

WOLFWALKERS: This is an animated film that is the third of the Cartoon Saloon's "Irish Folklore Trilogy". (The first two are **THE SECRET OF KELLS** and **SONG OF THE SEA**.) The story has strong echoes of **HOW TO TRAIN YOUR DRAGON**. It has a very pleasant style of artwork, and a supernatural adventure story strongly influenced by Disney films. Released 11/13/20; available on Apple TV+. Rating: low +2 (-4 to +4)

DOLITTLE: This is a reboot of the 1967 and 1998 films (both titled **DOCTOR DOLITTLE**, the first starring Rex Harrison, the second Eddie Murphy) of Hugh Lofting's book. This version stars Robert Downey, Jr., and does not have the pushmi-pullyu that appeared in the previous two films. It demonstrates the current state of CGI, though some have criticized the implementation. As is common these days, various celebrities use their voices for the voices of the animals. This is a film that starts out looking like it might be an exciting pirate story, but eventually the excitement wears off. Released 01/17/20; available on Amazon Prime and on DVD. Rating: high +1 (-4 to +4)

[-mrl]

And one guest mini-review by Evelyn:

THE WOLF HOUSE: This fairy tale seems like a mash-up of the "Three Little Pigs", "Little Red Riding Hood", and "Hansel and Gretel". It's a combination of 2-D and 3-D (stop-motion) animation, and works at appearing like a single continuous take with a constantly moving camera. (It reminded me of **BIRDMAN**.) But since it took five years to make, it is not likely to have been a single take. The premise is a girl who runs away from a German colony in Chile, and there are swastikas hidden in a few of the backgrounds. Another touch is that at the end it simulates the scratches and wear one sees on these sorts of educational films. This is a must-see for students of animation techniques. Released 03/20/20; available on Amazon Prime and on DVD. Rating: +1 (-4 to +4) [-ecl]

Kolchak, Las Vegas, and Forensics (comments by Evelyn C. Leeper):

We were recently watching **THE NIGHT STALKER** recently (as part of our continuing series of Richard Matheson films, following Matthew R. Bradley's book **RICHARD MATHESON ON SCREEN**). As we were seeing Carl Kolchak visiting crime scenes in Las Vegas, taking pictures, advising the police, and making suggestions, Mark suddenly said, "You know, what we need is a series about crime investigation in Las Vegas, maybe following the same team every week." I assume he also meant one with lots of shots of downtown Las Vegas, the Strip, and other iconic areas. I don't know--do you think he's onto something there?

(Actually, that might be a good idea for a mash-up, with the Las Vegas CSI investigating a crime that some obnoxious reporter insists is supernatural. Unfortunately, Darren McGavin is dead, but maybe he could show up the way Laurence Olivier did in **SKY CAPTAIN AND THE WORLD OF TOMORROW**. Along with William Petersen and Jorja Fox, it would be a killer movie--no pun intended.)

We are also finishing up the Great Courses/Teaching Company course on "Trails of Evidence: How Forensic Science Works", and I found myself concluding that the Las Vegas police as portrayed in the 1974 film were pretty sloppy. They find one body in the middle of a large patch of sand (at least fifty fee square) which has no footprints in it. Do they have a police photographer take any pictures before they tromp all over the sand? No--apparently there *is* no police photographer. Only Kolchak, the newspaper reporter, takes photographs. [-ecl]

THE STEPFORD WIVES (letter of comment by Arthur Tansky):

In response to [Evelyn's comments on THE STEPFORD WIVES](#) in the 05/28/21 issue of the MT VOID, Arthur Tansky writes:

I know that when I read **THE STEPFORD WIVES** for my local book discussion group (back in 2009), I was certain that the wives were not brainwashed, but were replaced by robots. I've still never seen the movie. And I didn't care enough for the book to go back and see how we arrived at different understandings.

In case you're interested, here are the notes I made for myself back then:

THE STEPFORD WIVES by Ira Levin

The book was written in 1972. The 1978 **COMPROMISING POSITIONS** was much more explicitly sexy. Is it the six-year difference or is it the authors? It was interesting reading this so soon after I read CP. I'm not, and never have been, a woman, but CP's woman-to-woman sex talk sounded genuine. SW's didn't.

It's difficult to read this book, knowing the town's secret. Even though it has some nice bits for the re-reader (e.g. Diz's smiling for the first time as he contradicts Joanna's comment that he doesn't want other people to be happy).

I found that this book would be more in the Horror genre than SF. However, it may fit better with Romances.

I was put off by some of what seemed to be gratuitous sex (although understated by today's standards). Then I realized that this book was written not for fen, but for bored suburban housewives. It was supposed to look like just another sex in the 'burbs books, then take the reader by surprise. It can't do that now, and I wonder why it's still popular.

There are also problems with the writing that I wouldn't have expected except in a first novel (which this isn't). I was often confused as to who was being referred to by pronouns.

I was also unsatisfied with a lack of information at the denouement. Was Walter converted to the dark side by propaganda from the

other men, or did he buy the house in Stepford specifically in order to get a Stepford Wife? In a small town, isn't one house a month turnover a little high? Especially in such a town as this?

There's also a bit of a plot hole. If these are animatronic dolls, Bobbie wouldn't have needed a padded bra or a girdle.

Also, I admit a surprise: I expected mind control rather than robotic replacements. I wonder if the movie version used the former and whatever info filtered into my brain came from talk about that.

And if they're that far advanced in robotics, don't you think that maids would have come before replacement wives? (Another reason I don't think it fits in the SF genre--not enough thinking things through.) [-at]

Tom Swift, Jack Ryan, Grand Opera, Sexuality, and Race (letters of comment by Scott Dorsey, Keith F. Lynch, Paul Dormer, Tim Merrigan, Gary McGath, Jeff Urs, and Lowell Gilbert):

In response to [Dale Skran's comments on Tom Swift](#) in the 05/28/21 issue of the MT VOID, did we get letters! Dale wrote, "In this already entertaining mix throw a new version of Tom Swift, with Tian Richards playing a black, gay, and super-rich version of Tom. This is in sharp contrast to Nancy Drew, who in spite of having a diverse, modern set of friends, looks and acts like she stepped right out the original books." [-dls]

Scott Dorsey writes:

I don't think this is a character inversion at all. In the original books, Tom Swift was clearly very, very rich, likely from all those profitable inventions he came up with. He had no real sexuality of any sort, so making him gay isn't that much of a stretch. Being Black is a pretty dramatic shift but a perfectly reasonable one if you are going to update the character. The original character was white by default of course, as things would be in the Age of Edison. [-sd]

Keith F. Lynch responds:

He was definitely straight in the original novels.

I was rather surprised that the movie TOM CLANCY'S WITHOUT REMORSE cast a Black actor to play the protagonist, John Kelly a.k.a. John Clark.

Are there any characters who should never be Black?

(I'm not complaining that Kelly was Black. But I am complaining that he coerced a confession from a suspect, whom he then killed. He's supposed to be a good guy.) [-kfl]

Scott replies:

Was he [straight]? I don't remember him ever expressing any interest in girls at any point. Even the Hardy Boys were vaguely interested in Iola, even if they never made out with her in the rumble seat of Chet's jalopy.

Hmm, now I need to go re-read some of those Swift books. I haven't read them since third grade when I found a stack of them in the school's attic.

Of course [there are characters who should never be Black]. Characters in historical dramas need to represent the original characters. You couldn't cast a Black man as George Wallace effectively. The same goes for characters for whom their race is a dominant factor in their lives and in the plot (again, George Wallace being a fine example).

[Re Jack Ryan] You can take that up with Clancy. [-sd]

Paul Dormer adds:

Coincidentally, a new series about the life of Anne Boleyn is starting of British television. The title role is being played by Jodie Turner-Smith. [-pd]

Evelyn notes:

For those unfamiliar with Jodie Turner-Smith, she is Black. [-ecl]

Keith clarifies:

Note that I'm speaking of the *original* novels, circa 1910. The reprints and sequels may have been bowdlerized.

[Clancy] was unavailable for comment due to death.

To be fair to the movie, he did write positive depictions of coerced confessions. I don't recall if there was one in WITHOUT REMORSE, but there was certainly one in CLEAR AND PRESENT DANGER. [-kfl]

Tim Merrigan adds:

Soon after the (grown up, grifter) Bobbsy Twins were introduced to the show, I looked up the original books and their publisher. (I hadn't known that The Bobbsy Twins were part of that universe.)

It seems that having no sexuality was part of the publisher's bible, unless it was asexual.

[Re characters who should never be Black] Jefferson Davis? [-tm]

Keith replies:

What show [were the Bobbsy Twins introduced to]?

To be fair, they were six years old [in the books].

The original novels in 1904, so they'd be 123 today, hence also presumably not sexually active. [-kfl]

Tim reminds Keith:

Nancy Drew, the show this subthread is about.

But that was the bible for all the titles they published, Nancy Drew, The Hardy Boys, Tom Swift, and several others I can't think of off the top of my head.

I have a question for people who've actually read the books, in whatever iteration. Was Nancy constantly dealing with supernatural investigations? I was kinda under the impression she mostly dealt with "mundane" crimes, missing persons, murders, theft, etc. rather than the ghosts, including the ghost of her biological mother, and hauntings and possessions and curses, the show has her dealing with. [-tm]

Regarding the race of characters/actors, Gary McGath writes:

In opera anything goes. In THE MAGIC FLUTE, Pamina is supposed to be white, but Kathleen Battle has played her (quite well, too). I once saw a live performance of FAUST where Marguerite was white but her brother Valentine was Black. Conversely, a number of white performers have played Aida, who is Ethiopian. It's no stranger than overweight sopranos portraying heroines who are dying of wasting diseases. [-gmg]

Evelyn interjects:

Mark once referred to an opera company's season including LA BOHEME and LA TRAVIATA as featuring "the two tubercular titans of grand opera." [-ecl]

Paul writes:

I have seen the great Jamaican-born baritone Sir Willard White sing Kutuzov in Prokofiev's WAR AND PEACE.

I also saw a review of a production of THE BOYS FROM SYRACUSE where, for each pair of twins, one was white and the other Black. And nobody could tell them apart. [-pd]

Re Tom's interest in girls, Jeff Urs writes:

Wikipedia matches my memory:

"Phyllis Newton--Daughter of Ned Newton and Tom Jr.'s customary social date. Facing death, Tom Jr. declares his love for Phyllis in TOM SWIFT ON THE PHANTOM SATELLITE."

Just the existence of a Tom Swift, Jr., strongly implies that the elder Tom had some interest in women. I haven't read the books, so I don't know if any family details were ever given. [-ju]

But Lowell Gilbert responds:

You seem to be implying the existence of some kind of consistency that none of these stories employed on any kind of ongoing basis. They were reliably consistent with their backstories, the relevant points of which were generally laid out in the first (no, second, now that I think of it) chapter, but not with wider details. [-lg]

And Jeff Urs replies:

Oops. That was me reading one thing and seeing another. [-ju]

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

As I said, I'm going to start with the shorter fiction; not all the novellas are available to me except through inter-library loan, which is currently suspended. (And given my broken hip, even getting the locally available novellas is on hold.) I am not going to do the novels, or (Ghu help me) the series, though I will talk about the long form dramatic presentations (i.e., movies) after I manage to get

SOUL from Netflix.

So let me start with the short story category.

"Badass Moms in the Zombie Apocalypse", Rae Carson (UNCANNY MAGAZINE, January/February 2020): My main problem with this is that there seems to be a never-ending stream of post-apocalyptic zombie movies these days. (Well, more like a surging river, and "these days" is more like "at least the last twenty years".) Is it right to downgrade because of that? Who knows?

"A Guide for Working Breeds", Vina Jie-Min Prasad (MADE TO ORDER: ROBOTS AND REVOLUTION, ed. Jonathan Strahan (Solaris)): I found the style awkward to read, and the ideas familiar (robots achieving [more] self-awareness, unexpected consequences, etc.).

"Little Free Library", Naomi Kritzer (Tor.com): This is a slight variation on the "libraries as portals" idea, but on a smaller scale. (I am reminded of books such as Stephen Fry's MAKING HISTORY, where you have a time machine that can send items back to the past, but only in very small quantities.) This is a more lightweight story than a lot of what we are saying on the ballot these days, but it is enjoyable.

"The Mermaid Astronaut", Yoon Ha Lee (BENEATH CEASELESS SKIES, February 2020): I kept waiting for a big "reveal", and there was one of sorts, but not all that surprising. More a character study than a story with a plot, it operates on a different level than a lot of the other finalists.

"Metal Like Blood in the Dark", T. Kingfisher (Uncanny Magazine, September/October 2020): I managed to totally miss the allegory in this one, but it was still not a bad story. (I won't say more, so as to not spoil it.)

"Open House on Haunted Hill", John Wiswell (Diabolical Plots, 2020, ed. David Steffen): Most haunted house stories are intended to be scary; this one is not. It's not exactly a ghost story, but I would think of it in the same category as BLITHE SPIRIT, THE GHOST AND MRS. MUIR, and TOPPER. In any case, it's a nice change from all the horrific haunted house stories one reads.

Ranking: "Badass Moms in the Zombie Apocalypse", "Open House on Haunted Hill", "Little Free Library", "Metal Like Blood in the Dark", "The Mermaid Astronaut", "A Guide for Working Breeds", no award

[-ecl]

Mark Leeper
mleeper@optonline.net

Quote of the Week:

The analysis of variance is not a mathematical theorem,
but rather a convenient method of arranging the
arithmetic.

Tweet

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