

MT VOID 08/14/20 -- Vol. 39, No. 7, Whole Number 2132



Mt. Holz Science Fiction Society
08/14/20 -- Vol. 39, No. 7, Whole Number 2132

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The latest issue is at <http://www.leepers.us/mtvoid/latest.htm>.
An index with links to the issues of the MT VOID since 1986 is at
http://leepers.us/mtvoid/back_issues.htm.

NASFiC 2020 Columbus Free Access:

Those of you starting to suffer from cabin fever, take note:

If I read their news releases correctly, access to the (virtual) NASFiC in Columbus Friday, 8/21, through Sunday, 8/23, will be free:

"Attending the North American Science Fiction and Fantasy Convention will now be easy as everything will be online!

"On the day the convention begins, the page you are viewing now will provide you with a virtual 'log book'. When you have signed it, this website will provide you access to several more pages, with embedded chat channels and streaming video.

"It will be free, but we will still accept donations."

<https://columbus2020nasfic.org/how-to-attend.html>

[-ecl]

Kosher Food (comments by Mark R. Leeper):

From Mark's Diary January 18, 1991:

[Who would have believed that the whole concept of the restaurant was going to be so radically changed almost overnight? It may seem petty but restaurants have become a surprisingly a major slice of our lifestyle.]

Evelyn has subscribed to a magazine called KOSHER GOURMET. I really love that title. It is similar to the concept of the "Special Olympics." "KOSHER GOURMET" is really an inspirational title. It brings to mind images of people achieving great things in spite of overwhelming handicaps. If someone can keep kosher and still make gourmet meals, I can move mountains. It has been an open secret for years that the most popular Jewish dishes can be found on the menus of Chinese restaurants.

It's not all the fault of kosher, of course. The Jews are an oppressed people. We have developed one good kosher food and it was taken away from us. McDonald's a while back wanted to introduce a new menu item, bagels, and to illustrate it they show a guy in New York ... a black guy. I guess they know that Jews would have better taste in bagels than to get the ones McDonald's would serve. Maybe they can convince someone that bagels are New York black soul food. Or perhaps they figured that the only way to put someone recognizably Jewish on the ad would be to show him in a long coat and hat with a beard and curly sideburns. And the market wasn't ready for that!

Anyway, they succeeded. Or somebody did. My Chinese officemate was asking about Jewish food and I told him bagels were Jewish. "What's Jewish about bagels?" Yeah. What's Chinese about egg rolls? [-mrl]

Opera and Unisex Restrooms (letters of comment by Paul Dormer, Dorothy J. Heydt, Keith F. Lynch, and Peter Trei):

In response to [comments on opera at the Bastille](#) in the 08/07/20 issue of the MT VOID, Paul Dormer writes:

Opera Bastille is a fairly new building, opened in 1989 in the Place de la Bastille.

What I found amusing was that in typical French fashion, it has unisex loos. (Bathrooms, if you prefer, but no baths in them.) Women have to go past the urinals to get to the cubicles.

Dorothy J. Heydt responds:

We're beginning to get unisex restrooms (our preferred term for loos in a public place) in the States, but we don't have to worry about urinals. They're single-occupancy, with one toilet, one washbasin, and a lock on the door.

Now I'm remembering a story I read in the early 1950s, about a college that had just gone co-educational, with women students living in a former men's dormitory. The grounds-and-buildings staff had it on their agenda to take out the urinals in the loos ... but when they arrived on the scene, they found the girls had planted geraniums in them. The story ended there, so I don't know what happened to the geraniums. [-djh]

Keith F. Lynch says:

Balticon turns the two restrooms closest to the con suite into unisex restrooms, by replacing the hotel's signage. Fortunately, they leave another pair of restrooms unchanged. [-kfl]

Peter Trei adds:

Arisia does this too. I don't have an issue with it. I've used the urinals as women walked past me to the cubicles. BFD. [-pt]

Paul Dormer also adds:

The Barbican Arts Centre in London has done that for their lowest level area, which contains a cinema and a theatre (officially called The Pit).

As far as I could tell at the Bastille Opera, all loos contained a row of urinals and some cubicles.

In some ways, this makes sense. Women are always complaining in the UK that there are never enough loos to go during the interval. Certainly, when I go to English National Opera, the way to the loos is a narrow corridor in which there is a queue of women waiting to get into the ladies, and the gents you can go straight in. And there are cubicles as well as urinals in the gents. [-pd]

Responding to Peter, Paul also says:

Reminds me of an experience at an airport. I think it was in Canada and I was either going to or coming back from the 1994 Worldcon. I was standing at the urinal, doing what you do, when I heard a cubicle open behind me, followed by an "Eek" from a woman realising she was in the wrong loo. [-pd]

[There is a lot more at <https://groups.google.com/forum/?fromgroups#!topic/rec.arts.sf.fandom/-cPzJe3NxxwE>. -ecl]

Fear and Loathing (letter of comment by John Kerr-Mudd):

In response to [Mark's comments on COVID-19](#) in the 08/07/20 issue of the MT VOID, John Kerr-Mudd writes:

[Mark writes,] ">Based on Mark Leeper's Journal, October 16, 1992 (with updates)"

Gosh that's quite early! [-jkm]

"I have been talking to a friend about how so much of the world so quick reacted over a virus. One day (March 15--the Ides of March, incidentally) only a very small of number of people had even heard of Covid-19 and the next day just about everyone was terrified of ..." [-mrl]

Only the Chinese, but hey, it was their problem. [-jkm]

Mark responds:

If by "that's quite early" you mean that the club (and hence the MT VOID) is quite old, it was founded in 1978 (!) by Evelyn and Mark Leeper. [-mrl]

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

I was looking forward to reading SHAKESPEARE'S LIVES by S. Schoenbaum (Oxford, 978-0-19-283155-2). There were two reasons for this: Michael Dirda recommended it in BOOK BY BOOK, and it was available in my local library. (My library is doing curbside pick- up, but inter-library loan service is not available, and much of what I want is only available from other libraries.) But there were two reasons that I gave up. The main one was that the writing was often turgid and unreadable (at least to me). But what put the icing on the cake was that one of the sections I was most interested (about the forger William-Henry Ireland) ended abruptly, due to the fact that the signature containing pages 141 to 172 was missing!

Our book discussion group finally started meeting again, outside and socially distanced. Rather than going back to the books scheduled for March and May, we just picked up with the July book, CLIPPER OF THE CLOUDS (a.k.a. ROBUR THE CONQUEROR, but primarily available in the United States as the first part of a volume titled after its second half, MASTER OF THE WORLD (Ace, no ISBN).

When I was young, I loved Verne's THE MYSTERIOUS ISLAND. I read it until it literally fell apart. It had adventure, and characters, and all that good stuff that is missing from CLIPPER OF THE CLOUDS. CLIPPER OF THE CLOUDS is (by my estimate) 90% infodump, and 10% of what Verne thought passed for action. Half of the infodump is about the physics of flight (both heavier-than-air and lighter- than air), and the other half long descriptions of cities and landscapes that the Albatross was passing over. The rest is what passes for action, with Robur performing good deeds (rescuing sailors, freeing people destined for human sacrifice, etc.), and Uncle Prudent and Phil Evans constantly complaining about how evil Robur is and how they must destroy him and the Albatross.

And interspersed with this is a healthy dose of racism. against everyone from Swedes and Norwegians to Chinese, but primarily Blacks, and in particular Frycollin, whom Verne describes as "a pure South Carolina Negro, with the head of a fool and the carcass of an imbecile. ... Grinning and greedy and idle, and a magnificent poltroon." Throughout Frycollin is insulted and tormented, with Uncle Prudent and Evans constantly threatening him with terrible fates--all in jest, of course, though only they get the joke.

And given Verne's reputation for science, the errors he makes are awfully basic. He calls fur seals "amphibians". He confuses hurricanes and tornadoes. He says the night at the South Pole is 179 days long. (That would imply that the day is also 179 days long, with only a couple of days for transition between the two--an astronomical impossibility.)

In the English translation, there are several references to speeds in "knots per hour"--"knots" itself meaning "miles per hour"--but this is the fault of the translator; Verne himself refers to "kilometers per hour. The translator is also the source of the one use of the "N-word" in referring to Frycollin, though all the racist passages are fairly accurate translation of Verne's original.

One can at least forgive Verne his descriptions and questions about Antarctica. When Verne wrote (in 1886) there was not widespread knowledge that Antarctica was a continent (rather than just ice on top of water like the Arctic), or whether it had mountains (no one reached the interior until about twenty years later), or pretty much anything else.

Verne writes, "An American who has not a bowie-knife in his pocket is no longer an American." When we were in Turkey, a Turk we talked to was surprised that we did not own a gun; he thought all Americans owned guns. So the stereotype of the armed American persists. [-ecl]

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Quote of the Week:

You think dogs will not be in heaven? I tell you,
they will be there long before any of us.
--Robert Louis Stevenson

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