

MT VOID 06/09/17 -- Vol. 35, No. 50, Whole Number 1966



```

e e e e e   e   e e e e e   e   e   e e e e e e   e   e   e e e e e e e e
e   e   e   e   e   e   e   e   e   e   e   e   e   e   e   e   e   e
e   e e e e e e e e   e   e   e   e   e   e   e   e   e   e   e   e
e   e   e   e   e   e   e   e   e   e   e   e   e   e   e   e   e   e
e   e   e   e e e e e   e   e   e   e   e   e   e e e e e e e e
  
```

Mt. Holz Science Fiction Society
06/09/17 -- Vol. 35, No. 50, Whole Number 1966

Table of Contents

[The Rise of the Hacker Century](#) (comments by Mark R. Leeper)
[BE AFRAID](#) (film review by Mark R. Leeper)
[Greece](#) (letters of comment by Keith F. Lynch and Gregory Benford)
[This Week's Reading](#) (LAGOON, WICKED WONDERS, and A CARIBBEAN MYSTERY) (book comments by Evelyn C. Leeper)
[Quote of the Week](#)

Co-Editor: Mark Leeper, mleeper@optonline.net
 Co-Editor: Evelyn Leeper, eleeper@optonline.net
 Back issues at http://leepers.us/mtvoid/back_issues.htm
 All material is copyrighted by author unless otherwise noted.
 All comments sent or posted will be assumed authorized for inclusion unless otherwise noted.

To subscribe, send mail to mtvoid-subscribe@yahoogroups.com
 To unsubscribe, send mail to mtvoid-unsubscribe@yahoogroups.com

The Rise of the Hacker Century (comments by Mark R. Leeper):

If you have been reading my columns in the MT VOID you know that I am a little uneasy about the fact that so much of our economy is heavily dependant on the Internet and that the Internet appears to be in many ways very insecure. A recent large-scale crisis was a major worldwide ransomware attack of the WannaCry virus. In it first day of freedom the virus hit at least 150 countries and a total of more than 230,000 computers. What was that all about?

First, what is ransomware? It is a type of malicious software designed to block access to the victim's system, generally by encrypting system data. The same encryption software that can protect your data from being read by others can be used by others to encrypt your own data so that you cannot read it or decrypt it. Then as extortion your data is held for ransom, typically it would be a money ransom payable in bitcoins.

What is a bitcoin? It is a piece of purely digital currency that is regulated by software so that it is not controlled by any bank. Transactions in bitcoin are purely anonymous and non-traceable. There is no way for an investigator to find out the details of a transaction. But the privacy that bitcoin allows makes it the currency of choice for very private transactions like drug deals.

What is the WannaCry virus? It is a particularly brutal piece of ransomware. May 12 it hit machines all over the world. Thousands of computers all around the world were infected and shut down for ransom, payable in bitcoins. Russian computers were particularly badly hit. Even as ransoms are being collected there is little idea as to who committed the heist or who has paid the ransom. We will never know how successful the WannaCry virus was. But the smart money says it probably paid off very well.

Symantec, a major computer security firm, has noted that some of the hacking tools have been used by North Korean hackers or in actions attributed to North Koreans. But none of this is particularly conclusive. Both Russia and North Korea seem to have a history of perhaps doing a lot of international hacking.

What is the ransom WannaCry demanded? Well, that is a relatively modest sum of about \$300 up to about \$600. If they demanded a much bigger ransom most people would just scrap their computers and start over on new machines.

And as of May 30--the most recent report I could find--the scam had netted only about \$110,000, a relatively small sum. But that is just someone's estimate as of that date. This is not so low because of largesse. If the ransom were too high a significant proportion of those afflicted will just trash their afflicted computers and buy new ones. On the other hand if the virus has infected a high-profit target like a hospital computer, it is conceivable they could have been shaken down for lot more.

Since the 1940s the government has been preparing for nuclear war. And we are terrified that North Korea is also preparing for that same kind of war. And that would be bad enough, but at least that requires a large and somewhat traceable investment. But operating in cyberspace is much less expensive no country, including the United State, has any particular advantage. A teenager with some relatively economical computer hardware could defeat major world powers. For that matter we have been attributing cyber-attacks to North Korea or Russia based on the style of software coding. Styles are easy to imitate and counterfeit. It will probably not be long before the people behind cyber-attacks will be framing each other. That will greatly complicate reacting to a cyber-attack. If a country gets attacked with a nuclear weapon, there will probably be enough evidence left behind to detect whom the attacker was. The same is not true of a cyber-attack. That will greatly complicate having a reasonable and effective reaction.

I admit I am not an expert in these matters. At least that is the way I see the situation. This may no longer be the American Century, and it might be the Hacker Century. I invite and welcome reader response. [-mrl]

BE AFRAID (film review by Mark R. Leeper):

CAPSULE: Director Drew Gabreki manages to create an atmosphere of dread from a cliché-ridden plot supplied by scriptwriter Gerald Nott. A successful doctor escapes the big city and goes to live in a small idyllic Pennsylvania. The results are just about what horror fans would expect. The story is more complex than it at first appears, but it is built of fairly familiar building blocks. Rating: low +1 (-4 to +4) or 5/10

While it is undeniable that there is a feeling of dread that hangs over **BE AFRAID**, just what exactly is going on remains undefined right up to the end of the film. Not that we have a hard time recognizing the territory we are in. The film starts on a dark and stormy night familiar from legions of horror films. Throughout there are intentional or not references to other horror films. One might wonder if they were just coincidence but a tracking shots following a youngster on a plastic tricycle couldn't be just a coincidence. And when the selfsame five-year-old claims that a man comes into his bedroom you know he will be ignored because what does a five-year-old know? Right. The boy is living in a house that has a notorious past, but isn't that just more coincidence?

As the film begins the story already is going at full swing. A man seems to have gone crazy and is going after who he calls "them" as well as his own family with what appears to be an axe handle. We cut away to physician John Chambers (played by Brian Krause) who is tired of the hassle of a big city ER and moves into a house in a small Pennsylvania town. Almost from the very beginning his twelve-ish son, Nathan (Michael Leone), claims that a man wearing a hat comes into his room at night. And soon Chambers' older son Nathan (Michael Leone) unexpectedly comes home from college from which he has decided to drop out. John and his wife Heather (Jaimi Paige) are arguing out what they should be doing to get Nathan back to school. Then to add to their problems, Nathan is walking in the nearby woods when he runs into Mr. Axe-handle who claims to be looking for his daughter. It turns out that Nathan (who sees a man coming into his room at night) also sees a strange girl about his own age who shows up and disappears in the woods. Her favorite place seems to be a sinister-looking abandoned train tunnel. Things go from bad to worse as the family is visited by nightmares and John takes it a step farther by finding he has sleep paralysis, so he cannot escape his nightmares.

The film is full of half-lit scenes, nightmares that will not end, phantoms who look like they have been dipped in tar, long walks down all-too-Freudian tunnels, phantoms in bathtubs, and worried parents. There is plenty here to be scary, but little that distinctively sets this film apart from too many horror films being released this or most years. And a lot of this film has to be stared at because so much of the film is under-lit. Then the trailer tells you, "Fear what you can't see." But then there is not a lot you actually CAN see.

This film gives the impression that the horror sequences were added on informed by other horror films rather than being an integral part of the story. Much is familiar, but at least except for the sleep paralysis no single horror touch is repeatedly used within the film. I rate **BE AFRAID** a low +1 on the -4 to +4 scale or 5/10. Release date: June 1, 2017.

Film Credits: <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt3311020/combined>

What others are saying: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/be_afraid_2017

[-mrl]

Greece (letters of comment by Keith F. Lynch and Gregory Benford):

In response to [Mark's comments on Greece](#) in the 06/02/17 issue of the MT VOID, Keith Lynch writes:

"Crito, we owe a cock to Asclepius. Do pay it. Don't forget."
-- Socrates' last words.

So Greeks have known, for at least 24 centuries, that debt has to be paid off.

If we're to take their claim seriously, that implies that the Greek leaders should be treated as incompetent children.

[Mark writes,] "I say that Greece should have known what way too many Americans have learned, that you have to manage debt."

Or better yet, to avoid all debt, except perhaps in a dire emergency. [-kfl]

Mark responds:

Avoiding debt **is** managing debt. It is the strongest form of managing debt. Speaking for myself I have had to pay interest on only two debts in my lifetime. One was a house mortgage and the other was a credit card debt due to a strayed mail sack. [-mrl]

Gregory Benford writes:

[Mark writes,] "If it takes 12 letters to say something in English, in Greek it will require 18 to 24 letters. Same idea, but it just takes a lot more letters to express in Greek."

True of German and French, too--my novels often run two volumes there. Russian too.

Greece is a vampire on the euro. You're right, austerity will draw in others. But the northern Euros are tired of bailing out not just Greece, but Spain, Italy, Portugal... Good for the dollar, though.

As a history fan, I'd be interested in your take on my BERLIN PROJECT. [-gb]

Evelyn replies:

Sorry, neither of us have read it. [-ecl]

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

LAGOON by Nnedi Okorafor (ISBN 978-1-4814-4088-2) is a science fiction first contact novel set in Lagos, Nigeria. That I feel that I have to specify the country for the largest city in Africa (with a population of between 18 and 21 million) says something about Americans' geographic knowledge. If asked to name the five most populous African cities, I guarantee that basically no one would get them right. (Feel free to try, and then Google for the answer.) And Okorafor writes in her postscript, "If all you know about one of Africa's most powerful and innovative nations is that there is an abundance of 419 scammers there, that's on you, not me." (Actually, the other thing I know is that the security at Lagos's airport was so bad in the 1990s that the United States banned direct flights from there.)

It is fascinating to read a science fiction novel set somewhere different for a change. That said, it would have been helpful to know there was a glossary for the pidgin in the back of the book sometime before I discovered it halfway through.

Joe Karpierz reviewed WICKED WONDERS by Ellen Klages (ISBN 978-1- 6169-6261-6) in the 05/19/17 issue of the MT VOID, so I will not write a complete review. Rather I will second Joe's recommendation and now make some specific comments.

Generation ships have been in science fiction for decades, but it is only recently that the moral aspects of them have been addressed. That is, by what right do people decide to commit not just themselves, but their descendents for several generations to life "in a tin can." In "Amicae Aeternum", Klages addresses this by considering what life would be like for the younger generation, born on Earth and committed to spend the rest of their lives on a spaceship, not by their choice, but by their parents'. You might say it is no different than parents deciding to move the family to another town, or country, or continent, but the latter is a similar environment and situation. But the ship is different. (As one character notes, "There will never be a new kid in my class.")

Science fiction has considered this question in other contexts: should parents be allowed to genetically engineer their potential offspring? should parents be allowed to have AIs implanted in their children? and so on. In a sense, it is strange that it took this long for it to get around to the ethics of generation ships.

Most of Klages's stories have women as protagonists. More specifically, most have young girls as protagonists. One might think this would make the stories "young adult" fiction. The problem is that I have no idea what is meant by "young adult" fiction. Probably this is because when I was a young adult reading science fiction pretty much all science fiction was suitable for young adults. Asimov, Bradbury, Clarke, (early) Heinlein--there was nothing that young adults could not read. In that sense, Klages's stories are written for older adults, but there is no reason that young adults could not read that as well.

Agatha Christie is known for her intricate plotting, but if you re-read her works enough, you realize that she is actually quite sloppy, or at least reliant on coincidence to an extreme degree. Consider A CARIBBEAN MYSTERY (ASIN B000FC10ZW). [WARNING: SPOILERS] For example, what are the chances that the two doctors that Palgrave was talking about who, having both encountered the murderer, should then encounter each other and end up discovering they had both encountered the murderer? And given that, what are the chances then that one of them would tell Palgrave and that *he* would then run into the murderer--halfway around the world, no less?

Why would one of the doctors give the snapshot to Palgrave? It would have meaning for the doctor, but mean nothing to Palgrave.

Apparently the murderer covered his tracks for a while by spreading the rumor that Palgrave had high blood pressure. Really? He told several people in the course of a few hours the day before Palgrave is found dead, and no one remembers where they had heard about his blood pressure less than a day later. (It *could* have been the case that the murderer had decided Palgrave was a threat earlier, but then realized that the threat was more immediate than he had thought. However, this is not even mentioned, and we know if it were the case, Miss Marple would have realized it, because she is never wrong.)

And isn't it convenient that just the right guest happens to know both all about "anointing" and that the murderer has a motive for another murder? [-ecl]

Mark Leeper
mleeper@optonline.net

Quote of the Week:
Food, love, career, and mothers, the four major guilt groups.

--Cathy Guisewite

[Tweet](#)

Go to [our home page](#)