guess, but Maggie also finds out that this monster is something different, something more terrifying, than anyone has previously seen.

Maggie is disturbed by what she has seen, and, prodded by Ma'ii-- who is also known as Coyote--and accompanied by Kai Arviso, she travels throughout the walled in Dinetah reservation looking for who created the fearsome monster and hoping that somehow, along the way, she will be reunited with Neizghani. In their travels, the not only have the usual encounters with all sorts of creatures, but there's a hefty dose of magic thrown in as well. As their travels progress and they get closer to the answer they're looking for, people who don't have Maggie's and Kai's best interests at heart close in to prevent them from reaching their goal.

TRAIL OF LIGHTNING is a well-written novel with interesting characters and an engaging story. One might almost call this urban fantasy, but because of its setting I would call it "rural fantasy". Roanhorse merges her fantasy with the lore of the Navajo people, interweaving both elements to make it a fascinating story.

But it didn't bowl me over. I'm not a huge reader of fantasy, whether it be high fantasy, sword and sorcery, urban fantasy, or any other kind. However, I've read my share enough to know that while the mix of Native American lore with magic and technology may be a bit different and something new to a lot of people, the plot of TRAIL OF LIGHTNING is not sufficiently new and different to make it stand out. Was it a good book? I think so.

One of the criteria I have for judging a book is whether I resented spending the amount of time I did on that book. I did not resent spending the time I did reading TRAIL OF LIGHTNING. However, in my opinion it does not do enough to make its mark on the field to win a Hugo award. I guess I've gotten a little snooty in the last few years over the kinds of books that I think deserve awards. While I understand that my opinion is just that--it's an opinion, and I'm certainly not important enough (or at all) for anyone to take what I say too seriously--I think that in order to win a Hugo a novel needs to do something different, add something substantial to the field. In my opinion, TRAIL OF LIGHTNING does not do that. It's not enough just to be a well-crafted book, like this one is.

TRAIL OF LIGHTNING is a good book and one I enjoyed reading; it's just not a great one. [-jak]

LAWRENCE OF ARABIA (letter of comment by Dorothy J. Heydt):

In response to [Mark's comments on LAWRENCE OF ARABIA](#) in the 05/31/19 issue of the MT VOID, Dorothy J. Heydt writes:

My favorite quote from that film:

Mr. Dryden: Lawrence, only two kinds of creature get fun in the desert: Bedouins and gods, and you're neither. Take it from me, for ordinary men, it's a burning, fiery furnace.

T. E. Lawrence: No, Dryden, it's going to be fun.

Mr. Dryden: It is recognized that you have a funny idea of fun.

[-djh]

HUCKLEBERRY FINN (letter of comment by Dorothy J. Heydt):

In response to [Taras's and Evelyn's comments on HUCKLEBERRY FINN](#) in the 05/31/19 issue of the MT VOID, Dorothy J. Heydt writes:

[Evelyn writes,] "I'm not sure the claim is that HUCKLEBERRY FINN is the great American novel *about slavery*; it is called the great American novel, period." [-ecl]

Right. My junior year in high school, I had an English teacher who was determined to teach us Great Literature (tm), which for him was typified by Willa Cather and Ralph Waldo Emerson, and for reasons best known to himself he kept talking about writers who were trying to write The Great American Novel. And he *despised* [science fiction and fantasy] in any form.

I had my revenge, though. The school had a yearly "literary magazine," which this guy edited. The winning story was a fantasy about a Native American drum dancer whose dance-spells worked, and always made it rain. She got tired of being considered light entertainment, and switched to a war-dance instead....

It was, barely, of professional quality. It had already been published in either AMAZING or FANTASTIC, you know, one of the lower-grade pulps of the 1950s. And I had a copy of it. I gave my copy to the snooty teacher with no comment. [-djh]

MUNCHHAUSEN, BATMAN, and Immortality (letters of comment by Paul Dormer, Kevin R, Scott Dorsey, Gary McGath, and Dorothy J. Heydt:

In response to [Taras Wolansky's comments on MUNCHHAUSEN](#) in the 05/31/19 issue of the MT VOID, Paul Dormer writes:

The film was commissioned by Goebbels and I read that Josef von Baky and Erich Kastner decided that to honour Goebbels, what better than a film about another great liar. (I see that Kastner was a banned writer in Germany at the time and his name doesn't appear in the credits. And in case these accented characters don't go through, the director's name is spelt B a-acute k y and the writer is K a-umlaut s t n e r.) [-pd]

Gary McGath writes:

I have that movie on DVD in German and like it quite a lot. Erich Kaestner was under a ban by the Nazis, but he wrote the screenplay under an assumed name. The "nude women" were pretty mild; they were just topless and standing around in a swimming pool.

At least today, the Germans are much more relaxed about the human body than Americans are. I recently borrowed the German DVD miniseries "Maximillian" from my local library; that had scenes of full frontal nudity. So does GOODBYE LENIN, another favorite of mine. [-gmg]

Paul Dormer responds: I've seen that film on TV a few years ago, and don't remember any naked women.

Off to Berlin in a couple of weeks. Last time I was there I visited the communist era museum which is quite fascinating. Reminded me of that film. And even in the communist era, FKK (naturism) was popular in the east. A few years ago, photographs appeared that some thought might be the teenage Angela Merkel in a naturist camp, although others thought the dates didn't work. (Google Angela Merkel naked.) [-pd]

Kevin R replies:

Only if played by Kate McKinnon. :-) [-kr]

Scott Dorsey responds:

Go see the radio museum in Koenigs Wusterhausen. It's in the transmitting facility that was Radio Berlin International, the big East German propaganda station, and which before that had been the Nazi medium wave station covering the Berlin area. They don't talk about some of the most interesting history but they do talk about some of it. No nudity, though. [-sd]

And Gary replies to Paul:

I said "full frontal nudity," not naked women. It was a naked man. Sorry to disappoint any guys. :-) [-gmg]

To which Paul responds:

Don't remember that, either. [-pd]

Gary suggests:

You said it was on TV, so they may have cut that bit. It was just a couple of seconds and didn't affect the plot. [-gmg]

But Paul notes:

Unlikely. It was BBC4. And in the UK, Channel 4 has a nude dating program, complete with close-ups of genitals. [-pd]

Leading Dorothy J. Heydt to observe:

If Kipling were around, he'd write a whole 'nother version of "Farewell, Romance!" [-djh]

And in response to Evelyn's comments on BATMAN and MUNCHHAUSEN in the 06/07/19 issue of the MT VOID, Gary writes:

[Evelyn writes,] "It's tough to decide which of BATMAN and MUNCHHAUSEN should rank lower. BATMAN is more blatantly racist, but MUNCHHAUSEN was made by actual Nazis. If I were actually voting, I would not even rank them, so that neither would get my vote even if other entries were eliminated." [-ecl]

Given that Nazis don't stand to benefit today from MUNCHHAUSEN, I'd be concerned only with the content. The German protagonist shows himself superior to the Russians, Turks, and Italians that he meets, but that degree of nationalism is pretty much par for the course for movies made in any country at the time. In Italy, he doesn't fare at all well. I find it an amusing light fantasy, and some of Erich Kaestner's subversive touches show through.

The Batman movie sounds interesting from the standpoint of historical study. Hostility to the Japanese during World War II was different in kind from hostility to Germany and Italy. It had much more of a racial element. You can see this, for instance, in the Warner Brothers cartoon "The Ducktators," which apologizes to the "nice ducks and geese in the audience" (i.e., German-Americans and Italian-Americans) but piles on stuff like an "I am Chinese" joke with the Hirohito duck. And, of course, there was the atrocious way FDR treated Japanese-Americans.

One bit which I consider especially subversive is that the Baron voluntarily gives up his immortality at the end for the sake of experiencing love as a normal human being. This seems to me like a rebuke of the "thousand-year Reich." [-gmg]

Dorothy responds:

Oh, I can think of several examples of a mortal refusing immortality, or an immortal giving up immortality, but none of them from pre-WWII. E.g., Digory telling Jadis that he doesn't want to live forever, he'd rather die and go to Heaven; and the Tenth Doctor telling Professor Lazarus that a long life is a burden. [-djh]

Paul says:

THE MAKROPOLOS CASE, originally a play by Karel Capek, now best known as the opera by Leos Janacek (and the first opera I ever saw staged). The opera singer Emilia Marty is revealed to be 300 years old. She has recovered the formula that gave her long life but at the end decides after 300 years, she's had enough. The play dates from 1922 and was Capek's answer to Shaw's BACK TO METHUSELAH. The Janacek opera dates from 1926. (And I saw Capek's grave last time I was in Prague, just days after seeing a staging of the opera. I'll be in Prague again next month.) [-pd]

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

In the 05/17/19 issue, I wrote, "There's always one on each ballot--one finalist that is totally unavailable--and this year it is 'Attitude' by Hal Clement. ('Attitude' is available in NESFA's Clement collection, but I have no access to it.)"

Well, Charles S. Harris pointed out that the NESFA collection was available at archive.org. Apparently in addition to public-domain material, they have copyrighted material, but the latter is available only as a check-out, one person at a time, and with a two-week limit. So I wanted to wait until I returned it before referencing it here.

As a story, "Attitude" is okay, but really doesn't seem to go anywhere. Some astronauts are taken prisoner by aliens, studied for a while, then released. I suppose it's better than some of the other novellas, but I'd still place it below "no award."

Rankings (revised): "We Print the Truth", "Clash by Night", no award, "Attitude", THE MAGIC BED-KNOB, "The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath", THE LITTLE PRINCE

On to the Retro Hugo, Best Dramatic Presentation, Short Form

Short is in the eye of the beholder (and the WSFS Constitution details); four of these were considered feature films in their day.

THE APE MAN certainly has the fantastical content that some people say is missing from so many of the other finalists. The problem is that it is not a very good film. How did this make the ballot instead of THE LEOPARD MAN or SON OF DRACULA, or even one of the "Superman" cartoons?

FRANKENSTEIN MEETS THE WOLFMAN was the first of the "monster rally" films, or perhaps it was the "ur-monster-rally" film. It must have been popular, because many more followed. But it marked the end of having any philosophical underpinnings to the films. Gone are discussions of the morality of creating life, the questions of what to do about an evil you have no control over, ... With this, it became "can the Frankenstein Monster beat the Wolf Man?" (Actually, Universal Studios finally gave up, and acquiesced to referring to the monster itself as "Frankenstein". The argument that it refers to the Baroness is a very weak one.) That said, it is fun enough to watch. It's just not Hugo material.

"Der Fuehrer's Face" is fantasy (after all, it has a talking duck), but really, this is just not the sort of thing to watch one gives a Hugo. As with so many finalists on this Retro Hugo ballot, it shows the effect of its times. The "Volksfilm" style of MUNCHHAUSEN, the blatant anti-Japanese racism of BATMAN, the war itself as the setting in A GUY NAMED JOE--all of these have an effect on the result and how one would rate them, both at the time and now, 75 years later. This might have struck a chord in 1943, but today it seems more a triumph of style over substance, of the animation over the actual content.

I WALKED WITH A ZOMBIE was Val Lewton's second film (after CAT PEOPLE). It had a mixed cast--not all black like CABIN IN THE SKY, but definitely more aware of racial issues than that film. (Given that most of the film takes place in the Caribbean, and at least one major actor is from Trinidad, the term "African-American" would not be accurate.)

The main character (Betsy Connell) demonstrates her cluelessness when she watches in wonder the flying fish from the ship, only to be told that "they're not leaping for joy; they're jumping in terror. Bigger fish want to eat them."

Then when she is driven to Fort Holland, she asks about the figurehead of Saint Sebastian and the (black) coachman says that it came from a ship that brought his ancestors in chains to the island, to which she replies, "Well, they brought them to a beautiful place." The coachman is unimpressed.

And I have to mention Sir Lancelot, the great calypso singer. (I WALKED WITH A ZOMBIE is reported to be the first American film containing calypso music.) He was in two other Val Lewton films as well (THE GHOST SHIP and THE CURSE OF THE CAT PEOPLE) as well as ZOMBIES ON BROADWAY, but was known primarily as a singer.

In short, this is a great film. I re-watch it every couple of years or so, and always find something new in it. This time around, that might be how it was looking at issues of race three-quarters of a century before it became the hot topic in film.

THE SEVENTH VICTIM (Val Lewton's fourth film) is also a great movie, full of atmosphere and style. But for those who feel that PHANTOM OF THE OPERA is not Hugo-eligible, this will be equally problematic. There is no definite fantastical element. There are devil worshippers, but whether there is an actual Devil, and whether their worship is even rewarded is never addressed. It is not like the Dennis Wheatley films about Devil worship, where it is blatant that there is a Devil and demonic forces, and they act upon people in this world. But Val Lewton's films tend to have this ambiguity, and this is a perfect example--and one of Lewton's best. (For the record, Lewton's films fall into three categories. There are the average, his five non-genre films. There are the good but flawed films: THE GHOST SHIP, THE CURSE OF THE CAT PEOPLE, BODY SNATCHER, ISLE OF THE DEAD, and BEDLAM. And there are the great films: CAT PEOPLE, I WALKED WITH A ZOMBIE, THE LEOPARD MAN, and THE SEVENTH VICTIM. That the last three were all 1943 films makes that year Val Lewton's "annus mirabilis."

I will admit that I saw "Super-Rabbit" only with a (mediocre) commentary covering a lot of the soundtrack, but it did not strike me as anything special.

Rankings: I WALKED WITH A ZOMBIE, THE SEVENTH VICTIM, FRANKENSTEIN MEETS THE WOLFMAN, no award, THE APE MAN, "Der Fuehrer's Face", "Super-Rabbit"

[-ecl]

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Quote of the Week:

Nature loves a burst of energy.
--Boe Lightman

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