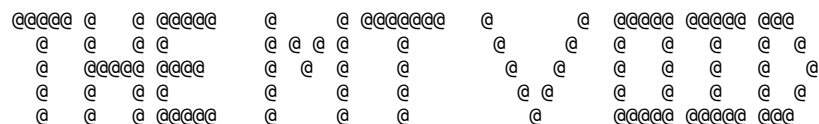


MT VOID 05/21/21 -- Vol. 39, No. 47, Whole Number 2172



Mt. Holz Science Fiction Society
05/21/21 -- Vol. 39, No. 47, Whole Number 2172

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An index with links to the issues of the MT VOID since 1986 is at http://leepers.us/mtvoid/back_issues.htm.

THE DONUT KING (comments by Evelyn C. Leeper)

THE DONUT KING, a documentary that Mark reviewed in the 04/02/21 issue of the MT VOID, will be run on Channel Thirteen in New York (and possibly other PBS stations) on Monday, May 24, at 10PM. [-ecl]

Spanish-Language DRACULA (1931) Compared to the Classic Lugosi Version (pointer):

A half-hour study, worth seeing: https://youtu.be/ZZDoon5n_Q4

Mini Reviews, Part 17 (film reviews by Mark R. Leeper):

Here is the seventeenth batch of mini-reviews, three dramas.

PROMISING YOUNG WOMAN: In this thriller, a 20-something woman looks to find revenge on acquaintances (and others) from her past for incident years before. At times the music overpowers the dialogue, but the twists and turns will keep you involved. Released 12/25/20; available on Amazon Prime and on DVD. Rating: low +3 (-4 to +4)

BUFFALOED: Much of this story of 20-something debt collectors has been done before with more mature (or at least older) characters. Reminiscent of THE BIG SHORT and THE WOLF OF WALL STREET, this is told with a breathless pacing because the principal characters are younger and faster. Released 02/14/20; available on Netflix streaming and Amazon Prime. Rating: low +2 (-4 to +4)

THE FORTY-YEAR-OLD VERSION: A black woman playwright who has just turned forty is trying to get her play produced while earning enough money to live faces obstacles to her success. Why are so many pieces of performance art showing how bad the situation is for the artist? This is a look at the obstacles a playwright faces in getting their work produced. The material is ripe for humor but remains a little restrained. Released 10/09/20; available on Netflix streaming. Rating: high +1 (-4 to +4)

[-mrl]

A HOLE IN THE SKY by **Peter F. Hamilton** (copyright 2021, Tantor Audio, 9 hours 52 minutes, ISBN: 139781705245293, narrated by Elizabeth Katt) (audiobook review by Joe Karpierz):

Peter F. Hamilton, known for his "wide screen" (no, that's not something I came up with on my own) space operas, full of dozens of characters, menacing aliens, multiple viewpoints, and large scale space battles, and complex plots, has done something completely different. He's written a YA novel. **A HOLE IN THE SKY** is the first volume, if you will, in the Arkship Trilogy. I say "if you will" because the novel is released in audio form only, and quite frankly I'm not sure if the term volume still applies, although I suppose it does.

The fact that it is a YA novel is not the only departure for Hamilton. Whereas his other novels are told from multiple viewpoints, **A HOLE IN THE SKY** is a first person narrative told in a linear fashion. Hamilton is well known for his complex plots covering multiple characters in different settings. The characters and plotlines eventually converge, bringing together everything and everyone into one climactic and scintillating event that typically leaves the reader wanting for more. Not so with **A HOLE IN THE SKY**.

The novel takes place in the arkship *Daedalus*. As with most generational starship stories, the *Daedalus* is searching for a new home after leaving the Earth. The *Daedalus* is on its second search, leaving behind the first world that it found because of indigenous life forms. It is thus on a five-hundred-year journey to its second home.

People in the *Daedalus* live a very simple life, almost, but not quite a type of pre-technology life. And while it's a simple life, mostly consisting of farming, there is some technology, most of which is in the control of the law enforcement team, known as the Regulators, and the medical team, which has some rudimentary technology. The arkship is in this state because some time in the past there was a rebellion, during which most of the technology was destroyed. The captain held off the rebellion, but in the process uploaded herself into the computer systems to become "the Electric Captain", who occasionally appears on the video screens in each of the villages to give announcements and make pronouncements. The people who live in the *Daedalus* live a simple life, looking forward to the time that they land on their new home.

Because the ship is on what amounts to a second voyage, everything must be rationed and cycled, which includes the humans themselves. At the age of 65 (as I remember, I could be wrong at this point), all humans are cycled for the good of the remaining humans living on the *Daedalus*. Our protagonist, Hazel, a late teenage girl participating in Cycling Day, is given a message by one of the Cheaters--those who run away to live past their Cycling Date. She is told that the atmosphere is leaking out of the *Daedalus*, which is the cause of the headaches everyone is having. After her brother suffers an accident that leaves him paralyzed, Hazel and her brother go off in search of the Cheaters. While with the Cheaters she discovers that everything she has been told is a lie, and that the residents of the *Daedalus* are in grave danger.

Yes, this is a YA novel. Yes, this is different from anything Hamilton has ever done. But you can see typical Hamilton stuff within this novel. Our protagonists are in grave danger from an alien threat (while this may seem like a spoiler to some, in reality anyone who had consumed a Hamilton novel knows that alien threats are the norm). The Electric Captain is not really on their side--again, not a surprise for anyone who has read any Hamilton prior to this. And while there isn't some "wide screen scope" that Hamilton readers are used to, there is enough here that reminds the reader that this is really is a Hamilton novel.

Is it any good? Well, I think so. As a rule, I don't read YA (I've been putting off reading the Alastair Reynolds YA novels, but **A HOLE IN THE SKY** may get me started reading those.), but as this was a Peter F. Hamilton book I couldn't resist giving it a try. Once I gave it a chance, I did enjoy it. I've been reading a few reviews from folks saying that they didn't like it because it was not what they're used to from Hamilton. You know, that's okay. You don't have to like every book by an author whose works you love. Yes, it's different. But different doesn't have to mean it's bad. And **A HOLE IN THE SKY** is not bad. It's actually quite good.

The other thing that should be discussed is the narrator. Elizabeth Katt is not John Lee, the usual narrator for Hamilton's audio books. But that's okay. I don't think Lee should have been the narrator for this YA effort. Is Katt the right narrator for this? She certainly seems to be okay for it. I definitely had no problem with her narration. A different narrator for a different type of book is certainly called for. Many of those same reviewers I mentioned earlier didn't like her narration. I think it's because they are used to something else from Hamilton, including the narrator. I think it's important to keep an open mind on these things. In any event, I think both the story and the narrator worked, at least for me. I think it will work for most folks if they just give it a chance. [-jak]

PIRANESI by **Susanna Clarke** (copyright 2020, Bloomsbury Publishing, \$27.00, Hardcover, 245pp, ISBN 978-1-63557-563-7) (book review by Joe Karpierz):

After reviewing a book that was nothing like anything else the author had ever written (**A HOLE IN THE SKY** by Peter F. Hamilton), I must have decided that I wanted to keep a theme going by reading and reviewing a book that was unlike the previous book by the author. While the Peter F. Hamilton has a relatively large back catalog, Susanna Clarke does not have a large back catalog. In fact, as far as I know, she has only written one previous novel, the award winning **JONATHAN STRANGE & MR NORRELL**. **PIRANESI** is nothing like that book. **PIRANESI** is short, compact, doesn't have footnotes, the print isn't so small, but like that previous book, the story is terrific.

The title character lives in a house that would remind Doctor Who fans of a TARDIS. Well, sort of, as we never do see the outside of the house. But inside, there are what seem to be endless numbers of rooms, corridors, halls, and staircases. There is an ocean inside the house, which rises and falls as does the tides. There are statues. Hundreds and hundreds of statues. The house is an ornately decorated labyrinth.

Piranesi is trapped in the house. He has no idea how he got there, nor does he have any idea how to get out. He sustains himself by catching fish from the ocean. The house is the only place he has ever known. He lives to explore the house and record what he sees. He keeps journals, in which he records interesting events. He does not use a traditional date system; instead, he'll mark time by keeping track of those interesting events. For example, the first entry in the novel is dated "Entry for the first day of the fifth month in the year the albatross came to visit the south-western halls".

There is one other person in the house. In fact, Piranesi calls him "The Other". Piranesi and The Other meet twice a week--on Tuesday and Friday--to perform research into "A Great and Secret Knowledge". The Other usually has Piranesi do research for him, while other times The Other will dismiss whatever Piranesi is telling him. The Other is getting frustrated and irritated that he can not find this knowledge, and sends Piranesi off to try to find more information for him. During these explorations, Piranesi discovers evidence of another living person, something he has not encountered previously. As Clarke reveals--and Piranesi learns-- more and more information about the third person, it becomes apparent that there is something more going on here than meets the eye.

The elevator pitch for the novel is all about the house and the title character. I've read articles and listened to podcasts that talk about the house and Piranesi living there and not much else. In reality--or is it?--all of that is just the surface of what is really going on here: an exploration of identity and coping, of learning to live with who and what you are, being afraid to step out, and finally being bold enough to do so.

PIRANESI is a strikingly good novel. While it may not have everything going for it that JONATHAN STRANGE & MR NORRELL did, it is complex, intricate, detailed, and interesting. Ah, but the question is whether it's Hugo worthy. I don't know the answer to that question just yet. It may or may not be the best of the finalist list, but it will probably be up there. [-jak]

UNTIL THE END OF TIME: MIND, MATTER, AND OUR SEARCH FOR MEANING IN AN EVOLVING UNIVERSE by Brian Greene (book review by Gregory Frederick):

This is another science book by the physicist and author Brian Greene. In this latest offering from Greene, he looks into the far future of the Universe. This book is full of deep thoughts, ideas, and philosophy which can be informing and heartbreaking. It is also filled with descriptions of the theories of numerous contemporary thinkers, from Chomsky to Hawking, and inspiring stories even from Greene's own life. Greene discusses what maybe the eventual end to everything in the Universe if the accelerating expansion rate of the Universe continues as it is today. In the far future, for example, humans on Earth may not be able to see any other galaxy but the one Earth inhabits due to this expansion. The author is a good guide for explaining the most recent ideas of cosmology. [-gf]

Status Update (comments by Evelyn C. Leeper):

Last week, I wrote, "As noted in a separate email last week, I broke my other hip last Thursday... This delayed the MT VOID by a day, but I am home so everything should be okay now."

Gary McGath wrote:

If you mentioned it here before, I missed it. In any case, best wishes now, and I'm glad the medical ordeal wasn't worse. [-gmg]

I should have been clearer. I had sent email to the MT VOID mailing list, but had not posted anything to the other distribution forums (fora?) such as Usenet, mostly because they had not been impacted. (The schedule is to mail the MT VOID on Friday, including to the N3F distributor, and to post it to Usenet on Sunday.)

Anyway, I'm getting better, but the next real milestone (other than getting these itchy staples and stitches out!) is to be able to drive. Given that my right leg was unaffected, I'm hoping that will be not too far in the future. [-ecl]

Status, Smartphones, and Recent Reading (letter of comment by John Purcell):

In response to various comments in [the 05/14/21 issue of the MT VOID](#), John Purcell writes:

I am very sorry to hear of Evelyn's hip injury. It is good that this time around she appears to be on a faster track to recovery, and I hope all indeed does go well for her. Best wishes for a speedy recovery.

As for smartphones/cell phones/whatever-they're-called-these-days phones, I keep getting notifications from Apple that I qualify for a new upgrade to the latest iPhone, but I'm perfectly happy with the four-year old iPhone 7+ I have. It has more than enough bells and whistles to still flummox me from time to time, and frankly, it has taken me all this time to get it set up exactly how I like it. Cellphones are still a massive distraction to society, and I find myself glancing at the news, weather reports, emails, sports scores, etc., way too much. There are times when I wish they had not been invented, but they really do come in handy when you need to look up directions or make an emergency phone call to your spouse or one of your grown children. Welcome to the 21st century!

The rest of this little issue does not really prod other comments from my brain, but my recent reading has been older fantasy and science fiction, such as THE WELL OF THE WORLDS (1953) by Henry Kuttner, THE CROQUET PLAYER (1936) by H. G. Wells,

and currently I'm reading Theodore Sturgeon's 1953 classic MORE THAN HUMAN. The only recent publication to cross my eyes was Steven H Silver's alternative history work AFTER HASTINGS (2020), which was quite enjoyable. Any day now I will probably start writing out capsule reviews of these for another small issue of Askew, but don't hold your breath on that since Askance #51 is currently under construction and I want to get that done first.

All in all, thank you for another fine issue, and I look forward to this coming Friday's version. [-jp]

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

People love Sherlock Holmes. He's such a great detective. He solves cases that baffle Scotland Yard. But while this is true, if you look at the total result of his cases, his score is not that great.

Let's look at just the cases in the first collection (THE ADVENTURES OF SHERLOCK HOLMES). In most of these Holmes does figure out what has happened and who the perpetrator is, but as for bringing the perpetrator to justice ... well, let's see.

A Scandal in Bohemia: Holmes fails to get the photograph but the perpetrator agrees not to cause Holmes's client embarrassment.

The Red-Headed League: One of Holmes's few successes, mostly because he calls Scotland Yard in to help.

A Case of Identity: Holmes discovers the perpetrator but cannot bring him to justice.

The Boscombe Valley Mystery: Holmes covers up the crime to save the feelings and reputations of the innocent--but then Watson writes it up and publishes it, which would seem to negate Holmes's efforts in that direction!

The Five Orange Pips: The criminals get away. However, their ship is apparently sunk in a storm, and the implication is that this brings some level of justice, ignoring all the innocent passengers and crew who also died. (I am reminded of "Alfred Hitchcock Presents", where the criminal in each story must be punished, so after he often got away with it, Hitchcock would tag on a line or two explaining how the criminal was caught after all.)

The Man with the Twisted Lip: Holmes gets Neville St. Clair to agree to stop begging, but it is not clear that St. Clair can find a real job to replace it as a source of income.

The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle: Holmes lets the criminal escape because he thinks the criminal has learned his lesson.

The Adventure of the Speckled Band: Holmes basically kills the criminal, or at least causes his death, and explicitly expresses no remorse.

The Adventure of the Engineer's Thumb: The criminals escape, and the engineer is given the consolation of being able to tell his story at dinner parties.

The Adventure of the Noble Bachelor: The truth is revealed, but Holmes's client is not satisfied with the result.

The Adventure of the Beryl Coronet: The criminal escapes, and is unlikely to suffer any consequences, but Holmes seems to gloat that the criminal's accomplice will be punished, even though she was deceived into it.

The Adventure of the Copper Beeches: The victim is rescued by someone other than Holmes and with no help from Holmes. The perpetrator is mauled by a dog, but apparently not otherwise punished.

So in a dozen stories, the perpetrator is brought to justice once. In two ("A Scandal in Bohemia" and "A Case of Identity"), the crime was specific enough that the criminal is unlikely to repeat their crime. In three ("The Boscombe Valley Mystery", "The Five Orange Pips", and "The Adventure of the Speckled Band"), the criminals end up dead. In two ("The Man with the Twisted Lip" and "The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle"), Holmes intentionally lets the criminal escape, and in three ("The Adventure of the Engineer's Thumb", "The Adventure of the Beryl Coronet", and "The Adventure of the Copper Beeches"), the criminals escape on their own. And in one ("The Adventure of the Noble Bachelor"), there is basically no crime.

This is an interesting contrast to Hercule Poirot, who only once or twice lets the criminals escape, and that is under very rigid circumstances. All other times he is strict about bringing the criminals to justice, even when he believes it detrimental to society as a whole. (He does allow several criminals the option of suicide when they are caught, as does Miss Marple, and for that matter, Philip Marlowe. I guess it's a tradition.) [-ecl]

Mark Leeper
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Quote of the Week:

The fundamental laws necessary for the mathematical treatment of a large part of physics and the whole of chemistry are thus completely known, and the difficulty lies only in the fact that application of these laws leads to equations that are too complex to be solved.

--Paul Dirac

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