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An index with links to the issues of the MT VOID since 1986 is at
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Supermarkets (comments by Evelyn C. Leeper):

Evelyn here, returning to the old tradition of the MT VOID leading with an editorial (rather than an endless stream of movie reviews). But I hope you're not expecting something deep and philosophical. No, my comments are about my local supermarket (and its suppliers).

My first comment--okay, complaint--is the whole system of discounts. An item has a regular price. Sometimes it has a sale price. So far, so good. But then there are *better* sale prices if you have an affinity card. The supermarket sends a circular in the mail on Fridays. It often has coupons for additional discounts. Sometimes these coupons can instead be loaded onto your affinity card using their app--but not until Sunday, by which point you have forgotten them. But sometimes they are not digital, and must be clipped and handed in. There are also digital discounts which have no coupons, but have a "digital coupon" notation on the item in the circular. (Finding them and loading them is also a problem; the "free matzo" digital coupon could not be found by searching on "matzo", "matzoh", or "Yehuda" [one of the brands included]. It was listed only as "Osem" [another brand].)

But when you get to the store, there is *another* flyer at the entrance, with another dozen or so "super-coupons" which have not appeared in the circular. These are fairly small, but if you want to use some of them, you somehow have to tear them out of the sheet.

But now come the pitfalls. Some coupons require you buy two, or three, or some other multiple of the item. Some have limits in how many you can buy. Some are for specific sizes--and not all of that brand qualify (e.g., only certain sizes of a given brand of potato chips). Most are good all week, but some are good for only two or three days. Some require you spend a certain minimum. And all of this information requires a magnifying glass to read (the section with the minimum purchase info is 5 lines of print in a space 3/8" high).

And now I'll complain about the Passover food. The big complaint this year is not aimed at the store, but the matzo manufacturers. For years ... decades, even ... Passover matzo came in five-packs of one-pound boxes. No more--they're now four-packs. (There are a few hold-outs: Osem and Streit's, I think.)

To get a free pack, it used to require spending \$25, then \$50, and now \$75.

The free holiday entree (Easter ham or turkey, kosher chicken, etc.) now requires \$400 of purchases in the four weeks preceding Easter, which is normally the four weeks preceding Passover. Not this year. So if you want the kosher chicken, you have to spend \$400 even before they have put out the Passover food (which definitely boosted your spending). The one bright point is they will let people redeem their points for the kosher chicken until Passover, even though the usual deadline is Easter.

(This part is not the supermarket's fault; blame Pope Gregory XIII.)

[-ecl]

All Eclipses in an Hour (comments by Evelyn C. Leeper):

In our part of New Jersey, Eclipse Day dawned bright and sunny. Right about the time the eclipse was due to start, clouds drifted in and covered the sun such that at maximum eclipse, no shadows were being cast (so I'm pretty sure the sun wasn't even visible). After the eclipse ended, the clouds went away and it was sunny again.

ObsF: "All Summer in a Day" by Ray Bradbury

[-ecl]

How to Shop in Used-Book Stores: 14 Tips from a Bibliophile:

Michael Dirda gives us advice on shopping in used bookstores (non-paywalled URL):

<https://wapo.st/4cOWL0H>

This Week's Reading (book comments by Evelyn C. Leeper): There seems to be a recent increase in "Rashomon"-type books. By that I mean books that tell the story told in a famous work from a different point of view. You might think of Tom Stoppard's ROSENCRANTZ AND GUILDENSTERN ARE DEAD (1966) as an early example, but this is actually pre-dated by nearly a century by W. S. Gilbert's comedy ROSENCRANTZ AND GUILDENSTERN (1874).

(I am not talking about the stories of side characters, such as stories featuring Mycroft Holmes or Mrs. Hudson, or prequels or sequels such as WIDE SARGASSO SEA by Jean Rhys, or even alternate histories such as THE EYRE AFFAIR by Jasper Fforde.)

We also had GRENDDEL by John Gardner (1971), WICKED (1995) (and its sequels), and various works based on fairy tales, by Gregory Maguire.

The genre got a big boost from Alice Randall's THE WIND DONE GONE (2001), with the attendant publicity it received from a lawsuit by Margaret Mitchell's estate. (The lawsuit was eventually dropped.)

Ering on the side of caution, Sandra Newman got authorization from George Orwell's estate for JULIA (an alternate 1984). But most authors have stuck to works in the public domain as their inspiration. So we have seen LONGBOURN by Jo Baker and THE OTHER BENNET SISTER by Janice Hadlow (alternate tellings of PRIDE AND PREJUDICE). Nghi Vo waited until the year that THE GREAT GATSBY came into public domain before publishing THE CHOSEN AND THE BEAUTIFUL (2021). And now we have JAMES by Percival Everett (an alternate HUCKLEBERRY FINN).

JAMES starts out with telling the same story as Mark Twain from Jim's point of view, and we quickly learn that Jim is not how he is depicted in Twain's book. He is literate, articulate, and most definitely not satisfied with his enslavement. (How he became literate is not clear; he is apparently self-taught, as unlikely as that seems.) As for articulate, it turns out that Jim (or James, as he prefers) is bilingual: he speaks "slave" and also standard English. Actually, most slaves are bilingual in this way. So Twain's having Jim speak "slave" reflects the fact that "slave" would be all that Twain ever heard slaves speak.

JAMES then has a long section in which he is separated from Huck (as also happens in Twain's version), and this gives Everett a chance to show more of the conditions of slavery and the South than Twain could--or wanted to--show. (If Twain is "Gone with the Wind", then Everett is "12 Years a Slave".)

[SLIGHT SPOILER] JAMES does eventually become an alternate HUCKLEBERRY FINN, as the events towards the end of the book diverge from Twain's telling. For starters, the story runs into the Civil War, while Twain stays about a decade earlier. James/Jim's story also takes a different, more realistic, turn, as he increasingly becomes the "master of [his own] fate," to borrow a phrase from William Ernest Henley. (It also has a somewhat unrealistic plot twist, which is apparently there to serve an underlying message.)

[If anyone has an "official" name for such novels, please let me know.]

[-ecl]

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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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