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Chart of the History of Science Fiction (and Napoleon's Retreat) (comments by Mark R. Leeper):

Ward Shelley has taken the history of science fiction (until about 2008) and brought it down to a statistical representation of the various strands of science fiction in one chart. Read about it at <http://tinyurl.com/mtv-sfmap>. You can click on the diagram, blow it up in size and have fun exploring it. Shelley is looking for Kickstarter support to update his diagram.

This was probably inspired at least in part by Charles Joseph Minard's fascinating statistical chart of Napoleon's retreat from Russia. It may be the most inclusive and impressive graphical statistical display in history.

See it at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_Joseph_Minard#Work

[-mrl]

The Soap Opera Effect (comments by Mark R. Leeper):

When I was growing up the high point of many if not most weeks was 11:30 Saturday night when Channel 40 would run one of the old Universal horror films. It might be DRACULA or THE MUMMY. Maybe it would be THE BRIDE OF FRANKENSTEIN. Channel 40 was a UHF station, which meant that the signal was not as strong as it might have been. It was watchable and I would have been willing put up with a little fuzziness. As time went by, video technology got better and better and Universal became a little less possessive of their copyright properties. It got so I could see the classics whenever I wanted ... on VHS. The image was not quite perfect. VHS sometimes flagged a little at the top of the frame but it was almost as good as watching the films on Channel 40.

Then came the year that Universal released their old horror movies on DVD. It was not quite as complete a set as I would have wanted. It was missing THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA and ABBOTT AND COSTELLO MEET FRANKENSTEIN. But THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA was not really one of the Universal classics and I never was very fond of Abbott and Costello. As far as I was concerned I had what I wanted. Universal released their classic horror on what they called "Legacy Packs." They were released to DVD over two years, both times in October to catch fans in a Halloween frame of mind. And the films had the sharp picture images that came with good DVDs.

But I wondered if this was it and there would be no more releases of the classic Universal films. They could not do much to sell more if their classics on disk if virtually all of the great ones were out for sale on DVD already.

Well, Universal had at least one more trick up their sleeve. They released "Universal Classic Monsters: The Essential Collection". It contained the first film of each of their series: DRACULA, FRANKENSTEIN, THE WOLF MAN, THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA, THE INVISIBLE MAN, etc. And, because it was considered too popular to leave out, they also included THE BRIDE OF FRANKENSTEIN. But the real selling point was that the films were released on Blu-ray. I heard from friends that Blu-ray was a real improvement. You could see the film better than you ever saw it before. In the scene where the Frankenstein monster meets his creator's bride you could see the detail on the texture of the train of her wedding gown. It sounded good to me. I bought the set. And it was just as advertised. But somehow the screen images were too sharp. Blu-ray players (often?) come with image enhancers to make sure the picture is really sharp. It made the detail so sharp it was like watching a live videotaped play. That somehow de-mystified the visual effect.

It seems that to give film a more dreamlike quality directors may put a woman's stocking over the camera lens. That is an effect that the cinematographer may or may not want to use. Apparently old-fashioned cinema film is not as sharp as digital video. It is a matter of taste, I suppose, but what modern Blu-ray players are doing are undoing a needed imperfection of the film process. It makes the films look like they were shot on videotape.

What I had stumbled onto was a known phenomenon. It is called the "soap opera effect." Soap operas are shot on video and give a very literal effect, sharper than cinema film. A modern Blu-ray player will interpolate between consecutive images to create an image between images to give the effect of a greater number of frames per second. Apparently there was a similar problem in filming THE HOBBIT at 48 frames per second per eye. I believe the idea had to be scrapped. It robbed the film of some of its fantasy.

See: <http://tinyurl.com/mtv-48fps>

As Wikipedia says in their "Motion Interpolation" article: "Motion interpolation or motion-compensated frame interpolation (MCFI) is a form of video processing in which intermediate animation frames are generated between existing ones by means of interpolation, in an attempt to make animation more fluid and to compensate for display motion blur."

So when Dracula swirls his cape I am seeing it sharper and more clearly than it was in the 1930 movie theaters. That can be an improvement in some ways, but it robs the kindly old bat gentleman of his dreamlike effect. It looks like a videotaped film. It is like a TV soap opera. You are more aware that you are looking at an actor made up for the stage. I guess you have to decide, do you want to see the master of all the unknown supernatural forces or would you prefer to see an actor in makeup on a stage? [-mrl]

ALL THE BIRDS IN THE SKY by **Charlie Jane Anders** (copyright 2016, Tor, copyright 2016 Recorded Books, 12 hours 36 minutes, \$10.99 paperback, ISBN-10: 0765379953, ISBN-13: 978-0765379955, ASIN: B01A5QB5FW, narrated by Alyssa Bresnahan) (excerpt from the *Duel Fish Codices*: a book review by Joe Karpierz):

Up until ALL THE BIRDS IN THE SKY, the only other Charlie Jane Anders fiction I've read was the novelette "Six Months, Three Days" which won the Best Novelette Hugo in 2012 in Chicago and which was nominated for several other awards. It was a brilliant story, but since I generally don't read a lot of short fiction, I haven't read anything else of hers. 2017 Hugo finalist ALL THE BIRDS IN THE SKY popped up on my radar early last year when there was a lot of buzz about the book, especially on the Coode Street Podcast. I'd been wanting to read the book, but for some reason had made no effort to do so until it came up as an Audible Deal of the Day. I snarfed it up immediately, and was happy to see it was announced as a finalist for the Best Novel Hugo.

ALL THE BIRDS IN THE SKY is the story of two people, Patricia and Laurence. We follow their story from the time they are children, around six or seven years of age or so, through their middle school adolescent years, through high school, and beyond. Patricia learns at an early age that she may be able to practice magic--having birds and a tree talk to you will kind of steer you in that direction. Laurence discovers that he has a knack for gadgets; he invents a device that looks like a wrist watch but is actually a time machine that moves the wearer two seconds into the future at the push of a button. He travels to MIT on his own to witness the launch of a rocket and meets a bunch of college-age students who have all invented that same time machine. His life is never the same after that.

Patricia and Laurence become friends. They have a few things in common, including overbearing parents, being outcasts at school--and being treated miserably; I think a lot of us can sympathize with that--and being different. Laurence, of course, is the nerd who doesn't like the outdoors. Patricia is a loner. They have their talents, and they share the knowledge of those talents with each other. All of this makes them targets for the "in crowd" at school. But they are targets in another fashion. An assassin is after them, an assassin who believes that they are special, and will play a big role in the coming apocalypse if they are not disposed of.

Eventually, Patricia and Laurence drift apart. They run into each other now and again, but they travel in different circles. Laurence is a member of an organization that is working on a secret project that the group hopes will save humanity from the coming end times. Patricia has become a magician and is a member of a local group of magicians which is working toward the prevention of the same apocalypse. Each one of them is special within their own group, and both play a big part in each organizations plan to save the world. As the reader might guess, there's enough going on in the world without the inevitable confrontation between technology and magic mucking about with things. And yet, that confrontation does happen and does play an important part of the story.

ALL THE BIRDS IN THE SKY is a brilliant novel, but it's not about the apocalypse, not by a long shot. It's a story about relationships (as was, come to think of it "Six Months, Three Days"); the relationship between Laurence and Patricia, the relationship between magic and technology, the relationship between insiders and outsiders, the relationship between nature and science, the relationship between those in power and those not in power. All these relationships are woven into a tapestry that tells a terrific story about what may be the end of the world and how we as a human race, along with a bit of help from technology and magic, deal with adversity. Anders makes us care about these characters, and I think we as readers get a head start in this department as there are many people who can relate to being treated as outsiders and outcasts. We can also relate to finding that group within which we fit like a glove, and we see that happen for both Patricia and Laurence.

It's hard to categorize this book as either science fiction or fantasy, but I don't think there's really a need to do so (unless the reader really wants to, then the reader can make up their own minds as to what this book really is). While magic and technology are important to the story, they are not the point of the story; the magic and technology are there as a framework to move the story along, to help the relationships I've already talked about take center stage as humanity fights for survival.

The end of the novel is one of the most poignant and lovely scenes I've read in a very long time. Both Patricia and Laurence have suffered great losses along with the rest of humanity, and their realization that they need each other to move forward and help each other deal with what's out there makes for one of the best endings to a novel I've read in a very long time.

Alyssa Bresnahan is, for me, the perfect narrator for the book. Her ability to switch between the various characters, whether they be human, animal, or otherwise (hey, I can't give it all away) is outstanding, as is her ability to provide emotional nuance to each of the characters as they go through both good and bad times to get to the end of the world.

ALL THE BIRDS IN THE SKY really surprised me. I didn't know what to expect as I ventured into it, but what I got was nothing short of outstanding. Your version of the end of the world may be different from this one, but if I had to pick one for myself I think I'd choose this one. [-jak]

A NIGHT WITHOUT STARS by **Peter F. Hamilton** (copyright 2016, Del Rey, 721 pp., ebook ISBN 9780345547231, hardback ISBN 9780345547224) (excerpt from the *Duel Fish Codices*: a book review by Joe Karpierz):

Peter F. Hamilton concludes his two-book *Chronicle of the Fallers*, a story of the Commonwealth Universe, with the satisfying *A NIGHT WITHOUT STARS*. The novel also seems to be the last of the Commonwealth novels, but more about that later.

The first novel in the *Chronicle of the Fallers*, *THE ABYSS WITHOUT DREAMS*, ended with the planet *Bienvenido* and all its occupants--humans and Fallers alike--being expelled from the Void due to some work by the ever present Nigel Sheldon into the vastness of space between galaxies. It is set some 200 years later than the prior novel, and the human occupants of *Bienvenido* are still battling the fallers. Complicating the issue is the fact that the humans are split into two factions: the Eliters, the technologically capable and enhanced group; and the rest of humanity, which is almost luddite in its attitude toward technology. These are the descendants of *Slvasta*, who was a vehement opponent of technological advances, and is trying to lead the human residents of *Bienvenido* away from what he fears will turn the planet into something like the Commonwealth, who he blamed for the situation the planet is in. As a result, the human factions fight against each other, and can gain no traction against the enemy Fallers.

This blinding hatred of Eliters has, in part, caused humanity to miss the fact that the Fallers are now planning an all-out attack on the humans in order to wipe them out and take over the planet. On their side is an Eliter called the *Warrior Angel*, but the current rulers of the planet want nothing to do with her. The only real progress humanity is making against the Fallers is a series of space launches the purpose of which is to attack the Faller "Trees" that are in orbit, as the Trees are known to be the source of the attacking Fallers. One of these flights inadvertently releases an unusual ship that lands on the planet which

contains a baby. A local named Florian is charged with taking care of the baby for a month, at which point things will supposedly look up for the humans of Bienvenido. Clearly, the baby is not what it appears to be; it does, however, appear to hold the key to the survival of the humans on Bienvenido.

And thus the stage is set for a climactic battle between the humans and the Fallers. The path is not easy, as there is much political maneuvering, back-stabbing, and in-fighting in the human camp, while the Eliter camp is doing the best it can to save humanity from both the Fallers and itself.

A NIGHT WITHOUT STARS, while not quite vintage Commonwealth, is definitely vintage Peter F. Hamilton: a large cast of characters, a grand scope, aliens (friendly and not so friendly), and high concept scientific maneuverings. As is also typical with a Hamilton novel (I keep thinking of the musical Hamilton every time I type "Hamilton"; I really need to stop that), the story is told along several fronts which eventually, slowly, and surely come together for the eventual resolution of the plot and story.

As I read A NIGHT WITHOUT STARS, I couldn't help but see parallels with what is going on in society today, especially in the U.S.: technophobes who refuse to accept the benefits of science and technology, infighting within the government, and potential attacks from outside (and within). While this book was written and published long before the election here in the United States, there seems to be an eerie parallel between the situations in the novel and where we reside as a country today.

Earlier I stated that this appears to be the last of the Commonwealth novels. After the resolution to the conflict on Bienvenido, Hamilton takes us on a grand tour of all of the characters we've become familiar with over the course of seven novels as the principle characters of A NIGHT WITHOUT STARS are looking for homes within the Commonwealth: Edeard, now living in the Commonwealth after having his own adventures in the Void; Mellanie; Oscar Munroe; Paula Myo; Nigel Sheldon; and even the great Ozzie himself gets a mention (although we don't actually get to see him here). It's as if the main cast of the Commonwealth is getting one last bow before riding off into the sunset (although given that we don't actually see Ozzie here at the end gives me a slight pause in thinking that this is the last Commonwealth book--there appears to be a loose end to tie up that may have another story in it).

If this is truly is the last of the Commonwealth stories, it feels like A NIGHT WITHOUT STARS ended it in a satisfactory manner. Like the individual novels in the saga, the Commonwealth stories have covered a lot of ground across the grand scope of the universe to finally come together at the end for one last happy hurrah. Maybe there are happy endings after all. [-jak]

Davy Crockett, Enceladus, HIDDEN FIGURES, and THE RISE OF THE ROCKET GIRLS (letter of comment by John Purcell):

In response to [Mark's comments on Davy Crockett](#) in the 04/21/17 issue of the MT VOID, John Purcell writes:

Well, here we go with a couple brief comments on your latest issue.

You ask at the end of that little bit called "Shades of Gray" if Davy Crockett passed the Beaver Hat test. If he had known how Texas was going to turn out 180 years later, I think he would have tossed aside his rifle and left without looking back. [-jp]

In response to [Greg Frederick's comments on Enceladus](#) in the same issue of the MT VOID, John writes:

I like the idea of exploring Enceladus for life forms. Those deep sea vents sound like a probable spot for exploration and testing. This makes sense. Yeah, NASA should focus on Enceladus. After all, we were warned to stay away from Europa. [-jp]

In response to [John Hertz's and Evelyn's comments on HIDDEN FIGURES](#) in the same issue of the MT VOID, John writes:

It is interesting that John Hertz and Evelyn are exchanging viewpoints on the book HIDDEN FIGURES. I have yet to read that book or see the movie based on it, but recently I read THE RISE OF THE ROCKET GIRLS by Nathalia Holt (2016), and it was wonderful. Unlike HIDDEN FIGURES, RISE OF THE ROCKET GIRLS starts back in the last years of World War II, and is essentially a history of the women who were literally human computers that were behind the success of first jet and rocket engine tests that would eventually evolve into the Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, California. Fascinating book. I believe it would make the perfect companion volume to HIDDEN FIGURES.

Yeah, that will do it today. Many thanks for the zine, and take care. [-jp]

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

NEW YORK 2140 by Kim Stanley Robinson (ISBN 978-0-316-26234-7) is a typical Robinson novel, full of environmental

and social comment, and with plenty of info-dumps. But a few things seemed poorly thought out. For example, will the World Trade Organization and the G-20 still be around in 2140, with those names? And there are other details that also seem just too current to be accurate for 120 years in the future. (The WTO is only a couple of decades old; the G20 is not even that old.) And Robinson has two characters conveniently named Mutt and Jeff (full names Ralph Muttchopf and Jeff Rosen), and another named Charlotte Armstrong. (For those not up on mystery authors, this is like having a character named "Eric Flint".)

The biggest problem is that the novel is not well structured. For three-quarters of it, we get a fairly interesting picture of life in "drowned New York". Then we get an eighth of it describing a monster hurricane, and the last eighth describing the aftermath. At the very end we get two pages of an unbelievably facile economic revolution, and then two pages explaining why it may not last. If Robinson intended this as a blueprint for social change, he is certainly over-simplifying how it would work. (Admittedly there is a lot of economic info-dump before this, but still, everything runs far more smoothly than people should expect.)

Let me start by saying that *LATIN@ RISING: AN ANTHOLOGY OF LATIN@ SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY* edited by Matthew David Goodwin (ISBN 978-1-60940-524-3) has (in my opinion) a terrible title. "LATIN@" does not refer to science fiction and fantasy in Latin. Nor does it refer to anything involving email addresses or the Internet. It does not even refer to *Latina* science fiction and fantasy. As best as I could guess (and googling confirmed this), this is a new trendy way to combine "Latino" and "Latina" into a single word, which however is 1) unknown to most people who would see this book on a shelf, and 2) unpronounceable.

So let me clarify: This book is an anthology of science fiction and fantasy by authors of both sexes, living in the United States, and of Latin American origin.

(And while I am complaining, let me add that I hate the paper, which has some sort of shiny finish that feels funny *and* reflects the light if held at the wrong angle, making it difficult to read. I also dislike the weird font used for the titles. The publisher is apparently very proud of both of these aspects, announcing on the last page that the book was printed on "60 pound Anthem Plus Matte paper, and that the tiles are set in "Aquiline Two, Bickham Script, and Adobe Caselon type.")

Many of the stories focus on issues of identity, but it would be a mistake to assume that is necessarily the focus of most Latinic science fiction and fantasy. I am sure that it is an important topic, but it could also be the case that Goodwin was looking for that type of story in particular, or that it tended to interest him more. The identity may be the characters' ancestral background, or their more recent family history, or their place in a society not their own, or their transformation by a disease or surgery into something else, or even that they are a different species.

The problem with anthologies such as this is that they may be interpreted as representing the entirety of a group. Goodwin acknowledges this, but writes, "And while there is not one kind of U.S. Latin@ experience, there are historically some overlapping themes, such as migration, colonialism, conflict between Latin@ and Anglo groups, code-switching between Spanish and English, and an indigenous political heritage much different from indigenous groups in the United States." (As an aside, why "Latin@" but not "Angl@"?). He seems to imply that stories not dealing with these subjects are anomalies, and the result is that he ends up leaving the impression that Latinic science fiction and fantasy does not cover the broad spectrum of science fiction and fantasy in general.

Given all that, I still recommend it--the stories are good stories, even if the marketing is not what I would have done. [-ecl]

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Quote of the Week:

And this brings me by natural sequence to the great drink question. As you know, of course, the American does not drink at meals as a sensible man should. Indeed, he has no meals. He stuffs for ten minutes thrice a day. Also he has no decent notions about the sun being over the yardarm or below the horizon.

--Rudyard Kipling

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