



of the MT VOID.

This had several effects on my writing. Spelling and format corrections were taking much more time to fix. It seemed like when I tried to type a word it would come out miss-spelled. An attempt to fix the spelling would often make things worse. Single letters would come out doubled and double letters would come out singly. There was more than one way it would happen. It seemed like it has more than one cause. At one time I could sit down at a keyboard and start typing and the words just rolled out very easily. I seem to have lost that talent. I was not able to write a film review without frequently hours of correcting. And when I did try to write the ideas and wording just stopped coming as if I had a monumental case of writer's block.

People have suggested speech-to-text programs, in particular Dragon Speak, but it turns out that Dragon Speak is no longer produced for the Mac. I have tried other programs and I don't interface well with them.

Evelyn and I have been writing most of the VOID for what is no longer just "several years." I think it is fair to say it is now "many" years. I am afraid that my contribution will be greatly diminished. Now I am not saying the VOID is going away. I am not even saying it will change in form. But what I am saying is that it may contain less of my writing. My columns may be shorter; I may not even have a new column in every issue. There will probably also be fewer and shorter film reviews.

In any case I want to thank our readers for their loyalty. And I will continue to work on the VOID, with just what will probably a lower output. [-mrl]

**PERIHELION SUMMER** by **Greg Egan** (copyright 2019, Tor.com, \$14.99, trade paperback, ISBN 978-1-250-31378-2) (book review by Joe Karpierz):

Climate change is here. But what if that climate change was not brought about by the residents of planet Earth, but by an external force? And what if the result of the application of that external force makes anything we're seeing and projecting look like small potatoes? And how will humanity handle it? Greg Egan's latest novella, "Perihelion Summer", attempts to deal with those questions.

A small black hole, the size of about one tenth the mass of the sun, has entered the solar system. The black hole is given the name Taraxippus. (A little research shows that a taraxippus was a ghost of sorts blamed for frightening horses at hippodromes throughout ancient Greece.) Matt and his friends refuse to take any chances. They build a self-sustaining aquaculture rig which they dub Mandjet. They feel that no matter the effects of the passage of Taraxippus, they will be safe at sea during its passage. I'm going to guess that Egan chose the name Taraxippus very carefully and deliberately, as all the careful calculations about the effects of the passage of the black hole near the Earth are thrown out the window when it is discovered that Taraxippus is actually a \*pair\* of orbiting black holes.

As usual with something like this, there is good news and bad news. The good news is that the black holes do not cause any direct damage to the planet. The bad news is that they pass close enough to permanently alter the orbit of the Earth around the sun. The result is that the seasons are now more severe; winters are colder, summers are hotter, portions of the planet are rendered basically uninhabitable, and the melting of the polar ice caps is accelerated.

The point of "Perihelion Summer", I think, is not that climate change is coming or is already here, but that the various peoples of the world have to find ways to deal with it--together. The climate change that Egan describes is more severe than anything we'll experience in our lifetimes, I think. Maybe unintentionally, but it seems that Egan maybe is telling us that as a species, we must learn to work together to solve the problems that are directly in front of us, whether they are self induced or brought about by nature. [-jak]

**PERMAFROST** by **Alastair Reynolds** (copyright 2019, Tor.com, \$14.99, trade paperback, ISBN 978-1-1250-30356-1) (book review by Joe Karpierz):

I have been a fan of the writing of Alastair Reynolds for a long time. I've read a good number of his novels (and one of his novellas, "Slow Bullets") and have never been disappointed (I do aim to read the entirety of his catalogue, but that will take some time and I don't believe I'll be disappointed in any of it). And I'm not this time around either.

How do you feel about a time travel, climate change, near-future disaster story? I'm not sure I've encountered one of those before, but in Reynolds' latest novella "Permafrost", I have now, and I'm thoroughly impressed.

In the year 2080, a group of scientists have gathered at the edge of the Arctic Circle in Russia to perform what really is a last-ditch experiment. They are attempting to make a very small alteration to the past which will a) leave recorded history intact, and b) avert the upcoming catastrophe that will wipe out humanity if the experiment is not successful.

The story is not told in a linear fashion, and that is somehow appropriate for a time travel story. The narrative begins in the middle, and works its way back to the beginning of the 2080 time period as well as that of the year 2028. Let me get back to you on that.

The final recruit is Valentina Lidova, an elderly schoolteacher who is brought on board in large part because she is the daughter of mathematician Luda Lidova, whose research into the mathematics of paradox is basically the foundation of the time travel experiment. Valentina is one of several pilots who are injected into the past. The pilots don't know when they'll eventually be inserted into the body of a host, or who that host will be. It turns out that Valentina is the first--well, sort of.

I mentioned 2028. In that year, a young woman has brain surgery, and after she comes out she begins hearing another voice in her head. Well, yes, guess who. Valentina and her host, Tatiana, get to know each other. And in the process, we get to know about both of them--Valentina's relationship with her mother the famous mathematician, and Tatiana's rather reckless lifestyle--as well as what the great catastrophe is that project Permafrost is trying to stop as well as how it started.

Reynolds' treatment of time travel and paradoxes is interesting, and how it works leads to my comment earlier of "well, sort of" when stating that Valentina was the first to make contact. It really is all relative, and the uniqueness of how time travel works in "Permafrost" allows the reader not to roll their eyes and go "really?". The workings of time travel paradox in "Permafrost" are quite clever and something I've never seen before.

"Permafrost" is a good one. I highly recommend it. [-jak]

**DRIVEN** (film review by Mark R. Leeper):

**CAPSULE:** Bill Huffman, a minor paid informant for the FBI, is used to skating the thin ice near the edge of the law. He might have stayed inconsequential until he meets his new neighbor, John DeLorean, temporarily the most successful automobile executive and designer ever. After an enviable career as a leading-edge designer for the major auto companies he is now taking what he learned and is using it and designing what is to be the most superior car on the road. Or is he? DeLorean has announced that he has designed and is building the car that will bear his name. However, DeLorean has a cash-flow problem and he decides to have Bill do a drug run to pick up cocaine for the auto executive. **DRIVEN** is a fast-paced joyride of a film based on the DeLorean legal case that took the attention of the country. Directed by: Nick Hamm; written by: Colin Bateman. Rating: +2 (-4 to +4) or 7/10

**DRIVEN** opens to a montage of short flashbacks signaling the viewer that this will be a complex story. It is told at the frenetic pace and the energy of Tom Cruise's **AMERICAN MADE** or the Coen Brothers' **BURN AFTER READING** or maybe the chaotic rapid fire of **LORD OF WAR**.

We know from the start that something has gone wrong since the story unfolds in flashbacks during a high-profile trial. We see the story through the eyes of Bill, a car enthusiast and private pilot (played by Jason Sudeikis) who finds his new next-door neighbor is the famous John DeLorean (played by Lee Pace). He is totally excited to meet the Big Man, but has a bit of a distraction at the moment. The FBI is blackmailing Bill to get to a small-time drug smuggler. But DeLorean would be a much higher profile arrest so they use Bill to try to entrap DeLorean.

**DRIVEN** is something of a romp, but it also is something of a lament. Mostly the writer reminds us multiple times of that there are many virtues of DeLorean's planned car. Even so your Federal Bureau of Investigation protected you from his plan of unleashing his car on the American road. As such the film follows many of the same issues as Francis Ford Copula's **TUCKER: THE MAN AND HIS DREAM** (1988).

The best performance of the film is provided by Lee Pace who is charismatic in bright silver hairstyle and his opaque sunglasses. He is razor-sharp but still maybe not sharp as he would need to be to win at this game. This film is based only on the folklore of John DeLorean, but it still is a wild ride. I am driven to rate **DRIVEN** a +2 on the -4 to +4 scale or 7/10.

**DRIVEN** is in theaters and on digital/demand August 16, 2019.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt5592796/reference>

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

[-mrl]

**Ode to Joy** (letters of comment by Scott Dorsey, Dorothy J. Heydt, Paul Dormer, Joy Beeson, Kevin R):

In response to [Mark's review of ODE TO JOY](#) in the 08/09/19 issue of the MT VOID, Scott Dorsey writes:

[Mark writes,] "I have to admit that I have always found the titling of Beethoven's 'Ninth Symphony' just a bit puzzling. Why would we need an 'Ode to Joy'? I would have thought that joy was the one commodity that just about everyone would be in favor of. We all love joy." [-mrl]

That's the point. When [Friedrich] Schiller wrote the lyrics, they were originally an Ode to Freedom. Turns out the censors didn't like that. They were a bit suspicious of freedom. But everybody is in favor of joy, so that one passed through for publication. [-sd]

Dorothy J. Heydt responds:

Really????

How appropriate, then, that when the Berlin Wall fell, Leonard Bernstein conducted a performance of the 9th with "Freude" changed to "Freiheit!" [-djh]

Scott Dorsey observes:

Indeed, and I believe he talked about it at the time. [-sd]

Paul Dormer adds:

I was thinking that.

When Michael Tippett came to write his Third Symphony in the early Seventies, he ended it with four songs to poems he wrote himself. (People are very divided over Tippett's attempts to write his own words.) The last one is introduced by the fanfare from Beethoven's 9th and starts with the words, "They said that when she waved her wings, the goddess joy would make us one." and then goes on to catalogue the horrors of the Twentieth Century. Even so, it ends on a note of hope.

I was a teenager at university when that was premiered and I remember listening to it on a small radio in my room. As the first three songs are blues settings, including a solo flugel horn, the critics soon christened the work Beethoven meets the Blues. [-pd]

Joy Beeson also responds:

We sang "Joyful We Adore Thee" in church this morning, but the music leader didn't mention that tidbit when he gave the history of the song.

Or maybe I wasn't paying attention. [-jb]

Scott Dorsey replies:

Now, \*that\* is a third set of lyrics. Another example of the church co-opting secular music and turning it into their own thing. [-sd]

And Kevin R asks:

Ever think they were singing about you, when you were younger? :-) [-kr]

[A continuation of this discussion can be found on Google Groups at <https://tinyurl.com/void-ode-to-joy>.]

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

There is a genre of story that is orthogonal to the usual genres of science fiction, fantasy, mystery, and so on: the Jewish story. In mysteries, there are the Harry Kemelman "Rabbi" books. Even Westerns have their examples: the film *THE FRISCO KID*, for one. For a long time science fiction's examples seemed to be limited to those stories collected by Jack Dann in *WANDERING STARS* (1974). Dann published a sequel *MORE WANDERING STARS* in 1999, and we have seen a few more anthologies, as well as works from such authors as Lisa Goldstein, Joel Rosenberg, and Lavie Tidhar with a strong Jewish element to them. This week I have three books from this sub-genre. And just coincidentally, all three are told by first-person narrators: the father of the bride, the dybbuk, and Benoit Mandelbrot, respectively.

*FATHER OF THE BRIDE OF FRANKENSTEIN* by Daniel M. Kimmel (ISBN 978-1-5154-2379-9) (2019) is a recent work of Jewish science fiction. This is described by the author as a mash-up of the films *FATHER OF THE BRIDE* and *BRIDE OF FRANKENSTEIN*. I would have sworn that it was inspired by Kimmel having recently been the father of a bride and experienced the current wedding insanity firsthand, but his afterword seems to contradict this. The premise is that someone in

a lab re-animates a corpse. It is unauthorized, of course, but the result is "Frank"--and a series of lawsuits over his sentience, humanity, age, and relationship to someone claiming to be his sister. These are settled much more quickly in court than is entirely believable, but I suppose this is literary license. All of this ties in with the upcoming wedding of Frank and the first-person narrator's daughter. The book does have the same problem a lot of mash-ups do: the two parts don't thoroughly mix. Discussions of what kind of wedding cake to get have little connection to the science fictional or philosophical aspects of Frank's existence. The good news is that both halves are reasonably engaging (no pun intended!). I found the philosophical, religious, and legal discussions to be the more interesting, but the wedding planning is mildly amusing. For some reason, this reminded me of *THE DYKE & THE DYBBUK* (see below), but while *THE DYKE & THE DYBBUK* seemed to be written specifically for a Jewish audience, *FATHER OF THE BRIDE OF FRANKENSTEIN* is accessible to non-Jewish readers as well.

[Do wedding vendors require checks? The narrator at one point is glad he packed his checkbook; I would have thought in 2019 everyone involved would be taking credit cards.]

*THE DYKE & THE DYBBUK* by Ellen Galford (ISBN 978-1-8780-6751-7) (1994) is an older modern Jewish fantasy. In fact, I read and reviewed it twenty years ago, in the 01/06/95 issue. (So long ago was it that I listed several brick-and-mortar bookstores from which one could mail-order it.) At the time I was lukewarm towards it, and to some extent I still am. It is still unlikely to appeal to a non-Jewish reader. But I found myself enjoying it a lot more than many novels I read (or start) because they are highly praised. This tale of a dybbuk "haunting" a lesbian London taxi driver because of a 200-year-old curse may have a cast full of stereotypes, particularly in the aunts, but as has been observed, these stereotypes are often based on a reality, e.g., the aunt who doesn't trust anyone else's kitchen as being kosher enough.

So I have to give it a more positive review for Jewish readers, but still have the caveat that Gentile readers may not find it as funny.

*MANDELBROT THE MAGNIFICENT* by Liz Ziemska (ISBN 978-0-7653-9805-5) is told with an elderly Benoit Mandelbrot as first-person narrator, but it is set when Mandelbrot is in his teens, fleeing Poland and later Paris as the Nazis spread across Europe. Mandelbrot is fascinated by mathematics, particularly such concepts as the Sierpinski triangle, Peano curves, and the Hausdorff dimension, and the Kabbalist concept of the Sefirot. Mandelbrot even comes up with a plan to use all this to help save his family.

The story reminded me of some of Ellen Klages's work, particularly *PASSING STRANGE* and "Caligo Lane". It is certainly recommended to people interested in mathematics, though I suppose it goes without saying that the story is fiction. [-ecl]

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Quote of the Week:

Here is that marriage of style and content we look for  
in all great writing. A shatteringly vulgar and worthless  
life captured in shatteringly vulgar and worthless prose.  
--Stephen Fry, *PAPERWEIGHT*

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