

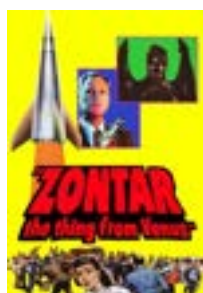
FILMS FANTASTIC 16

The Journal of the NFFF Film Bureau

EYES ON FILM



A CINEMATICORNUCOPIA: What to Watch—



Or Watch Out For...



#16
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FILMS FANTASTIC
The Journal of the NFFF Film Bureau

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Table of Contents

Reviews in Retrospect: Screened at the Globe Heath Row	Page 1
Recent Films Reviewed: The Moviegoer Tom Feller	Page 9
Shouts From the Balcony: Letters	Page 16
Burning to Succeed: <i>Fahrenheit 451</i> (1966) Artemis Van Bruggen	Bacover Interior

Editor's Note:

This is an unusual issue of *Films Fantastic*: it is comprised almost entirely of a wide range of short reviews, whether of recent films or older ones. It is, in a sense, a practical guide to highlights— and lowlights— of science fiction film viewing drawn from the last sixty or so years. We also have the zine's first lettercol, and it's not just fan mail from some flounder. Let us know what you think, of the films or the zine or both.

Films Fantastic is a quarterly publication of The National Fantasy Fan Federation, appearing in March, June, September, and December.

The Federation offers four different memberships. Memberships with *The National Fantasy Fan* via paper mail are \$18. Memberships with TNFF via email are \$6; these memberships include electronic editions of all N3F fanzines, including *Films Fantastic*. Additional memberships at the address of a current member are \$4. Public memberships are free. Send payments to Kevin Trainor, PO Box 143, Tonopah, Nevada 89049. Pay online at N3F.org. Our PayPal contact is treasurer@n3f.org. Send phillies@4liberty.net your email address for a public membership.

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REVIEWS IN RETROSPECT

SCREENED AT THE GLOBE

Reviews by Heath Row

In the heart of Los Angeles, there's a very small movie theater some call The Globe. It is my living room. (We live on Globe Avenue). The reviews in this column will focus on science fiction, monster, horror, B movies, and other films of interest to Neffers.

The Atomic Man (1955)

This quiet black-and-white British production is a sleeper of a science fiction story loosely garbed in the trappings of a noir film, shades of *D.O.A.* The movie grew out of an earlier BBC TV play *Time Slip*, which was transmitted live in 1953. Script writer Charles Eric Maine adapted the teleplay into the feature-length movie and later as the 1957 novel *The Isotope Man*.

It was a story worth returning to (and repurposing) several times, it seems.

The body of an atomic scientist is recovered from the Thames—shot in the back and apparently radioactive. (He seems normal, but photographs of him reveal some kind of glow). But it is difficult to determine who he is, what happened to him, and why, because he's not carrying his identification—and communicating with him is difficult: his responses don't seem to connect with what others say to him.

A magazine reporter recognizes the injured, recovering man as a nuclear physicist, who somehow seems also to still be working in his lab. The reporter and a photographer colleague—Gene Nelson and Faith Domergue are well cast opposite each other—figure out why the injured scientist can't communicate and discover an international industrial espionage threat.

The science fiction aspect of the movie isn't that compelling or convincing, but it's a fun espionage thriller featuring a leading couple with relatively decent chemistry. In fact, *The Isotope Man* was the first of three novels featuring reporter Mike Delaney—clearly a character Maine believed in.



Availability: DVD (Reel Vault, 2015); streaming on Amazon (as *Timeslip*)

Brazil (1985)

An absolutely wonderful movie and a cult favorite. If you haven't seen *Brazil* yet, if you enjoyed *Delicatessen* and *Eraserhead*, and you generally enjoy the work of Terry Gilliam, watch this with all due haste. I'd seen this before but recently watched it again with my wife and son



—and it’s a movie to return to. Gilliam directed the movie and co-wrote it with Tom Stoppard and Charles McKeown, offering an excellent story about a dystopian future full of impersonal offices, pneumatic tubes, and dismal apartment blocks featuring practically organic heating, ventilation, and air conditioning systems.

Jonathan Pryce plays an idealistic office drone who wants to make his own way, avoiding the support of his mother, newly beautiful from plastic surgery. (She reminds me of Lady Cassandra O'Brien from the *Doctor Who* episode “The End of the World.”) He encounters a rebellious HVAC worker—played by Robert De Niro—and an independent woman who reminds him of a woman he dreams about repeatedly. The dream sequences are important and

intriguing, the stuff of high adventure and fantasy. While pursuing her in the waking world—and befriending the HVAC rebel in a way—he draws the attention of law enforcement.

That doesn’t go well, and the ending is open for interpretation. Michael Palin, cast as a friend of Pryce’s character, ends up being assigned to the protagonist’s case in Information Retrieval. Is the ending actually happening? Is it a subconscious dream like the others earlier in the movie? Or did the protagonist... die? It actually doesn’t matter, regardless of your interpretation. *Brazil* is a beautiful, lightly disturbing movie, and its ending works perfectly.

Watch the film for its parts—the office scenes, the inner workings of our hero’s apartment, his adventures with his lady love, his relationship with his mother and friend—and watch it as a whole. Gilliam constructed a compelling world (similar in some ways to that of Judge Dredd) that’s worth witnessing.

Availability: DVD and Blu-ray (Criterion, 2006 and 2012); streaming on multiple platforms (<https://tinyurl.com/brazil-streaming>)

The Mutations (1974)

This British sf-horror movie also titled *The Freakmaker* isn’t important, certainly, but it is interesting. Perfect for a sleepy Sunday morning while folding the week’s laundry. Donald Pleasance was cast as a university professor and scientist experimenting with plant-animal hybrids, either resulting in very large carnivorous plants or bipedal plant men. He leads a secretive, symbiotic life parallel with that of the disfigured owner of a local carnival—played by a heavily made-up Tom Baker just before he was cast as *Doctor Who* —who supplies the mad scientist with people abducted off the street as subjects for his experiments. In turn, the carnival owner occasionally takes the resulting plant men back in to serve as additional “freaks” in his freak show.

Pleasance is adequately detached from reality and unctuously sinister, and Baker’s practical makeup effects are subtly revolting, making his character more monster than man. In his carnival, the denizens of its freak show come off as more and more humane and principled as the plot progresses. The scientist and carny’s symbiotic relationship begins to unravel when

Baker's character, Lynch, abducts a student of Pleasance's Professor Nolter. That leads to the female student's friends—two fellow students, cast by actors just slightly too old to be convincing as students—and a visiting American scientist played by square-jawed Brad Harris who's as much brawn and masculine sex appeal as he is brains. His character is named Brian Redford, perhaps a veiled reference to Robert Redford. Harris's character wears glasses to look more intelligent, and in one scene, he exhorts another male character to act more like a scientist.



One of the female students appears to be involved in the drug counterculture of the late 1960s and early 1970s, so there are some references to marijuana and psychedelics, and the scenes involving the carnival are delightfully moody—particularly one in which several freak show employees are chasing down a victim in a vacant park billowing with mist. The special effects and makeup required to represent the oversized carnivorous plants and plant men are worth some attention. Yet it's actually kind of surprising that Baker was cast as Doctor Who that same year—hot on the heels of this and another film, the TV movie *The Author Of Beltraffio* (based on the Henry James short story) directed by Tony Scott, Ridley Scott's brother.

Availability: DVD (Sinister Cinema, 2008) and as *The Freakmaker* (Desert Island, 2012); streaming on Amazon

The Door Into Summer (2021)

This surprisingly recent movie, based on the 1956 novel by Robert A. Heinlein, is a bit of an odd duck. To be honest, I'm mystified why Toho decided to make the movie at this late date. Despite the quality of Heinlein's writing, he's hardly experiencing a renaissance in cinema. The most recent productions of note based on Heinlein's work include the 2014 Australian *Predestination* (based on his short story "All You Zombies") and 1997's *Starship Troopers* (based on the novel). The novel *The Door into Summer* itself hasn't been reprinted since a 2016 German paperback issued by Heyne and a British Gollancz SF Masterworks ebook and trade paperback in 2013. And the novel, which focuses on two modes of time travel and the creative resolution of a time-travel paradox, as well as corporate gamesmanship, includes some problematic aspects, including a May-September romance involving a 12-year-old girl and a 28-year-old engineer. So it's an interesting choice.

But there is a cat in the book. Maybe that's enough.

Actors Kento Yamazaki and Naohito Fujiki star in the lead male roles, one as the heroic engineer and entrepreneur, originally from the year 1995, and the other as his android creation in the year 2025. Yamazaki's a heartthrob, really, a model who starred in the 2015 live-action TV series *Death Note*, which adapted the manga and subsequent anime, as well as the 2018 medical drama remake *Good Doctor*.

Fujiki also starred in *Good Doctor*. The movie's portrayal of 1995 and 2025 is relatively flat and similarly styled, with the future of 2025 a slightly cleaner, more streamlined, softly lit view of the current day—though with driverless taxicabs, willowy skyscrapers, and androids, mostly in service roles. And the special effects are few and subtle, pleasantly done.

For the most part, the movie stays true to the book, though the preteen girl of the

novel is 17 in the movie, which is convenient and slightly more comfortable. Key scenes from the narrative—the shareholders’ meeting and betrayal that undoes the engineer’s future and fortune, the excitement involving the escape of the cat and the theft of a truck, the arrangements to enter “cold sleep” and remain in suspended animation for 20 years (30 in the book), the discovery of advanced technology similar to that of the engineer’s rudimentary designs in the future, the meeting with the professor who developed a time machine—are all present, though they are cleaner and more pat in the movie, more tidily pre-arranged by the engineer. The primary difference between the movie and the book is that the android—the 2025 version of Pete, named after the cat—accompanies the engineer back into the past. That doesn’t occur in the novel and doesn’t really need to, effectively making this a buddy movie. Also in the movie, the engineer’s business partner when he goes back in time to 1995 isn’t a nudist as he is in the novel. The movie doesn’t address the post-apocalyptic nature of society, which was the impetus for the cold sleep. And Yamazaki is a little too young, too pretty, to be convincing as a heroic engineer and entrepreneur.

I’m glad I read the book first—one evening dedicated to reading the week before watching the movie—but I wonder if I’d have been able to follow the plot as easily had I not done so. Time travel narratives can be confusing, especially when the main characters go back and forth between two eras. I’d recommend this to Heinlein completists and fans of the live action *Death Note* as a gateway to Heinlein’s writing. But the movie remains a mystifying oddity even after watching it. Why was it even made?

Availability: DVD and Blu-ray (Region 2, Happinet, 2021); streaming on Netflix

Yokai Monsters: 100 Monsters (1968)

An excellent oddity, this Japanese movie directed by Kimiyoshi Yasuda features impressively wide-ranging *tokusatsu* special effects by Yoshiyuki Kuroda. Its focus rests squarely on traditional Japanese monsters known as yokai, which appear in *kaidan* (ghost stories), represented using a combination of costuming and puppetry, as well as animation.

In terms of plot, a duplicitous landowner wants to raze a shrine and nearby homes in order to construct a brothel. On the eve of the intended destruction, he hosts a Hyakumonogatari Kaidankai ceremony in which an aged visiting professional storyteller recounts various yokai tales—recounting 100 monsters in total over the course of the evening. Unfortunately for all involved, the gathering ends before the storyteller conducts a purification ceremony to stave off evil spirits, and terror ensues.



A couple of wonderful sequences feature *kasa-obake*, a limbed, eyed, and tongued umbrella—which combines animation and puppetry to good effect—a neck-extending *rokurokubi*, perhaps the most horrific and effective yokai included in the movie; and a head as big as a house (perhaps my favorite sequence). Even more impressive, however, are the scenes in which multiple yokai are present, particularly the massive parade through the village at the end of the movie.

This movie is one of three related movies, made in close proximity. If you like *Yokai Monsters: 100 Monsters*, there are even more to check out in subsequent films. A wonderful, wonderful movie.

Availability: DVD (ADV Films, 2003); streaming on multiple platforms (<https://tinyurl.com/yokai-streaming>)

Captain Kronos: Vampire Hunter (1974)

(This review appeared, in a slightly different form, in the apazine *Faculae and Filigree* #12).

In mid-May, a friend and I gathered to watch the 1974 Hammer film *Captain Kronos: Vampire Hunter*. It's a wonderful movie: it is atmospheric and heroic, resolves contrary to expectations, features some wonderful practical effects, and introduces interesting novelty to the predominant considerations of vampire cinema, as well as action-oriented swordplay.



The movie's plot is relatively straightforward. A supernatural force is attacking the young women of a village, draining their youth and leaving them elderly and decrepit. Captain Kronos, travelling with his hunchbacked sidekick, Grost, is on his way to visit with an old friend when they learn of the threat to the village. Kronos is a vampire hunter of some renown, and he and Grost dedicate their attention and energy to defeating whomever—or whatever—is harming the women.

At one point during the movie, I remarked that the movie suggested a cross between

Robin Hood or Zorro and more straight-ahead vampire fare. I'm surprised there weren't more contemporary sequels or media tie-ins, because the character of Captain Kronos, his back story, and his commentary on the wide variety of vampires existing in the world (and the, oh, so many ways to kill them!) offer plenty of opportunities for future storytelling, shades of Robert E. Howard's Solomon Kane.

The movie has gotten some fan attention. *Fangoria* covered the movie in its August 1980 issue (#7). *Little Shoppe of Horrors* featured the movie on the cover of its 18th issue, which included articles on Brian Clemens and the making of the movie, and interviews with Caroline Munro, composer Johnson, and several other cast members. And Paul Mount wrote a 2015 piece for *Starburst*.

Regardless, there's been surprisingly little based or built on the movie, its characters, or its storyline over the years. Laurie Johnson's original motion picture soundtrack is available on compact disc. The London Studio Symphony Orchestra also recorded a selection of Johnson's music from *Kronos*, *The Avengers*, *Dr. Strangelove*, and *First Men in the Moon*.

Steve Moore and Ian Gibson contributed a comic-based sequel in *The House of Hammer* #1-3 (October 1976 to January 1977). Steve Moore and Steve Parkhouse also contributed an adaptation for *Hammer's Halls of Horror* #20 (May 1978). More recently, Guy Adams wrote a novelization titled *Kronos* that was published by Random House UK in 2011. And Titan Comics published four issues of a *Captain Kronos* comic book under the Hammer Comics imprint between September 2017 and January 2018, which were later collected in a trade paperback.

Somehow, I'd like there to be more. Fan fiction writers haven't even picked up the mantle. There is absolutely no Captain Kronos fan writing available on FanFiction, and Archive of Our Own yields but two pieces, both slash fiction pairing siblings Paul and Sara Durward, and Kronos and his hunchbacked sidekick Hieronymus Grost. Neither quite what I had in mind. (Worry not; I'll still read them).

Why wasn't more done with Kronos? Written, directed, and co-produced by Brian Clemens, who also created *The Avengers* and *The Professionals*, the movie certainly had promise. (Big Finish offers an audio line featuring *The Avengers*, but not *The Professionals* or Captain Kronos). And Hammer intended it to become one of the studio's horror franchises, similar to Christopher Lee's *Dracula*.

It was not meant to be. By 1970, the film industry in England started to struggle financially because of the mainstream turn to color television. Shortly after *Captain Kronos: Vampire Hunter* was released, gothic horror had fallen out of fashion, and Hammer could no longer attract production backers. So it turned to episodic television with *Hammer House of Horror* and *Hammer House of Mystery and Suspense*.

Hammer produced five movies in 1974, including *Kronos*. It released one each in 1976 and 1979, only to become absent from movie theater screens until its resurgence in 2008. *Captain Kronos* came too late to meet its potential.

So I wonder: How many vampires remain on the loose, threatening our family, friends, and neighbors, as well as the very foundation of society itself? Why has Captain Kronos forsaken us? I shudder to think how much safer the world could be.

Availability: DVD and Blu-Ray (Paramount and Shout! Factory, 2021 and 2020); streaming on multiple platforms (<https://tinyurl.com/kronos-streaming>)

Night Fright (1967)

This movie is not to be confused with the 1985 movie titled *Fright Night*. I didn't make that mistake—I watched this on purpose—but I want to warn you all the same. Do not make that mistake. *Night Fright* would be a sad second indeed if your intent was to watch *Fright*

Night. Other than the transposition of the words in the title, the two have very little in common other than both being movies.

This movie, *Night Fright*, is a slow-paced, quiet film in which a small town is terrorized by an animal that escaped from an ill-fated experimental rocket launch into outer space. Apparently, the animals—who were intended to circle the moon and return—were exposed to radiation, mutating as a result. One creature surviving the space craft’s crash landing goes on a killing spree, slaying some area youth, frustrating the efforts of law enforcement, and posing a mortal threat to those in the rural area.

Re-released in England nearly two decades later as *E.T.N.: The Extraterrestrial Nasty* during the Video Nasty controversy—to capitalize on the success of *E.T. The Extra-Terrestrial*—the movie ends well enough. Extremely low budget—cast members’ cars and homes were used in the filming—the movie involved John Agar, Shirley Temple’s ex-husband, and director James A. Sullivan, who edited *Manos: The Hands of Fate* and worked on a couple of films with Larry Buchanan (read on for more Buchanan).



Availability: DVD (Alpha Video, 2003 and 2021); streaming on multiple platforms (<https://tinyurl.com/nf-streaming>)

In the Year 2889 (1969)

An excellent followup to *Night Fright* above, *The Year 2889* continues our exploration of Texas regional filmmaking and works related to Larry Buchanan, who directed this movie. Made for TV for American International Pictures, this post-apocalyptic sf thriller is basically a scene-by-scene remake of the 1955 Roger Corman film *Day the World Ended* (the cast and crew even used the script from the earlier Corman movie). Imagine a low-budget movie remade with an even lower budget, and you’ll have a fair idea of what to expect.

Set in the future—but *not* in the year 2889—the movie follows the fate of a group of people sequestered in a home isolated in a secluded valley. At first it’s just a father and daughter, waiting for her fiancé to arrive after the bombs dropped; the father chose the

homestead’s location because of the protection afforded by the valley’s topography and the area’s wind and weather patterns. They are soon joined by other people, including a young man and his radiation-sick brother, a wandering alcoholic hunter, and a couple: a jealousy-prone erotic dancer and her shifty, handsy manager.



Over the course of the movie, the group must protect each other and their home from rising radiation levels, mutants that threaten the sanctity of the valley, and, as it turns out, each other. The least of their concerns is that the forward-thinking,

science-minded father stocked survival supplies for the planned three people, not the eventual, resulting seven survivors, which leads to further rationing, contributing to the tension and worry. The telepathic mutants, though rarely seen, are a highlight of the movie and reminded me of the zombies in *Night of the Living Dead*.

If the movie wasn't set in 2889, why is the movie titled *In the Year 2889*? The filmmakers had previously made a Jules Verne adaptation, *Master of the World*, in 1961, and planned to produce another film based on the Jules and Michel Verne story "In the Year 2889." They scrapped that project and just reused the title. This film isn't as slow or sleepy as *Night Fright* above, but *In the Year 2889* is still relatively languorous in its pacing and presentation. It was the first movie screened on *Son of Svengoolie* in 1979.

Availability: DVD split with *It's Alive!* (Image, 2004); streaming on multiple platforms (<https://tinyurl.com/2889-streaming>)

Zontar, the Thing from Venus (1967)

We end with Larry Buchanan's *Zontar, the Thing from Venus*. Another awesome example of Texas regional filmmaking and Buchanan's shoestring approach to movies, *Zontar* is a made-for-TV movie remaking Roger Corman's 1956 *It Conquered the World*. John Agar, who also starred in *Night Fright* above, leads the cast.

The gist of the movie is this: A NASA scientist has been communicating secretly with an alien from Venus named Zontar. The alien, communicating via short-wave radio, indicates that he plans to come to Earth aboard a damaged satellite to help the human race overcome its numerous challenges, ushering in a new age of peace and freedom. Nothing can go wrong, right? Alas, that is not to be. Instead, Zontar's arrival leads to all sorts of mayhem (I guess the moral of the story is to be wary of alien radio hams).

Once on Earth, Zontar deploys flying creatures—injecto-pods—to take over the town's populace, including local law enforcement. One of the more suspenseful scenes showcases a police officer fighting off one of the injecto-pods. Zontar also proceeds to interfere with the local power grid and otherwise affect vehicles, telephone communication, and running water. The NASA scientist eventually comes to his senses, joining his heroic friend—played by Agar—in his efforts to defeat the thing from Venus.



When viewers finally see Zontar itself, a three-eyed, bat-winged, black creature that gives birth to its injecto-pods from its wings, it's well worth the wait, and the final scenes set in a sulfur spring-heated network of caves are a delight indeed. Don't let anyone tell you differently; *Zontar, the Thing from Venus*, is must-see cinema.

Availability: DVD split with *The Eye Creatures* (Image, 2005); streaming on multiple platforms (<https://tinyurl.com/zontar-streaming>)

RECENT FILMS REVIEWED

The Moviegoer
Reviews by Tom Feller

Don't Look Up (2021)



The premise of a large object colliding with the Earth is an old one. In film, the earliest example I can think of is the 1951 movie *When Worlds Collide*, which itself is based on a 1933 novel. A recent example is *Greenland*, in which a man is attempting to get his family to an underground facility there to survive the collision. That film is done straight, but the ambitious purpose of *Don't Look Up* is satirical. Now this is a much more difficult challenge, and the new film is only partially successful. The impending collision is supposed to be a metaphor for climate change and/or the pandemic. However, the jokes such as a four star general asking people to reimburse him for snacks that are free or the President's son carrying a Birkin Bag all the time either distract from the film's purpose or just aren't funny. It lacks the precision of a film like *Dr. Strangelove*, especially with the excessive number of celebrity cameos.

Leonardo DiCaprio is an astronomy professor at Michigan State (considered a second rate school by some of the snooty characters) and Jennifer Lawrence, who has boyfriend problems, is one of his graduate students when they discover a comet on a collision course with the Earth. It will hit in six months and 14 days. Meryl Streep is President, a female version of Donald Trump, and Jonah Hill, her son, obviously based on Ivanka Trump, Jared Kushner, and/or Donald Trump, Jr., is one of her chief advisors. She is more concerned about her polling numbers and a Supreme Court scandal than the survival of the human race. When the scientists take their case to a celebrity talk show hosted by Tyler Perry and Cate Blanchett, they find their

discovery takes second place to a celebrity couple break-up. DiCaprio eventually learns to play the celebrity game and experiences both its perks (an affair with Blanchett) and its pitfalls (the dissolution of his marriage to Melanie Lynskey). A mission to destroy the comet led by Ron Perlman, as in the 1998 films *Deep Impact* or *Armageddon*, is aborted when an Elon Musk/Jeff Bezos/Mark Zuckerberg-type character played by Mark Rylance persuades the President to authorize another mission that would mine the comet for its mineral wealth. The ending resembles the one in *When Worlds Collide* for one set of characters and *Seeking A Friend for the End of the World*, a 2012 film in this genre, for another.

Dune (2021)

Back in the Seventies, there was an adaptation of the *Three Musketeers* starring Michael York as d'Artagnan. It was a faithful adaptation, so it ran well over three hours. Instead of showing one very long movie, the filmmakers split it in two. Now if the producers of the 1984 version of *Dune* had done that instead of cutting David Lynch's original four hour film down to two hours, it might have been successful. The abbreviated film was incomprehensible to anyone who had not read the book. The latest version of Frank Herbert's classic learns from that by only showing the first half of the book and ends when Paul (Timothée Chalamet) joins the Fremen led by Stilgar (Javier Bardem) and meets Chani (Zendaya), who will become the love of his life..

Filmed in Jordan and Abu Dhabi, it is quite faithful to the original. The only major change is that the gender of the planetary ecologist Liet Kynes (Sharon Duncan-Brewster) is changed from male to female. As I'm sure many members of the N3F know, it is the story of how the Atreides family, Duke Leto (Oscar Isaacs) and Lady Jessica (Rebecca Ferguson), take possession of Arrakis, a desert planet home to giant worms and the source of melange, aka The Spice, an essential resource for interstellar travel. They are assisted by expert soldiers Gurney Halleck (Josh Brolin) and Duncan Idaho (Jason Momoa). Their principal enemy is Baron Vladimert Harkonnen (Stellan Skarsgard), who is made up to look like Marlon Brando in *Apocalypse Now*. (The make-up took seven hours every day to apply!) While not exactly an enemy, Charlotte Rampling makes a very effective Reverend Mother of the Bene Gesserit, a society of female witches. The film won the Oscars for the Original Score, Sound, Production Design, Cinematography, Film Editing, and Visual Effects categories, which was more than any other film this year. It was also nominated in the Best Picture, Adapted Screenplay, Make-Up and Hairstyling, and Costume Design categories.



Free Guy (2021)

The premise of this science fiction film in the tradition of *The Matrix*, *Toy Story*, and *Ready Player One* is that a Non-Player Character (NPC) named Guy (Ryan Reynolds) in Free City, an on-line video game, becomes self-aware. It is an old premise, at least as old as Daniel Galouye's 1964 novel *Simulacron-3*. The name of the game comes from "Liberty City", the setting of the game *Grand Theft Auto*, and the exterior scenes were actually filmed in Boston.

At least once a day, Guy gets up, greets his goldfish, puts on the same clothes, stops for coffee at the same coffee shop, says hello to his friend "Buddy" (Lil Rel Howery), a security guard, and reports for work as a bank teller. He gets robbed several times a day by player

characters and thinks nothing of it. One day he is attracted by a player character named Molotov Girl (Jodie Comer) and follows her down the street. He finds and puts on a pair of sunglasses that show him what player characters see, revealing the underlying structure of his world. He then becomes his own player character and performs actions to protect the NPCs, becoming world famous in the process. Back in our world, we learn that Molotov Girl is played by Millie (also played by Comer). She is a programmer who believes that Free City uses code that she originally wrote but was stolen by the game's owner Antwan (Taika Waititi). She is assisted by a Free City employee named Keys (Joe Keery). They realize that Guy has become the first true artificial intelligence in history and take action to prevent him from being deleted. It is quite entertaining.



Spiderman: No Way Home (2021)

This film takes place immediately after the previous Spiderman film. Mysterio (Jake Gyllenhaal) is dead, and Spiderman (Tom Holland) is blamed. Then J. Jonas Jameson (J.K. Simmons) reveals that Spiderman is really Peter Parker. At the beginning of the new film, Jameson is having a field day, because most of the world now agrees with him that Spiderman is a menace, and Flash Thompson (Tony Rivolori) writes a tell-all book about Peter and Spiderman. If this isn't bad enough, Aunt May (Marisa Tomei) and Happy Hogan (Jon Favreau) break up, and high school seniors Peter, MJ (Zendaya) and Ned (Jacob Batalon) are all rejected by MIT and their backup schools. At least,



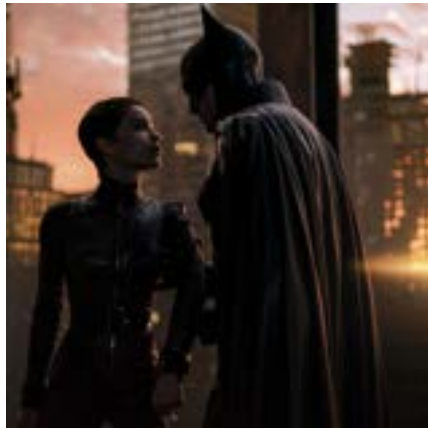
Peter has the good sense to retain Matt Murdock, aka Daredevil (Charlie Cox), as his lawyer. Because of all this, Spiderman seeks out Dr. Strange (Benedict Cumberbatch) and asks him to cast a spell to have everyone in the world forget that he is Peter Parker. Strange agrees, but the spell casting goes wrong. Not only does no one forget about Peter Parker and Spiderman, but several villains from parallel universes (and previous Spiderman movies) come into ours. They are The Green Goblin (Willem Dafoe), Dr. Octopus (Alfred Molina, digitally de-aged), Sandman (Thomas Hayden Church, voice only), The Lizard (Rhys Ifans,

voice only), and Electro (Jamie Foxx). Fortunately, two other Spidermans from other universes also show up, played by previous Spiderman actors Tobey McGuire and Andrew Garfield. Somehow, it all works out, although there is a severe price for Peter to pay.

The Batman (2022)

I wasn't sure how anyone was going to top the Christian Bale *Batman* movies and Joaquin Phoenix's *Joker*, but I would say that this new film is different but equally good. It is in the style of Seventies movies such as *The French Connection*, *The Godfather*, *Taxi Driver*, *Klute*, *All*

the President's Men, and *Chinatown*. The Riddler (Paul Dano) murders both Gotham City's mayor (Rupert Penry-Jones) and its police commissioner, kidnaps the district attorney (Peter Sarsgaard) and attaches a remote-controlled bomb around his neck, and sends a mail bomb to



Bruce Wayne (Robert Pattinson). Fortunately, for Bruce, but not for Alfred (Andy Serkis without CGI), the latter opens the package and winds up in the hospital. Batman's investigation leads him to the Iceberg, a nightclub run by the Penguin (an unrecognizable Colin Farrell), where Selina Kyle, aka the Catwoman (Zoe Kravitz), works as a cocktail waitress. The club is actually owned by Carmine Falcone (John Turturro), whom Alfred always believed was behind the murders of Thomas and Martha Wayne. (Martha's maiden name in this version, by the way, is Arkham.) At the time of the film's beginning, Batman has been operating for two years, and his only friend in the police department is James Gordon (Jeffrey Wright), at this point in his career a detective-lieutenant. His Batmobile is something that Mad Max would love to drive, although he usually drives a

motorcycle. Corruption in the dysfunctional city government occurs from the very top to the bottom, and the unravelling of all the layers drives much of the plot. The acting, fight choreography, car chases, musical score, and special effects are all excellent. The sun never shines on Gotham City, in keeping with its neo-noir tradition.

Dr. Strange in the Multi-Verse of Madness (2022)

As the title indicates, this film utilizes the multi-verse premise, and the title character (Benedict Cumberbatch) battles mild versions of Lovecraftian monsters. As a corollary of the premise, a character states that when we dream, we see ourselves in other universes. Early in the film, Dr. Steven Strange leaves the marriage of his ex-girlfriend Christine Palmer (Rachel McAdams), to rescue America Chavez (Xochitl Gomez) from Gargantos, a giant one-eyed octopus-like creature, with the help of his friend Wong (Benedict Wong), now the Sorcerer Supreme. Chavez, they learn, has the ability to travel between the universes. After killing the monster, they observe runes on its tentacles, so Strange consults Wanda Maximoff (Elizabeth Olsen), aka the Scarlet Witch, who is mourning the death of her two sons in *Wandavision*. It turns out that this is the worst thing he could have done, because the Witch now wants kill America to assume her power and to travel to another



universe where her children are alive and replace her counterpart. This sets up the plot for the movie. After a big battle scene in Kamar-Taj (headquarters and training center for sorcerers), where the Witch defeats the sorcerers, Dr. Strange and America flee to an alternate Earth in which that world's Strange had been killed by Thanos. They meet Christine, who in this world is a scientist rather than a surgeon, and the Illuminati, a kind of superhero council. It consists of Mordo (Chiwetel Ejiofor), a sorcerer who was Strange's enemy in his own world and the first *Dr. Strange* movie, but apparently his best friend in this one, Reed Richards (John Krasinski), Captain Marvel (Lashana Lynch), Captain Carter (Hayley Atwell), a British version of Captain

America, Black Bolt (Anson Mount), and Professor Charles Xavier (Patrick Stewart). The action is unrelenting in this very entertaining film, the 28th in the Marvel Cinematic Universe.

Moonfall (2022)

The main premise of this silly, but entertaining, movie from disaster movie guru Roland Emmerich is that the Moon is really a Dyson Sphere. It was placed in orbit around the Earth by the same species that seeded our planet with life, making them our distant ancestors. Now that species had a mortal enemy, nanites who finally tracked them to our solar system. They first showed themselves when they attacked the space shuttle Endeavor in 2011. One crew member was killed and another, Jocinda Fowler (Halle Berry), was knocked unconscious. However, NASA publicly blamed the accident on mission commander Brian Harper (Patrick Wilson). The nanites do not reappear until ten years later when they cause the moon to change its orbit and begin spiraling into the Earth.

By this time, Fowler has risen to a high rank in NASA, but Harper, now an alcoholic, makes his living making public appearances as a former astronaut, but a poor one because he is still in disgrace. He meets a conspiracy theorist named KC Houseman (John Bradley) who is



convinced that NASA knew as early as 1969 that the moon is not what it seems. They convince Fowler that his theory is true, so she uses her authority as a NASA administrator to take the Endeavor out of a museum in southern California, transport it to Vandenberg Air Force Base, and, despite one its engines not working, launch it into space with the three of them as the crew.

Naturally, all three have personal problems. Harper is divorced from his wife (Carolina Bartczak) and estranged from his son (Charlie Plummer). Her new husband (Michael Pena) is a Lexus

salesman,. (There is a lot of product placement.) Fowler is also divorced but on better terms with her husband (Eme Ikwaukor) , an Air Force general who has been given the assignment of nuking the moon. They have a young son (Zahn Maloney) and a nanny (Kelly Yu). KC's mother has Alzheimer's and resides in a memory care unit somewhere in Southern California.

Actually, the implausibility that bothered me the most was that several of the characters drive from California to Colorado in only a few hours while earthquakes are occurring all around them, and apparently they never have to stop for gas, bathroom breaks, etc. Furthermore, cell phones are still functioning right up until the end. Now I will concede the actors did their best, especially Bradley. The special effects are actually quite good, but you have to check your brain at the door before watching this film.

Uncharted (2022)

This is another silly, but entertaining, movie, based on a video game. The main premise is that the Magellan expedition in the early 16th Century discovered gold, which the eighteen surviving members hid in a still secret location. The main character is Nathan Drake (Tom Holland), who is working as a bartender and pickpocket in New York at the beginning of the film. He and his older brother Sam (Rudy Pankow) were orphans, but Sam had run away 15



years previously, just one step ahead of the law. They believe themselves to be descended from Sir Francis Drake. Over the years, Sam sent Nathan postcards from around the world. Then Victor “Sully” Sullivan (Mark Wahlberg) shows up, claiming to be an associate of Sam, and persuades Nathan to join him on a search for Magellan’s gold. Their first stop is Barcelona, where they meet Chloe (Sophia Ali), who sometimes helps them and sometimes hinders them. (My wife and I found this part of the movie to be the most interesting, because it was filmed on location and we recognized several of the sites from our visit there in 2007.) Other competitors for the gold are Moncada (Antonio Banderas) and Braddock (Tati Gabrielle). The action scenes and the visual effects are excellent and the stars are likeable, but there is nothing that we haven’t seen before in the *National Treasure* or *Indiana Jones* movies.

The Lost City (2022)

Loretta Sage (Sandra Bullock), the female protagonist of this adventure film, is a the author of steamy historical romances, and the film definitely shows the influence of *Romancing the Stone*. Educated as an anthropologist, she is a widow, and her late husband was an archaeologist, so *Raiders of the Lost Ark* is also one of the influences. She is on a book tour, but has an argument with Alan Caprison (Channing Tatum wearing a Fabio wig), the male model who appears on the cover of all her books. She storms off, orders an Uber, but gets in the wrong car. It belongs to Abigail Fairfax (Daniel Radcliffe), the billionaire scion of media mogul, and he kidnaps her. (In a poke at wokeness, the film makes a point of saying that his name is meant to be gender neutral.) Because her novels are all well researched, both historically and archaeologically, he considers her to be an expert in both fields. He takes her to an island in the Atlantic Ocean with an active volcano, where he is financing an archaeological dig and forces her to translate a parchment that he hopes will tell him the location of a secret treasure. Meanwhile, Alan and her manager Beth (Da’ Vine Joy Randolph) have engaged Jack Trainer (Brad Pitt), a retired special forces soldier and yoga instructor to rescue her. He is a stereotypical romance hero, and Pitt is made up to look as he did in *Legends of the Fall*. While the model tags along, he gets her away from the billionaire but is apparently killed while they are making their escape. Therefore, the model has to complete the rescue. However, he has no military, martial arts, firearms, or survival skills, although he does score high in emotional intelligence. Fortunately, she has some experience with the outdoors from anthropological fieldwork and archaeological digs and is both smarter and a better swimmer. This movie was filmed on location in the Dominican Republic, and Tatum and Bullock make a great romantic couple, although she is sixteen years older in another gender inversion. Patti Harrison plays Loretta’s social media manager and is so funny that she steals all the scenes in which she appears.



The Northman (2022)



There have been many films and TV shows about the Norse, aka the Vikings. This one is based on the same legend that inspired *Hamlet*. It begins in 895 AD in what is now Denmark when Amleth (Oscar Novak) is a boy, and his father King Aurvandill (Ethan Hawke) returns from a war. They engage in a coming-of-age ritual supervised by Heimur the Fool (Willem Dafoe) in which they crawl around on all fours and howl like wolves. Immediately after the ceremony, Aurvandill is murdered by his brother Fjolnir (Claes Bang), but Amleth

escapes. Meanwhile Aurvandill's queen Gudrun (Nicole Kidman) is supposedly kidnapped by Fjolnir. Twenty years later Amleth, now played by Alexander Skarsgaard, is a Viking warrior participating in a raid on a Slavic settlement in what is now Russia. He encounters a blind seer (Bjork) who sets him on a quest of revenge. Learning that his uncle has been deposed as king of Denmark by Harald of Norway and is now a minor king in Iceland, he cuts his hair and brands himself to appear to be a slave. He stows away on a ship to Iceland, where he meets Olga (Anya Taylor-Joy), who, although a slave, has some magical powers of her own. They become lovers during the course of the movie. After arriving, he is sold to his uncle, which gives him the opportunity he take his revenge. The film is visually beautiful, the fights are well choreographed, and Amleth's reunion with his mother does not go as he expects. However, this film is not as original as it pretends to be. There are many stories, almost too numerous to count, in which the search for revenge becomes self-defeating, and I'm not sure we need another one.



CINE-MINI: POLTERGEIST (1982)

It's been forty years and I still think of this movie *Poltergeist*. It begins when a young family settles in their new home and they feel full of promise. Ominous signs begin for them immediately when their little girl stares into the static of their TV screen early one morning, hears spirits calling, and, in a phrase that would echo down movie history, says, "They're here." After further paranormal incidents, the family sees a psychic and an evasive real estate man enter into their lives. Eventually, they learn that their house was built on a burial ground, only the headstones were moved to make way for their housing development, the dead remain and they are uneasy. Finally, the ground threatens to take them, the dead are rising from their coffins and the family flees in the dead of night. And we are left with the question: What exactly do we owe the dead? A fine flick, yes.

Will Mayo

SHOUTS FROM THE BALCONY:

LETTERS FROM VIEWERS

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the history of the genre. Especially, say, to distinguish such different versions as "The Blob" (1958) vs "The Blob" (1988). Anyway, again, nice zines.

These are some nice zines. Though in future issues, it would be nice to see up front--including in each title and Table of Contents--the year of publication for the piece being reviewed, so we could more easily skim for "what's new," or situate within

That's a good idea-- and you'll notice it's been adopted as of this issue, although you'll have to skim the collections of short reviews for the specific dates. After all, we can't make it too easy to skim over the hard work of our contributors. Glad you liked the rest of the issue.

Jennifer Svarckopf
Ottawa, Ontario

Thanks for another enjoyable issue of *Films Fantastic* (15: Cinematic Ghosts - Loving and Possessive). While scary movies are not generally for me, I did enjoy Emily Alcar's *The Ghost and Mrs. Muir* article. Does it really count as a scary movie? Perhaps not officially but I know the idea of being in love with a ghost and then having one's memory of it washed away is scary to me. *The Haunting* article by the editor was also interesting, but Eleanor being excited by such a bizarre and nasty situation is disturbing enough to me that I won't be watching it either.

Jean Lorrh's article, "The Unity of "Operation: Annihilate!";" from the previous issue is also worth a read if you haven't had a chance to catch up on your *Films Fantastic* issues yet. Of course, I read the whole Spock issue as soon as it arrived.

I also enjoyed the cine-mini and reviews. I've added *The Shadow* and *Star Crash* (Issue 14) to my to watch list and maybe even *Destination Moon*. The movie posters on the back cover were a lovely addition, if ever so slightly distressing.

Thanks for the compliments; I'm sure the authors will be happy to see them (the editor certainly is). As to *The Ghost and Mrs. Muir*-- what will strike any given person as scary is a matter of personal reactions, but overall title promised only cinematic ghost stories, not necessarily scary ones. In fact, I would be inclined to say that a substantial percentage of the better ghost stories and films are at least as much melancholy as they are frightening, with the climax using fear as a means of breaking the viewer's possible resistance to accepting the ghost's situation. Jean Lorrh's article is indeed well argued, well written, and impressive, especially given that it was written by a fairly new fan more than fifty years ago. I hope to do more such classic reprints in future issues.



CINE-MINI: SUPERMAN (1978)

There have been by now several movies made about Superman. But my favorite will always be the one from 1978. It was an innocent time for the movie to be set in which Superman could still reassure Lois Lane, just after saving her from a crashing helicopter, "It's still the safest way to fly." Too, there were still plenty of phone booths around back then for Clark Kent to make his ready change into his Superman suit although more often he just did it in an elevator shaft. It was a time when the news was filled with such bad news as malaise, inflation and the hostages at the embassies in Iran and to escape it all we all fled in packs to see this particular film. A fine flick from a different time, yes.

Will Mayo

BURNING PASSIONS: Fahrenheit 451 (1966)

Artemis van Bruggen

David Thomson, a well-known contemporary film writer, loathes François Truffaut's *Fahrenheit 451*, which he calls a "disaster," and Truffaut's "worst film." You get the feeling he would burn it if he could. He never really says why he hates it so much (he justifiably dislikes Oscar Werner's performance in the lead role, but few other films with self-centered lead actors evoke such condemnation; and he vaguely claims that "the abstraction of science fiction was alien to Truffaut's commitment to behavior." The film deserves better. It isn't perfect (what film is?), but it is a fine adaptation with plenty of striking scenes and some excellent performances.

The film starts unexpectedly: the credits are spoken aloud, not shown (we see the camera zooming in on TV antennas, each image saturated in a garish monochrome color); we know at once that the printed word is restricted, and that the anti-book world denies complexity. A raid follows (in normal color); the black-clad firemen discover and burn a collection of books, watched silently by neighbors of the owner, who, warned only minutes before, has fled. Apart from the credits and the telephoned alert to the book collector, not a word has been spoken. We get the point: this is a world in which books are forbidden, yet in which there is some sort of resistance movement.

What to watch for after this: the increasing tension between Montag (Oscar Werner), the leading fireman (the fire department is wholly male) and Fire Chief Beatty (Cyril Cusack, in an absolutely scene-stealing performance); the appearance of Montag's neighbor Clarisse (Julie Christie), whose free spirit gradually weakens Montag's allegiance to the system; Montag's wife (also Julie Christie), a good citizen defined by the televised world; and the second book burning.

The firemen are called out to a private house alone in a woods. They find a middle-aged woman (Bea Duffel) and a private library. Only once before has Beatty had the pleasure of destroying such a hoard. He is brutal: books are merely the cause of dissatisfaction and unrest. In prescient words (drawn largely from Bradbury's novel, written in 1951), he dismisses them: "... novels," he notes with disgust; "all about people who never existed. The people that read them, it makes them unhappy with their own lives, makes them want to live in other ways, they can never really be." Beatty flips off philosophy, biography and autobiography, pointing out the contradictions among them. "The only way to be happy is for everyone to be made equal."

The house and the books burn together. The pile of books is soaked in kerosene, but the woman, refusing to leave, lights a single match instead; it is she, not the firemen, exercising her will as an individual, who ignites the fire, forcing the men to dash out in terror. The flames explode, accompanied by Bernard Herrmann's amazing music; woman and books die together. It is a truly powerful scene.

There is much more to discover in the film; if you haven't seen it, you should; it is one of the most interesting sf films of the 1960s, and it remains all too relevant over fifty years since it was made.



