

# MT VOID 01/15/21 -- Vol. 39, No. 29, Whole Number 2154



Mt. Holz Science Fiction Society  
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[http://leepers.us/mtvoid/back\\_issues.htm](http://leepers.us/mtvoid/back_issues.htm).

### Mini Reviews, Part 4 (film reviews by Mark R. Leeper):

Here is the fourth batch of mini-reviews, three documentaries connected with politics. Apparently, while the production of narrative films slowed down this year, that of documentaries was not as affected, and no one is delaying the release of their latest blockbuster documentary because of the pandemic. In fact, the pandemic, and the election year, probably resulted in even more documentaries than usual.

**TOTALLY UNDER CONTROL:** This documentary takes a comprehensive and convincing look at COVID-19 from its scientific underpinnings to its political ramifications. Controversies are covered in detail, and there is a strong political dimension in the narrative. I will not say whether I agree or disagree (but somebody sure said something right). It did not waste time but came to the point and explained it. Released 10/13/20; available on Hulu. Rating: low +3 (-4 to +4)

**SLAY THE DRAGON:** This is a documentary about the fight against gerrymandering. There are a few too many sequences of young politicians running around and screaming. On the whole, this is a relatively familiar format (talking heads), though it does have to convey a complicated mathematical situation. Released 04/03/20; available on Amazon Prime and on DVD from Netflix. Rating: +2 (-4 to +4)

**FEELS GOOD MAN:** Essentially this is the story about three full-grown men who, needing excitement in life, built themselves a sort of tree house for adults. Matt Furie created Pepe the Frog as a children's character, but a right-wing movement chose it to represent them. Furie had initially been sanguine about other artists using Pepe without permission, but this appropriation was too much. Released 10/19/20; available on Amazon Prime. Rating: low +1 (-4 to +4)

[-mrl]

### THE LODGE (film review by Mark R. Leeper):

THE LODGE is a production from Hammer Films. Hammer was a British company that specialized in horror and science fiction from

the mid 1950s to the late 1970s. In 2008 Hammer came back or (as many claim) a modern production company acquired the right to use the Hammer name. The new Hammer has even taken images from the original Hammer's films as part of their logo. Their first film was the obscure BEYOND THE RAVE, but their second was the much better known English-language version of John Ajvide Lindqvist's novel LET THE RIGHT ONE IN. That novel had been adapted in 2008 by Tomas Alfredson into a Swedish language film with the same title as the novel. This re-use of other material makes sense since Hammer won their stripes making English cinema versions of television shows and American horror franchises.

Frankly I do not care if they really are or are not the original Hammer. They are making movies in the best tradition of Hammer Films. They are not in the same style, but they are solid genre films made intelligently to make the most of a smallish budget. That is the best tradition of the original Hammer. Even if they only bought the name, they are doing well by it.

THE LODGE is their eighth film. A frozen environment is the setting, leaving the viewer with a chilled feeling. Two children, their stepmom-to-be, and a dog are trapped in an isolated New England cabin in the woods during a blizzard. (The father has taken the car to go back to the city.) Compared with old Hammer horror films, there is more atmosphere, but the same or less character development. The pacing is slow, perhaps to add to the feeling of isolation. Soon strange things start happening. While not quite up to Hammer's LET ME IN or THE WOMAN IN BLACK, it has its moments.

Released 02/07/20; available on Amazon Prime. Rating: high +1 (-4 to +4)

The new Hammer Films productions are:

- BEYOND THE RAVE (2008)
- LET ME IN (2010)
- THE RESIDENT (2011)
- WAKE WOOD (2011)
- THE WOMAN IN BLACK (2012)
- THE QUIET ONES (2014)
- THE WOMAN IN BLACK: ANGEL OF DEATH (2015)
- THE LODGE (2019)

Film credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt7347846/reference>

What others are saying: [https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/the\\_lodge](https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/the_lodge)

[-mrl]

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**INTERLIBRARY LOAN** by **Gene Wolfe** (copyright 2020, Tor, \$25.99 hardcover, 238pp, ISBN 978-1-250-24236-5) (book review by Joe Karpierz):

INTERLIBRARY LOAN is the sequel to 2015's A BORROWED MAN, and is the final novel of Gene's Wolfe's outstanding and celebrated career. The novel continues the story of a reclone of a mystery novelist named Ern A. Smithe. You may remember that a reclone is a being that has been cloned from the original, and in fact there can be and often are many copies of the reclone. Reclones reside in libraries, and can be checked out just like any other book, and must be returned like any other book. And just like any other book, the more a reclone is checked out, the longer it stays in the library. If a reclone isn't checked out often enough, it is removed from the library by being sent to the Fire.

The new story has Ern A. Smithe getting sent to a library in small town Polly's Cove on an interlibrary loan along with a cookbook writer--Millie--and a romance writer--Rose. Ern is checked out of the library by a girl name Chandra on behalf of her mother, Adah Fevre. There are a couple of mysteries for Ern to get involved with here. The first is that Adah's husband Barry, an anatomy professor, has been missing for several years. The second is a book that contains a map which appears to mystical powers. Adah hopes that Ern can help her with these mysteries, as the last copy of Ern that she check out from the library was unable to help her with the problem.

And that's just the beginning.

After poking around at the university where Barry taught, Ern charts a boat to head to Corpse Island, where Barry supposedly gets cadavers to aid in teaching his anatomy class. Along with Ern, Auda, and Chandra comes another reclone named Audrey who is known for her seafaring exploration books and exploits. The group encounters a surprise during their journey (it would be spoilers, I suppose, to say what the surprise is, but I suspect that it's not hard to figure out) to the island, where they discover that the residents have been burying their dead in ice caves for hundreds of years. Other things that the reader encounters include a magical box that seems to shift realities, a portal to another world that reminds the reader of the portal from A BORROWED MAN, the discovery of the death of the aforementioned prior version of Ern A. Smithe, a western writer reclone, and a hidden treasure, among other things.

The problem is that the story doesn't seem to fit together very well, if at all. While it turns into something else entirely--even though I'm not sure what that something else is--after starting out as a straightforward mystery, it's hard to discern where Wolfe was going with all this. The book also ended on something of a cliffhanger, which leads me to believe that Wolfe intended to write a third book in the series.

INTERLIBRARY LOAN was turned into the publisher not long before Wolfe's death. If that is indeed the case, then there was no time for editing to be done, for plot threads to be tightened up, and for the story to be made more coherent. It is a book that feels rushed, and probably was. If so, one could argue that it shouldn't have been published at all. Then again, as I stated in my review of A BORROWED MAN, I found reading the classic Gene Wolfe stories difficult, potentially because I wasn't mature enough as a reader

back then. I think I'm a better reader now than I was then, and while I could be wrong about this book, I don't feel I am. There is a Twitter account that says, and I may be paraphrasing here, "You don't read Gene Wolfe, you reread Gene Wolfe". I will not be rereading INTERLIBRARY LOAN. [-jak]

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**Biopics and RADIOACTIVE** (letters of comment by Gary McGath, Peter Trei, Scott Dorsey, and John Halpenny):

In response to [Evelyn's comments on biopics and Mark's review of AMMONITE](#) in the 01/08/21 issue of the MT VOID, Gary McGath writes:

I don't care very much for biopics, for this reason. If I watch one, I try to think of it as an alternate-universe version of the historical people portrayed. [-gmg]

Peter Trei writes:

My favorite bit of Marie Curie trivia is that she was utterly cavalier about radiation safety. She, her lab, her possessions, her home became heavily contaminated. In later life, when she visited other labs, radiation alarms would go off. She and her husband now lie in the Pantheon in Paris, interred in inch thick lead coffins.

<https://www.thevintagenews.com/2018/02/27/marie-curie/>

[-pt]

Scott Dorsey replies:

Everybody was at the time, though. Nobody had any idea that this energy would be harmful. People were carrying around pitchblende in their pockets, walking around energized x-ray tubes, and drinking radium water for their health. [-sd]

John Halpenny adds:

Radium was the wonder drug of the time. There is a "Radium Hot Springs" in Alberta. I was once in Bad Gastein, Austria, and was told that the naturally radioactive caves were at one time famous for their healing properties. You could still go in for a form of radiation therapy if you had a note from your doctor. [-jh]

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**Weather in Texas, Incorrect Dates, RADIOACTIVE and THE AERONAUTS, and Solar Pons** (letter of comment by John Purcell):

In response to [various comments](#) in the 01/08/21 issue of the MT VOID, John Purcell writes:

I hope you two are doing well today, and that the weather over there in New Jersey today is better than here in SouthCentralEastern Texas. At present it is a whopping 35 degrees Fahrenheit here, which is about 20 degrees colder than the normal January temperature in this region. It's also raining as this cold front zings rapidly through--should be back into the 50s and 60s in two days--and there is even a chance of snow flurries this evening. That's going to blow quite a few Texan minds. I consider this sweater weather. In fact, yesterday when it was in the mid-40s and the sun was out, which is really nice weather to me, an ex- Minnesotan, so when I went to Kroger to get a few items I was in jeans, t-shirt, sneakers, no jacket. It felt great to me. Most of the native Texans going into and out of the store were dressed up as if they were part of the Shackleton Expedition. Needless to say, I garnered some very strange looks. The good news is that everyone I saw was wearing face masks, so at least that part of the national situation is seeping through skulls here.

Anyway, a couple comments on the latest MT VOID are in order, notably your date snafu. Personally, I don't want a do-over of 2020; so far the first week and half of 2021 has not been much of an improvement. At this point--given what happened in Washington, DC a few days ago and its ensuing fallout--the only thing that could improve 2021 right now is whether a large asteroid impacts Earth or the Yellowstone supervolcano erupts before Easter; the sooner the better. Life has definitely taken a surreal turn, and I truthfully do not want to see what happens next.

Valerie and I watched both RADIOACTIVE and THE AERONAUTS on Amazon Prime on our not-so-new-anymore large screen television, and we enjoyed them both. As biopics go, they were good, and we thought that the focus on Marie Curie's personal life, especially the misogyny of the academic world that she endured, was well done, giving the viewers more than just the historical viewpoint into her life's work. I really liked the focus being how her work fit into her life. A good movie. As for the AERONAUTS, that was pure escapism based on a real event. Even so, it was fun, and the visual effects on our 50-inch screen were like being in a private theater. Very cool! They made you feel as if you were actually on top of that balloon or floating along in the gondola with the characters. Taken simply as an adventure film, THE AERONAUTS works just fine. We have not seen TESLA or AMMONITE yet, but they are saved on our watchlist. Valerie and I tend to like historical mash-up biopics, just fyi.

I have always enjoyed Sherlock Holmes stories, whether part of the original canon or pastiches, and the Solar Pons tales of August Derleth are very good. I need to find them either online or at our Half-Price Bookstore.

Holy crap! It started snowing outside. [-jp]

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

I have returned to W. Somerset Maugham and his COLLECTED STORIES (VOLUME 2) (Penguin, ISBN 978-0-14-001872-7). These are billed as being set in the South Seas, though there are some set elsewhere. Most are novelette length (around 15,000 words, give or take). All are gems, and usually have a bit of a twist in the end, albeit an often predictable one.

"The Vessel of Wrath" tells of Miss Jones, a straight-laced missionary and her attempts to reform (or have deported) Ginger Ted a drunken reprobate. But the fates conspire to send them together to a an isolated cholera-ridden island.

In "The Force of Circumstance", while Guy, a white planter from Malaya, is on vacation in England, he meets and marries Doris and takes her back to Malaya. She is full of good intentions but discovers there are aspects of Malaya that she simply cannot adjust to.

"Flotsam and Jetsam" has another Englishwoman who marries a white expatriate in Malaya. She expects glamour and excitement in the jungle, but finds that she has made a big mistake.

On the surface, "The Alien Corn" is a well-known story: someone wants to undertake an artistic career against his family's wishes, both sides agree to a trial period at the end of which his talent will be judged by an expert, and if he is lacking, he will give up his hopes and follow the family's plans. But there is another level: the family is Jewish, but has changed their name and hides their origins, trying to pass themselves off as Englishmen for many generations.

But the story also raises the question of whether Maugham is promoting anti-Semitic tropes. Certainly the first-person narrator seems to do so, but the question is whether those view represent Maugham's views, or the views held by much of the English population of the time and placed into his narrator. Not every first-person narrator is the voice of the author. And in fact Maugham says this explicitly in a preface to this volume: "... the 'I' who writes is just as much a character in the story as the other persons with whom it is concerned." Maugham goes on to use this as an explanation of why the 'I' may be better in some way than the writer, but it is also a reason not to attribute all the characteristics of 'I' to the writer.

In this case, however, one can discover that Maugham expressed anti-Semitic feelings when writing as himself, so one much concede that these negative views are indeed Maugham's own. Then, of course, one is left with the question of what to do when an artist whose work you respect turns out to be (as one person has understated it) "a jerk." As that person has said, it is much easier when the artist has been dead for years (and especially if their work is in public domain), but more difficult if your continued purchase of their books or music or whatever is putting money in their pocket. [-ecl]

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Quote of the Week:

Every time you stop a school, you will have to build  
a jail. What you gain at one end you lose at the other.  
It's like feeding a dog on his own tail. It won't  
fatten the dog.

--Mark Twain

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