

MT VOID 09/15/17 -- Vol. 36, No. 11, Whole Number 1980



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Mt. Holz Science Fiction Society
09/15/17 -- Vol. 36, No. 11, Whole Number 1980

Table of Contents

[Going the Distance](#) (comments by Mark R. Leeper)
[Love for the 20,000](#) (comments by Mark R. Leeper)
[THE LIMEHOUSE GOLEM](#) (film review by Mark R. Leeper)
[COLD MOON](#) (film review by Mark R. Leeper)
[THE DISAPPEARING SPOON by Sam Kean](#) (book review by Gregory Frederick)
[This Week's Reading](#) (THE SHEPHERD'S LIFE) (book comments
 by Evelyn C. Leeper)
[Quote of the Week](#)

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Going the Distance (comments by Mark R. Leeper):

Evelyn sent me an article saying that the human animal's maximum life span is about 120 years. This was my response:

Some people say the 120-year limit can't be broke. A doctor will tell you it's an absolute, like the firmness of the earth. Going beyond the 120-year limit is pie in the sky. They'll tell you the heart will seize up. You can't budge your stick. They'll tell you anybody tries to live longer will auger in. Well, now, maybe it can't be broke. Then again... maybe it can. Maybe it can only be broke for a specified diet and exercise regimen.

(It is a film reference. If you don't get it, don't worry about it.) [-mrl]

Love for the 20,000 (comments by Mark R. Leeper):

Evelyn and I (unfortunately) are voracious book collectors. When we get interested in a subject I have the bad habit of collecting books on that subject. Do I read them all? Probably most go nearly unread and the rest have been skimmed or just one section on one topic has been read. I intend to continue, but years later I still have not finished it as some other topic of interest has come up. It is a bad habit, but I have always been a slow reader. I considered owning a book was the next best thing to having read it.

I blame my sub-par reading rates on my school when I was in low grades. I was taught "see-and-say" reading rather than phonics and that has been a burden to me all my life.

When I finish with a book I probably should somehow dispose of it since, as it has been observed, it is a lot easier to acquire a book than to get rid of one. Indeed a book is like a kitten; it is easy to obtain, but then calls for years of care. There are all sorts of threats to books out there. My collection has been attacked by leaky water heaters and by insidious organisms like mildew.

Evelyn and I have a collection of some 20,000 books. All or almost all are cataloged (thank you, Evelyn) and I have a pretty good idea where to find any particular book in the catalog. Our collection is legendary to people I know.

My brother-in-law asked if we did not make a mistake buying all this big collection of books now with the world going to e-books. I think there is a basic misunderstanding. I will not say "never" but "nearly never" have we bought books as an investment that we hope to sell and cash in on. We just like being surrounded by books.

This reminds me of a story.

When I got to high school I saw our school had a big impressive library. It must have been four times as big as my junior high school library. For months after I came the high school I would explore. Each afternoon when school was over I would go to the new library and wander. Any row I picked I would find something of interest.

One day, a week or so after school started, I went to English class. The teacher said today we are going to introduce you to the library. "We've already met," I said to myself. Still, that's cool. Maybe I would find some books I didn't know.

The librarian gave a talk to the class and asked if anybody could guess what a book entitled A HOG ON ICE would be all about. I had seen the book on one of my expeditions. After someone guessed it was about hockey I raised my hand and said it was a book of popular expressions. The librarian responded that in all her years of running the library I was the only student who had known or guessed correctly what the book was about. The kid sitting behind me asked me how I knew. Well, I admitted I had seen the book on a previous visit. The guy behind me said I knew it because I had seen the book. The librarian said I had been driving her crazy. (Me? Crazy? Exaggeration for humor.) She had seen me come in each afternoon, but she could not figure out what my interests were. She noticed that I kept coming to the library but seemed to go some place different each time. (Yup.) The librarian started referring to me as the "man who ruined her life." It gave me a few moments of fame. The name stuck with me. I wish I remembered her name. She was really good at her job. I wish I could tell her that while she had not ignited my fascination with books, she had certainly fanned the flames. [-mrl]

THE LIMEHOUSE GOLEM (film review by Mark R. Leeper):

CAPSULE: A police detective stalks a serial killer in Victorian London and tries to connect it to a recent killing. The film feels like it was dipped in "Victorian atmosphere concentrate." The movie takes itself very serious indeed, but the viewer can look between the lines to see it as something of a romp. Peter Ackroyd's 1994 novel DAN LENO AND THE LIMEHOUSE GOLEM, is the basis of this dourly fun mystery with a popular London music hall as a background. Juan Carlos Medina directs a screen adaptation by Jane Goldman. The film features the never-fail actor Bill Nighy and Olivia Cooke. The mystery is perhaps not enough mysterious, but the acting and the look and feel are worth the trip. Incidentally, one disappointment is that the plot has virtually nothing to do with golems. Rating: high +2 (-4 to +4) or 8/10

Note: Limehouse is a district in East London that at this time was a realm of poverty and a cesspool of crime, sin, and vice. A golem is a creature from Jewish folklore, a clay statue mystically brought to life using the same recipe that God used to bring Adam to life.

Our story starts in 1880 in a run-down district of London. The Ripper has not yet begun his crimes, but he would recognize and approve of the neighborhood. Sherlock Holmes might suffer a breakdown collecting details. Limehouse is the home of a concentration of drunks, drug addicts, prostitutes, cutpurses, cutthroats, and a crowded music hall. There is this new murder that reminds people of a recent and unsolved series of serial murders committed by a character nicknamed the Limehouse Golem. While the killing spree in the film precedes the Ripper murders by about eight years, the golem leaves ripper-like clues such as cryptic messages left on walls near the scene of the killing.

A murder has been committed by poison. The unruly public thinks it is a return of the Limehouse Golem. Assigned to the unpleasant case is John Kildare (played by Bill Nighy). Kildare is in the late period of his career and he suspects he is intended to fail so he can be eased out. Kildare's chief suspect for the killing is Lizzie Cree (Olivia Cooke), the wife of the murdered man. Also present are familiar faces on good actors like Eddie Marsan and Daniel Mays.

The film is based on fictional murders and a fictional trial, but with personages such as Karl Marx, Dan Leno, and George Gissing added to the story. A setting such as Limehouse would frequently have turned up in Hammer films. Hammer was famous for its low budgets, the kind that were recreated with very simple sets. On the other hand for this film art directors Frederic Evard and Nick Wilkinson had a much more appropriate budget and the images are full of life. They are not just sufficient; they are extravagant. They might almost be said to be unrealistically lavish, if that is the right word for depicting a place like Victorian Limehouse. As thick as the settings are, some of the accents are thicker. They are too realistic and indistinct for the ears of the American audiences.

This is a mystery in the best traditions of BBC/PBS "Mystery". I rate THE LIMEHOUSE GOLEM a high +2 on the -4 to +4

scale or 8/10.

Film Credits: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/the_limehouse_golem

What others are saying: <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt4733640/combined>

SPOILER WARNING: The viewer sees too many clues over too short a period of screen time. Don't try to guess the killer--you might be right.

[-mrl]

COLD MOON (film review by Mark R. Leeper):

CAPSULE: CAPSULE: In a small backwater town in Florida a teenager has gone missing. She lives with her grandmother who is deeply worried about the lost girl. Griff Furst directs this adaption by Jack Snyder of Michael McDowell's novel, COLD MOON OVER BABYLON. The story is either a psychological or a supernatural thriller. You can take your pick. Furst takes advantage of the Deep South setting where giving a feel of gothic to the proceedings. Rating: high +1 (-4 to +4) or 6/10

For a genuine Southern Gothic feel to a film, you really need to see some swamp or some kudzu. Somehow you need the feel of HUSH, HUSH SWEET CHARLOTTE or SUDDENLY LAST SUMMER. Somehow COLD MOON is missing that, but it does have some gothic feel. Our film takes place in Babylon, Florida in 1989, though the film is based on COLD MOON OVER BABYLON by Michael McDowell, which was written in 1980. The film starts with a missing-person mystery. High-schooler Margaret Larkin was on an errand on her bicycle when she completely disappeared. Her grandmother Evelyn (Candy Clark) wants her found in no uncertain terms. Early on we are sure she will not show up alive.

At about the halfway point of the film we find who the culprit is and we move into the killer's mind as he is tormented by ghosts of the dead who may or may not be all in his mind. Actual ghosts or imaginary, they are real enough to torment him. The mystery plot is little that is new to the mystery genre. The film's strongest point is the visual imagery of the dead returning to avenge the murder. I am not an easy scare for a horror film, but the makeup effects had me on edge. In a flashback we see a man with his head hidden in a black hood murder her. No doubt the Deep South texture enhances the chills for the viewer. The uncertainty whether the ghosts are real or not is familiar to most horror audiences since THE INNOCENTS or its source in the Henry James story A TURN OF THE SCREW.

The film is based on Michael McDowell's novel, COLD MOON OVER BABYLON. McDowell is noted for writing the stories of BEETLEJUICE and NIGHTMARE BEFORE CHRISTMAS. This is a somewhat more serious plot than either of those films had.

Main character Sheriff Ted Hale is played by familiar face Frank Whaley. Horror film veteran Candy Clark plays Evelyn. And Christopher Lloyd of the BACK TO THE FUTURE series--nice to see him still working--is along in a small but effective part.

COLD MOON has the feel of a horror novel and makes for a few unexpected chills. I rate it a high +1 on the -4 to +4 scale or 6/10.

Release date: October 6, 2017.

Film Credits: <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt4441098/combined>

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

[-mrl]

THE DISAPPEARING SPOON (AND OTHER TRUE TALES OF MADNESS, LOVE, AND THE HISTORY OF THE WORLD FROM THE PERIODIC TABLE OF THE ELEMENTS) by **Sam Kean** (book review by Gregory Frederick):

This book is a science history book and is basically about the history of the development of the periodic table of the elements. It also covers the details of the discovery of some of the elements and the properties of many elements. Therefore, the chemistry and the physics of some elements is discussed. Also, the human behaviors of passion, competition, and obsession factor into this story too. Chemistry concerns the electromagnetic force and the bonding the outer shell electrons of an atom while the physics delves into the nucleus of the atom, the strong and weak nuclear forces and its structure. Though, Dmitri Mendeleev is the person most associated with creating the first periodic table there where others before him who attempted

the same thing. Mendeleev's lab experience gave him a deep level of knowledge of the elements and he had the courage to even predict some of the properties of elements that were missing in his new periodic table.

Originally, the table listed elements by order of their atomic weights but later this was found to be not a good way to list them. After Mendeleev's early work, another scientist, Henry Moseley, was probing the nucleus of an atom and it was determined that the atomic number which is the number of protons in a nucleus of an atom is the best way to order the elements. So, when you look at the periodic table you will see that cobalt which is heavier than nickel precedes it in the table. Nickel has a larger atomic number than cobalt though. Learning about the physics of an atomic nucleus was needed to unravel the problem of ordering the elements. Some exotic creations like the Bose-Einstein Condensate which was created by reducing the temperature of a group of atoms (2,000 rubidium atoms) to a billionth of a degree above absolute zero which causes them to act as one giant atom is described in this book.

If you like to understand how humans learned about the materials which make up our world, then this enjoyable book is for you. [-gf]

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

At the NASFIC this year, Brother Guy Consolmagno recommended some books that look at education, including *THE SHEPHERD'S LIFE* by James Rebanks (ISBN 978-1-250-06024-2). The jacket flap says, "A James Herriott for Modern Times". Given that Herriott died in 1995, it is not as if he lived back in Edwardian times or anything like that. (Rebanks was born in 1974, so I suppose he is from a slightly newer generation.)

Rebanks describes the life of shepherds and farmers in the fells of the Lake District. From the time he was shunted into a "comprehensive" school (which sounds like what we would call a vocational school) until he left school at the age of fifteen, he had no use for schooling or books, but later he became a voracious reader. (The title, for example, seems to be an homage to *A SHEPHERD'S LIFE* by W. H. Hudson.) However, he has a very different view of the Lake District than William Wordsworth or Alfred Wainwright (who wrote a series of walking guides in the 1950s and 1960s). Rebanks has little patience for tourists who look only at the scenery and completely ignore the inhabitants. The fells to him are both beautiful and harsh; it is not an easy life there.

Contrary to the implication of Brother Guy, *THE SHEPHERD'S LIFE* is not about education, but about the life of the sheep farmers in the Lake District. (While much of what he says would be true of small sheep farmers everywhere, much is very specific to the sheep farming in that region.) To a great extent Rebanks is making a plea to maintain a way of life that has existed for thousands of years, though one senses that he realizes that this becomes more difficult as time goes on. A combination of government regulation of livestock, the increasing value of the land for purposes other than farming, and the temptations of the outside world on succeeding generations all work against maintaining small, labor-intensive, marginally profitable farms. [-ecl]

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Quote of the Week:
Everybody knows how to raise children, except the people
who have them.

--P. J. O'Rourke

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