

MT VOID 09/21/18 -- Vol. 37, No. 12, Whole Number 2033



Mt. Holz Science Fiction Society
09/21/18 -- Vol. 37, No. 12, Whole Number 2033

Table of Contents

- [Who Is Winning, Bond or Hunt?](#) (comments by Mark R. Leeper)
- [Thoughts on a Chengdu Worldcon](#) (comments by Evelyn C. Leeper)
- [BLUE REMEMBERED EARTH by Alastair Reynolds](#) (book review by Joe Karpierz)
- [UNHOLY LAND by Lavie Tidhar](#) (book review by Joe Karpierz)
- [PEPPERMINT](#) (film review by Dale Skran)
- [Matt Helm and Other Spy Films](#) (letters of comment by Rincewind, Keith F. Lynch, and Peter Trei)
- [This Week's Reading](#) (JOURNEY TO PORTUGAL, WHERE THE TIME GOES, AMERICAN NOTES, and THE BLACK CAT) (book comments by Evelyn C. Leeper)
- [Quote of the Week](#)

Co-Editor: Mark Leeper, mleeper@optonline.net
Co-Editor: Evelyn Leeper, eleeper@optonline.net
Back issues at http://leepers.us/mtvoid/back_issues.htm
All material is copyrighted by author unless otherwise noted.
All comments sent or posted will be assumed authorized for inclusion unless otherwise noted.

To subscribe, send mail to mtvoid-subscribe@yahoogroups.com
To unsubscribe, send mail to mtvoid-unsubscribe@yahoogroups.com

Who Is Winning, Bond or Hunt? (comments by Mark R. Leeper):

I recently saw in short order the new MISSION IMPOSSIBLE film, MISSION IMPOSSIBLE--FALLOUT and MOONRAKER. Not that I expect that was a good choice. What with extremely conspicuous product placements, humor like Jaws finding his true love, James Bond having a noisy ray gun battle MOONRAKER consistently rates least or rock bottom on any aspect I expect a bond film to have.

Then there is MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE--FALLOUT. The new "Mission: Impossible" film starts about on the glitz level of a James Bond film and builds to a finale as intricate, lavish, and elegant as that of any action film that comes to mind. The plot is a little hard to follow and the characters hard to keep straight, but the film definitely delivers the goods. It has taken a while, but it feels like the Ethan Hunt ("Mission: Impossible") films are overtaking the Bond films, making better and more effective action films.

One difference is the approach of the visual design. A Bond film goes for lavish while the "Mission: Impossible" film now goes for the spectacular. What is the difference? If they want to show a rocket launch from inside a volcanic crater, the Bond producers begin at ground level and build a record-breaking huge sound stage. In a similar situation the "Mission: Impossible" film crew just films at the top of a spectacular Norwegian mountain. The mountain looks great. It is worth the extra effort. In the race between the two spy film series, the Bond films have been around a lot longer and so have their credentials, but the "Mission: Impossible" films are stiff competition and may even be beating the James Bond series at its own game.

One advantage the "Mission: Impossible" films enjoy is stability of cast. In the Bond films seven different actors have played Felix Leiter. The "Mission: Impossible" films never seem to rotate any actor into or out of a role to roll another actor in. The unspoken rule seems to be one actor per part and one part per actor. Ideally that is how a series should work.

[Postscript: Evelyn caught me on this one and trounced me. Yes, there are actors in non-speaking roles who look like different characters. But in most cases once an actor has made an impression they do not use him again. Even there are counter examples, notably Charles Gray and Anthony Dawson, each of which played Blofeld in addition to a small speaking role. See her comment at the end of this column.]

Of course Tom Cruise playing Ethan Hunt probably has a role in the series for as long as he wants it. And nature seems to be on Cruise's side in this. Very little age seems to be showing on the 56-year-old Cruise.

Most Bond films have attractive women for window dressing. They are like tinsel placed on a Christmas tree. In MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE--FALLOUT the women we see seem at least as intelligent as the men. Ethan Hunt, though, does seem to be superhuman. After ten minutes of high-speed running he seems barely winded.

The plot of MISSION IMPOSSIBLE--FALLOUT is sufficiently full of twists and double-crosses to make a summer action thriller. In fact, it is probably too full of chases and gunfights. And this time the plot enjoys jumps from aircraft so we have action heroes literally falling from the sky. The plot may or may not be about a group of terrorists who want to attack the three Abrahamic religions in a single *grand* stroke. In one instant they want to blow up nukes planted in Jerusalem, the Vatican, and Mecca.

One extended fight scene in MISSION IMPOSSIBLE--FALLOUT takes place in a men's room. One gets through it before one realizes that there is nothing off-color or any worse than just suggestive. My vision of how the script is written is to have the writers get from Cruise a laundry list of stunts the actor thinks he is capable of and which he would like to try for the film. Weave these stunts into a story and a big piece of the writing is done. The screen time can be stretched a bit with the addition of the ubiquitous fights and chases. For no particular reason but that it makes the film more spectacular, we get large beautifully photographed sequences of Paris, London, Britain, New Zealand, and Norway.

With a little less gun-fighting and a few less chases his could have been the action film of the summer. It might still be. I have one serious complaint: after at least ten minutes or more of careful searching I am convinced the proper punctuation is "MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE--FALLOUT". But that is not obvious, nor is it the majority opinion. [-mrl]

[Other actors who played different characters in different James Bond films include Shane Rimmer, Joe Don Baker, Maud Adams, George Baker, Anthony Dawson, Jeremy Bulloch, Nadim Sawalha, Burt Kwouk, Charles Gray, Martine Beswick, Nadja Regin, Tsai Chin, Milton Reid, Irvin Allen, Albert Moses, Sid Man, Bill Nagy, George Leech, Anthony Chinn, Derek Lyons, Simon Crane, and Derek Lea. And Tom Cruise is six years *older* than Wilfrid Brimly was when he played his role in COCOON. -ecl]

Thoughts on a Chengdu Worldcon (comments by Evelyn C. Leeper):

Chengdu (China) is bidding for the 2023 Worldcon. My reactions to this are mixed, and that is not even considering political considerations.

On the plus side, it is merely another step in making the Worldcon truly a world convention. Though the first Worldcon outside the US (Torcon I) was held in 1948, it was still in North America. It took almost a decade more to leave the continent (Loncon I, 1957) and that was still an Anglophone country. After another Lon, there was finally a Worldcon in a non-Anglophone country (Heicon, 1970). After this we seemed to have an almost steady-state of four non-US Worldcons per decade, though most were in Canada, Britain, or Australia, with only one a decade hitting the rest of the world (Confiction, Nippon 2007, and The Helsinki Worldcon).

But mainland Asia has been ignored until now, and it was only recently that we started seeing Chinese science fiction translated into English (and winning a Hugo!), and we discovered just how big the fan base was there. (The Chinese magazine has SCIENCE FICTION WORLD has 130,000 subscribers. Both ANALOG and ASIMOV's have fewer than 30,000 subscribers.)

But therein lies the seeds of my negative reaction. A Worldcon in Europe may be overwhelmingly European, but given the diversity of languages in Europe, Anglophones can be reasonably sure there will be substantial programming in English. Chengdu could easily be overwhelmingly Chinese, and with all of them speaking a single language, English could easily be limited to one or two tracks.

I realize that this attitude is somewhat provincial, but I think it reflects a reality. Few people will want to attend a Worldcon of which they will understand little, let alone want to travel thousands of miles to get there. It seems to me that the people who will vote for Chengdu fall primarily into two groups: Chinese fans, and non-Chinese fans who have no plans to attend a Worldcon in Chengdu but want to support it in the interests of making Worldcon a *World*con.

(This is not that out of line with tradition, given that supporting memberships have been around to serve this purpose for

decades.)

And given the size of the Chinese fan base, one can envision many of the Hugo nominees being in Chinese with no translations available. This would not be an attempted coup by a small number of organized voters, but the genuine opinion of the majority of the members. One cannot argue that this is wrong, but one can feel that it would represent a sudden shift in Worldcon and the Hugo Awards that would undoubtedly distress many fans. [-ecl]

BLUE REMEMBERED EARTH by **Alastair Reynolds** (copyright 2012, Penguin Group, ISBN 978-1-101-56885-9) (book review by Joe Karpierz):

BLUE REMEMBERED EARTH is the first book of "Poseidon's Children" trilogy by Alastair Reynolds. Unlike most of his other work, notably the "Revelation Space" books, which are dark and gritty, BLUE REMEMBERED EARTH is optimistic. It takes place in the 22nd century. The view of mankind's place in the solar system is certainly looking up. There is no more war, crime, or poverty. People lead long and, it seems, prosperous lives. There is a price to be paid, of course. Humanity is under constant surveillance, and safeguards are installed into every human to prevent violence, especially violence against another person (as we see in one point in the novel). Those who don't want to live under constant surveillance can move to a place called the "Descrutinized Zone" on the moon.

The politics and economy look a lot different than they do in our time. The United States does not seem to be one of the dominant technological powers; China and Africa lead the way in that category, and the Akinya family of Africa is the focus of BLUE REMEMBERED Earth. The Akinyas can probably at best be described as a dysfunctional family. Geoffrey, our main protagonist, has basically turned his back on the family business, much to the consternation of his cousins Hector and Lucas. His sister Sunday is an artist living in the Descrutinized Zone on the moon. Geoffrey and cousins don't get a long; Sunday almost never comes home. And to top it all off, the family matriarch, Eunice, has passed away. It is her passing that is the kickoff point of the novel.

Eunice lived alone in lunar space on the Winter Palace, and isolated herself from the family for a very long time. Almost nothing is known about her. A safe deposit box belonging to Eunice has turned up in a bank on the moon. Hector and Lucas bribe Geoffrey with a large sum of money for his elephant research--he has implanted a networking type of device into an elephant in order to learn more about the inner workings of its mind--to get him to go to the moon and see what's in the safe deposit box. As much as Geoffrey dislikes his cousins, he needs the money for his research, so accepts the deal. His trip to the moon has the side benefit of allowing him to visit Sunday while he is there. What he finds, in and of itself, is meaningless. But it turns out to be the first of many clues planted by Eunice to get the family to do ... what, exactly?

As you might imagine, Sunday gets involved--after all, she isn't going to let Geoffrey come to visit without finding out why he's really there. And then there's the Panspermian Initiative, a group that is dedicated to the colonization of space and which has close ties to Eunice. The Panspermians also have an interest in what Geoffrey found in the safe deposit box. As I said, what he found was a clue, which led him to another clue, which led him to another clue, starting at the moon and working outward towards Neptunian space. What Geoffrey, Sunday, and the rest find out there is just the beginning.

BLUE REMEMBERED EARTH is pretty good stuff. If you found the "Revelation Space" novels too dark and dense for you, this book may be the thing for you. It's a fairly straightforward story, and while the plot may be one that we've seen time and time again in science fiction and fantasy, Reynolds does a pretty good job of sprucing it up so the reader is truly interested in what comes next.

What does come next? ON THE STEEL BREEZE, and I'm looking forward to getting to read it. Really, the story of Poseidon's Children has just begun, and it's worth following it forward. [-jak]

UNHOLY LAND by **Lavie Tidhar** (copyright 2018, Tachyon Publications, \$15.95 trade paperback, ISBN 978-1-61696-304-0), \$9.99, ebook ISBN 978-1-61696-305-7, 288pp) (book review by Joe Karpierz):

There was a time in my life when a book described as "literary science fiction" would have caused me to run at full speed in the other direction. I don't run away from it any more, but I don't necessarily run toward it, although it can be argued that most of what I read and review these days is much more literary than I might be willing to let on. But I will run toward the work of Lavie Tidhar, whose work contains literary qualities that would make your high school English teacher (well, mine, anyway, since in the mid-1970s genre fiction was to be avoided at all cost) nod with approval while at the same time paying homage to the ideas of science fiction of old. Tidhar's last novel, CENTRAL STATION, was a novel that nodded toward the old traditions while telling the story with modern literary sensibilities. And he's done it again with UNHOLY LAND.

The novel uses the actual historical event of an expedition to Africa to take a look at some land that was under consideration to be a site for a Jewish homeland. In this way, it is somewhat reminiscent of Michael Chabon's THE YIDDISH POLICEMAN'S UNION, but that idea of an alternate Jewish settlement is about where the similarities end. While Chabon's

book remains grounded in reality--only qualifying as genre because of its alternate history aspect (although I would argue that the book is not really science fiction in anyway, although it was a brilliant novel)--UNHOLY LAND, when all is said and done, takes the reader in a completely different and unexpected direction that is unmistakably genre.

At the beginning of the novel, pulp author Lior Tirosh is traveling from Berlin to his homeland, Palestina, in East Africa. Things are a little bit odd right at the very beginning, but when he goes to talk with his niece, he discovers she is missing--well, missing as far as he is concerned, anyway; no one else seems to be worried about her. Thus, the novel starts out as a fairly straightforward detective story in an alternate history setting. And yet, it is not all *that* different from our world of today. Palestina is in conflict with a neighboring state, and a wall is being built to keep intruders out (I don't for a minute believe that Tidhar was thinking about the current situation in the United States when he wrote this, but it sure makes for an interesting thought experiment).

There's a lot of stuff going on here that is very meta in nature. Tirosh feels as if he himself is a detective in one of the novels he's written. Tidhar leads the reader into thinking that Tirosh is actually Tidhar himself; there is mention of Tirosh having written little, unknown books such as OSAMA and CENTRAL STATION. He even refers to looking for a book called UNHOLY LAND in a shop, a book that he himself wrote.

But, as I said earlier, there is much going on that leads the reader and Tirosh to believe that something is amiss, and this is where the book changes from a detective story to an all-out inter-dimensional genre tale. The book quite literally changes from one story to another in such a way that is seamless. It's one thing, and all of a sudden it's another. At the beginning of the novel, I was wondering what it was Tidhar was getting at; it certainly didn't seem like genre to me. It was a bit slow to get moving as well. But once that twist is revealed and the transition made, the book was really a page-turner as it made a mad dash toward its completion.

Once again, Tidhar has written a gem. It truly is a book that your high school teacher would approve of you reading. But since when have you needed her approval to read anything? You'll give yourself all the approval you'll need when you've finished reading it. [-jak]

PEPPERMINT (film review by Dale Skran):

Jennifer Garner has returned to the big screen in her first action role in a long time in PEPPERMINT. This film is being savaged by the critics on Rottentomatoes (although many admit Garner's performance is strong), with a 12% rating. There are also some voices on the Net decrying PEPPERMINT as racist white savior trash.

Basically, PEPPERMINT is a re-imagining of DEATH WISH/THE PUNISHER with a female lead. Riley North (Garner) is a modest working-class woman with job at a bank, a mechanic husband and a super-cute kid. The husband is offered a chance to participate in a heist by a friend but turns it down. Unfortunately, the target of the heist, a local drug lord, decides he wants to make an example of everyone involved in the putative robbery, and sends three thugs to kill the husband. Via chance, Riley lags behind to get napkins, and returns just in time to see her family gunned down by three Hispanic gang-bangers.

Things go from bad to worse for Riley. It turns out the judge, the prosecuting attorney, the cops, and the defense attorney are all in the pocket of the drug lord, and before you know it the case is dismissed and Riley is on an ambulance headed to the local psych ward. In the grand tradition of all those Lone Rangers who decide to take things into their own hands, she clocks the cop with a handy oxygen bottle and escapes.

Five years later on the anniversary of the death of her family she returns to LA and embarks on a program of revenge. Apparently, she started off by robbing the bank where she worked of \$50K and has traveled round the world on a Batman-like walkabout that includes illegal cage matches and a really large amount of target practice. Along the way she stole a military-grade arsenal and acquired a Punisher-style battle-van.

This proceeds along pretty much as you might expect. One criticism of PEPPERMINT is that there is nothing really new here, and this is correct. It is a bit unfair that PEPPERMINT is being compared to the quite good Netflix PUNISHER, and not the several really bad earlier Punisher movies, but fair is fair--there is no big innovation in PEPPERMINT. And the critics are right on Garner as well--she does do a good job playing a convincing Riley North. This is not a great movie, but it is entertaining. At some point I might even see it again since I missed one scene.

As to whether this is racist trash, the attack I read was based on just watching the trailer. The full movie is far from being some kind of anti-Hispanic screed. The bad guys are, not, in fact, all Hispanic. They are both Hispanic and Asian, and the corrupt officials are all Caucasian. There is a diverse group of heroic, honest cops, including a black female FBI agent and an experienced Hispanic detective. So, no, this is not some kind of anti-immigrant movie. In a way it is refreshing to see something other than the endless stream of Eastern European white bad guys who are Hollywood's current "go-to" method for avoiding offence to U.S. audiences.

However, there is another aspect to the movie that is political. The entire government structure that turns on Riley North is corrupt, making her transition to vigilante violence her only real alternative. I submit that this narrative is sometimes applied by conservative writers to cities like Chicago that have persistently high crime rates. Clearly there is a difference between the many American cities where crime has dropped (like NYC), and another group where violence has remained high, or risen. There is a serious point here--if Chicago is truly totally corrupt, what should a citizen do? What should a citizen of Mexico, or Columbia do--other than try to leave?

I would not be surprised to see a sequel appear. PEPPERMINT opened at \$17M, but this is more than the opening for DEATH WISH 2018 or JOHN WICK, and production costs were only \$25M. The PEPPERMINT opening was only a bit less than ATOMIC BLOND. I saw the movie during the day, and the audience seemed to consist of older women, so I assume it was mainly Garner fans.

I'm rating PEPPERMINT a 0 to +1. It is certainly better than my archetypal zero film--BLUE THUNDER. I liked JOHN WICK (86% on the Tomatoemeter) and ATOMIC BLOND (78%), but PEPPERMINT is comparable to both, not greatly inferior as suggested by the disparate ratings. JOHN WICK is fun, but the premise is just silly, and the convoluted plot of ATOMIC BLOND does not bear close examination. By comparison to both PEPPERMINT is tightly wound and deeply logical.

PEPPERMINT is an R-rated violent movie with no sex. Although there is a graphic scene where the judge is killed in a torturous fashion, I found the movie fairly low on the R-rated gore meter. This is not HERBERT WEST REANIMATOR. Certainly, too violent for kids, but fine for older teens. Recommended to fans of Jennifer Garner and the Punisher. And no, I am not going to explain why it is titled PEPPERMINT. [-dls]

Matt Helm and Other Spy Films (letters of comment by Rincewind, Keith F. Lynch, and Peter Trei):

In response to Mark's comments on Matt Helm in the 09/14/18 issue of the MT VOID, Rincewind writes:

I don't take my spies seriously, so I enjoyed the first couple of Matt Helm films. The last one fell flat. Have you ever sent the two "Flint" films starring James Coburn? Or "The President's Analyst," also starring Coburn? [-er]

Mark replies:

I have seen all of those you list, but like only THE PRESIDENT'S ANALYST. I do recommend the French "OSS 117" films, though I have seen only two. [-mrl]

Keith Lynch responds:

I've seen both of the Flint movies. I have the second, politically incorrect one on DVD. Austin Powers, a later Bond parody, called it his favorite movie. [-kfl]

Peter Trei adds:

THE PRESIDENT'S ANALYST is one of my top 10 films. Its paranoia is prescient. [-pt]

Keith adds:

I do take my spies seriously, so I enjoyed the TV series "The Americans" much more than I've enjoyed any James Bond movie or spoof thereof. My brother and I finally finished watching "The Americans" last weekend.

I have a special fondness for THE PRESIDENT'S ANALYST. The biggest villain in that movie is The Phone Company. Just like in my case 41 years ago, when a Phone Company (there was only one in those days) installer who was called by my evil roommate to install a line for his terminal had apparently been told to keep an eye out for that stolen terminal since it needed a phone line. Why that resulted in *me* getting arrested, I don't know. [-kfl]

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

JOURNEY TO PORTUGAL by Jose Saramago (ISBN 978-0-15600-713-9) is a travelogue through Portugal. It is extremely poetic, but if you are not familiar with Portugal, or are not interested in details of every church in the country, after a while it becomes repetitious and hard to follow. Clearly written primarily for a Portuguese audience, it is probably not going to appeal to most readers, even fans of Saramago, outside that country.

WHERE THE TIME GOES by Jeffrey E. Barlough (ISBN 978-0-978-76345-9) is the latest in Barlough's "Western Lights" series. His most recent books have had a somewhat light tone but in this volume, he returns to his earlier style, described as

"Charles Dickens meets H. P. Lovecraft." Unfortunately, he also ends with a cliffhanger; the next book (THE THING IN THE CLOSE) is due out December 4. I really like Barlough's style, but I would suggest new readers start at the beginning with DARK SLEEPER (ISBN 978-0-441-00730-1). And speaking of Charles Dickens, AMERICAN NOTES by Charles Dickens (ISBN 978-0-140-43649-5) is his description of his 1842 trip to the United States. He concentrates mostly on prisons, orphanages, and institutions for the blind and the mentally ill, with additional comments on transportation and hotels. He also has a long chapter at the end about slavery, although it's worth mentioning that he never traveled further south than Richmond, in large part to avoid having to deal with slavery firsthand.

For years I put off buying THE BLACK CAT by Philip J. Riley and Gregory Mank (ISBN 978-1-593-93779-9) because, unlike all the other volumes in this series, this did not have the original shooting script of the film. This was particularly crucial for THE BLACK CAT, because so many changes had to be made because of the Production Code. When I finally did buy it, I was pleased/relieved to see that although the script was not included, The text basically described the entire original shooting script and detailed the changes made. I'm assuming that there was some copyright issue that prevented the inclusion of the actual script, but a description of the film in process, including all changes, was deemed not to be a copyright violation. I still would have preferred the actual script, but this is a reasonable substitute. [-ecl]

Mark Leeper
mleeper@optonline.net

Quote of the Week:

I distrust camels, and anyone else who can go a week
without a drink.

--Joe E. Lewis

[Tweet](#)

Go to [our home page](#)