

# MT VOID 11/16/18 -- Vol. 37, No. 20, Whole Number 2041



Mt. Holz Science Fiction Society  
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### **The Square Dance Conspiracy, Part 3** (comments by Mark R. Leeper):

Continuing with my findings about square dancers (from a column originally published 10 April 1987):

I have been doing a series recently on the rising tide of square dancing in this area and, I am told (this should scare you), at places like MIT. The vast majority of square dancers take their orders (which they term "calls") from a caller. The caller is sort of a local lieutenant in the conspiracy, but there appears to be no single leader of this conspiracy, no Reverend Moon of the Square Dancers. The callers go off to secret classes where they "learn to call." These have not been infiltrated by outsiders as far as I can tell, but there are hints about who might be pulling the strings in square dancing itself.

Think about what you have seen about square dancing. It is a very mathematical, very symmetrical form of dance. But who really sees the symmetry? The caller stands above the floor and can see the symmetry, but even there only from an angle. The perfect place to appreciate square dancing is directly overhead. So what does that imply? Lots of forms of dance can only be fully appreciated from directly overhead. But the June Taylor dancers who used to appear on the Jackie Gleason show and who specialize in this sort of geometric display, came along only after there were overhead cameras to show the effects to an audience. When square dancing was invented, there were no such overhead cameras, at least none that the history books record. These were designs that could be appreciated only from the air directly overhead at a time when that was an impossible position for a human to get to... just like the mysterious figures on the plains of Nazca.

Clearly there is a possibility that square dancing was invented for the benefit of (and perhaps by) visitors from another world. It may have started when these alien visitors first "came to call." They now have a serious foothold in technical institutions in places like MIT and AT&T. Beware. [-mrl]

### **ISLE OF DOGS** (film review by Mark R. Leeper):

**CAPSULE:** Wes Anderson gives us a science fiction animated film in which the characters are intelligent

dogs who talk like humans. We are twenty years in the future and in Japan, and we are in the middle of a war of humans of the Kobayashi Clan against an overloaded population of dogs. The human city intends to exile all dogs to an island-sized trash dump. There the dogs will be in quarantine. Is this fair to the dogs? They do not think so. The plan is being angrily debated. We flash to Trash Island ruled by exiled dogs. There the dogs are getting used to their new home. But it is clear things cannot go on as they have been. The story is itself could be better, but the film is a treasure trove of ideas--some cute and some engaging. There are even more ideas than in director Wes Anderson's previous film, GRAND BUDAPEST HOTEL (2014). Rating: high +2 (-4 to +4) or 8/10

Wes Anderson has not yet made a name for himself that readily comes to mind in discussions of the best contemporary animated fantasy films and their makers. That is probably just because while many of his films include some animation, it is generally just to add a small piece of humor. His main body of work is live-action comedy. Yet where he uses animation (as he frequently does) humor is an indispensable part element of his overall quirky style.

The dogs in ISLE OF DOGS are animated three-dimensional figures they look both realistic and whimsical. In the film humans speak in Japanese but the dogs speak in English. This ambitious film is animated with three-dimensional animation. The dogs' faces are both realistic and sympathetic. The story is told with ingenious wit.

Anderson has his own group of actors who are likely to show up in his films who might almost be considered as his own repertory company: Bryan Cranston, Edward Norton, Bill Murray, Jeff Goldblum, Bob Balaban, F. Murray Abraham, Harvey Keitel, and Tilda Swinton. Also being heard from are Kunichi Nomura, Ken Watanabe, Greta Gerwig, Frances McDormand, Fisher Stevens, Koyu Rankin, Liev Schreiber, Scarlett Johansson, Frank Wood, and Yoko Ono. And the idea of having dogs who talk like humans may well have been inspired by the novel CITY by Clifford Simak.

I was never very fond of the older Wes Anderson films going back to RUSHMORE, but his style has been steadily improving. I really enjoyed THE FANTASTIC MR. FOX and especially THE GRAND BUDAPEST HOTEL. These films are nearly unique.

Alexandre Desplat composed the score to have a very Japanese atmosphere. It is composed of wooden blocks, and chanting. Also Anderson has named the film in such a way that one cannot purchase tickets without declaring love of dogs. Full disclosure: I do love dogs. And until I get one I rate ISLE OF DOGS a high +2 on the -4 to +4 scale or 8/10.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt5104604/reference>

What others are saying: [https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/isle\\_of\\_dogs\\_2018](https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/isle_of_dogs_2018)

[-mrl]

**The Metric System** (letter of comment by Dan Cox):

In response to [Gary Labowitz's comments on the metric system](#) in the 11/09/18 issue of the MT VOID, Dan Cox writes:

Re Metric vs. "English":

In the 70s we tried raising a generation to internalize metric measurements. The teaching approach was not the best, involving memorizing more prefixes than necessary. I suspect that native metric users don't usually say "70 decimeters and 3 centimeters" when they could say "73 centimeters".

The 5K run is already metric, and is an example of a measurement which many in the US have internalized. But 2 liters, 1 liter, and 750ml are probably the most internalized here. Be careful how often you internalize 750 ml.

I've read that the hard part could be retooling. Not just the extra wrench sockets that fit metric bolts while being usable on your quarter-inch-drive socket-wrench handle, but making all of the parts in metric sizes. Go into a large home hardware store and the vast majority of machine screws still use "English" measurements 20, 24, 32, or 40 threads per inch. Though the thickness is defined as "number 2", "number 4", etc. These are sizes I internalized without ever knowing their precise definition.

Pipes come in various sizes, measured by inside-diameter or by outside-diameter, depending on what material the pipe is made from. I wonder if the metric world standardized that. Electrical wiring comes in gauges, with larger wires having a smaller number identifying their gauge. [-dte]

**Gender Pronouns, George Orwell, and Square Dancing** (letter of comment by Gary Labowitz):

In response to various comments in [the 11/09/18 issue of the MT VOID](#), Gary Labowitz writes:

I have only a brief moment for now. I have to start preparing for Thanksgiving, and my monthly casserole for the Hospice downtown. So, I'll be brief.

On gender pronouns comment:

Your example should read, "No one I knew was at the party, and I missed 'em." Ask eel if it sounds "right" or even "okay" that way.

On the Penguins: What comes to my mind is the book report given by a small third grade girl: "This book told me more than I wanted to know about Penguins." Short, sweet, and absolutely correct.

On Square Dancing:

I grew up in Kansas City, MO, and boy did I square dance. You got to swing your gal ... and that was fun. I also did dancing (not square, but oval) on roller skates, when I got a little older. And then on to ballroom, and freeform on the stage (I never tapped). At this point, however, I'm lucky to be able to get out of an easy chair and stand up!

Live Alert has a motto, "Help! I've fallen and I can't get up." I figure I could start a company to be called Live Alert Lite, with the motto: "Help! I sat down and I can't stand up!" Do you suppose it would sell? [-gl]

**George Orwell** (letter of comment by Kip Williams):

In response to [Evelyn's comments on George Orwell](#) in the 11/09/18 issue of the MT VOID, Kip Williams writes:

I had never read the stories Orwell wrote about in his essay on English stories for boys, but that hardly mattered. It was all in the article, and I found it interesting enough that I ended up finding and reading Kipling's "Stalky and Company" some time after.

The comparison, for me, would be to Bernard Shaw, whose criticisms of music don't depend upon my having heard the performance, or even knowing the piece of music he's referring to. He gives his information, writing very clearly with no jargon (except when he's making fun of jargon after someone wrote in and claimed he didn't know any).

As long as I'm mentioning music criticism, a word of admiration for a critic, long years dead now, who wrote of an amateur performance of a piece by Blumenfeld with the dry observation "it is unfortunate that the composer did not indicate exactly how flat he wished the Trio to be sung." [-kw]

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

The second author in the Great Courses course on American classics was Washington Irving. As was noted in the lecture, Washington Irving wrote a lot that was read in his time, but today he is known for two short stories: "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" and "Rip Van Winkle", both in THE SKETCH BOOK OF GEOFFREY CRAYON (ISBN 978-0- 940-45014-1 [Library of America edition; many cheaper/free versions also available]). Irving is the anti-Hemingway. Where Hemingway is known for his short sentences (his average sentence length is slightly over ten words), Irving starts "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" with:

"In the bosom of one of those spacious coves which indent the eastern shore of the Hudson, at that broad expansion of the river denominated by the ancient Dutch navigators the Tappan Zee, and where they always prudently shortened sail, and implored the protection of St. Nicholas when they crossed, there lies a small market-town or rural port, which by some is called Greensburgh, but which is more generally and properly known by the name of Tarry Town."

(Okay, this is an atypical sentence, but his average sentence length is still forty words.)

Though the lecturer emphasized Irving's characterizations, I think it is probably true that it is the premise of each story that people remember. And the irony is that these are not very original. The Headless Horseman is a variation on a ghost, perhaps with some inspiration from the legend of the ghost of Anne Boleyn ("With her head tuck'd underneath her arm, she walks the Bloody Tower"). And "Rip Van Winkle" is just a variation on "The Seven Sleepers of Ephesus". But for some reason they have cemented themselves into the mythology of America. Neil Gaiman writes about Old World gods and demons coming to the New World, and many authors have drawn on Native American legends, but the Headless Horseman and Rip Van Winkle are the first \*United States\* legends. [-ecl]

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Quote of the Week:

The analysis of variance is not a mathematical theorem,  
but rather a convenient method of arranging the  
arithmetic.

--Ronald Fisher

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