

# MT VOID 04/16/21 -- Vol. 39, No. 42, Whole Number 2167



Mt. Holz Science Fiction Society  
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### Mini Reviews, Part 13 (film reviews by Mark R. Leeper):

Here is the thirteenth batch of mini-reviews, this time of four horror films.

**ANYTHING FOR JACKSON:** Apparently inspired by ROSEMARY'S BABY, this is the story of an elderly couple who are attempting to call up the Devil to restore their dead grandson to life. The film nullifies any sympathy one might have for them, and the pacing is slow, but there are new interesting twists in the plot. Released 12/03/20; not yet available on streaming or DVD. Rating: high +1 (-4 to +4)

**THE BEACH HOUSE:** For a long time it is not clear where the story is going. It seems to be just two couples meeting and spending time together, but then it turns into something else. This is an example of how inexpensive special effects can be used to good effects. Released 07/09/20; available on Amazon Prime. Rating: +1 (-4 to +4)

**THE MORTUARY COLLECTION:** The anthology horror film, once a form that was popular, makes a dubious return in this film. Four stories of varying length, plus a framing sequence, comprise this film. The stories are not as good as the old ones (e.g. those in DR. TERROR'S HOUSE OF HORRORS) but they still have some punch. Released 10/15/20; available on Amazon Prime.. Rating: low +1 (-4 to +4)

**ALONE:** This is a standard stalker film set in the backwoods with a pinch of DUEL and another of MOST DANGEROUS GAME. The villain chases the protagonist in woods and/or at night. Released 09/15/20; available on Amazon Prime and on DVD from Netflix. Rating: high 0 (-4 to +4)

[-mrl]

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**HOW TO MARS by David Ebenbach** (copyright 2021, Tachyon Publications, 256pp, \$16.95 trade paperback, ISBN 978-1-61696-356-9, \$9.99 digital formats, ISBN 978-1-61696-357-6) (book review by Joe Karpierz):

What if you were a scientist who was presented with the opportunity of a lifetime: a chance to go to Mars and do research on the red planet? What if there was a catch or two, like a) it's a one-way trip and b) the mission is going to be the subject of a reality show? Would you consider the proposition? If you were offered a spot on the mission, would you accept it, knowing that you'd never come back to Earth, and that your every move would be scrutinized by not only Mission Control, but by anyone on Earth who cared to

watch?

This is the premise of *HOW TO MARS*, the first science fiction novel from mainstream writer David Ebenbach. The idea for the book came from a news story about a now-bankrupt company called Mars One, which was going to send twelve people to Mars on a one-way mission. Ebenbach wanted to explore the idea, including who would even want to do it, who would propose the idea, and how the people who were sent to Mars on the mission would live and survive. It's an interesting investigation into the possible make up of the people who would jump at the chance, and just how they would handle everything that would come up.

To help with that last point, the eccentric owner of the Destination Mars! corporation wrote a handbook that would try help the Marsonauts survive on the planet. The handbook, almost assuredly entitled "How to Mars", is both whimsical and serious. It seeks to provide real-world advice, set down rules for the colony, and remind the Marsonauts that the book itself can't conceivably cover every eventuality that they would encounter. It was also very clear on one thing: there is to be no sex on Mars. It's actually not a bad idea, although if the owner of Destination Mars! actually thought anyone would listen to that particular idea he was mistaken. Clearly, there could be all sorts of relationship problems between the people involved, and social implications for the group as a whole. Not to mention what would happen if one of the Marsonauts got pregnant.

Well, life on Mars, including research, is really boring, even for scientists. The same thing day after day, with nothing new happening, results in so much dullness that the reality show is cancelled and some people actually stop their research. Things got so boring, that the inevitable happened.

Yep, you guessed it. Josh and Jenny had sex, and Jenny got pregnant.

On the plus side for the Destination Mars! corporation, the reality series was picked up again because people back on Earth were of course interested in all the possible sordid things that could happen now that something new and interesting is actually going on up there.

And while one of the other points of the missions was starting to prepare their location for further Marsonauts with the long-term goal of starting a true colony, this was not the way the Destination Mars! corporation wanted to go about it. And so, the novel is really an exploration of the characters and backgrounds of the 6 scientists who were selected for the mission and how those backgrounds prepared them to handle the ultimate unexpected (but really, it should have been expected) situation.

Well, maybe not the ultimate unexpected situation. While the group was hoping to eventually discover life on Mars, they certainly did not, at least not the conventional type of life. No, to this point I haven't mentioned the native Mars life form, which calls itself the Pattern, and how it revealed itself only to Stefan, a Marsonaut prone to anger and violence. I'd like to call the Pattern aliens, but if the Pattern is native to Mars then aren't the humans the aliens? Yes, an age-old question.

Ebenbach's novel is lighthearted and fun, but thought-provoking. Just how would we handle ourselves in the situation the six Marsonauts found themselves, and would our natural humanity take over just when things were entering uncharted territory? Although the question of how our natural humanity would actually play out, it's probably a pretty good bet that things would come out okay in the end. They usually do. [-jak]

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#### Hugo Awards/Lodestar Award/Astounding Award Finalists:

- Best Novel
  - *BLACK SUN*, Rebecca Roanhorse (Gallery / Saga Press)
  - *THE CITY WE BECAME*, N.K. Jemisin (Orbit)
  - *HARROW THE NINTH*, Tamsyn Muir (Tor.com)
  - *NETWORK EFFECT*, Martha Wells (Tor.com)
  - *PIRANESI*, Susanna Clarke (Bloomsbury)
  - *THE RELENTLESS MOON*, Mary Robinette Kowal (Tor Books)
- Best Novella
  - *Come Tumbling Down*, Seanan McGuire (Tor.com)
  - *The Empress of Salt and Fortune*, Nghi Vo (Tor.com)
  - *Finna*, Nino Cipri (Tor.com)
  - *Ring Shout*, P. Djeli Clark (Tor.com)
  - *Riot Baby*, Tochi Onyebuchi (Tor.com)
  - *Upright Women Wanted*, Sarah Gailey (Tor.com)
- Best Novelette
  - "Burn, or the Episodic Life of Sam Wells as a Super", A. T. Greenblatt (Uncanny Magazine, May/June 2020)
  - "Helicopter Story", Isabel Fall (Clarkesworld, January 2020)
  - "The Inaccessibility of Heaven", Aliette de Bodard (Uncanny Magazine, July/August 2020)
  - "Monster", Naomi Kritzer (Clarkesworld, January 2020)
  - "The Pill", Meg Elison (from *Big Girl*, (PM Press))
  - *Two Truths and a Lie*, Sarah Pinsker (Tor.com)
- Best Short Story
  - "Badass Moms in the Zombie Apocalypse", Rae Carson (Uncanny Magazine, January/February 2020)
  - "A Guide for Working Breeds", Vina Jie-Min Prasad (Made to Order: Robots and Revolution, ed. Jonathan Strahan (Solaris))
  - "Little Free Library", Naomi Kritzer (Tor.com)
  - "The Mermaid Astronaut", Yoon Ha Lee (Beneath Ceaseless Skies, February 2020)
  - "Metal Like Blood in the Dark", T. Kingfisher (Uncanny Magazine, September/October 2020)

- "Open House on Haunted Hill", John Wiswell (Diabolical Plots, 2020, ed. David Steffen)
- Best Series
  - The Daevabad Trilogy, S.A. Chakraborty (Harper Voyager)
  - The Interdependency, John Scalzi (Tor Books)
  - The Lady Astronaut Universe, Mary Robinette Kowal (Tor Books/Audible/Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction)
  - The Murderbot Diaries, Martha Wells (Tor.com)
  - October Daye, Seanan McGuire (DAW)
  - The Poppy War, R.F. Kuang (Harper Voyager)
- Best Related Work
  - Beowulf: A New Translation, Maria Dahvana Headley (FSG)
  - CoNZealand Fringe, Claire Rousseau, C, Cassie Hart, Adri Joy, Marguerite Kenner, Cheryl Morgan, Alasdair Stuart.
  - FIYAHCON, L.D. Lewis--Director et al "George R.R. Martin Can F\*\*k Off Into the Sun, Or: The 2020 Hugo Awards Ceremony (Rageblog Edition)", Natalie Luhrs (Pretty Terrible, August 2020)
  - A Handful of Earth, A Handful of Sky: The World of Octavia E. Butler, Lynell George (Angel City Press)
  - The Last Bronycon: a fandom autopsy, Jenny Nicholson (YouTube)
- Best Graphic Story or Comic
  - DIE, Volume 2: Split the Party, written by Kieron Gillen and Stephanie Hans, letters by Clayton Cowles (Image Comics)
  - Ghost-Spider vol. 1: Dog Days Are Over, Author: Seanan McGuire, Artist: Takeshi Miyazawa and Rosie Kampe (Marvel)
  - Invisible Kingdom, vol 2: Edge of Everything, Author: G. Willow Wilson, Artist: Christian Ward (Dark Horse Comics)
  - Monstress, vol. 5: Warchild, Author: Marjorie Liu, Artist: Sana Takeda (Image Comics)
  - Once & Future vol. 1: The King Is Undead, written by Kieron Gillen, illustrated by Dan Mora, colored by Tamra Bonvillain, lettered by Ed Dukeshire (BOOM! Studios)
  - Parable of the Sower: A Graphic Novel Adaptation, written by Octavia Butler, adapted by Damian Duffy, illustrated by John Jennings (Harry N. Abrams)
- Best Dramatic Presentation, Long Form
  - Birds of Prey (and the Fantabulous Emancipation of One Harley Quinn)
  - Eurovision Song Contest: The Story of Fire Saga
  - The Old Guard
  - Palm Springs
  - Soul
  - Tenet
- Best Dramatic Presentation, Short Form
  - Doctor Who: Fugitive of the Judoon
  - The Expanse: Gaugamela
  - She-Ra and the Princesses of Power: Heart (parts 1 and 2)
  - The Mandalorian: Chapter 13: The Jedi
  - The Mandalorian: Chapter 16: The Rescue
  - The Good Place: Whenever You're Ready
- Best Editor, Short Form
  - Neil Clarke
  - Ellen Datlow
  - C.C. Finlay
  - Mur Lafferty and S.B. Divya
  - Jonathan Strahan
  - Sheila Williams
- Best Editor, Long Form
  - Nivia Evans
  - Sheila E. Gilbert
  - Sarah Guan
  - Brit Hvide
  - Diana M. Pho
  - Navah Wolfe
- Best Professional Artist
  - Tommy Arnold
  - Rovina Cai
  - Galen Dara
  - Maurizio Manzieri
  - John Picacio
  - Alyssa Winans
- Best Semiprozine
  - Beneath Ceaseless Skies
  - Escape Pod
  - FIYAH Magazine of Black Speculative Fiction
  - PodCastle
  - Strange Horizons
  - Uncanny Magazine
- Best Fanzine
  - The Full Lid
  - Journey Planet
  - Lady Business nerds of a feather, flock together

- Quick Sip Reviews
- Unofficial Hugo Book Club Blog
- Best Fancast
  - Be The Serpent
  - Claire Rousseau's YouTube channel
  - The Coode Street Podcast
  - Kalanadi
  - The Skiffy and Fanty show
  - Worldbuilding for Masochists
- Best Fan Writer
  - Cora Buhkert
  - Charles Payseur
  - Jason Sanford
  - Elsa Sjunneson
  - Alasdair Stuart
  - Paul Weimer
- Best Fan Artist
  - Iain J. Clark
  - Cyan Daly
  - Sara Felix
  - Grace P. Fong
  - Maya Hahto
  - Laya Rose
- Best Video Game
  - DisCon III used their authority under the WSFS constitution to create a one-time Special Hugo Award Category for Best Video Game. See this announcement for further details.
  - Animal Crossing: New Horizons
  - Blaseball
  - Final Fantasy VII Remake
  - Hades
  - The Last of Us: Part II
  - Spiritfarer

Lodestar Award for Best Young Adult Book (presented by the World Science Fiction Society) The Lodestar Award is not a Hugo Award, but is an Award established by the World Science Fiction Society and administered in the same manner and in parallel with the Hugo Awards.

- Cemetery Boys, Aiden Thomas (Swoon Reads)
- A Deadly Education, Naomi Novik (Del Rey)
- Elatsoe, Darcie Little Badger (Levine Querido)
- Legendborn, Tracy Deonn (Margaret K. McElderry/ Simon & Schuster Children's Publishing)
- Raybearer, Jordan Ifueko (Amulet / Hot Key)
- A Wizard's Guide to Defensive Baking, T. Kingfisher (Argyll Productions)

Astounding Award for Best New Writer (presented by Dell Magazines) The Astounding Award is not a Hugo Award, but is administered in a similar manner and in parallel with the Hugo Awards.

- Lindsay Ellis (1st year of eligibility)
- Simon Jimenez (1st year of eligibility)
- Micaiah Johnson (1st year of eligibility)
- A.K. Larkwood (1st year of eligibility)
- Jenn Lyons (2nd year of eligibility)
- Emily Tesh (2nd year of eligibility)

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

I just watched LOST HORIZON (the 1937 version, of course) for the tenth time this millennium. I have commented on this before, but given the recent trend toward re-evaluating the attitudes of classic films (and books, and other art), I thought I would note what would raise eyebrows these days, not to claim the film should be burned, but to recognize.

- The credits are in a pseudo-Oriental font.
- Conway rescues only the white people, though he does acknowledge that 10,000 Chinese will die
- Gloria talks about "a Chinaman's chance."
- Lovett wonders if the rescuers are cannibals.
- The lamasary seems to be an example of Le Corbusier's Modernism (a European style), which does predate the film's date, but not sufficiently for Shangri-La to have become familiar with it, and build the entire lamasary, especially since they presumably already had a lamasary.
- Chang is played by H. B. Warner, a white man. (He also played Jesus--another person of color--in the 1927 KING OF KINGS.)
- Women are treated as something the men give or take, and fitting the stereotype of obedience and compliance, rather than having an equal say in their relationships.
- The grooms speak English, and the children are all being taught English, even though the native English speakers are a tiny minority.
- Father Perrault is the classic "white savior."
- George Conway calls Chang a "Chinaman."

And completely separate from these is the problem that while one can suspend disbelief about a valley being so salubrious as to prevent ageing, it is pushing it into the realm of the supernatural to suppose that someone who has remained young for years would have all that ageing catch up with them in a few minutes if they leave the valley. [-ecl]

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Quote of the Week:

Never express yourself more clearly than you are  
able to think

--Niels Bohr

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