

MT VOID 01/29/21 -- Vol. 39, No. 31, Whole Number 2156

```

e e e e e @ @ e e e e e @ @ @ e e e e e e e e e e e e e e e e e e
e @ @ e e @ @ e @ @ e e e e e e e e e e e e e e e e e e e e e
e e e e e e e e e e e e e e e e e e e e e e e e e e e e e e
e e e e e e e e e e e e e e e e e e e e e e e e e e e e e e
e e e e e e e e e e e e e e e e e e e e e e e e e e e e e e
  
```

Mt. Holz Science Fiction Society
01/29/21 -- Vol. 39, No. 31, Whole Number 2156

Table of Contents

- [Science Fiction \(and Other\) Discussion Groups, Films, Lectures, etc. \(NJ\)](#)
- [My Picks for Turner Classic Movies for February](#) (comments by Mark R. Leeper)
- [Online Film Critics Society Annual Movie Awards](#)
- [Vasili Alexandrovich Arkhipov Day](#) (comments by Evelyn C. Leeper)
- ["The Ballad of Black Tom" by Victor LaValle](#) (audiobook review by Joe Karpierz)
- [This Week's Reading](#) (THE MALACIA TAPESTRY and THE GREAT GATSBY)
(book comments by Evelyn C. Leeper)
- [Quote of the Week](#)

Co-Editor: Mark Leeper, mleeper@optonline.net
Co-Editor: Evelyn Leeper, eleeper@optonline.net
Sending Address: evelynchmelisleeper@gmail.com

All material is copyrighted by author unless otherwise noted.
All comments sent or posted will be assumed authorized for inclusion unless otherwise noted.

To subscribe or unsubscribe, send mail to eleeper@optonline.net
The latest issue is at <http://www.leepers.us/mtvoid/latest.htm>.
An index with links to the issues of the MT VOID since 1986 is at http://leepers.us/mtvoid/back_issues.htm.

Science Fiction (and Other) Discussion Groups, Films, Lectures, etc. (NJ):

At the risk of stating the obvious, now that all the meetings are Zoomed, you don't have to be in Old Bridge or Middletown or even New Jersey to participate. So if we are discussing one of your favorites, contact me at for Zoom information.

Both the Old Bridge and Middletown groups have (temporarily, we hope) switched to Zoom meetings. For Middletown meetings, participants need to watch the film on their own ahead of time as well as reading the book.

February 4, 2021 (MTPL), 7:30PM: THE PRESTIGE (2006) & novel
by Christopher Priest

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MHijGNSQ6TI>

rental: <https://www.amazon.com/gp/video/detail/B003QS67F0/>

<https://tinyurl.com/Priest-The-Prestige-1995>

March 4, 2021 (MTPL), 7:30PM: ENEMY MINE (1979) & novella

by Barry B. Longyear

rental: <https://www.amazon.com/Enemy-Mine-Dennis-Quaid/dp/B000I9U9ZE/>

https://archive.org/stream/Asimovs_v03n09_1979-09/Asimovs_v03n09_1979-09_djvu.txt

reprinted in: REEL FUTURES, THE REEL STUFF

March 25, 2021 (OBPL), 7:00PM: THE MINISTRY FOR THE FUTURE

by Kim Stanley Robinson

My Picks for Turner Classic Movies for February (comments by Mark R. Leeper):

The first adaptation of John W. Campbell's "Who Goes There" was also the first Fifties science fiction film that really still makes good entertainment. It is not just an artifact but a genuine thriller. It works in part because it is timeless. Destination Moon became outdated when the government decided it would put a man on the moon. But except for references to Truman and the Cold War, THE THING FROM ANOTHER WORLD could be set in the current decade.

The plot is simple enough. A flying saucer crashes near the North Pole. Men from a small military installation nearby accidentally destroy the saucer but bring back its pilot frozen alive in ice. A second accident allows the alien to thaw and come to life. The creature proceeds to lay siege to the base.

What makes this film so watchable is that it takes the time to create interesting people and has its share of whimsical characterization. It also is very subtle in its handling of the alien. The viewer spends the whole film without ever getting a really clear view of the alien visitor. This makes the alien considerably more frightening. In fact, the stills of James Arness, released well after the film had run its course in theaters, are almost silly-looking. So the film has very little in the way of special effects and not much monster makeup, just intelligent characters in an unusual situation. And the film still stands up forty-three years after it was made.

There is a lesson there that modern filmmakers would do well to heed, if they still can.

This was also the first science fiction film of the Fifties to carry an anti-science theme. It was scientists who wanted to push things too far without thinking of the consequences to humanity. In this case Prof. Carrington wants to breed cuttings from the alien, a thinly disguised statement that it was the fault of scientists rather than the military that nuclear weapons were used. These days the military and not the scientist would be more likely to be at fault, as it was in *ANDROMEDA STRAIN*, but this was less than six years after the end of World War II and much of the public still identified itself with the military.

The dialogue is done in a realistic style that was uncommon to films. Dialogue overlaps so that more than one actor may be talking at once.

Overlapping dialogue probably makes this a difficult film to dub into other languages. Of course, the score is by Dmitri Tiomkin and is a classic. Tiomkin's tones musically evoke images of an Arctic blizzard with a pounding wind. It is definitely a chilling score.

The best touch: Finding the shape of the craft to be circular could have been silly but instead is genuinely thrilling. On the other hand, the silly "melting-man" climax was a mistake.

This is certainly one of the top three or four science fiction films of the Fifties and deserves a low +3 on the -4 to +4 scale.

[*THE THING FROM ANOTHER WORLD*, February 4, 6:30 PM]

Also running on TCM is *THE GIANT BEHEMOTH* (1959) (also known as *BEHEMOTH THE SEA MONSTER*), the second of Eugene Lourie's "Dino" trio, following *THE BEAST FROM 20,000 FATHOMS* (1953) and preceding *GORG0* (1961). These were the first three English-language sound films to have dinosaurs destroying cities. The film stars sometimes-cowboy Gene Evans and popular British television actor Andre Morrell.

For some of the animation effects they used a model built on an armature which gave the dinosaur from the front the look of a capital 'A'. It's not clear where that came from but it creates a different look for this film's beast. The model that was going to be used for the distance shots in the Thames and elsewhere was broken when the producer let his son play with it the weekend before they wanted to film it. As a result, the film does not show as much of the behemoth as people wanted/expected, and some scenes are not very good. The film also uses some inexpensive video effects to portray radiation. Still, it is a film of interest that not many fans have seen.

[*THE GIANT BEHEMOTH*, February 4, 12:00 N]

[-mrl]

Online Film Critics Society Annual Movie Awards:

- BEST PICTURE - *NOMADLAND*
- BEST ANIMATED FEATURE - *SOUL*
- BEST DIRECTOR - Chloe Zhao, *NOMADLAND*
- BEST ACTOR - Delroy Lindo, *DA 5 BLOODS*
- BEST ACTRESS - Frances McDormand, *NOMADLAND*
- BEST SUPPORTING ACTOR - Leslie Odom Jr., *ONE NIGHT IN MIAMI*
- BEST SUPPORTING ACTRESS - Maria Bakalova, *BORAT SUBSEQUENT MOVIEFILM*
- BEST ORIGINAL SCREENPLAY - *PROMISING YOUNG WOMAN*, Emerald Fennell
- BEST ADAPTED SCREENPLAY - *NOMADLAND*, Chloe Zhao
- BEST EDITING - *NOMADLAND*, Chloe Zhao
- BEST CINEMATOGRAPHY - *NOMADLAND*, Joshua James Richards
- BEST ORIGINAL SCORE - *SOUL*, Trent Reznor Atticus Ross
- BEST DEBUT FEATURE - Emerald Fennell, *PROMISING YOUNG WOMAN*
- BEST FILM NOT IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE - *MINARI* (United States)
- BEST DOCUMENTARY - *DICK JOHNSON IS DEAD*

TECHNICAL ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS:

- *SOUND OF METAL*, Sound Design
- *EMMA*, Costume Design
- *TENET*, Visual Effects
- *MANK*, Production Design
- *THE INVISIBLE MAN*, Visual Effects

SPECIAL ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS:

- "Small Axe": Director Steve McQueen created a series of films for the small screen that rivals the best of the theatrical features

of the year, that can be seen individually and yet work together to explore a cultural experience largely unseen on big screens, television, or streaming to date.

- Distributor Kino Lorber for being the first company to offer virtual film distribution as a way to help independent theaters during the pandemic through the Kino Marquee.
- Kudos to the independent theater entities that participated in presenting "Virtual Cinema" when forced to close due to the pandemic. Films that otherwise may not have been seen were made available through online platforms, with ticket prices shared by the distributor with the theater.

LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS:

- Rob Bottin (Makeup Artist)
- David Byrne (Composer)
- Jane Fonda (Actor)
- Jean-Luc Godard (Director)
- Frederick Wiseman (Documentarian)

Founded in 1997 by film critic Harvey Karten, OFCS is a professional association that comprises of online film critics, film journalists, historians and scholars from around the world. The membership is dedicated to its mission of furthering the growth of the informed film audience by utilizing the Internet as a valuable source of news and commentary. OFCS provides a forum for its members to communicate and discuss ideas about journalism and cinema and encourage a high standard of journalism across online media platforms.

[Mark is a member of the OFCS.]

Vasili Alexandrovich Arkhipov Day (comments by Evelyn C. Leeper):

Tomorrow, January 30, raise a glass to Vasili Alexandrovich Arkhipov. Without him, chances are that you would not be here.

In July 1961 he was on the nuclear submarine K-19 when its engines started to melt down, and was instrumental in preventing a nuclear catastrophe. But that was just a sideshow.

On October 27, 1962, he was the second-in-command on the nuclear submarine B-59 off Cuba when the United States Navy started dropping depth charges on it. They were too deep for radio contact and the captain wanted to launch a nuclear torpedo. The political officer agreed, but they needed Arkhipov's agreement to do so, and he refused to consent. Apparently his actions during the K-19 crisis helped convince the captain and the political officer to surface and ask Moscow for instructions--which luckily did not include firing a nuclear torpedo.

Had they fired that torpedo it might easily have set off a nuclear war. I don't know about you, but we lived a half mile from a major military base, and in fact my school's back fence was the base's fence as well. (We did those "duck-and-cover" drills, but we all knew that if there was a bomb, it would be close enough that the school desks was not going to be much help.)

So everyone talks about how President Kennedy saved us, and a few people point out that Khrushchev was also pretty critical to the process, but no one seems to remember Vasili Alexandrovich Arkhipov, one of the true heroes of the Cuban Missile Crisis. Vasili Alexandrovich Arkhipov was born on January 30, 1926. [-ecl]

"The Ballad of Black Tom" by Victor LaValle (copyright 2016, Macmillan Audio, 3 hours and 9 minutes, ASIN B0161YR0I8, narrated by Kevin R. Free) (audiobook review by Joe Karpierz):

A few years ago, there was a Lovecraft revival of sorts. Writers of stature were rebelling against the racist Lovecraft, and they did so by writing stories that invoked the kind of stories he wrote without the racism and bigotry, or as in the case of "The Ballad of Black Tom", make that racism and bigotry part of the story in a way that the reader understands how those things shape the characters within. Further, the trophy for the World Fantasy Award was changed from being a bust of Lovecraft, recognizing that nominating and awarding people of color with a bust of a man who was clearly a bigot was just plain wrong. "The Ballad of Black Tom" won the Shirley Jackson award for best novella, and was a finalist for-- take a deep breath--the Hugo, Nebula, British Fantasy, Bram Stoker, Theodore Sturgeon, and World Fantasy Award. It is, depending on how you want to look at it, a retelling, a revisiting, or a rebuttal of Lovecraft's "The Horror at Red Hook". I mentioned in my review of "At The Mountains of Madness" that I was interested in Gothic horror and eventually picked up a copy of THE NECRONOMICON (no--not the one referenced in Lovecraft's stories, but a giant collection of his stories) but never read it. Unlike "At The Mountains of Madness", about halfway through "Black Tom" I decided to pick up The Necronomicon and read "The Horror at Red Hook". I discovered a few things: 1) yeah, that racism and bigotry is right out in front; 2) Lovecraft's writing style was putting me to sleep (although to be fair I was reading the story late in the evening with only one light on in the room); and 3) "The Ballad of Black Tom" is a superior version of the story.

Charles Thomas Tester lives in Harlem with his father, Otis. Tommy, as he is known, takes odd jobs to earn money to keep the roof over their heads and feed them the best he can. The story opens with Tommy delivering a strange book to an odd woman in a part of town where he clearly doesn't belong. He is Black. The neighborhood is white. He tries to be inconspicuous, knowing that carrying a guitar case--after all, Black people are musicians--and wearing particular clothing can in fact hide him in plain sight. It certainly doesn't always work, as he is followed and taunted by white men reminding him of his place, that place being "not here". Tommy seems to know something about the occult and magical things; he knows what the book he is delivering contains and is capable of, for example. This fact lends an air of mystery to Tommy. LaValle is making the reader wonder why Tommy gets involved in this kind of stuff in the first place if he knows that odd things can happen.

He gets the attention of a man named Robert Suydam, who, recognizing Tommy's desire and ability to be hidden, offers him a large sum of money to play guitar at a party he is throwing two days later. He goes to the house a day early to essentially audition in front of Suydam, and enters a house that is very strange, where things aren't as they appear to be. Tommy is afraid, but the lure of money, being able to help his father, overrides his desire to flee. Tommy leaves, but has been followed by a couple of law enforcement personnel, who are tailing Suydam at the behest of his family who think he's not the simple old man he appears to be. What Tommy learns is that Suydam is deep into the mysteries of the Old Ones, and is looking to awaken things that he shouldn't. The meeting is attended by "people like you"--essentially Suydam's words--who will help him perform his unholy task. This is, of course, a case of the white man having people of color, people he feels are inferior, doing his work for him.

The second half of the novella is much closer to the story of "The Horror at Red Hook", as it follows the tale of one of the policemen from the first half, who is tracking down what's going on with Suydam and, eventually, the person we now know as Black Tom, who is Suydam's lieutenant and who has strange powers. This is the part of the story that contains the horrors that Lovecraft wrote about in the original. It is frightening, to a degree. While I'm fascinated by this kind of material, I don't think I've been truly frightened by anything the way I was frightened by the movie ALIEN back when it came out.

Kevin R. Free is the perfect narrator for this story. There aren't a lot of characters for him to try to voice, but those that are there he distinguished between wonderfully. As I'm writing this, I realized that other than servers at a club the characters visit, there are no women in the story. Even the servers are people of color, fitting terrifically with the setting that LaValle is portraying. All in all, "The Ballad of Black Tom" is highly recommended and well worth your time. [-jak]

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

I started THE MALACIA TAPESTRY by Brian W. Aldiss (PS Publishing, ISBN 978-1-84863-792-4) but after about a third I realized I had no interest in it. I went back and looked at the books I had added to my "to-read" list from Time Magazine's list of a hundred best fantasy books, and realized I had little interest in them and they would be "obligation" reading rather than books I actually wanted to read.

I find a lot of books end up this way. When I was younger it almost might have made sense, but at this point I figure I don't have time to waste reading books I'm not really enjoying. Of course, this means I am doing more re-reading of books I have already commented on, which makes it more difficult to fill these columns.

The big news this month, of course, is that THE GREAT GATSBY by F. Scott Fitzgerald (Scribner, 978-0-743-27356-5) passed into public domain. This is (I think) pretty much a good thing, but it has its downside. For example, the "Planet Money" podcast people did a full reading of the book, at slightly longer than four hours. This is less than ideal--a single four-hour-plus track is hard to reposition oneself in. But a bigger objection I have is that they bowdlerized it; at the end they said there were some racial and ethnic slurs that the readers felt uncomfortable saying, so they changed them. (They did say what pages they were on in the Scribner edition, but that's of no use to people who picked up the free ebook from Project Gutenberg.) They should of at least announced this *before* they did the reading, not at the end.

And, please, Planet Money, don't do HUCKLEBERRY FINN. I'm not ready for "African-American Jim" and "Native American Joe." [-ec]

Mark Leeper
mleeper@optonline.net

Quote of the Week:

I finally found out what font they use for alphabet
soup ... Times New Ramen.

--Dennis Johnson

Tweet

Go to [our home page](#) THE MT VOID