



... putting away millions of dollars in a Swiss bank so you never have to worry about being middle-class again?

Then maybe \*you\* have what it takes to be a WORLD LEADER. WORLD LEADERSHIP CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOL wants to help you open up a potential for world leadership you may have only suspected you had. WLCS can be that all important boost you need to become a respected WORLD LEADER. As a prospective WORLD LEADER, do you know... .. how to say just the right thing to inspire loyalty in your subjects?

... when should you crush your enemies and when you should appear magnanimous?

... how to make alliances with other world leaders without letting them know you secretly hate their guts?

... what should you do if you have to entertain another world leader whose breath is so bad it makes you nauseous?

... how can you rig an election?

... how to make your failures look like INCREDIBLE successes?

... what is the proper etiquette of declaring war?

... how can you make an insurgent army look to the world press like a bunch of juvenile assholes?

WORLD LEADERSHIP CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS can show you where Machiavelli was right and where he is outdated. And starting this fall WLCS will start a new program in using and defending against guerilla warfare. Eighteen world leaders (who wish to remain nameless) have graduated from WLCS as satisfied WORLD LEADERS. Now it's your turn. Send a stamped, self-addressed envelope to: Prof. Marco Ferdinandos c/o WLCS P.O. Box 2001, New York, NY. [-mrl]

**A 221B Drabble** (by Evelyn C. Leeper):

[Drabbles are stories that have exactly 100 words. A variation is the "221B Drabble", which is about Sherlock Holmes, has exactly 221 words, and has the last word starting with "B".]

Sherlock Holmes sat smoking his pipe.

"Bored!" he groaned. "I'm bored!"

Watson sighed. He had heard this before. Every day Holmes read the newspapers, and every day he flung them aside in disgust.

Suddenly cries came from outside. "Martians! Martians have landed!" Convinced this was some sort of jest, Watson got up to look out the window and see what was happening. It didn't look like a jest. People were running down the street, pushing and shoving, though from what they were running, or to where, was not at all clear.

"Holmes, do you know what's going on? Was there anything in the newspapers about this?"

"Oh, there was something about green lights on Mars, and some metal shell or something supposedly landed in Woking yesterday, but really, it was all very vague and unsupported."

"Well, it seems that it has convinced a large portion of London's population. Shouldn't we try to find out what is going on?"

"Why? There are two possibilities: they are friendly, or they are hostile. If friendly, there's nothing to fear. If they are hostile, there are two possibilities: they are weaker than us, or they are stronger. If weaker, the army will defeat them. If stronger, there's no point in fleeing. Either way, there's nothing to be done, which is why I am still bored."

[-ecl]

**TRANSFORMATION: A NOVEL (THE TRANSCENDENTAL MACHINE)** by **James Gunn** (copyright 2017, Tor, 208pp, ISBN: 0765386666, ASIN: B01NACO82D) (book review by Joe Karpierz):

TRANSFORMATION (I'm going to drop the "A novel" for purposes of this review) concludes SFWA Grandmaster James Gunn's "The Transcendental Machine" trilogy begun in 2013 with TRANSCENDENTAL and continued in 2016's TRANSGALACTIC. The trilogy started on a high note but took a dip with TRANSGALACTIC. Unfortunately, the decline continues in the final novel, and a trilogy that started with a lot of promise ends in disappointment.

Riley and Asha return have been through a lot. They were part of a voyage the purpose of which was to find the Transcendental Machine. They found that machine, stepped into it, and ended up on opposite sides of the galaxy while being transformed into something greater than they were--something Transcendent. They spent TRANSGALACTIC trying to find each other in order to unite against the Pedia, an AI which wanted the Transcendental Machine destroyed.

In TRANSFORMATION, we learn that planets on the edge of the Federation have gone silent. Members of the Federation council agree to send Riley, Asha, Tordor (the Dorian leader of the Federation council, Earth's Pedia, and Adithya, a member of a group that is out to destroy the Pedia since they believe it has hampered the growth of humanity, out to the fringes of Federation space to investigate the cause of the planets going silent and report back if possible. Only Riley and Asha trust each other, while various permutations and combinations of the other three travelers do not trust each other--other than the Pedia, who is incapable of mistrust, I would suppose. Tordor has the galactic coordinates of the silent planets, and off the group goes to investigate.

The novel turns into a travelogue, as the crew visits several planets, each one different than the last, with different societies, physical characteristics, stages of decline. Other than the first planet, on which everyone had died, the societies on the other planets had one thing in common: they had regressed in one manner or another, with the result being that each society had lost what knowledge they had, especially of the Federation. The travelers eventually determined the path of what they believed was an alien force destroying each civilization. And of course, the path leads directly to Federation Central. The result is a race to the next planet in the hope of encountering the malevolent force and stopping it before it continues its path of destruction.

I don't think it's going to be much of a spoiler to say that they do indeed catch up with the invaders and have the confrontation they are looking for. While the result of that confrontation is, in essence, satisfying for the characters, it certainly isn't for the reader.

This is a book--check that, a trilogy--of big ideas. The problem is that this book, and the trilogy as a whole, doesn't live up to the potential of those big ideas. The Transcendental Machine transformed those who went through it into something more, but that idea seemed to be abandoned, at the very least pushed into the background. It really didn't come into play in TRANSFORMATION. The ending was abrupt and unsatisfying. Gunn reveals to the reader the nature of the invading force, but never follows up on it. There's a whole lot more that is begging to be said about the invaders and what the Federation should do about them. Instead, the story abruptly ends with no satisfying resolution to the problem.

Another problem I had with the trilogy as a whole and TRANSFORMATION in particular is that there is no real thread tying all three books together. The trilogy is entitled "The Transcendental Machine", but while the titular machine plays a big part of the first novel, its influence in the later novels decreases to the point where it is almost non-existent. While Riley and Asha appear in all three novels and do play major parts in the narrative, it's not clear that the first book really has much of anything to do with the third.

I enjoyed TRANSCENDENTAL, was disappointed in TRANSGALACTIC, and felt cheated by TRANSFORMATION, especially the ending. Overall, The Transcendental Machine is a disappointing work and quite possibly a sad end to the brilliant career of a giant in the field. [-jak]

**CRYONICS** (letter of comment by Gregory Benford):

In response to [Fred Lerner's comments on cryonics](#) in the 10/13/17 issue of the MT VOID, Gregory Benford writes:

Fred Lerner asks

"...the central question of cryonic preservation and revival: what incentive is there for anyone in the future to go to the trouble of reviving someone who underwent the process?"

I addressed this in my novel CHILLER, my first bestseller. But the major new answer is: create an Endowment in Perpetuity in nations such as Luxemborg. A mere \$100,000 or so can appreciate through investment into millions, to afford your revival. Several have done such and I'm in the process. [-gb]

**Alternate Realities, STARLINGS, and SHERLOCK HOLMES AND THE SHADWELL SHADOWS** (letter of comment by John Purcell):

In response to [Mark's comments on alternate realities](#) in the 10/13/17 issue of the MT VOID, John Purcell writes:

Your latest VOIDing starts off on a rather sobering note. In a way I agree with you that the Internet has helped to create alternate realities that an individual may choose from. In his essay "The Mass-Less Media" (The Atlantic, Jan-Feb 2006),

William Powers posits that the Internet has created niche markets which an information consumer can choose from: the fragmentation of a central news sharing source-- like the mass markets of CBS, NBS, BBC, UPI, and Associated Press--that dominated the twentieth century has resulted in people with the ability to find an information source that matches their way of thinking, an individual's particular belief system. Powers saw that as a good thing because he felt such a cornucopia of information sources encouraged active discourse, but by now, twelve years later, these niches seem to have solidified into almost immovable positions. If anything, people go to these same sources time and again to entrench themselves deeper. All this raises the disturbing question of asking if creating the Internet was a bad idea. There's a dilemma for ethicists to ponder.

In response to [Joe Karpierz's review of STARLINGS](#) in the same issue, John writes:

I hate to admit this, but I have not read much if anything by Jo Walton. I may have to correct that situation by perusing my shelves of science fiction magazines; I know many of those issues have stories by her.

In response to [Evelyn's review of SHERLOCK HOLMES AND THE SHADWELL SHADOWS](#) in the same issue, John writes:

That Sherlock Holmes book Evelyn wrote about sounds like a bit of fun. I shall check the local library's online catalog and see if they have a copy. [-jp]

**Ulysses S. Grant** (letter of comment by Jim Susky):

In response to [Evelyn's review of General Grant's memoirs](#) in the 10/21/16 issue of the MT VOID, Jim Susky writes:

Ron Chernow's latest biography, about Ulysses S. Grant, was reviewed in the 2017OCT02 New Yorker. This reminded me that Evelyn had reviewed Grant's memoir in 2016. [-js]

[The issue was 10/21/16, almost exactly a year ago today! The review is at <http://tinyurl.com/void-usgrant>. -ecl]

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

As READINGS: ESSAYS AND LITERARY ENTERTAINMENTS by Michael Dirda (ISBN 978-393-32489-3) once again proves, Dirda may be a reviewer for a major newspaper (the "Washington Post"), but he is also an unapologetic science fiction fan. He talks about reading TARZAN THE UNTAMED in a department store at age 13 because he could not afford to buy it. He also says things like:

"Some titles are so good one hardly needs the book: e.g., H. P. Lovecraft's long poem 'Fungi from Yuggoth', ..."

[After describing how he found a book signed twice by its owner, Paul A. Linebarger] "Interesting, yes, but exciting only when you realize that Linebarger wrote, under the pen name Cordwainer Smith, some of the greatest science fiction stories of all time. Look for 'Scanners Live in Vain,' 'The Game of Rat and Dragon,' and 'The Ballad of Lost C'Mell.'"

"Among the best novels of the past twenty years is Russell Hoban's RIDDLEY WALKER. ... One of the funniest, most well-written books of the '80s is John Sladek's satire of robots and modern life, TIK- TOK."

"I once thought it would be fun to construct a horror story about what happens when Miskatonic University, in an effort to save money, decides to deaccession the NECRONOMICON, that handbook to all things foul and eldritch by the mad Arab Abdul Alhazred."

And his chapter titles include "Childhood's End", "The October Country", and "Light of Other Days".

Though Helene Hanff (84 CHARING CROSS ROAD) and Michael Dirda would probably have not agreed on too many books (Hanff preferred older English essayists while Dirda seems to favor 20th century novels), one gets the same sense of a love of books and reading from both of them. [-ecl]

Mark Leeper  
mleeper@optonline.net

Quote of the Week:

The mathematical framework of quantum theory has passed countless successful tests and is now universally accepted as a consistent and accurate description of all atomic phenomena.

--Erwin Schrodinger

Tweet

Go to [our home page](#)