

MT VOID 09/04/20 -- Vol. 39, No. 10, Whole Number 2135



Mt. Holz Science Fiction Society
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Co-Editor: Mark Leeper, mleeper@optonline.net
Co-Editor: Evelyn Leeper, eleeper@optonline.net
Sending Address: evelynchimelisleeper@gmail.com
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Eighty Miles (comments by Mark R. Leeper):

From Mark Leeper's Diary June 26, 1982:

I want to enlist your help in a good cause. If any of you see Evelyn, I want you to say to her, "Eighty miles a week." That's it. "Eighty miles a week." Thanks, I appreciate it.

Well, let me tell you about why you are telling her this. Evelyn has certain house responsibilities. For example, Evelyn's responsibility is arranging for the driveway to be shoveled and ending world tyranny. (But that's another story.) Another of her responsibilities is setting up the VCRs. If there is going to be a program on, she sets up the machine, pops in one of the buffer tapes, and makes a note as to which tape the program is going on in a sort of tape-tracking program. At least 95% of the time this goes just fine. Occasionally a recording is just not where she has said that it was. Often she updates the program from memory long after the fact, and she misremembers where she put the program. So I came up with a great solution. An index card with digits "0" to "9" and a paperclip. "Just move the paperclip when you put in a tape and you have a record of what tape you put in," I explained proudly.

"WHAT?!"

"It's just one more quick step."

"YOU WANT TO TAKE OVER THE RECORDING?"

"Uh, no, Buttercup, I just thought this was a better way to do things."

"IF YOU DON'T LIKE THE WAY I DO THE JOB, YOU ARE WELCOME TO IT!"

"But it takes two seconds to move that clip."

"GREAT. YOU DO IT."

"Sorry I said anything."

Now for you to understand the next part, you have to know about THE CARPET FROM HELL. We recently got new carpeting in the den. Now we don't know a lot about carpets. I assume many of you out there already know about THE CARPET FROM HELL, but you didn't tell us. You see, it looked like a dark carpet, but when the light hits it right it is almost white. This makes it an "easy-care" carpet. With some carpets it is hard to tell when they need cleaning. THE CARPET FROM HELL leaves no doubt. One poppyseed and from thirty paces the carpet visually calls to you and says, "Hey, Jerk. Come over here and get this thing off me."

Then there is speedy recovery. If I do pushups on THE CARPET in the morning, I can still read my fingerprints off THE CARPET FROM HELL that evening.

Now, the exercycle poses a problem since I turn it toward the television when I use it. For days afterward you can see just how I had it turned. So Evelyn has a solution. She puts a towel under the exercycle and a rug on top to hide the towel. I try to explain to her that a rug on a carpet goes like a cheeseburger on a bagel. But as the last straw, when I turn the exercycle she wants me to rearrange the rug and towel so they stay under the exercycle. So next time she tells me I have to rearrange the carpet, I am going to tell her she has to do the exercycling. And it's eighty miles a week I do, so I'll expect her to. So if you see her, just remind her it's eighty miles a week. But she doesn't listen to me. So I want her to hear it from you. [-mrl]

The Virtual NASFiC 2020 (comments by Evelyn C. Leeper):

[Friday, 08/21] I gave the virtual NASFiC a try (since it's free), just to see how these things work. For me, they didn't.

The first problem is not the virtuality part. It's that even with only five panels I'm interested in (enough to sit in front of a screen to watch), there are two at the same time. (I swear if there were only two panels I was interested in, they would be at the same time.)

The other is the realization that while I am not necessarily impacted, a virtual convention by its very nature excludes Orthodox Jews an entire day's worth of programming (at least in real time). I realize nothing can be done about this year's situation, etc., but for on-going conventions, this is another "accessibility" issue to be considered.

After I actually watch a panel, I may have more comments. :)

[Sunday] And I do.

When I'm at a convention, I am focused on the convention. When I am at home, I am thinking about preparing lunch, and doing the laundry, and a whole bunch of other stuff that has resulted in my totally forgetting about some of the panels I want to see. Plus if I am watching a panel, that ties up the computer, which is in the room where Mark may want to exercise and watch a movie, or even watch a different panel. Just as with virtual learning, when there are multiple people who want to access a single family computer, problems can arise. And this resulted in my not watching any of the other panels I wanted to see. I either lost track of the time, or something was making it inconvenient to watch a panel then.

So my conclusion is that virtual conventions are not for me. I may watch a panel from a convention if it is available later on YouTube or some such, but a large part of the convention is being in the world of the convention, away from cooking, cleaning, shopping, and all the other minutiae of mundane life. For some people, a "staycation" is possible, but I am apparently not one of them.

Reactions:

After I posted the first part of this, Dorothy J. Heydt asked whether the problem of time conflicts was true of all conventions. Well, yes, the worst (best?) I can remember is five conflicting panels (though I cannot remember which convention this was. I do recall that ConFrancisco was so packed that I had no time for lunch on the three full days.

Regarding the Sabbath panels, Dorothy suggested that they could be recorded and then the observant could watch them on some other day, which would also solve the all-the-panels-I-want-to-see-are-at- the-same-time problem.

Keith F. Lynch, however, noted the problems with that: "I can view the panels, but can't ask questions of them, nor can I participate in any of the interactive activities, since those require Discord, which still demands my exact birthday, allegedly just to prove I'm over 13. So I might as well spend my time watching YouTube videos instead." Also, he notes that some panelists don't want to be recorded.

[I just give a birthday that slightly off. I'm not lying about my age, which is all they need anyway (but I do have to remember

what I tell them, since sometimes that turns out to be a security question as well).]

Keith also observes (correctly), "What would you suggest be done about that? Holding cons only during weekdays would prevent people who work normal business hours from participating." I didn't say I had an answer, just that this was yet another issue.

Summarizing, Keith echoes my feelings: "It would also go a long way toward ending cons as we know them. Several traditional reasons for having cons, such as being able to find books that can't be found anywhere else, and being able to watch movies that can't be seen anywhere else, are already obsolete. Speaking only for myself, a large part of why I go to cons is to interact with other people, not to passively watch events."

Keith actually attended a fair amount of NASFiC and has posted his NASFiC report at <https://groups.google.com/g/rec.arts.sf.fandom/c/Su-eGAiQv78>.

[-ecl]

[This is one of those issues that divide Evelyn and me. To the best of my recall I have been advocating on-line SF conventions since something like 2005, and over the years since it has become more advantageous to move programming, huckster rooms, etc. online. -mrl]

BIRDMEN: THE WRIGHT BROTHERS, GLENN CURTIS, AND THE BATTLE TO CONTROL THE SKIES by Lawrence Goldstone (book review by Greg Frederick):

This history of technology book is about the early pioneers of flight. Most people know that the Wright Brothers invented the first successful heavier than air flying machine. But few know that Samuel Langley was flying steam-powered model airplanes down the Potomac River in 1896 before the Wright Brothers' first flight in 1903. Langley's models were small, unmanned vehicles and the Wrights had a manned flying machine. When Langley built a larger version of his plane and tried to have a man fly it every attempt was a disaster. Each of Langley's larger manned plane trials crashed immediately. Langley did not understand dynamic balance and the control that was needed to fly a plane safely. Also his plane was too under-powered to fly. Another early aviator and inventor, Glenn Curtis is probably not known to most of the public either. He created the version of a plane that we all know today. He used tricycle landing gear, a steering wheel and ailerons (to turn) in his aircraft and set the stage for the design of most modern planes even to today. The Wright Brothers used wing warping to turn their plane, a sled for landing instead of wheels, and a drop-weight catapult system to propel their plane along a rail until it started flying. Curtis's planes took off flying under their own power using the wheels to roll along the ground and the more powerful motor to cause it to lift off into the sky. The Wrights and Curtis were locked in a battle for years; the Wrights patented the technology of flight and tried to make others pay for the right to build and innovate any new aircraft. This did not stop people like Curtis from modifying and inventing new flying technology though. If you like to learn about how aircraft technology was invented this well written and detailed book is for you. [-gf]

[At the Stafford Air & Space Museum in Weatherford, Oklahoma, we learned that the criteria used for "first powered flight of a heavier-than-air machine" was that it had to raise itself by its own power, sail forward without reduction of speed, and land at a point as high as where it started. It turns out now there is some debate about whether the Wright Brothers were really the first to do this. Gustave Whitehead claimed to fly in 1901 and 1902, and has eyewitness reports to back that up, but no photographs. Alberto Santos-Dumont's claim is that the Wright Brothers took off from a rail or used a catapult for their flights, while his 1906 flight did neither. -ecl]

Absentee Voting, Classics Illustrated Comics, and THE THREE MUSKETEERS (1974) (letter of comment by Jim Susky):

In response to [Evelyn's comments on absentee voting](#) in the 08/28/20 issue of the MT VOID, Jim Susky writes:

Thank you for your timely reminder to vote by mail.

Alaska makes it pretty easy--I first tried it a few years back and must say that "voting at leisure" has great attractions--especially for those typically opaque "propositions".

(This year I applied on line and expect the General Election ballot to arrive in the mail.)

Given viral considerations, 2020 has the potential to be a low- turnout year--so we can use all the reminders we get. [-js]

In response to [comments on Classics Illustrated Comics](#) in the same issue of the MT VOID, Jim writes:

Thanks to Kip Williams and R. Looney for the links to Classics Illustrated Comics (and the "Junior" ones).

I remember Robur's flying machine as well as Verne's cannon, which shot that "rocket" to the Moon (and back).

Strange coincidence--Classics 001 (The Three Musketeers) was listed at the top--and we watched last night the tiresome, utterly disposable 'film treatment' of that novel (recorded from TCM).

Not even a very fetching Raquel Welch could save that film. [-js]

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

WARNING--SPOILERS for A MURDER IS ANNOUNCED by Agatha Christie and THE HOUSE OF SILK by Anthony Horowitz.

Agatha Christie is often praised for her plotting, but in A MURDER IS ANNOUNCED, the plot is totally unbelievable. Christie favors mistaken identities, but outdoes herself here, with *three* instances involving not one, but *two* sets of twins. There is also the unlikelihood of the orderly from the Swiss hospital where he met Miss Blacklock ending up at the hotel in Chipping Cleghorn, where Miss Blacklock came to live because it was so out of the way. How likely is it that the blackmailer would agree to help his victim in some practical joke, even if he is getting paid, especially when it sounds a bit dodgy to start with? Isn't it beyond belief that one twin in disguise would decide to come to try to tap Miss Blacklock for money, while the other (also in disguise) would just happen to meet Miss Blacklock's cousin just when he is going to visit her, supposedly with his sister who can't make it and so needs a replacement? And at the end the whole thing is solved because Miss Marple is brilliant at impersonations.

I *did* say there were spoilers.

And there are also spoilers for THE HOUSE OF SILK, by Anthony Horowitz, though in this case Horowitz does the spoiling. The book is titled "The House of Silk", so when Holmes and Watson go to an orphanage and discover that it is run by "the Society for the Improvement of London's Children", the acronym "SILC" leaps out at us (but not at Holmes, because he and Watson don't hear about the House of Silk until later. And Watson's description of the case as "monstrous" and "shocking" gives modern audiences an idea of what is going on. They say the detective should not have information kept hidden from the reader (though in the original stories Holmes certainly did), but here the reader has information withheld from the detective.

Watson is also getting senile. He writes, "... each and every one of my chronicles ended with the unmasking or the arrest of a miscreant." This is totally wrong; in fact, as early as the third story ("A Scandal in Bohemia" there is no such unmasking or arrest. Nor is there one in "The Man with the Twisted Lip" or "The Adventure of the Yellow Face" or "The Adventure of the Missing Three-Quarter" or "The Adventure of the Blanched Soldier". Watson's memory must be failing him. [-ecl]

Mark Leeper
mleeper@optonline.net

Quote of the Week:

One picture is worth 1,000 denials.
--Ronald Reagan

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