MT VOID 01/19/18 -- Vol. 36, No. 29, Whole Number 1998

```
@@@@@ @   @ @@@@@   @     @ @@@@@@@   @      @  @@@@@ @@@@@ @@@
  @   @   @ @ @     @ @ @ @    @      @      @  @   @ @   @ @  @
  @   @@@@@ @@@@     @ @ @ @    @       @   @   @   @ @   @ @   @
  @   @   @ @ @     @   @ @    @        @ @     @   @ @   @ @   @
  @   @   @ @ @@@@@ @   @ @    @         @      @@@@@ @@@@@ @@@
```

                    Mt. Holz Science Fiction Society
                 01/19/18 -- Vol. 36, No. 29, Whole Number 1998

Table of Contents

Correction:

In the 12/01/17 issue of the MT VOID, I made a typo in John Hertz's comment on Hertz Van Rental, typing "Eijndal" instead of "Rijndal". It should have read:

Hertz Van Rental is a Dutch branch of the family, maybe from around Rotterdam. The name is a local version of Rijndal, i.e., Rhine Valley. [-jh]

Two Lesser-Known Sherlock Holmes Television Series:

"The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson" (1979-1986) starring Vasily Livanov and Vitaly Solomin (eleven episodes, forming five stories):

https://tinyurl.com/void-livanov-playlist

"Sherlock Holmes" (2013) starring Igor Petrenko and Andrei Panin (sixteen episodes, forming eight stories):

https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=VzwBIvVwuOg

Both are in Russian, subtitled in English. [-ecl]

_____

Hand-Written Computer Fonts (comments by Mark R. Leeper):

At the time of year that I am writing this, late December, I am getting a lot of paper mail (as opposed to email) from charities and causes. This is the end of the year and many people will for tax motives make their biggest contributions to charities and causes in December. Every day in my mailbox I get three or four appeals for money. Now the people who are doing the requesting know that they want their particular appeal to stand out from the rest. They know that they have a lot of competition in the mailbox to make their message stand out.

Well, they know that a lot of the requests are coming from big organizations where everything is computerized. They want to give the impression that they are not just an impersonal computerized machine. They want you to think that they are thinking specifically of just you. They are giving their appeal to your personal attention. How can they send that message? If their target audience sees that they have been given an individual hand- addressed envelope, then of course your particular contribution is something they feel is personal to both you and them. This is a one-on-one appeal. Only one problem remains. It really does take time to hand-address an envelope. Do not forget you have to hand- write the return address also. That is a little time-consuming. Maybe it is two minutes per envelope. For 1000 pieces of mail that is 2000 minutes. That is 33-1/3 hours. That runs into time, even if the person doing the addressing can keep up the pace. You have to pay these people minimum wage or get them to volunteer. It is a lot to pay for a momentary warm feeling.

Can you get that warm feeling any way that is cheaper? You can get a hand-written computer font for your computer. You just have to sample your own handwriting. You fill 26 little boxes to sample your lower case, 26 more for upper case. Then there will be punctuation you have to worry about. In all there are probably fewer than 100 characters in all that you have to show the computer how you write and it will print out addresses on envelopes in your hand-writing.

There are two problems with this approach. One is that it is fairly easy to detect that someone sending you a letter has used a hand-written font. My name is Leeper. Of six letters in my surname half are 'e's. If each of the 'e's are exactly like one another, that is the kind of thing that would be obvious to me. Some font makers seem to sample twice as many characters and so lower the odds that the similarities will be noted. But it is still noticeable.

Another way to tell is to look at the address line end-on. If you can sight down a line of writing and the base of each character sits on a ruler-straight line. That is very hard to do with human penmanship. It is conceivable that a computer printer could be able to have the baseline move up and down a little off the baseline, but I doubt it.

But then if you use this font for a charity appeal, you still have that second problem. THIS IS THE MAIN POINT. Think on this. If you are asking for contributions your most valuable asset is the trust of your contributors. If the first thing you do is to try deceiving your contributors to thinking you are giving them some special service that you are not, it sends a very bad message.

There have been major appeals that have been caught breaking their word to their contributors. It usually does not go over very well.

But I will tell you if I as a contributor get an appeal for money from you and before I have opened the envelope I have caught you trying to defraud me, trying to fool me into thinking you are taking the time to convince me that you are giving me personal attention when I see that you are not, how seriously do you think I am going to take the appeal inside that envelope? [-mrl]

_____

OPERA (1987) (a.k.a. TERROR AT THE OPERA) (film review by Mark R. Leeper):

> **CAPSULE:** In 1987 Dario Argento, one of Italy's best- known horror directors, used PHANTOM OF THE OPERA as the inspiration for a story of a maniac stalking the members of an opera company. This is one of Argento's most graphically horrific pieces. As a film of the Italian "giallo" genre, it has its share of jump scares and gory scenes, but an instantly forgettable plot. An unworthy story is packed newly released Bluray package with lushly beautiful restored photography and great use of color. There is less for the mind than there is for the eye. Which is appropriate since eyes are a major visual theme of this film. Rating: +1 (-4 to +4) or 6/10

First, some basics for beginners interested in seeing the film OPERA produced, written, and directed by Dario Argento.

Who is Dario Argento? Argento was one of two highly respected horror film directors from Italy. (The other was Mario Bava.) From the 1960s into the new century these two were ahead of a small pack of horror directors.

OPERA was made in 1987. It was clearly influenced by the popularity of Andrew Lloyd Webber's musical THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA. This film almost seems like a version of that play done in the style of a giallo.

What is a giallo? Originally it was a type of crime novel. There were a series of them from one publisher and they could always be recognized by their yellow book covers. The word "giallo" is Italian for yellow. Giallo has come to mean a gory and graphic crime story with a villain usually being a maniac who has no problem slicing his victims. OPERA is one such giallo. This film should not be confused with Dario Argento's PHANTOM OF THE OPERA. Nine years after it was made Dario Argento made a film he could claim was an adaptation of PHANTOM OF THE OPERA, though it also was excessively gory and graphic and was barely more faithful to PHANTOM OF THE OPERA than is OPERA. OPERA (a.k.a. TERROR AT THE OPERA) has been rarely seen in the United States, but now is being released on Bluray with beautiful photography and restored color.

Argento's film starts out as if it will be an updating of the story of "The Phantom of the Opera." But after about fifteen minutes it is telling its own story. Cristina Marsillach plays Betty, a singing student who gets the opportunity to play the lead in a production of Verdi's "Macbeth". Almost immediately there are murders at odd times with no recognizable pattern. We are introduced to N-1 characters that are really red herrings and one character who is the murderer. We are not given much in the way of clues as to who the murder is and what his (or her) motive is. In the end all is revealed in one scene in which the real killer gets talkative. (This is all fairly standard giallo fare.) Until then, the killer wants Betty to see all his murders so puts duct tape over her mouth and a row of needles in her eyelids so if she closes her eyes she destroys her eyes. Speaking of eyelids, did I mention that eyes are a major theme of the photography? During through the course of the film we are constantly looking at eyes. In the very first scene we are looking at the opera house reflected in the eyes of a raven.

An interesting side-note: The story has the opera company bringing into the opera house live ravens to have as stage decoration for their opera. They create absolute havoc. But it is rumored they caused the fictional opera company not nearly as much havoc as the ravens created on Argento's real set. A raven is an amazingly intelligent animal, and one thing you do not want to have to deal with is a large and intelligent bird.

The color restoration is beautiful and Bluray shows off the color splendidly on home video. The singing is beautiful also. It is a pity the story was not more engaging. I rate OPERA a +1 on the -4 to +4 scale or 6/10.

Release: Bluray debut on January 23, 2018. Of note, Dario Argento wrote and produced the 1991 film THE SECT which also has restored color now and is bring released on Bluray.

Film Credits: http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0093677/reference

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

[-mrl]

TOO LIKE THE LIGHTNING by Ada Palmer (copyright 2016, Tor, $26.99, 432pp, ISBN 978-0-763-7800-2) (excerpt from the Duel Fish Codices) (book review by Gwendolyn Karpierz):

Full disclaimer: I did not finish TOO LIKE THE LIGHTNING. I only made it through 105 pages before I had to quit.

I don't know what's wrong with me. Everyone else loved this book. It's been touted as amazing, intricate, intelligent. I've hardly ever read such rave reviews on the back cover of any book.

"Oh, Duelist Fish Gwendolyn," you'd say, "it's the writing style. It's too high-falutin' for you. You couldn't handle it."

The thing is, I don't mind a more eloquent writing style; it usually appeals to me. But in some ways, you'd be right: It *was* the writing style. Not that it was too fancy. Just that it was so incredibly *patronizing*.

TOO LIKE THE LIGHTNING, by Ada Palmer, is set in a world far advanced from ours. People don't live with their own blood, but choose their families. Religion is outlawed. Gender is taboo. And there's one thing I have to admit: It's a very intricate world. Palmer went deep. She didn't skimp.

It reads like she is so very *impressed* with herself for doing so.

The style of the book is supposed to mimic, I believe, an eighteenth century style. Supposedly in following these conventions,

the narrator (Mycroft Canner, a harmless criminal- turned-Servicer) frequently addresses the reader in the most condescending tone I have ever encountered in a novel. 'Dear reader,' he frequently assures us, 'if you have no idea what's going on, who all these people are, and what any of these means, don't worry. You're not supposed to know.' What? Excuse me? Your job as a writer is to make sure your reader knows about what's important, and if it's not important and serves no purpose, don't put it in! There's literally a part right before Palmer inserts an indecipherable economics chart where Mycroft says, "Again, reader, do not wrestle with the numbers. Do not even read the chart..." If the story can be read without it, why include it? You're just showing off that you know about that thing and your reader does not!

At one point, the writing devolves into a script format: Designation, colon, dialogue. "Are you disconcerted by this scriptlike format, reader?" Mycroft asks, and then proceeds to justify it by asserting that it was common in the eighteenth century. Fine. I'm not disconcerted by it, I'm *frustrated* by it. It's lazy writing, because you don't have to think up actions and internal descriptions to keep your dialogue interesting. If I encountered that in a creative writing class--and I have--I would cross it out and write that it was unacceptable. It's *lazy*.

All this is accompanied by a dizzying number of irrelevant historical names and an incomprehensible economical plot (this is probably just my lack of understanding of economics, but I felt it was distracting from the far more interesting concept of Bridger, the boy who can bring inanimate objects to life in a world where there is no magic). Furthermore, if you're going to pick a gender neutral pronoun for everyone, stick to your guns! Don't arbitrarily assign gender pronouns in the narration! How people identify and how they present can be very different; you don't just get to switch around without an actual discussion of what those things mean!

Overall, this book frustrated me on too many levels, until I just didn't care anymore. In his review some five months ago, Duelist Fish (no, I'm not going to explain that title) Joe noted that things get so topsy-turvy "to the point where we're not really sure what's going on." Since when is that a bonus in a book? You don't want to know what's *going* to happen, but you sure want to know what's happening in the present moment.

Now, like I said, everyone else seemed to really like this book, so don't take my word for it. I just didn't need to be patronized by a book I was reading for enjoyment. [-gmk]

The Traveling Money (letter of comment by Jim Susky):

In response to [Evelyn's comments on the traveling money](#) in the 01/05/18 issue of the MT VOID, Jim Susky writes:

Thanks for your article on a "transaction puzzle", which elicits some thoughts.

If the King had started the chain with a "legitimate" $50, then the "loss" would have the same--none at all, as you stated.

I believe that in the USA the "loser" would be the hatter or whoever holds the phony bank note when an "authority" seizes it. If the hatter turns it in to a US bank, then he loses what he "found"--a case of Easy Come Easy Go.

Another way to see this is that the phony note provide "velocity" to $50--a term I've heard in matters economic. Yet another is the way that note affects information. Each actor knows his own net zero subset on his "books" but none of the other "balances"--all get resolved.

Part of the wrong answer was:

"butcher now owes the farmer $50 for the pig. (Or presumably the butcher has to return the pig.)"

It occurs to me that if the farmer agreed that the butcher owes him, he could instead take less than the entire pig with some value-added hams, bacon and chops. [-js]

Edmund Wilson and J. R. R. Tolkien (letter of comment by Fred Lerner):

In response to [Evelyn's comments on Edmund Wilson's LETTERS ON LITERATURE AND POLITICS: 1912-1972](#) in the 01/12/18 issue of the MT VOID, Fred Lerner writes:

Have you ever read Edmund Wilson's "Oo, those awful orcs"? You can find it at https://www.jrrvf.com/sda/critiques/The_Nation.html. [-fl]

Evelyn responds:

No, but I will. [-ecl]

Emoticons and Morse Code (letter of comment by Keith F. Lynch):

In response to [Mark's comments on emoticons](#) in the 01/12/18 issue of the MT VOID, Keith Lynch writes:

Unfortunately for that joke, none of those three characters were part of American Morse code at the time. [-kfl]

Writing from 2312 (letters of comment by Philip Chee, Tim Merrigan, Keith F. Lynch, David Goldfarb, and Peter Trei):

In response to [Joe Karpierz's review of NEW YORK 2140](#) in the 01/12/18 issue of the MT VOID, Philip Chee writes:

[Joe Karpierz writes,] "After I read Kim Stanley Robinson's Mars Trilogy what seems a half a lifetime ago, I didn't read a novel by him until 2312."

Ah? This MT VOID is from the future? BTW who won the superbowl in 2018? [-pc]

Tim Merrigan responds:

They'd probably have to research ancient sports records. Do you have any idea of the results of any sporting events in 1724 (the same distance in the past as 2312 is in the future)? [-tm]

Keith Lynch replies:

Re "Who won the superbowl?": The same people who always win those things: The NFL. They rake in tons of money in advertising revenues.

Re events in 1724:

I would have to look it up. Just as I'd have to look up the winner of the most recent Superbowl or the most recent World Series.

As such, I'd make a poor excuse for an accidental time traveler. If we've learned one thing from SF, it's that accidental time travelers always just happened to have memorized tremendous amounts of sports trivia. And also a list of when and where all solar and lunar eclipses took place over the past 2000 years or so.

Me, I can barely remember which lifeboats left the Titanic half empty, which could be essential information if I ever find myself accidentally transported there just before the sinking. I do remember the Titanic's radio call sign, which is not especially useful. And I remember the theme song from Gilligan's Island, which could be useful if I'm ever stranded on a -- no, I guess it wouldn't be, not even then. [-kfl]

David Goldfarb responds:

For my own part, I find it quite easy to remember the World Series winner, at least.

Correcting to be polite: Super Bowl is two words. [-dg]

Keith answers:

I thought it was, but I went with how Philip had it. When it comes to sports knowledge, I always defer to what the other guy says. I guess I should make an exception for him. [-kfl]

Peter Trei asks:

How far back would sports trivia be valuable to a time traveller, as a basis for betting to gather money? Betting on sporting contests is ancient, but what to we have good records for?

As far as I can see formalized team sports don't really emerge until the mid-1800s.

Horse racing has formalized, named races and good records going back to the 1770s in Britain.

We know of *some* famous gladiators and chariot racers in Ancient Rome, and (I think) a handful of Ancient Greek Olympians, but those records are pretty spotty. [-pt]

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

With the centenary of the beginning of World War I four years ago, and the centenary of the United States's entry into that war last year, all the books about World War I that people finally got around to reading are now appearing in the used book stores. So I recently picked up THE FIRST WORLD WAR by John Keegan (ISBN 978- 0-375-70045-3) and MR WILSON'S WAR by John Dos Passos. I will get to the latter one of these days, but for now, I will talk about the former.

Early on, Keegan addresses the issue of why World War I was both so unexpectedly deadly and so unexpectedly protracted. As Keegan explains, "The ... belief in the power of the offensive was correct; whoever first brought his available fire power into action with effect would prevail. What had not been perceived is that firepower takes effect only if it can be directed in timely and accurate fashion. That requires communication." More specifically, it requires instantaneous communication, and the armies of World War I did not have this. Radio ("wireless telegraphy") requires heavy, bulky equipment that could not be transported easily in battlefield conditions or on airplanes, airships, or balloons. The telegraph was available, but required wires, which were invariably cut by the enemy. Reduced to line-of- sight signaling, runners, or even carrier pigeons, commanders often ended up having their shells fall too far forward (hence behind the enemy troops), or worse yet, too close, dropping on their own troops. When radio was used, as in the Tannenberg campaign, messages were often sent un-encoded, due to the lack of time and the difficulties of distributing code books. This happened on both sides; all that kept some messages from the enemy was that there was a shortage of operators and equipment preventing constant monitoring for messages.

Keegan does a good job of describing the background and politics of World War I. He is less successful (with me, anyway) in describing battle maneuvers. Some are relatively clear, e.g., the Germans would use tear gas to force the Allied troops to remove their gas masks, then use phosgene against them. But apparently even Keegan is unable to explain troop movements so that I can understand them. (His need to list every corps, division, brigade, and battalion by number did not help.)

Still, Keegan's writing is quite literary and often poetic, and I would certainly recommend this as a manageable-sized coverage of World War I. [-ecl]

```
                                    Mark Leeper
                                    mleeper@optonline.net

Quote of the Week:

        Lying has a kind of respect and reverence with it.   We
        pay a person the compliment of acknowledging his
        superiority whenever we lie to him.
                                    --Samuel Butler
```

Tweet

Go to our home page