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The Square Dance Conspiracy, Part 2 (comments by Mark R. Leeper):

Continuing with [last week's discussion of square dancers](#) infiltrating what was then AT&T Bell Laboratories (from a column originally published 3 April 1987):

Last week I reported on the growing conspiracy of a square dancing underground. I have been asked by friends who are square dancers and who claimed to be ignorant of what was going on that I should point out that perhaps (perhaps!) not all square dancers are in on the conspiracy.

Actually I am informed by (not necessarily unimpeachable) sources that 90% of all square dancers are innocent and probably 60% don't even know that the conspiracy exists. That is perhaps the most tragic part about the square dancing conspiracy. A Squarie is the innocent victim of the conspiracy perhaps even more than a non- Squarie. I am sure most square dancers have only the best of intentions, but will they be able to prove that to a Congressional committee if the question ever comes up?

And you Squaries, have you thought about how the square dance callers are conditioning you to follow orders? Ask yourself, why are you not even allowed to question the authority of the caller. That should tell you something. And you should ask yourself who your caller is taking his/her orders from. How will you feel when your caller start giving you...

"Waltz that gal across the floor. Hide some drugs in your desk drawer. Meet in the center with a right hand star. Toss a grenade at someone's car. Promenade that pretty little thing. Drill some holes in an airplane wing."

One Squarie told me of her square's personal rebellion against the caller. Just for fun they did everything the mirror image of what the caller wanted. This the Squarie thought of as a disobedience of a sort. It didn't even occur to her that the mirror image of a man throwing a Molotov Cocktail is still a man throwing a Molotov Cocktail. Scary, huh?

Oh, incidentally, I will say that I have been invited to a square dancing class to see "how innocent" it all is. This is a warning to all readers, if the same offer is made to you DON'T GO! Yes, you will be convinced square dancing is innocent with just one class. Ask an ex-Squarie--one who has been deprogrammed--about that first class, how it never ends, how you are fed on

a diet like Coke and cookies and no protein at all and kept dancing until you are too weak to argue back. Why do you think there are so many Squaries around these days?" [-mrl]

IF TOMORROW COMES by Nancy Kress (copyright 2018 Tor, 2018 Blackstone Audio, 336pp, 10 hours 40 minutes, ASIN: B0756J6F1N, ASIN: B078NH5N3N, narrated by Marguerite Gavin) (audio book review by Joe Karpierz):

IF TOMORROW COMES is the second book in the "Yesterday's Kin" trilogy by Nancy Kress. As a quick recap, the trilogy is an expansion of the Nebula-award-winning novella "Yesterday's Kin", which obviously has given its name to the trilogy. The premise of the original story, and the first part of the first book in the series, TOMORROW'S KIN, is that aliens claiming to be related to the human species have come to Earth warning of a spore cloud that is making its way toward Earth that could kill most of the planet's inhabitants once it passes through the cloud. The link between the first and second books is the gift of technology that allows humanity to build a starship to travel to the planet dubbed "World", although in this book the name is changed to Kindred.

So, some ten years after that original visit, a small, select group of diplomats and scientists--along with an elite military guard-- travel to Kindred for a standard exploratory mission with a bit of political and cultural exchange thrown into the mix. However, much to their surprise, a few things throw the plans for the trip into a tizzy. First and foremost, the civilization they find on Kindred is not what they expect. Rather than an advanced technological and cultural people, the residents of Kindred are neither, which causes a lot of problems when the help that is expected in developing more of the serum to protect the residents of Kindred against the spore cloud just isn't there. Second of all, the expedition is shot down out of space by a Russian starship that followed them. The fact that another political entity had access to the plans for the starship didn't surprise me. What was interesting was using the Russians as the villain of choice for this event. It's not clear whether Kress has the Russians in mind because of everything that is going on in our current political climate or something else entirely. I just found the choice a bit odd. The third item is that a side effect of the technology that allows the ship to move through space slips time forward by twenty-eight years. While this was referenced in the novel a few times, I suspect it will play a large role in the concluding novel, TERRAN TOMORROW, coming out in November of 2018.

The story told by IF TOMORROW COMES in and of itself is quite simple. The people of the expedition must be able to create enough vaccine to save themselves and the people of Kindred, and do so amidst a climate of fear and distrust. Throw in a bunch of military Rangers and a sharpshooting sniper - who are working at cross-purposes with each other - and the situation is sticky to say the least.

However, IF TOMORROW COMES is more complex than that. Kress of course uses her knowledge of genetics - a subject present in many other of her books - as well as the ongoing story of family, belonging, and conflict to tell an interesting tale. Several of the characters are quite compelling as well. Leo Brodie, the aforementioned non-Ranger sniper, starts out the story on one side of the conflict but through his experiences learns that maybe there is another way. Austin Rhinehart, who was taken from Earth to Kindred early in his life, is now an adolescent who is conflicted as well and is one of the more interesting characters in the story. Marianne Jenner, the main holdover from the first novel, maintains her role as both a scientist and a mother, as she encounters her son Noah who left Earth in the first novel and is now a figure of authority on Kindred.

I began this review thinking that this book was the typical middle book of a trilogy, something of a weak link that is there to move the story along, but is not really giving us too much to go on with regard to the overall arc of the trilogy. And I think that last statement may still be true. But the novel itself, if taken as a standalone, is a pretty good one and worth the read.

Marguerite Gavin returns, much to my delight, as the narrator for this second book in the trilogy. As I stated in my review of the first novel, she is a terrific narrator and a joy to listen to. I really can't add much to that.

Whether you listen to the audio book or read this in a traditional fashion, I believe that IF TOMORROW COMES is worth your time. I do look forward to the concluding volume in the trilogy. [-jak]

The Metric System (letter of comment by Gary Labowitz):

In response to [Lee Beaumont's comments on the metric system](#) in the 11/02/18 issue of the MT VOID, Gary Labowitz writes:

Thank you for taking me seriously. Sometimes people think I am kidding all the time.

Look, I'm now 79 and 10/12. I've spent my life with a "built in" feel for what 10 feet looks like. A mile is a distance I "feel" while driving. I know what a cup of rice looks like and can probably pour it out without measuring it. So when I get a recipe that says "350 grams of rice" what am I going to do? I have to use the internet to make the conversion for me. (It's about 2 cups, if I recall correctly. Since I was making risotto for me and my wife, I cut it to 1 cup and 4 cups of broth. It was delicious.)

Frankly, I think converting over to metric would require tagging everything with metric and English measurements and raising a new generation of kids that were "internalizing" the new measurements. If someone says he is 1.75 meters tall, I'm at a loss to picture that. I guess it is 5' 9" or about my height (5' 7 3/4").

I'm not bitching about all this. It's just that just using metric isn't going to cut it to get people to "feel" the measurements without having to convert everything in their minds. It just isn't practical to just switch over without a long period of people to "feel" the difference of running a 8K race for charity. (It's our 5K.)

Oh, the changes that will have to be made. That's why "And Day Now" is such a giggle for me. Switching over will take 20 - 40 years, with new generations going through the conversion. Can you image if somebody said, "Let's change over from English (and it's the American dialect) to Chinese!" Why is it that a suspect of a mass shooting event is an illegal alien, living here for about 7 years, and still can't speak English? How can a woman, now a naturalized American citizen, sue a pharmaceutical company for her bad experience from misuse of a drug because the instructions weren't printed in Hungarian? I kid you not, this was an actual case some years ago.

I don't care what system is in general use. But it's the English system of measurement now. And it will only be metric "Any Day Now." I'll never see it. [-gl]

Gender Pronouns (Letter of comment by Gary Labowitz):

In response to [Lee Beaumont's comments on gender pronouns](#) in the 11/02/18 issue of the MT VOID, Gary Labowitz writes:

Well, the use of "their" for the singular possessive pronoun goes back a long way; I think it was several hundred years. The "word police" of the 18th - 19th centuries were responsible for "standardizing" our language for us. Being male chauvinist pigs they decided the male form should be used when the gender of the noun was unknown. That was the common usage in lots of ways. God is a "he." A lone student, unnamed, is a "he." That's why I pointed out it was not a determinate of saying the actor was a "male," i.e. a human being with a penis. To distinguish we have actress! Which is itself an abomination. Women are actors, too. (Well, they weren't originally, and were deemed bawdy women who would go on the stage, anyway.)

The descriptive dictionaries (almost all are, I think) changed over to showing a definition of "their" as singular when applied to an unknown gender noun. "The student should raise their hand." Okay! "The student should raise his hand." Ambiguous. "The student should raise her hand." Clear and correct if the student is female. My take was, "The student should raise 'eir hand." (pronounced as "air.")

Again, when enough of us are wrong, then we will be right. That's the nature of language, anyway. Ain't it the truth!! [-gl]

Evelyn adds:

A related issue: The supposedly correct number for "no one" is singular, but "No one I knew was at the party, and I missed him" just sounds *wrong*. [-ecl]

The Square Dance Conspiracy (letter of comment by Kevin R):

In response to [Mark's comments on square dancing](#) in the 11/02/18 issue of the MT VOID, Kevin R writes:

Others have come around the Conspiracy, tracing it back to Henry Ford!

<https://qz.com/1153516/americas-wholesome-square-dancing-tradition-is-a-tool-of-white-supremacy/>

<https://chicago.suntimes.com/columnists/steinberg-henry-ford-americas-hateful-square-dance-instructor/>

<https://juliannemangin.com/the-state-folk-dance-conspiracy/>

I was taught square dancing as part of gym class in elementary school. I remember the caller was called "Dandy Don Durlacher," related, I believe, to this guy, "Ed," mentioned in this NYT article.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/20/nyregion/grab-your-partner-do-si-what-in-the-middle-of-manhattan.html>

Note the activity across the Hudson in the New York of 1949!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mUwvmRbsBXo&feature=youtu.be>

The anti-Jazz, anti-Semitic and anti-black motive to push square dance may have been historically doomed. Seems black

folks were involved early:

<https://daily.jstor.org/the-slave-roots-of-square-dancing/>

The "real American" dance form is tap, a collision of Irish hard- shoe step dancing, clog dancing and African-American forms.

I haven't danced in a square since...1970? I have resisted entreaties to get involved in Irish ceili or set dancing. I've sat and listened to the music while others danced, when I enjoyed the band, though.

I liked square dancing when I was a 6-8th grader, as it allowed low-pressure contact with actual girls in a structured setting. It beat dodgeball! I hadn't learned about its sketchy roots, though. And, though a child of the rock n' roll 60s, I also enjoyed country and western music, which I ascribe to my identifying it as an off- shoot, partly, of Irish and Scottish folk music, which we listened to in my house. I also enjoyed cowboy movies and TV shows featuring Gene Autry and Roy Rogers.

RnR was mainly jump and rhythm & blues with some elements of country (rockabilly.) I was a "roots music" fan from early on, sorta like the narrator in John Sebastian's "Nashville Cats." (The Lovin' Spoonful.)

I was never initiated into a conspiracy, though. [-kr]

Evelyn responds:

The two URLs Mark included at the end of his introduction were for articles by other people discussing the origins of square dancing, and Henry Ford's involvement in it. [-ecl]

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

THE PENGUIN ESSAYS OF GEORGE ORWELL (ISBN 978-0-140-18235-4) is not a collection of Orwell's essays about bird-watching in Antarctica. (Sorry, I couldn't resist.) Most of these essays are from the 1930s and 1940s, and it is often useful to check the publication date at the end of an essay before reading it, particularly those having to do with European politics. In those, by the way, one sees some of the ideas he later used in 1984, such as the re- writing of history. His essays on literature are also often tied up with politics. For example, he has some comments on how Charles Dickens used class distinctions in his novels, and how Wells's view of the World State seems to be detached from reality. I did skip a few of the essays when I was unfamiliar with the subject matter (e.g., essays about British turn-of-the-century children's books, or about people who were well-known in England when he wrote the essay, but are unknown, at least in the United States now), but the great majority of these essays are thought-provoking and worth reading.

I have just started the Great Courses course on "Classics of American Literature", which has 84 lectures. It seems like it might be a good idea to read the works along with listening to the lectures, but I suspect this ambition on my part will not last. Some will be too long (I would like to finish the course before I die :-)), some will not appeal to me (they may be classics, but I don't *have* to read them--especially if I have read them before), and some may be hard to find.

At any rate the first one is AUTOBIOGRAPHY by Benjamin Franklin (ISBN 978-0-486-29073-7). I am sure I read this ages ago, but it is short enough that I read it again. Though Franklin talks a lot about humility as a virtue, he does not display very much in this work--and indeed, writes about how hard it is to develop humility without ending up proud that you are so humble.

If one considers this an example of Franklin's wit, it is not the only one. When discussing the organization of people into militias for defense against the French, he snidely writes, "Indeed I had some cause to believe that the defense of the country was not disagreeable to any of them, provided they were not required to assist in it."

Of his invention of the Franklin stove, he says he took no patent out on it because, "That, as we enjoy great advantages from the inventions of others, we should be glad of an opportunity to serve others by any invention of ours; and this we should do freely and generously." What an ideal world Franklin must have lived in! :-)

Ever the scientists, Franklin writes that he had often been skeptical of claims of a speaker addressing 25,000 people, or an ancient general addressing entire armies. So when the Reverend Whitefield addressed a crowd from the corner of Market Street and Second Street, Franklin backed down Market Street until he could no longer understand him (almost to Front Street). He then calculated the area of a semi-circle of which his distance from Whitefield was the radius and concluded that, allowing two square feet per person, in an open area he could be heard by more than 30,000 people.

Franklin writes of losing his four-year-old son to smallpox, and says, "I long regretted bitterly, and still regret that I had not given it to him by inoculation. This I mention for the sake of parents who omit that operation, on the supposition that they should never forgive themselves if a child died under it; my example showing that the regret may be the same either way, and

that, therefore, the safer should be chosen." Given how much more dangerous smallpox inoculation was then compared to, say, measles vaccination now, maybe Franklin's comments should be more widely publicized.

But Franklin does show some linguistic ignorance. He writes, "We are told that it is proper to begin first with the Latin, and, having acquired that, it will be more easy to attain those modern languages which are derived from it; and yet we do not begin with the Greek, in order to more easily acquire the Latin." He completely misses the fact that Latin is **not** at all derived from Greek, while French, Spanish, and Italian are pretty much derived from Latin. He is correct, though, when he says that those who begin with Latin and quit after a few years have not learned anything practical, while starting with a modern language at least gives them something useful in their common life after the same period of time. [-ecl]

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Quote of the Week:

The four building blocks of the universe are fire, water,
gravel and vinyl.

--Dave Barry

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