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Excerpt from "Colombia, Venezuela, and Brazil Travelog" (Part 2) (travelogue by Mark Leeper):

[continued from last week]

There is a road around the base of the plateau. The jungle ends as you get near the plateau and then it is sandy up to the rock. There is a road around the base of the plateau. None of this is paved, you understand, but it is marginally easier to drive on than to go straight across country. We got on the road and drove around. I got a better look at the Summerlee column. Somehow from a distance I could not get a good picture because the jungle was in the way. Now if I take a picture, I cannot get enough in the frame to make it look interesting. We pass a marker for James Colver Point. I don't know what it is or why they labeled it. Nobody is telling us about it, but somebody thought it was worth labeling. Evelyn says Colver doesn't sound like a Portuguese or Indian name.

As we drove around the base we start to see a little camp. Actually it looks like one tent and one shack. And there is a wooden structure that is the base of the cable car. The jeeps go around to the wooden structure. The drivers get out and talk to someone from the shack. Evelyn, Jim and I get out to stretch our legs. Jim goes over to talk to Ellen. The two Toms seem to have come through the trip OK. Now the six of us are standing around talking. I am writing some notes into my palmtop. OK, now I am caught up to where we are. It is now just a minute after 11.

Okay, it is now almost 9PM. We are back at Roxton Camp. So what was it like?

The guy who runs the cable car came over to us and told us to go ahead to the cable structure. A car takes four people and we can split up any way we want over two cars. The two Toms come with Evelyn and me. Ellen and Jim got the other car to themselves. We got in. We talked and watched the ground drop away under us. I suppose I am a little afraid of heights. Particularly when you just have that cable holding you up and the ground is so far beneath. If you fall you just hit the side of the plateau a long way down. We talked to the Toms about Broadway plays of all things. Here we are in Brazil about to see dinosaurs and we are talking about Peter Schaffer and

Bob Fosse and The Phantom of the Opera.

It seemed like a long time we were going up, but it probably wasn't more than 25 minutes. As long as we were talking I could keep my mind off of how high we really were. When the wind came up the car swung a little and I could feel it in my stomach. Anyway we got to the top. There are three men up at the top. If there were more I didn't see them. All of the people running the lift were Brazilian. I mean Portuguese-Brazilian. I was expecting to see some of the aborigines still working in this area, but I have seen none. I think all of them, or what is left of them, are in Rio. Maybe we will see some when we get there. We get there in about eight days.

We had to wait around at the top for about 15 minutes before the guide could take us around. While we waited I talked to Tom Harris about where we had seen and where the two Toms had been. They said we would like Italy when we get there. I told them we are going to wait until we are old and tired before we see too many places with plumbing. Actually we are getting old and tired already.

The guide came to take us around. Some guide. She looked to be 18. Maybe 19. But she spoke English. A sort of English, I guess. We were going to walk around on the path and see dinosaurs. We were supposed to stay on the path. We were not supposed to keep an eye on the jungle because some things do come out. I wish. She was selling caramel corn, of all things. Before we set out she wanted to know if any of us wanted to buy some. Somehow selling caramel corn seems a little strange when you are in dinosaur territory. It smelled good, or maybe a little cloying, but it was not what we would have wanted.

We followed the path and our first stop was the pterodactyl rookery. We saw it at a distance ahead. It looked almost like a tent made of chain-link fence. There was a sort of double door we went through to get inside. The smell was overpowering and had been since we could first see the rookery. I don't know if that is the smell of the animals themselves or excreta, but it really smelled bad. The biggest pterodactyls were pretty big. Maybe it was as big as a man and a wingspan maybe three times as long as a man. They didn't look very happy. The wings had slits cut in them, which must be a lot like clipping a bird's wings. There were smaller ones and several chicks. I would have expected the young ones to be a little cuter. I guess they are a little too thin and boney to be cute. They seemed a bit lethargic. I suppose they could have been drugged. To me they just looked depressed. One does not ask a pterodactyl why the long face? They are just born with long faces.

[to be concluded next week]

[-mrl]

A MASTER OF DJINN by P. Djèli Clark (copyright 2021, Macmillan Audio, 15 hours and 37 minutes, narrated by Suehy la El-Attar, ASIN B08JD2THTX) (audio book review by Joe Karpierz):

A MASTER OF DJINN takes place in the same universe as the 2019 Hugo Award Novella finalist "The Haunting of Tram Car 015" as well as its predecessor "A Dead Djinn in Cairo" (neither of which I have read, I confess). The setting of DJINN is an alternate Cairo of the year 1912, where djinn and other magical creatures live freely with and alongside humanity as contributing members of society. How the djinn came to live among humans is the doing of al-Jahiz, a man who, forty years prior to the beginning of the novel, opened up the barrier between the magical and non-magical realms. That act allowed the djinn and other creatures to enter the normal world--which I suppose renders it not normal anymore--and also allowed al-Jahiz to disappear.

In 1912, a cult has developed around al-Jahiz, and in Cairo a secret brotherhood--"The Hermetic Brotherhood of al-Jahiz"--is led by an elderly prominent businessman. It appears that the Brotherhood's main purpose is to find artifacts and relics that were used by and associated with al-Jahiz. The novel opens at a meeting of the Brotherhood, wherein a sword that used by al-Jahiz is being delivered to the cult. During the meeting a mysterious man appears and murders the lot of them.

Special Investigator Fatma el-Sha'arawi of the Ministry of Alchemy, Enchantments and Supernatural Entities is called in to investigate. She is young but not inexperienced, and has risen to the top of the list of investigators who are called upon when odd things occur. Fatma works alone, but as with any story like this, no one really does. She is assigned a partner, Agent Hadia Abdel Hafez, who is young and inexperienced but brings new ways of looking at things. Fatma doesn't want her, wants nothing to do with her, but grudgingly accepts that she has no choice but to take Hadia as her partner. And to add to the party, Fatma's supernatural (although we don't know just how supernatural she is) lover Siti joins the party, and the three of them link up to try to find the man who killed every last member of the Brotherhood. That murderer claims to be al-Jahiz himself, returned from where ever he had disappeared to, to right the wrongs of what society has become, and while he's at it he plans to disrupt the impending World Peace Summit. And so, the chase is on to find the imposter, as he is called (because no one actually believes that he is al-Jahiz), before he can wreak more damage in Cairo.

The novel basically turns into a police procedural, with the three main characters as well as a host of Cairo police and other characters from the two prior novellas in this universe getting involved to stop the main threat that the villain intends to unleash upon Cairo and other places in an effort to attain world domination. To be fair, this is the plot of a lot of stories involving a monomaniacal villain and their sidekicks, but Clark does not disappoint. I will say that while A MASTER OF DJINN has the equivalent of the third act of an MCU movie--meaning that the novel progresses from the detailed story setup to the big battle at the end and the resolution to the problem--it's one of the more interesting and fun third acts, complete with the villain stopping everything to outline exactly everything that they've planned (you can see Snidely Whiplash twirling his moustache) and watching everything fall apart at the end.

But in the end, it's fun. The story is fun. The characters (and all the revelations surrounding them) are fun. Even the villain being the stock villain is fun to watch as everything that was planned falls down and caves in. The setting is fun. Clark does a terrific job world building, giving us a glimpse of what can only be called Steampunk Egypt, with its hot air balloons and mechanical men (dubbed "boilerplate eunuchs") and mechanical vehicles and all the rest of it. And the magic and the mysticism kept my interest as well. I had a good time listening to this novel. I hope others will as well.

And what can be said about Suehy la El-Attar, other than that she is a wonderful narrator for this book. She brings energy to the story. She switches voices seamlessly, and does it well. Her pacing is terrific, and it feels as if she is inside the story as she is reading it. I'd be happy to listen to her narrate other audio books. [-jak]

TEN PATTERNS THAT EXPLAIN THE UNIVERSE by Brian Clegg (book review by Gregory Frederick):

This is the first book I have read by the science writer Brian Clegg. As indicated by the title, ten patterns are discussed which help to explain the workings of the Universe. This book has diagrams that illustrate the relationships of space and time, and the quantum behaviors that rule how light and matter interact, for example. The cosmic microwave background and particle trail patterns revealed by the Large Hadron Collider are referred to as other examples of patterns which aid us in understanding our Universe. The power of the periodic table that reflects the underlying pattern of the configuration of atoms and the science of weather forecasting which has improved due to understanding large scale weather patterns are talked about also. Nice graphics are included in the book to clarify and simply the concepts the author is conveying. Clegg is called the master of accessible science writing and so far I would agree. [-gf]

Hugo Award Winners:

- Best Novel: A DESOLATION CALLED PEACE, by Arkady Martine (Tor)
 - Best Novella: "A Psalm for the Wild-Built", by Becky Chambers (Tordotcom)
 - Best Novelette: "Bots of the Lost Ark", by Suzanne Palmer (Clarkesworld, Jun 2021)
 - Best Short Story: "Where Oaken Hearts Do Gather", by Sarah Pinsker (Uncanny Magazine, Mar/Apr 2021)
 - Best Series: Wayward Children, by Seanan McGuire (Tordotcom)
 - Best Graphic Story or Comic: Far Sector, written by N.K. Jemisin, art by Jamal Campbell (DC)
 - Best Related Work: Never Say You Can't Survive, by Charlie Jane Anders (Tordotcom)
 - Best Dramatic Presentation, Long Form: DUNE (Warner Bros / Legendary Entertainment)
 - Best Dramatic Presentation, Short Form: The Expanse: "Nemesis Games" (Amazon Studios)
 - Best Editor, Short Form: Neil Clarke
 - Best Editor, Long Form: Ruoxi Chen
 - Best Professional Artist: Rovina Cai
 - Best Semiprozine: Uncanny Magazine
 - Best Fanzine: Small Gods, Lee Moyer (Icon) and Seanan McGuire (Story)
 - Best Fancast: Our Opinions Are Correct, presented by Annalee Newitz and Charlie Jane Anders, produced by Veronica Simonetti
 - Best Fan Writer: Cora Buhlert
 - Best Fan Artist: Lee Moyer
 - Lodestar Award for Best Young Adult Book (not a Hugo): THE LAST GRADUATE, by Naomi Novik (Del Rey Books)
 - Astounding Award for Best New Writer, sponsored by Dell Magazines (not a Hugo): Shelley Parker-Chan (1st year of eligibility)
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Herodotus (letter of comment by Joseph T. Major):

In response to [John Hertz's comments on Herodotus](#) in the 09/02/22 issue of the MT VOID, Joseph T. Major writes:

If you want to see Herodotus at work, read Gary Corby's THE SINGER FROM MEMPHIS (2016). The hapless Nicolaos is hired to escort a writer down to Egypt, oh and find out about the ongoing revolution there. Taking his wife Diotima (but not his annoying little brother Socrates) he sets off for the land of eld, and has many interesting encounters, including a prophesy about some semi-barbarous people north of Greece, saving Diotima from becoming crocodile lunch, the immovability of the Egyptian civil service, and a singer with some interesting ways. And with Elvis Presley jokes, too! What more could you ask for? [-jtm]

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

PYM by Mat Johnson (Spiegel & Grau, ISBN 978-0-81129-8158-2) is a sequel/completion of THE NARRATIVE OF ARTHUR GORDON PYM OF NANTUCKET by Edgar Allan Poe (many editions). I guess Johnson wanted to contrast his very brief title with Poe's unusually long one--though perhaps not long for those days.)

Poe's work is pretty much a straightforward maritime adventure story, with the supernatural aspects showing up only at the end, or at least the end of what Poe wrote, for the novel was never finished. Johnson has taken as his jumping-off point the discovery of a manuscript, "The True and Interesting Narrative of Dirk Peters. Coloured Man. As Written by Himself." Peters being the companion of Pym through his adventures, Jaynes (Johnson's African-American main character), decides this indicates Poe's story was actually non-fiction, and he collects a team to explore Antarctica, looking for the "African Diaspora Homeland". Along the way, he and his team encounter slavery, a couple who has built their own white supremacist bunker (the husband gives Jaynes three-fifths of a hut to live in), and an assortment of other races of varying hues and levels of civilization. There are definitely Lovecraftian references and overtones as well.

My one problem with PYM (by Johnson) is that I didn't understand a lot of the slang that the characters used. It may just be I am out of touch with the younger generation(s)--I often see headlines that are incoherent, and someone once described the feeling of reading a Tweet and understanding only half the words. But this problem was not so pervasive as to make reading the book a problem, and I do recommend it.

My one suggestion is that you read the Poe first. I read them in reverse order, which is sort of like reading THE RETURN OF THE KING before THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE RING. [-ec]

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Quote of the Week:

There is considerable overlap between the intelligence
of the smartest bears and the dumbest tourists.
--Yellowstone Park Ranger on why it is hard to
design a bear-proof garbage can.

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