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Mt. Holz Science Fiction Society
01/17/25 -- Vol. 43, No. 29, Whole Number 2363

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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.

Status Report (comments by Mark R. Leeper and Evelyn C. Leeper):

This is a brief break from film reviews and recommendations to bring you up to date on our status and the status of the MT VOID.

All three of us are chuggin' along.

Mark's Parkinson's is progressing, so as you may have noticed he is writing less for the MT VOID. He still picks the monthly TCM recommendations (well, okay, Evelyn picked THE WIZARD OF OZ), and the comments are written by Evelyn incorporating Mark's verbal comments. The same is true of some of the mini-reviews; check the initials at the end of each one.

As for the MT VOID, we are still putting it out every Friday, and neither snow nor rain nor heat nor gloom of night will stay it from its swift delivery, blah, blah, blah. So far it's managed through Hurricane Sandy, a broken hip, Hurricane Isaias, another broken hip, and several miscellaneous local power outages.

We do have an exit strategy, but so far that involves no change for the next couple of years. Back when the MT VOID was the newsletter for the Science Fiction Club at Bell Labs (under several different names) and distributed on paper via inter-office mail, when we went on vacation, we would compose the next two or three or four issues, print them up and leave them with someone to put in the out tray on the correct days. (Thanks, Rob!) Now, we don't go on vacation, but could schedule delivery on gmail if we did.

So no major changes are in the offing. Evelyn is reading less than she used to (in 2004 she read 240 books; last year she read 103), but still enough to keep her column going. We aren't seeing as many movies in the theater (in fact, the only two post-COVID were NO TIME TO DIE and OPPENHEIMER), but we still have Netflix, Hoopla, Kanopy, and Tubi. (You may have noticed many mini-reviews were of older films.)

As always, we appreciate your letters of comment on what we (and other contributors) write. Keep 'em coming! [-mrl/ecl]

EXODUS: THE ARCHIMEDES ENGINE by Peter F. Hamilton (copyright 2024, Random House Audio, \$23.63, 30 hours and 58 minutes, ASIN: B0CTKV1F28, narrated by John Lee) (audio book review by Joe Karpierz):

Both the problem and the joy of reading and reviewing a Peter F. Hamilton novel is that it is long and complex, with a huge scope and a large number of characters. It's got politics, romance, scheming, double crossing, and all sort of things that land it squarely in the realm of soap opera, except that it's set in space, with multiple species and aliens, with both space and planetary battles. So, it's not a soap opera, it's a space opera in the grand tradition of space operas.

EXODUS: THE ARCHIMEDES ENGINE, the first book of a duology, is a return to form for Peter F. Hamilton. His previous work was "The Arkship Trilogy", an audio book only (at least for now) young adult tale. THE ARCHIMEDES ENGINE brings him back to his typical "wide screen space opera" style. It is part of the Exodus video game setting, produced by Archetype Entertainment. However, Hamilton was not restrained too much by the video game (to be released later this year, I believe) story. I can see where parts of the novel would be a fit for a video game, but that certainly did not distract me from reading it as a novel independent of that game.

The novel is set 40,000 years in the future (When asked why so far in the future, Hamilton's response was that it gives him freedom to play without the restrictions of a near future setting. He could make up pretty much anything he wanted and get away with it because we would be so advanced by then that anything would be possible.). Humanity long ago fled a dying Earth (a theme I've seen in a few books recently) on arkships with the intent of settling on planets to create a new life for the people of Earth. One of the fleets of Arkships settled in the Centauri cluster, and signaled, via what is called a "green signal" to let the rest of the arkships know that a home has been found.

Let's get back to that far future timeline. Humanity has evolved into the Celestials (a term they coined for themselves). The Celestials are broken into Dominions, with "houses" that make up the Dominions. The oldest and most powerful of the Celestials are the Elohim, who are referred to in the novel but not seen as they have disappeared. They are the ones who terraformed the planets that make up the Centauri cluster, and they are the only ones who possess Archimedes Engines and also can make the interstellar gates which permit travel at almost the speed of light.

We do need to talk about the Archimedes Engines. They are devices that can move planets and stars, and at this point the reader can figure out that these devices play a major role in the novel. For a planet is making it's way into a particular section of one of the Dominions of the Centauri cluster. No one knows who sent it or why, although it is of a particular type of planet that can "rain iron", which would cause a political and financial upheaval of the dominion to which it is headed.

Another portion of the novel deals with the arrival of a new arkship from Earth name Diligent. It had been traveling for a very long time before it received the green signal. An arkship hadn't arrived in the Centauri cluster in a very long time, and thus was not only a curiosity but an inconvenience. What was to be done with the baseline humans that arrived on the Diligent? What was to be done with the Diligent itself? And from a reader's perspective, how do the Diligent and its travelers fit into the larger story? For that matter, what is the larger story. That would be telling, of course.

It has been noted by now that I haven't written about the characters in THE ARCHIMEDES ENGINE, and I know that characters can be very important to readers. Quite frankly, there are so many of them that it is hard to know where to begin. There are several that are important to the story --main characters, if you will - but even minor characters have important roles to play. Andthere is plenty of character development going on, but I could spend pages and pages going over that development.

This is a fairly typical Hamilton book. The story takes place in multiple settings, which if they haven't converged by the end of the novel (as they do in other Hamilton novels) they will in the second book. And because those settings and storylines converge, so will the characters that are involved. There are the requisite battles with weird alien creatures, although most of those battles take place on planetary surfaces rather than in space. And the Celestials themselves are weird and unusual. To repeat, this is a fairly typical Hamilton book. Which means that for those who like that sort of thing, and love his storytelling, they will gobble this novel up (although at 900+ pages in print form and 30+ hours in audio form, it will take a while). I happen to be one of those people. For me, this is like candy to a kid at Halloween. I can't get enough.

Narrator John Lee does his usual outstanding job with this book. I can't fathom anyone else narrating a typical Hamilton novel. Is this novel enough to get me to play the Exodus video game when it is released? It is not, but that's because I don't play video games. Your mileage may vary. [-jak]

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

Barry N. Malzberg died in December, leaving behind 35 novels and 355 short stories (according to the ISFDb), plus several books of essays and other works, spanning a career of fifty-seven years. His career was in some ways similar to that of Howard Waldrop--an attempt to make a living not just as a science fiction writer, but a writer of science fiction short stories. And that is fairly precise--in the 1976 collection DOWN HERE IN THE DREAM QUARTER (Doubleday, ISBN 0-385-12268-3, there is one novelette (which Malzberg claims was his only short fiction that was not a short story). The other twenty-four stories (including afterwords to each) total just 173 pages.

In his introduction, Malzberg says DOWN HERE IN THE DREAM QUARTER is basically his farewell to science fiction, and while there may be future collections, they will not contain new material. As with many science fiction authors' farewells of that time, it was premature: Malzberg had at least three more collections of newer material published, as well as seven more novels. In 2024, he had three new stories published, so he clearly never retired again.

Barry Malzberg is gone, but his body of work remains. Many of his books are in print on the Kindle or even in paper copies. And for used books, bookfinder.com is your friend. His major collections include:

- OUT FROM GANYMEDE (1974)
- THE MANY WORLDS OF BARRY MALZBERG (1975)
- THE BEST OF BARRY N. MALZBERG (1976)
- DOWN HERE IN THE DREAM QUARTER (1976)
- MALZBERG AT LARGE (1979)
- THE MAN WHO LOVED THE MIDNIGHT LADY (1980)
- THE PASSAGE OF THE LIGHT: THE RECURSIVE SCIENCE FICTION OF BARRY N. MALZBERG (1994)
- IN THE STONE HOUSE (2000)
- THE VERY BEST OF BARRY N. MALZBERG (2013)
- READY WHEN YOU ARE AND OTHER STORIES (2023)
- COLLECTING MYSELF: THE UNCOLLECTED STORIES OF BARRY N. MALZBERG (2024)

[-ecl]

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Quote of the Week:

I used to think that the brain was the most wonderful organ in my body. Then I realized who was telling me this.

--Emo Philips

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