

MT VOID 08/11/17 -- Vol. 36, No. 6, Whole Number 1975

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Mt. Holz Science Fiction Society
08/11/17 -- Vol. 36, No. 6, Whole Number 1975

Table of Contents

[What to Look for in the Eclipse](#)

[Bottled Water](#) (comments by Mark R. Leeper)

[A Cyber-Crime Too Big to Fail?](#) (comments by Mark R. Leeper)

[STAR-BEGOTTEN: A LIFE LIVED IN SCIENCE FICTION](#) by James Gunn

(book review by Joe Karpierz)

[1944](#) (film review by Mark R. Leeper)

[6 DAYS](#) (film review by Mark R. Leeper)

["West Wing"](#) (letter of comment by Philip Chee)

[This Week's Reading](#) (SYLVIE AND BRUNO, COUNTER-CLOCK WORLD, CRYPTOZOIC!, TIME'S ARROW, and "What Has Passed Shall in Kinder Light Appear") (book comments by Evelyn C. Leeper)

[Quote of the Week](#)

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What to Look for in the Eclipse:

Greg Frederick sends us the following from earthsky.org:

<https://tinyurl.com/void-eclipse-stages>

"The August 21 total eclipse will last several hours. There will be many interesting things to look for. Bookmark this handy checklist of must-see events and effects, from eclipse gurus Fred Espenak and Mark Littmann."

Bottled Water (comments by Mark R. Leeper):

Has anyone tried this new Poland Spring Concentrate? Just add water. [-mrl]

A Cyber-Crime Too Big to Fail? (comments by Mark R. Leeper):

I am hearing a lot about cyber-crime these days. What exactly is cyber-crime? In its most general sense it is any criminal activity that employs computers and/or the Internet. Types of cyber-crime include direct attacks on computer systems, cyber-bullying, spam, phishing, and distribution of child pornography. Any activity that is a crime and is assisted by use of computers or the Internet qualifies. In addition, there is any activity that may not have been outlawed because until the cyber-age has not even been possible but which would be criminal. This might include some forms of election tampering. Drone-spying on a political opponent would be called cyber-crime.

I have been thinking about election tampering. Wouldn't it be possible to modify vote totals and rig election results? There is a famous quote attributed to Joseph Stalin (falsely, I believe, but it does not matter). He said, or probably did not say, "It's not the people who vote that count, it's the people who count the votes." Votes are count might well be vulnerable to tampering by hackers. There is no way to be sure that it is not happening or that the election software is not hackable. Well, that sounds bad, but things have gotten worse.

Hacking the electoral system in the United States is a crime that strikes me as too big to fail. What would we do if it were discovered that Donald Trump paid some large sum of money for Russian hackers to tip all the right polls in the November elections so Donald Trump won the November elections? To impeach the President for stealing the election would mean admitting to the world that our electoral system is vulnerable to hacking and was giving false results. I doubt that we want to send that message.

I suspect we could never admit that our elections had been hacked. The hacking would be a crime just too big for us to admit to. Ask yourself what would be done if the FBI or CIA or even the NSA were to discover that Donald Trump paid some amount of money to completely hack the electoral system to give himself and the Republican party a huge landslide in the elections. You could not make that information public. They could not go to Hillary Clinton at this point and tell her that she was now President. There is at most one person who is prepared to be President at this point and that one person is Donald Trump.

What would happen if the world in general were to find out that our election process had failed and the person serving as President had no legitimate right to that title? The only reasonable reaction to that piece of terrible knowledge would be to hush it up.

It is true that a number of recent votes have gone in unexpected directions recently. It was claimed that exit polls showed results very different than the actual election. Britain has had the Brexit referendum and Theresa May's "snap election." Both had very unexpected results. That could be just how it came out or it could suggest vote total tampering.

The assertion that major tampering has been going on for years is not really falsifiable. We might find out that it is true, but we never can be sure it is false.

It is conceivable (and non-falsifiable) that the hackers as a whole represent a new political power. And it is not just another party to be pleased. They could conceivably be the most powerful political force in the world.

Like the coming of the plague to Europe, people had no idea what was causing the effects they were seeing. There were all kinds of crazy-seeming ways to fight the problem, but you were never sure you were safe. Charlatans would claim they could protect you and they might never even know that they themselves were wrong. [-mrl]

STAR-BEGOTTEN: A LIFE LIVED IN SCIENCE FICTION by James Gunn (copyright 2017, McFarland, \$25.00, trade paperback, 264pp, Print ISBN: 978-1-4766-7026-3, Ebook ISBN: 978-1-4766-2966-7) (excerpt from the *Duel Fish Codices*: a book review by Joe Karpierz):

At the risk of repeating myself (see my review of James Gunn's *TRANSGALACTIC* back in October of 2016), at the WorldCon in Kansas City in 2016 I attended a panel made up entirely of SFWA Grandmasters: Connie Willis, Robert Silverberg, Larry Niven, Joe Haldeman, and James Gunn. Those five science fiction luminaries represent more combined years of writing and awards than I think any of us can comprehend. Of the five, James Gunn has not only been writing the longest, he's also been with us the longest, having been born in 1923 (which by my math makes him 94 years old). To quote a statement that I've read many times in conjunction with the publication of his autobiography, *STAR-BEGOTTEN: A LIFE LIVED IN SCIENCE FICTION*, Gunn "has been called 'the last Golden Age author of science fiction.'" That's probably true, as I can't think of any other writer still with us that had work published back in the 1940s (although I'm sure someone who reads this review will remind me of someone I've forgotten[*]). The final book in *The Transcendental Machine* trilogy, *TRANSFORMATION*, was just published by Tor. While the rest of that illustrious panel are still active in the field one way or another--either still writing or attending conventions--it seems that Gunn has decided it's time to take stock in his life and his contributions to the field of science fiction, and so he has written *STAR-BEGOTTEN* to share his memories with fans and friends.

I've not read many autobiographies that I can remember, if any at all. The last biography I read was of the great New York Yankee Joe DiMaggio (a book which I reviewed in September of 2005). As a result, I didn't know what to expect. I suspect that there are as many ways to write autobiographies as there are people who write them. The way Gunn went about it was to start at the beginning and go through his life until he got to the present day. I suppose that's a pretty good way to do it. If I lived a life interesting enough to other people to write an autobiography, I would probably do it the same way.

What amazes me about Gunn is that he remembers in such detail his home, neighborhood, and friends growing up. 1923 is a long time ago, and while he obviously doesn't remember events starting at birth, it seems as if he remembers everything in

vivid detail from those long ago days. Later on in the book he does admit that he doesn't remember everything any more, and honestly who would when you're 94 years old?

The subtitle of this book is "A Life Lived in Science Fiction". It's a bit misleading, perhaps, in that a good portion of Gunn's life was spent outside of science fiction, including spending time in the military and in administrative academia. However, he does recall an incident early in his life in which he went to hear H.G. Wells speak. It was that event which probably sent him on the path toward his prolific writing career and his eventually being named an SWFA Grandmaster. Along the way, we learn about Gunn's fits and starts with writing, college education, and romance. We learn about his life with his family and how they shaped and supported his career. And of course, we do learn about the fiction and non-fiction he wrote and was involved with all along the way.

And certainly that's a long career, a career that saw him crossing paths with some of the biggest names of the field from the past: Fred Pohl, Ted Sturgeon, Damon Knight, Cliff Simak, Horace Gold, John W. Campbell, John Brunner, Samuel R. Delany, and others. We learn about his involvement with teaching students about science fiction, both by creating college level classes in the field and traveling the world to spread the word about the genre. Gunn indeed is a force for spreading the word about how the field works and about how it influences our lives. He was always willing to lend his name and time to endeavors that would enlighten people about science fiction. I suspect that while there is a significant number of writers that are more prolific with regard to their fiction than Gunn, I believe that his contributions to globally spreading the word about the field may be unmatched.

What's also fascinating is that Gunn has been around long enough to see the transformation of the field from the Golden Age of the 40s through today, from a time when there were few enough personalities in the field that he could know most of them, to today where if you know who a handful of them are you're doing a good job. In that way, STAR-BEGOTTEN provides an interesting insight into the massive change in the field in the last 70 years. Indeed, if you look at the list of names I provided in the last paragraph, other than Delany, you won't find any diversity at all. Today's field would be unrecognizable to that H.G. Wells of long ago, but Gunn has seen that change and continues to be part of it.

If I have one issue with the book, it is that there is a lot of repetition--Gunn repeats events and stories multiple times during the book. This jarred me out of the book on occasion, but in the long run it didn't significantly detract from the memoir.

As I've said a couple of times, James Gunn is 94. If this is the last thing he writes before he calls it a career, STAR-BEGOTTEN is a fitting end to his life in science fiction. [-jak]

[*] Robert A. Madle published "Black Adventure" in "Science-Fantasy Correspondent", March-April 1937. This is from the 1930s. Ironically, I cannot find a true example from the 1940s, though Donald Kingsbury did have two letters published in "Astounding", in 1945 and 1949. There are other possibilities from the ISFDB, but these are mostly for very obscure authors for whom no death date is known. Given that some of them would be 115, I suspect they are in fact no longer alive. [-ecl]

1944 (film review by Mark R. Leeper):

CAPSULE: In 1944 Estonia was torn between Estonians who were forced to battle the Germans and Estonians who were forced to battle the Soviets. Elmo Nuganen's film 1944 tells a story of a country on the Eastern Front being torn apart. Nuganen gives us some striking recreations of battles and of the effect on the Estonians caught vise-like between two ruthless war machines. Perhaps this film is just one cut below the current DUNKIRK. This is a chapter of history that deserves to be better known. Rating: +2 (-4 to +4) or 7/10

In 1939 Germany and the Soviet Union signed their infamous Non- Aggression Pact. Stalin was guaranteed that by the pact that the USSR would be safe from attack by a Germany that did not feel bound by it agreements. Stalin, then feeling safe from attack by Germany invaded countries he wanted to swallow into the Soviet Union, Estonia among them. The following year Stalin went ahead and incorporated Estonia into the Soviet Union. To make his point he took 55,000 Estonian men and mobilized them into the Soviet Army. In 1941 the German military, now declaring itself at war with the Soviets, invaded Estonia and drafted 72,000 Estonians into its own German Waffen-SS. Like an imposed civil war, that meant that Estonians were at war with other Estonians. Most Americans have been taught little of this military history. Much of the history in this film may be unfamiliar for most American viewers.

The film 1944 takes place July to November 1944 from the Battle of Tannenberg Line to the Battle of Tehumardi and the interval between. Estonia is at war with itself while Red troops fight against German troops. The Germans hypocritically tell their Estonian conscripts, virtually a slave army, that it is an honor to fight for Hitler and supposedly that it has been discovered that Estonians are really Aryan just like the Germans and they are all fighting for a happy and bright future in the Greater German Reich. Somehow the soldiers forced to fight do not seem to be convinced.

1944 gives the viewer a vivid experience of tank and machine gun warfare, but a somewhat softened view of trench warfare. We see the war for Estonia from the point of view of soldiers fighting for the Germans and soldiers fighting for the Soviets,

each destroying the country of his birth for the benefit of a foreign dictator he hates.

This film is probably being released currently in the United States to appeal to the people who liked Christopher Nolan's currently released film DUNKIRK. The battle scenes are strong material, but they do not have the personal feel that the close-ups of soldiers in battle have in DUNKIRK. The attention to detail in uniforms and weaponry is reportedly very good. However, the uninitiated in WWII history may have trouble telling who is with what faction and what is happening to whom.

The film is offered for sale on DVD with optional English dubbing, but the dubbing sounds like it was recorded on a sound stage. The voices neither fit the actors' looks, nor their persona. Occasionally the words are off by half a second.

I rate 1944 a +2 on the -4 to +4 scale or 7/10.

1944 is available in on DVD with a choice of Estonian with English subtitles, or with English dubbing. Given a choice take the subtitles which have a much more realistic feel than the dubbing. The DVD currently is a Wal-Mart exclusive. The film is also available on digital.

Film Credits: <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt3213684/combined>

What others are saying: <https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/1944>

[-mrl]

6 DAYS (film review by Mark R. Leeper):

CAPSULE: 6 DAYS, a UK/New-Zealand co-production, is a docudrama re-creating the 1980 Iranian Embassy siege in London. Iranian terrorists wanted to force Britain to exert its (dubious) influence on the Iranian government to release 91 Arab prisoners. The account is tense but has few or no serious discrepancies with the BBC account of the incident (on YouTube). Still, one hostage crisis film may be a lot like another.
Rating: low +2 (-4 to +4) or 7/10

6 DAYS is the story of the 1980 Iranian Embassy siege that took place in the area known as Princess Gate in the heart of London, yet it really was aimed at the Iranian government 3400 miles away. To put the time in historical perspective, both Margaret Thatcher's term as UK Prime Minister and the Iran Hostage Crisis began the previous year. Both influence the embassy siege.

A breakaway faction in Iran calling itself the "Democratic Revolutionary Front for the Liberation of Arabistan" wanted to cut out a piece of Southern Iran, then called Khuzestan and declare it Arabistan. It would be a refuge for Arabic speaking Iranians who are persecuted other places in Iran.

At 11:30 AM Wednesday, April 30, 1980, six heavily armed gunmen occupied the Iranian Embassy in London and took 26 hostages. The immediate goal of the action was to force the Iranian government to release 91 political prisoners, advocates of the Arabistan movement. They also demanded to be given a plane to take the terrorists and their hostages out of the UK. As the title suggests the film follows the events of the six days of the terrorists occupying the embassy. At the same time the Special Air Service (SAS)--the elite special forces unit of the British Army--and the Metropolitan police will both try to rescue the 91 hostages. We see six days of negotiation, lies, and bargains. One demand that can be complied with: the terrorists want their action covered by the BBC. The BBC is more than happy to cover the story.

We see the events primarily from two points of view. Max (played by Mark Strong) is the negotiator from the metropolitan police. Working somewhat at cross-purposes is the military SAS, represented by Rusty (Jamie Bell). Glenn Standring's screenplay is devoted almost entirely to the siege, with no side plots or subplots. Max does have two daughters who see him on TV. That is about it. From the start the entire operation was botched. It is not clear why the terrorists thought the UK could help the hostage-takers. Iran and the UK at this time were adversaries.

Mark Strong is a good actor with striking looks, but until now I have seen him in only supporting roles. In THE IMITATION GAME he played a government official. In JOHN CARTER he was some kind of secret alien overlord sort of thing. It is also good to see Tim Pigott-Smith is still around and making films. Music by Lachlan Anderson is just jarring texture with no melody.

Perhaps the biggest problem with 6 DAYS is not the fault of the account specifically. Plots of hostage crises and negotiations for release are very common. It is hard to find much here that is new and creative. If one discounts the violence in 6 DAYS, this film is a lot like DOG DAY AFTERNOON or INSIDE MAN. I rate 6 DAYS a low +2 on the -4 to +4 scale or 7/10.
Release date: August 18.

Film Credits: <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt4703048/combined>

What others are saying: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/6_days

BBC documentary on the Iranian Embassy Siege <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XD14OSmUniA>

[-mrl]

"**West Wing**" (letter of comment by Philip Chee):

In response to [Mark's comments on "West Wing"](#) in the 08/04/17 issue of the MT VOID, Philip Chee writes:

[Mark wrote,] "With Trump as President things in politics seems so changeable these days. If "West Wing" were revived and set in the present it would essentially be an anthology series with mostly new characters each week."

I haven't been following U.S. politics for a while but I get the impression that they have some sort of civil war going on both in the administration and in the alt-right community.

Is there a TL;DR summary of the current state of affairs? [-pc]

Evelyn responds:

I can't give you a "TL;DR summary" (isn't a "too-long-didn't-read summary" an oxymoron), but for the benefit of our non-US members, here is a short list of the people who have come and gone (and the number of days they were in office under Trump) would include:

- Sally Yates, former US deputy attorney general (10)
- Michael Flynn, former national security adviser (23)
- James Comey, former FBI director (10)
- Mike Dubke, former White House communications director (86)
- Sean Spicer, former White House press secretary (182)
- Reince Priebus, former White House chief of staff (189)
- Anthony Scaramucci, former White House communications director (11)
- Katie Walsh, former deputy chief of staff
- Walter Shaub, former director of the Office of Government Ethics

[-ecl]

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

"Life can only be understood backwards, but it must be lived forwards." --Soren Kierkegaard

The theme of this column is time running backward. I saw the film MY TOMORROW, YOUR YESTERDAY which uses this idea (somewhat) and I got to thinking that there have not been all that many books with it. So I figured it would try to read all of them to which I could find a reference--all five.

Well, only four and a chapter. The first known instance was Chapter 23 of SYLVIE AND BRUNO (1889, ISBN 978-1-548-52393-0), in which Bruno has a magical watch that includes a "reversal-peg" which supposedly reverses time. And it does--sort of. The girls are "un-embroidering" quite accurately, and the conversation sentences are in reverse order, but each sentence has its words in normal order, and each word's phonemes are in normal order. (We know this because Bruno understands them all perfectly.) As long as you have dialogue in a time-reversal story in which the point-of-view character is not reversed, this problem will persist.

COUNTER-CLOCK WORLD by Philip K. Dick (1967, ISBN 978-0-547-57219- 2) does not postulate that all time is reversed, just that (some) organic processes are. It is more a "Benjamin Button" [1] scenario, although apparently digestion, and even food preparation, also work backwards. Dick is not too specific on how food enters the body, but his people who have risen from the dead extract food from their mouths, put it on plates where it reforms with what is there already, and then uncook it and return it to what we would think of as its original sources. Dick is also not clear on whether this affects only humans or all life forms. (One presumes if the meat re-attaches to the steak and the steak gets uncooked, it must somehow ultimately get re-attached to the cow, which then ... comes alive again?)

Because it is not a universal phenomenon, the language issue is not a problem. Nevertheless, people start conversations with "goodbye" and end with "hello." Maybe this is just an affection to acknowledge the organic reversal. The other affectation (and clearly both of these were consciously adopted after the reversal effect started) is that the mouth becomes the obscene end of the digestive tract (as in calling someone a "horse's mouth"), and the new expletive is "Feood!" Cute, but not likely.

So the time reversal in COUNTER-CLOCK WORLD is only partial, which does avoid the language issue but is extremely paradoxical from a physics standpoint.

CRYPTOZOIC! by Brian Aldiss (ISBN 978-1-497-63758-0), it turns out, is mostly a straight time-travel novel. There is a notion of time being reversed, but it is not the main part of the novel, and since this seems to be an example of the "New Wave", it was almost impossible to follow it.

TIME'S ARROW by Martin Amis (ISBN 978-0-679-73572-0) is the truest to the concept of time flowing backward. Early on, we discover that the narrator is apparently a separate consciousness in Tod Friendly's body who has some inkling that the "time reversal" universe Friendly is living in is "wrong." As he says early on, "Wait a minute. Why am I walking *backward* into the house? Wait. Is it dusk coming, or is it dawn? What is the--what is the sequence of the journey I am on? What are its rules? Why are the birds singing so strangely? Where am I heading?"

And later the narrator sees the dates going from October 2 to October 1 to September 30 on the newspaper Friendly reads, and asks "How do you figure *that*? ... The mad are said to keep a film or stage set on their heads, which they order and art-decorate and move through. But Tod is sane, apparently, and his world is shared. It just seems to me that the film is running backward."

The narrator gives us a phonetic example of people talking--and here Amis covers the language issue, because it is as if it were a record being played backward: "dug" rather than "good" and "aid ut oo y'rrah" rather than "how're you today?" The narrator explains he found this (and the birds singing, and other sounds) incomprehensible at first, but learned to understand them, and hence what we get for the dialogue in the rest of the novel is really a translation.

Why the narrator has a sense that time should go in "our" direction and not "Tod's" is never explained. He certainly has no explanation, even though he recognizes it. Once, after relating a conversation between Tod and a woman, the narrator says, "I have noticed in the past that most conversations would make better sense if you ran them backward[2]. But with this man-woman stuff, you could run them any way you liked--and still get no further forward." Though he senses a reversal, the narrator's memory works in the flow of Tod's world--he has no foreknowledge of what is coming, which would correspond to our past.

But in addition to a stricter adherence to the "rules" of time reversal, Amis's novel is richer and deeper than the other works I have mentioned. As I wrote when I first read TIME'S ARROW in 1992:

All this sounds somewhat frivolous. But Amis is not being frivolous. [Friendly] turns out to be (have been?) a doctor in Auschwitz and part--but only part--of what Amis is doing is showing how much of life and our existence makes more sense when lived backward. Ecologically, for example, turning cars into iron ore and replacing it in the earth has a certain appeal that going in the other direction lacks. And clearly the Holocaust makes more sense run backwards than forwards. Many authors and philosophers have tried to make sense of the Holocaust and, while it's not clear that Amis's approach provides any practical answers, it does highlight how the Holocaust may be the archetypal example of humanity's tendency to do precisely the reverse of what makes sense. Conversely, of course, the normal function of a doctor (Tod T. Friendly's profession) makes more sense forward than backward. So in both our timeline and the reverse Tod T. Friendly (a name chosen with great care by Amis) moves from sin/evil to redemption-- in a sense, anyway, though the actual situation is far more complex.

The last work I read, "What Has Passed Shall in Kinder Light Appear", Bao Shu (pen name for Li Jun) (F&SF 03-04/15, and picked up for two "Year's Best" anthologies), is the most recent "time- reversal" work, although what is reversed here is not time per se, but cultural progress. As such, I suppose it technically does not belong here, but it *feels* like time reversal-- certainly as much as COUNTER-CLOCK WORLD. There may be more of this sort of work, under a different classification. When I first reviewed it, I said, "It is not a time travel story, though it has some ideas in common with that genre, and it is not an alternate history, though it has some ideas in common with that genre as well. Its underlying premise has been done before, though Bao Shu has a major variation from all the examples I have read before." The major premise was the reversal, though I wanted to avoid mentioning it there.

[1] "The Curious Case of Benjamin Button" by F. Scott Fitzgerald does not count, because *time* is not running backward, nor is Button living backward. His memory (and his digestion) is running in the same temporal direction as everyone else; it is just that his physical body is getting biologically younger rather than older as time progresses.

[2] That is to say, *backward* in Tod's world, but in the direction of *our* world. [-ecl]

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Quote of the Week:

Dogs are getting bigger, according to a leading dog manufacturer.

--Leo Rosten

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