

The interviewer was talking as if the Matt Helm books had actual literary merit. I decided to try one. I think I read two or three. I could report they were reasonably well written, and I was fairly pleased. And so thing sat.

Then came the night at the movies that THE HEROES OF TELEMAR was on a double feature with THE SILENCERS. The latter I knew was the title of a Matt Helm. I hoped they had made a film of the book. Yes, they had made a Matt Helm movie. Sure, I wanted to see that. "Be careful what you wish for," they say.

Probably it was on a film poster I saw that Helm was played by Dean Martin. Dean Martin? Yes, it was a Dean Martin showing the same intensity and high drama that Martin put into his Las Vegas performances played Helm. The character in the films was just like Dean Martin's persona--he was a Matt Helm who drank heavily, smoked heavily, and chased women more than heavily. The film is frankly an embarrassment to Matt Helm fans like ... well ... me. At least there was little chance that there would be a film sequel.

Well, it turned out THE SILENCERS did acceptably well at the box-office. Go figure. It was still probably riding on Bond's coattails. Columbia ended up making four Matt Helm films when one was way too much. I think what must have happened was that Columbia had released in 1967 their version of a James Bond film, CASINO ROYALE, as a spoof of Bond films. And that was at least based on a real Bond novel. The public probably went to spy films without checking the reviews. Columbia for a while could make money with spy film spoofs. But then even that cash cow ran out. George S. Kaufman said it: Satire is what closes on Saturday Night. All four Matt Helm films were done in an equally spoofy style.

The Matt Helm films were spoofy from the start. What sparked this is that I try to tell people films that they might like. If you want to try the Matt Helm films, TCM will be showing them all in one odiferous string on TCM in September. I warn the reader away, but I will still point them out. THIS IS NOT A RECOMMENDATION.

Starting Wednesday, September 26, at 8:00 PM:
 8:00 PM THE SILENCERS (1966)
 10:00 PM MURDERERS' ROW (1966)
 ` 12:00 PM THE AMBUSHERS (1967)
 ` 2:00 AM THE WRECKING CREW (1968)

[-mrl]

Going to See MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE--FALLOUT (comments by Tom Russell):

We went to one of those theaters with the recliner seats that you have to either reserve in advance or select from the ones that are left when you get there.

We got in line behind a group of about eight tween-agers who were paying for and selecting their seats--individually--of course. Each got 5 cents change for their ten-dollar bill.

The young lady at the counter could only accept cash. If you wanted to use a credit card you had to use one of the kiosks. We paid cash. Senior rate. Paid more than the tweens.

The upholstery of seat F8 was damaged--torn and squashed down as though someone had been jumping up and down on it. Sitting in that chair would have been like watching the whole show sitting on a toilet seat.

I had to go to customer relations, not back to the ticket window, to change seats. There wasn't anyone at the customer relations desk ... but someone did show up a couple of minutes later. Problem eventually solved. Except my wife thought I'd gotten lost or decided to go to a different movie.

Every one of the previews was for some kind of comic-book superhero movie. The first preview had such a gruesome torture scene we couldn't imagine anyone, young or old, would want to see it. All the plots seemed to be the same, just different costumes on the villains and heroes.

The movie itself wasn't bad. They did use a couple of tricks from the TV series of long ago, so that was fun. Either there were a couple of holes in the plot line or I missed some of the dialogue which would have explained them? They made up for this by filling the movie with chase scenes and ending it with a cliff-hanger. Really.

Oh, did I forget to mention the sound volume? Got our money's worth, more... [-tlr]

[When we went to see films recently, the theater was empty enough we could have just moved to two new seats. And we went the the first matinee, or on Discount Monday, or on Senior Tuesday, so it was always pretty cheap. -ecl]

PHORESIS by Greg Egan (copyright 2018, Subterranean Press, ebook ISBN 978-1-59606-867-4, \$5.99) (book review by Joe Karpierz):

Coming up on ten years ago I reviewed the only Greg Egan novel I ever read, INCANDESCENCE. I didn't like it. Even though I have many Greg Egan novels on my to-read list, I never go for them first. I like hard science fiction, but Egan always seemed a bit out of my reach. A couple of years ago I read and reviewed the novella "The Four Thousand, the Eight Hundred", which I liked quite a bit. Based on that novella, and the general impression I've gotten that Egan works better in smaller chunks when he doesn't have time to go all info-dumpy on the reader, I picked up PHORESIS.

The story is about two planets--Tvibura and Tviburi--which are tide locked and exist extremely close together. Tvibura is inhabited, while Tviburi is not. The driving issue in the story is that Tvibura is becoming less and less able to support its inhabitants by producing conditions that generate the air and soil needed to maintain the ecology of the planet. Because the planets are in such close proximity to each other, it is fairly easy to get a telescopic view of Tviburi from Tvibura. Because the inhabitants of Tvibura are in danger of starving, two plans are developed. One attempts to generate more of the geysers that produce the necessary air and soil. The other is more daunting: building a tower that will eventually allow the inhabitants of Tvibura to cross over to Tviburi and hopefully start a colony with the end result of getting the rest of the inhabitants of Tvibura to make the crossing.

The story takes place in three parts over multiple generations. The first part mainly talks about the planning for and engineering of the tower, the second deals with the crossing by the first pioneers and their struggles on the new planet, and the third relates the story of people living on Tviburi going back to Tvibura to investigate what had happened to those that stayed behind.

While "Phoresis" does have a great deal of the hard science and exposition that Egan is known for--engineering, climate, orbital mechanics, physics, astronomy, geology, and botany (and until I typed that out I didn't realize just how much Egan crammed into this novella)--it's a story that also deal with the social dynamics of a people that are trying to survive in a very unfriendly environment. While the characters are humanlike, they definitely aren't human. All the characters are female, and the males provide a rather, uh, unique way of reproduction (it was difficult enough to get my head around it, let alone try to describe it here). There is also some mention of the people not having to breathe for long periods of time. So, the characters are humanlike but not quite human.

I don't quite know what to make of PHORESIS. It has all the hallmarks of a Greg Egan story, but not so much that they're overwhelming. There's a good story and good character interaction. The social aspect of this story is really what makes it work...I think. But it doesn't quite work for me for some reason. There's nothing wrong with the story; it just didn't do anything for me.

Still, for Greg Egan fans, PHORESIS probably is a winner; I'm okay with that. [-jak]

BLACKKKLANSMAN (film review by Mark R. Leeper):

CAPSULE: This film tells the story, based on actual events, of two undercover policemen--one black, one white but Jewish--who worked together to compose a single undercover agent to infiltrate the Ku Klux Klan. Spike Lee gives us an ambitious comedy/drama/ thriller that reflects the history of American anti-black racism. It covers historic incidents from THE BIRTH OF A NATION up through the Charlottesville killing. Director: Spike Lee. W riters: Charlie Wachtel, David Rabinowitz, Kevin Willmott, Spike Lee. Rating: +3 (-4 to +4) or 9/10

BLACKKKLANSMAN has a good film thriller at its core but one almost has the feeling that pieces were glued onto the script and then their contributions seem appended to the script. Alec Baldwin contributes a humorous impression of a white supremacist bigot that would not have been misplaced as a "Saturday Night Live" sketch. Harry Belafonte gives us a short history of D. W. Griffith's film THE BIRTH OF A NATION. Spike Lee grafts these pieces as if Lee is saying "... and while I have your attention..."

BLACKKKLANSMAN is primarily the story of Ron Stallworth played by African-American John David Washington. He had a longstanding ambition to be a policeman. But instead, when he finally is on the force he gets the unfulfilling job of filing and unfileing in the archive room. He finally gets himself the more meaningful task of investigating the Ku Klux Klan in Colorado Springs. To get information on the local chapter of the KKK he phones the chapter directly. He gets some info, but not nearly enough. He is told he can get more info if he visits them in person. They will not cooperate if they know he is black so he gets another policeman, Flip Zimmerman (Adam Driver), to mimic his voice and to pretend to be him. This begins a long relationship in which Flip impersonates Ron if he is going to be seen and on the phone Ron talks in his own voice.

Organizing the plan takes time and the film has a slow start, but once it gets going the story is fascinating. The script is a

combined effort of Charlie Wachtel, David Rabinowitz, Kevin Willmott, and Spike Lee. At times the script is not subtle and there are many obvious unsubtle parallels to more recent history. As the film goes on it increases its speed and tension. However some of the excitement towards the end of the film is invented rather than reported. The character Connie, who is the wife of a Klansman, is abused and bullied. She was apparently invented for the film and is present to make the point that if the Klan starts by abusing blacks they will eventually turn on their own kind.

Adam Driver plays the role of Flip Zimmerman. Driver's acting career came as something of a surprise for me. I guess I saw that Driver was to have the role of Kylo Ren, "Star Wars"'s new continuing villain. He seems for the new series the equivalent of Darth Vader. Driver has a face like a worn tennis shoe. Nobody with a face like that gets very far in the movies. I thought. Well, maybe Humphrey Bogart. I guess there is also Eli Wallach. And there is Danny Trejo. But Driver has an unusual face and that may in the long run be a big asset for him. He is not used as well as he might have been. But he has a certain charisma.

Spike Lee has given a face to the Ku Klux Klan, the real Klan behind the regalia. In years to come when people picture the real Ku Klux Klan they will picture images from this film. I rate BLACKKKLANSMAN +3 on the -4 to +4 scale or 9/10.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt7349662/reference>

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

[-mrl]

THE SONG OF SWAY LAKE (film review by Mark R. Leeper):

CAPSULE: A grandson of one of the United States's most famous military men is now broke and intending to break into his grandfather's lake mansion to steal a very valuable and unopened jazz record. Instead he finds himself intrigued and seduced by the jazz-drenched life in the mansion, by his grandmother who picked this time to also visit the house, and by the attractive local girl who works at the resort across the lake. Directed by: Ari Gold. Written by: Elizabeth Bull, Ari Gold. Rating: +2 (-4 to +4) or 7/10

The Hal Sway family was once one of the most prominent families in the United States. People like Cole Porter and President Eisenhower came visiting their mansion by the lake--Sway Lake. The Sways owned the lake. In the 1940s their mansion was filled with swing music. Hal's son Tim was married while his father was still alive and living in the house. As a wedding gift a great legendary jazz musician wrote and recorded a song just for the newlywed Sway couple. But the record was never played or even opened. It was extremely valuable and kept in mint condition as a family treasure. Now it is two generations later. Hal's estranged son Tim has just recently committed suicide. Tim's son Ollie is living hand to mouth. Ollie, together With his unmanageable friend Nikolai decide to break into the Sway mansion, empty now for decades. Unexpectedly Charlotte--that is Ollie's grandmother who was Hal's wife--is spending a week in the mansion. Charlotte is imperious and rude to the boys and the help.

Thus begins a slow-motion cat-and-mouse game between two generations half a century apart in age. The stakes are raised a bit when the two young men discover Isadora, who works at a resort on the lake. With the lake, the mansion, and the 1940s jazz the men find themselves being seduced and falling under the influence of the peaceful lifestyle. Ari Gold's laid-back pacing douses the film in mellifluous atmosphere. After a summer of films featuring jagged, rapid-fire editing the lush atmosphere and the ambiance of the editing wins over the viewer like ENCHANTED APRIL.

The film does have a stab or two at laughing at lower and middle class entertainment. Just seconds into the film popular newsreel format gets a jab. We get an overhead look at the beauty of the property around Sway Lake and then a piece of newsreel footage in the funny voice a gossip columnist would use. Later we get pieces of home movie footage, but taken under water. This is a nice touch as one more sign of affluence of the Sway family. Few families at the time could afford underwater photography.

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

THE SONG OF SWAY LAKE opens in Los Angeles September 14.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt6371588/reference>

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

[-mrl]

Beloit College Mindset List and the Wisdom of Mark Leeper (letters of comment by Keith F. Lynch, and Tim Merrigan):

In response to [Evelyn's comments on the Beloit College mindset list](#) in the 09/07/18 issue of the MT VOID, Keith Lynch writes:

"1. They are the first class born in the new millennium, escaping the dreaded label of "Millennial", though their new designation-- iGen, GenZ, etc.--has not yet been agreed upon by them." [-bcml]

Baby boomer, generation X, generation Y, millennial, iGen -- I don't think there are really that many generations in so little time. It implies that people born in the mid-1960s should have college-age great great grandchildren already. I don't think so. [-kfl]

In response to [Mark's tidbits of wisdom](#) in the same issue, Keith writes:

"Live TV died in the late 1950s, electronic bulletin boards came along in the mid-1980s, meaning there was about a 25-year gap when it was difficult to put your foot in your mouth and have people all across the country know about it." [-mrl]

Aren't TV news program still mostly live? There are plenty of YouTube videos of TV news bloopers. [-kfl]

"These days the news media feels comfortable only when" [-mrl]

I see that you're following the Washington Post's lead in using "media" in the singular. It still looks illiterate to me. [-kfl]

"Give a man a fish and you have fed him for a day. Teach him how to fish and you have fed him for life." [-mrl]

"Build a man a fire, and he'll be warm for a day. Set a man on fire, and he'll be warm for the rest of his life." -- Terry Pratchett [-kfl]

Tim Merrigan responds:

As I understand most, if not all, "live" TV and radio is actually on a couple second "cough button" delay. [-tm]

Keith replies:

To get rid of bloopers, the delay has to be longer than two seconds. Whether it typically is, I don't know.

If the TV is digital, if it's bounced off a geostationary satellite, or if it's sent over the Internet, each of those adds its own perceptible delay. Even analog over-the-air terrestrial TV (and radio) has speed-of-light delay, but that's imperceptibly short. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5dwUWtyRP4c>.

More at <https://groups.google.com/forum/?fromgroups#!topic/rec.arts.sf.fandom/NxiuUut-fOI>.

Origami, Convention Panels, and Temporal Parochialism (letter of comment by John Hertz):

In response to various comments in past issues of the MT VOID (and my apologies for taking so long to get this in), John Hertz writes:

Mark, have you any origami tales for us?

I've long tried, and doubtless you have, too, to get con panels set up better. Alas, as Brother Silverberg noted--and that was a while ago--we too often learn late what we're assigned to. You might think that would lead to more ante-panel meetings in Green Rooms, but of course if you did think that you'd be mistaken. Quickly I add, the few times this has happened with a panel I've been on, it's been fruitful. My best guess is Pgm chiefs are so swamped it slips away.

Indeed we should eschew temporal parochialism. Inter alia as Mark Blackman said, "Of course it seems laughable now. Isn't that a gratifying sign of progress since then?" [-jh]

Mark responds:

I hate to show such a lack of imagination, but I cannot even imagine what a ripping yarn about origami could possibly be. [-mrl]

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

I recently bought a book titled THE COLLECTED POEMS OF EMILY DICKINSON (ISBN 978-1-59308-050-1). Now,

when you buy something labeled "The Collected Works of" don't you expect all their works? It is not called "Some Collected Works of" or "Some Works of" or even "Collected Works of", but "*The* Collected Works of". Well, this book is not the collected 1717 poems of Emily Dickinson. but only 593 of them. I didn't pay of a lot of money for this (it was a dollar at a Friends of the Library book sale), but it seems very deceptive.

CRAZY SH*T PRESIDENTS SAID: THE MOST SURPRISING, SHOCKING, AND STUPID STATEMENTS FROM GEORGE WASHINGTON TO BARACK OBAMA by Robert Schankenberg (ISBN 978-0-7624-4453-3) [asterisk as a star in original title] has quotes ranging from the familiar ("The tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots and tyrants." [TJ]) to the unfamiliar ("[Putting] a man on the moon really is a stunt and it isn't worth that many billions." [JFK]) to the appalling ("I think one man is just as good as another so long as he's honest and decent and not a n----- or a Chinaman." [HST]).

The problem is that none of these quotes are sourced. We don't know when these men said them, or where, and as a result, not even if.

Googling, I find the Kennedy quote was from a taped conversation between Kennedy and James Webb on 09/18/63. The Truman is from a letter to Bess Truman on 06/22/11. So Kennedy's statement was in the midst of the space program, while Truman's was from a time when he had never lived outside of rural Missouri. A collection of statements, with dates, on race relations by Truman would be more informative than a few random undated statements.

HUNGRY STONES AND OTHER STORIES by Rabindranath Tagore (ISBN 978- 81-7167-633-2) is a lovely little (4.5"x7") book full of lovely stories, some with fantasy or supernatural elements. It is printed in lavender/purple ink on cream-colored paper with French flaps and a border imitating moire taffeta on each page. The only problem in recommending it might have been that it was published in India. But luckily these days, globalization has solved this problem: there are many copies available on amazon.com (and its sibling sites), and even if there weren't, you could just order it from a bookstore in India. (Even before the Internet took off, I was ordering books from stores in Europe, though that often meant something like putting a ten-dollar bill in an envelope and mailing it.)

By the way, Tagore may be added to the short but growing(*) list of Nobel laureates who have written science fiction or fantasy. (*) Or not. With the current status of the committee to choose the Nobel Prize in Literature, there may not be any more in the future. The committee has eighteen chairs; it requires a quorum of twelve to transact business, including choosing new members to fill vacancies. But eight of the members have resigned, leaving the committee with not enough members to transact business or even to choose new members to reach a quorum. [-ecl]

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Quote of the Week:

All of the animals except for man know that the principle
business of life is to enjoy it.
--Samuel Butler

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