

# MT VOID 08/23/19 -- Vol. 38, No. 8, Whole Number 2081



Mt. Holz Science Fiction Society  
08/23/19 -- Vol. 38, No. 8, Whole Number 2081

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## Worldcon News:

Worldcon 2021 will be DisCon III in Washington DC August 25-29, 2021. The website is <http://discon3.org>.

Hugo winners announced in Dublin at this year's Worldcon are listed below. [-ecl]

## Comments on THE MAGNETIC MONSTER (1953) (film comments by Mark R. Leeper):

In the film ED WOOD, the title character gets enthusiastic over some stock footage, saying that with enough of that he could make a movie. In fact, lots of science fiction films have made use of stock footage to save on budgets. Sometimes it is a sequence of lizards fighting with the claim they are dinosaurs. Maybe it is footage from a Russian science fiction film reused in several cheap features like VOYAGE TO THE PLANET OF THE PREHISTORIC WOMEN. Of course, footage of V-2 launches was used extensively in Fifties space exploration films. Perhaps the most creative use of stock footage was in THE MAGNETIC MONSTER. I think the main purpose of this film was, in fact, to use footage from the German film GOLD. The result is actually surprisingly good for such an unambitious film. The integration of the German footage is really quite well done. And the story that was created is one of the most interesting concepts of Fifties science fiction.

I have to admit that I particularly like the idea of a material being a menace, as opposed to an animal, a plant, or a machine. A material that is dangerous by its very nature is an interesting concept. Other films that had such a threat were THE MONOLITH MONSTERS and THE NIGHT THE WORLD EXPLODED. In this film we are dealing with a new element. Most new elements are highly unstable and can exist only for a small fraction of a second before decaying. Serranium is just the opposite. It is not just stable, it is super-stable, pulling in energy from its surroundings and converting it to matter and growing.

This could have made for a very good science fiction film. Unfortunately, what we have is a frustrating combination of good and bad. The dialogue is hokey and the scientific jargon just does not sound believable. Curt Siodmak or Ivan Tors juiced it up in an attempt to sound super-scientific, but it just sounds ridiculous. This was the first of three films about the fictitious

OSI--the Office of Scientific Investigation. These are the people who get invited in like the FBI might be. Only they are called in when mysterious scientific phenomena are discovered. You know, like when suddenly the air over Los Angeles becomes highly radioactive or when aliens land, or that sort of thing. Really what they would probably do, if such a group could get funding, is sit around all day like the Maytag repairman. I think the producers got excited about the Manhattan Project and decided there were all kinds of nifty peacetime uses for on-call scientists.

A scientist fooling around on his own in a rented room over a hardware store creates the new element that is hyper-magnetic and radioactive, as well having the odd property of absorbing energy and growing. Clearly this is a case for the scientific guys at OSI. These investigators are patterned on G-men but are called A- Men--A for Atomic. Each is like a cross between Dragnet's Joe Friday and Mr. Wizard, and they discover that "a dangerously radioactive element [is] at large." First they have to locate the element and then they have to find a way to stop its deadly reign of terror. Finding the element was created by one scientist experimenting on his own one sagely concludes "in nuclear research there is no place for lone wolves." How true.

There are many crime film cliches in the story before it comes to its final conclusion at a Canadian nuclear research facility. Why Canadian? Well, the film had the German stock footage which featured people dressed in heavy coveralls and flat hats. It didn't look like in the United States, so the people were Canadians. Who knew what a Canadian was supposed to look like anyway? These Canadians dressed a little German, but what the heck.

1953 was certainly Richard Carlson's year for science fiction films. In one year he made IT CAME FROM OUTER SPACE, THE MAGNETIC MONSTER, and THE MAZE. That is not a really distinguished list, but it firmly established him as a science fiction actor and the following year he was the lead in THE CREATURE FROM THE BLACK LAGOON. other familiar faces include King Donovan (INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHERS), Bryon Folger, Strother Martin (COOL HAND LUKE), and Jeane Byron. Each but the last is a familiar film actor. Byron's claim to fame was to play a teacher on the TV series "The Many Loves of Dobie Gillis". And later she played the mother on "The Patty Duke Show".

For a film that throws around silly terms like "a paramagnetic force" and its "epicenter," it's interesting that when they show a blackboard of mathematics it is real mathematics written by someone who knows what math should look like. On the other hand who knows what a power plant to destroy an element looks like? So in the final scenes the viewer is not sure what is happening, but it is impressive looking. Supposedly the reactor (or whatever it is) is built in a cavern under a lake. An explosion blows so high that we see it over the surface of the water. (Actually the footage is of a depth charge being detonated.) There is no explanation what saves the people around the reactor from drowning and having the reactor area flooded. I suspect we are not supposed to ask.

I would rate the film overall a high +1 on the -4 to +4 scale.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0046026/reference>

What others are saying: [https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/the\\_magnetic\\_monster](https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/the_magnetic_monster)

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### Hugo Award Winners:

Best Novel:  
THE CALCULATING STARS by Mary Robinette Kowal

Best Novella  
ARTIFICIAL CONDITION by Martha Wells

Best Novelette  
"If At First You Don't Succeed, Try, Try Again" by Zen Cho

Best Short Story  
"A Witch's Guide To Escape: A Practical Compendium Of Portal Fantasies" by Alix E. Harrow

Best Series  
"Wayfarers" by Becky Chambers

Best Related Work  
Archive Of Our Own, A Project Of The Organization For Transformative Works

Best Graphic Story  
Monstress, Volume 3: Haven, written by Marjorie Liu, art by Sana Takeda

Best Dramatic Presentation, Long Form  
SPIDER-MAN: INTO THE SPIDER-VERSE

Best Dramatic Presentation, Short Form  
The Good Place: "Janet(S)"

Best Editor, Short Form  
Gardner Dozois

Best Editor, Long Form  
Navah Wolfe

Best Professional Artist

Charles Vess  
 Best Semiprozine  
     Uncanny Magazine,  
 Best Fanzine  
     Lady Business  
 Best Fancast  
     Our Opinions Are Correct  
 Best Fan Writer  
     Foz Meadows  
 Best Fan Artist  
     Likhain (Mia Sereno)  
 Best Art Book (A One-Off Category Created As Per WSFS Rules)  
     THE BOOKS OF EARTHSEA: THE COMPLETE ILLUSTRATED EDITION,  
         illustrated by Charles Vess, written by Ursula  
         K. Le Guin

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**GOLD (1934)** (film retrospective by Mark R. Leeper):

**CAPSULE:** The world is in a state of turmoil as what could be a new Golden Age may be bringing prosperity to most of the world, or the world may be falling into economic chaos. A rogue scientist Professor Achenbach claims to be about to perfect a process that will turn lead into gold. The first two acts of the story are fairly dry. All the imagination is visual and in the third act, when it comes almost too late. This film is best known for footage used in another film, THE MAGNETIC MONSTER (1953). Rating: low +1 (-4 to +4)

There is a type of science fiction film that flowered between the two World Wars. In WWI Weaponry advanced applying science and physics and armies faced airplanes, Zeppelins, tanks, and chemical weapons. People for the first time could tell that the future might be very different from the past. Films that were inspired by this sort of thinking included METROPOLIS, THINGS TO COME, THE TRANSATLANTIC TUNNEL, and F.P.1 DOESN'T ANSWER (F.P.1 ANTWORTET NICHT). One of the least remembered is the German film GOLD. GOLD was directed by Karl Hartl, who also directed F.P.1 DOESN'T ANSWER.

Chemistry Professor Achenbach thinks he has a process to make synthetic gold. With his recipe the valuable element will be cheap and easily available. Many countries are trying to get their hands on the process. The villainous British (remember this film comes from pre-WWII Germany) are trying to steal the formula working though Werner Holk (Hans Albers) Achenbach's assistant.

This pro-German film is full of science fiction and full of spectacular special effects, features that make some films blockbusters today. Yet more likely than not, GOLD will offer very little entertainment value to today's audiences. The viewer has a long wait to get to the good stuff in this film and it will probably not maintain viewer interest along the way.

GOLD is based on Rolf E. Vanloo's novel GOLD, in which a renegade scientist ready to solve the puzzle that medieval alchemists had been desperate for. He may have found a way to turn lead into gold. The same man was going to make synthetic gold available to the world. People would all be rich. Now this concept needs to be discussed. Creating gold is not the same thing as creating wealth. Releasing a lot of synthetic gold on the public will deflate the value of the precious metal. Its scarcity is what makes gold valuable. The market would just make an ounce of gold worth a lot less.

The super-science machinery toward the end of GOLD is on what is, if anything, a larger scale than that of METROPOLIS. Though that is perhaps an unfair comparison. METROPOLIS stages its special effects full-scale. GOLD creates its effects in camera. It uses matte paintings effectively. The text of GOLD is mostly just businessmen talking and it really needs spectacular images as a reward to the audience for sitting through the earlier parts of the film. That is seen only late in the film. Almost all of its futurism seems inspired by really fancy phosphorescent tubes. This is a film for sci-fi completists.

Regarding making gold, see also the TWILIGHT ZONE episode "The Rip Van Winkle Caper".

Rating: low +1 (-4 to +4) or 5/10

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0025189/reference>

Further Information: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gold\\_\(1934\\_film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gold_(1934_film))

[-mrl]

[And there was also a German film about the Titanic which Mark describes in the 02/23/18 issue of the MT VOID as "a German propaganda film blaming the British financial interests" for the sinking. -ecl]

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

Last week I included the list of Retro Hugo winners, but did not have time to comment; now I do. Thanks to Nicholas Whyte for reporting on the full results in his column/blog; I have yet to see them on the hugoawards.org site.

In the novel category, the winner was my first choice, CONJURE WIFE by Fritz Leiber, Jr., and my second choice, GATHER, DARKNESS! also by Fritz Leiber, Jr., placed second, so no complaints here.

For novella, I can't say I was surprised that THE LITTLE PRINCE by Antoine de Saint-Exupery won, but I was disappointed that my first- place choice, "We Print the Truth" by Anthony Boucher, came in fifth.

For novelette, my first choice, "Mimsy Were the Borogoves" by Lewis Padgett (C. L. Moore & Henry Kuttner) resoundingly won first place.

In the short story category, my last choice, "King of the Gray Spaces" (a.k.a. "R is for Rocket") by Ray Bradbury, placed first. I cannot say this really surprised me either. My first choice, "Death Sentence" by Isaac Asimov, did place second.

In Dramatic Presentation, Long Form, HEAVEN CAN WAIT won. I cannot help but wonder if people confused/conflated this with the 1978 Warren Beatty film of that name, which had the plot of the finalist A GUY NAMED JOE. My favorite, PHANTOM OF THE OPERA, came in second.

For Dramatic Presentation, Short Form, first place went to FRANKENSTEIN MEETS THE WOLF MAN, surely a sentimental favorite which (in my opinion) doesn't hold a candle to either I WALKED WITH A ZOMBIE or THE SEVENTH VICTIM, my first and second choices. (FRANKENSTEIN MEETS THE WOLF MAN was my second choice, and I WALKED WITH A ZOMBIE did come in second.) The argument that neither of my top choices are science fiction or fantasy doesn't strictly apply, since the category is for "dramatized science fiction, fantasy or related subjects"; the first has voodoo, and the second a coven of Satanists. The complaint that the first has overtly colonial attitudes is, I think, a serious misunderstanding of the subtext.

Well, of course John W. Campbell won for Best Editor, Short Form (in the first round), and Donald A. Wollheim came in second (also in the first round for that position).

For the other categories, I was not familiar enough with the works to comment. [-ecl]

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Quote of the Week:

I do not mind lying, but I hate inaccuracy.  
--Samuel Butler

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