

MT VOID 07/07/23 -- Vol. 42, No. 1, Whole Number 2283



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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.

History of the MT VOID (comments by Mark R. Leeper and Evelyn C. Leeper):

As we change volume numbers in the middle of the year, this may be a good time to once again describe the genesis of the MT VOID, pronounced "Em Tee Void".

The MT VOID started as a zine for the newly formed Science Fiction Club at Bell Labs in Holmdel in August 1978, but we have always been the editors (and primary writers). It has been weekly for decades, and has continued even after we retired and the Science Fiction Club dissolved. The current issue is #2278, making it (I'm pretty sure) the perzine with the most issues ever, and at 45 years, one of the longest running.

In July 1981, our area was split off and moved to Lincroft. At that point we thought we needed to spin off a new club, so we started re-numbering the MT VOID (not yet called that) at that point. Hence the volume roll-over in July. Eventually we ended up remerging the clubs and newsletters, but kept the new numbering.

At some point in the 1980s we also renamed the club as the "Mt. Holz Science Fiction Club". "Mt. Holz" came from the inter-company mail designations for the three New Jersey locations of AT&T et al where we once had meetings:

MT	Middletown
HO	Holmdel
LZ	Lincroft

As the work environment changed, meetings eventually ended, but the MT VOID kept rolling along. We retained the "Mt. Holz" name in the heading until last year, when we decided it was misleading to pretend there was an actual club behind this. [-mrl/ecl]

THE CIRCUMFERENCE OF THE WORLD by **Lavie Tidhar** (copyright 2023, Tachyon Publications, ISBN: 978-1-61696-362-0 (trade paperback); 978-1-61696-363-7 (digital)) (book review by Joe Karpierz):

What if I were to hand you a book that would disappear once you had finished reading it? You'd probably say that Amazon can do this anytime they want since they only sell us the right to read an electronic copy of a book, but not the book itself, and they can erase it from our e-readers anytime they want.

You wouldn't be wrong. But what if I told you that this book, called *LODE STARS*, by pulp author Eugene Charles Hartley, has encoded within it the means to defend ourselves against the Eaters, entities that destroy humans who are reconstituted memories that live within black holes, called the "Eyes of God"? Would you want a copy of this book? Would you read it? Would you believe it?

Yep, Lavie Tidhar's fertile imagination is at it again. The same mind that gave us *THE ESCAPEMENT* (which may still have readers scratching their heads--in a good way) brings us *THE CIRCUMFERENCE OF THE WORLD*, a novel that starts out innocently enough with the story of a young girl in love with mathematics, but makes its way to intergalactic space and the weirdness of black holes--among other things.

The story jumps to the year 2001, where Delia Welegtabit, that young girl now all grown up, married to mathematician Levi Armstrong who is obsessed with explaining the workings of the universe through mathematics. That's not the only thing he's obsessed with. As you might guess by now, the object of his obsession is the aforementioned *LODE STARS*. After he disappears searching for it Delia hires rare book dealer Daniel Chase to find him. Chase suffers from face-blindness (prosopagnosia) which makes him an interesting choice to go looking for Levi. In the process of looking for Levi, Chase gets interested in *LODE STARS*, and focuses his search on rare book shops hoping he can turn up a copy which will in turn help him find Levi. Who he does find is one Oskar Lens, a Russian underworld figure with a criminal past, which includes a stint at a prison in Siberia. Lens also wants to find a copy of *LODE STARS*, because he wants to protect himself from the Eaters.

Eventually, we get to meet Hartley, a short story writer who never quite made it to the big time, although he hobnobbed with all the big names of the pulp era. Tidhar is well known as a writer who is fond of the history of the field, and in *THE CIRCUMFERENCE OF THE WORLD* he is not shy about having Hartley interact with some of the biggest names in the field at the time. In a call-out to the Church of Scientology, Heinlein tells Hartley, "You know ... if you really want to make a million bucks, Gene, you should start your own religion." Hartley does just that, starting the Church of the All-Seeing Eyes. Hartley does a lot more name dropping along the way. We not only hear about Asimov and Clarke, but Bradbury and A. E. Van Vogt also get shout outs. John Clute and Nick Mamatas get mentioned as well. We also get a glimpse into Hartley's thoughtful and philosophical side. While recounting an early Westercon, Hartley says "You have to understand--we were more than writers, we were prophets of a new age. We could see the future, i we could imagine it and give it shape."

We also end up within *LODE STARS* itself, as a version of Delia (yeah, so Delia is looking for a book that has herself as a character in it, but doesn't know it), while looking for something called "The Occlude", finds a stash of "Ancient obsolete objects of all kinds piled up everywhere", and the list is, well astounding. Without giving too much away, she discovers items from stories from Asimov, Herbert, Van Vogt, Pohl, and others. Tidhar is clearly having fun rooting around science fiction's rich history, which Hartley himself is doing with the pages of *LODE STARS*.

Much like *THE ESCAPEMENT*, there is no direct path to the ending, nor does the ending give a neat resolution to the mystery of Hartley and *LODE STARS*. But then again, it's not clear that the book is about those things. Tidhar is a master of misdirection, his novels tend to be a lot deeper than what appears at the surface, and *THE CIRCUMFERENCE OF THE WORLD* is no different. The novel is a great, enjoyable, winding ride, and anyone who likes Tidhar's work should enjoy it. [-jak]

One Octopus, Two ???, Redux (letter of comment by David Goldfarb):

In response to [comments on the plural of "octopus"](#) in the 06/23/23 issue of the MT VOID, David Goldfarb writes:

Catching up on a slightly older MT Void, I find a discussion of "octopus/octopi". I want to start off with one correction: the word is not Greek. It is 16th-century scientific Latin--with Greek roots, but that doesn't make the word Greek. A pedantic and nitpicking distinction to be sure, but I'm not the one who started the pedantry here.

In classical Latin and ancient Greek, the word for this sea creature was not "octopus": they used "polypus" (whence the archaic English "poulp"). In Greek, ["poulpous" or "polupos"] [Greek transliterated because we cannot represent it in ASCII]. This word covered all the tentacled cephalopods: what we today would name octopus, cuttlefish, and squid. Mauro, in his translation of Aristotle, wrote of "duo genera polyporum". The naturalist Pliny the Elder likewise wrote about the polypus. And how did he pluralize it? He used "polypi".

I assert that if Pliny could pluralize "polypus" as "polypi", then in the modern day we should deem it acceptable to pluralize "octopus" as "octopi". Me, I stick to "octopuses", but when people with a little knowledge of Classical languages and natural history make this complaint, I find it grating. [-dg]

Proof-Reading, History, James Joyce, Pronunciation, and MOBY-DICK (letter of comment by Jim Susky):

In response to [Evelyn's comments on proof-reading](#) in the 06/23/23 issue of the MT VOID, Jim Susky writes:

In MT VOID 6/23/2023 Evelyn commented on various spelling and usage mishaps--in support of the notion that proof-reading is in decline.

This led to her commentary on PAST IMPERFECT (04/07/23) which alluded to "consensus history", disrespect for primary sources, and other historical offenses--along with plagiarism, fabricated back stories, and the abuse of grad students and assistants who do research and writing without appearance on the marquee.

(FWIW my editor's eye latched onto "thesis" used to denote multiple theses)

(and FWIW, I am NO proofreader)

Finally she mentioned recent "discussion these days of how to teach history, and especially what to teach and what to ignore".

All this led me to discover a few things about Joyce. I'd already known about his "classic" hairshirt (ULYSSES) but would surely have assumed an apostrophe in FINNEGANS WAKE.

It would be interesting to objectively assess Evelyn's thesis about proof-reading. With access to the Google Books project (and others?) a tireless AI could go to work on it--quietly, and without arousing breathless conjectures on "threats to humanity".

(And perhaps AI will soon be routinely used for proofreading chores--with suitable actually-intelligent oversight.)

Re: shifting pronunciations:

Strangely, I am reminded that certain common words have been mispronounced over the decades. A favorite is "almond". In the sixties I learned to say "almond" [as] "Ah mund". Dictionaries from that time have an alternate pronunciation, which I have never heard, but which sounds "New England" to me. In the seventies I heard radio announcers say "AL mund" and seventies dictionaries include that pronunciation. By now almost no one "uses" (or omits) the once-standard silent ell.

"Often": The ROM between my ears omits the TEE--but the late 70s dictionary at hand admits the T-sound.

Finally, I am impressed that Evelyn has written a 90,000-word "annotation" to MOBY-DICK (!). Somehow "annotation" is too small a word when it's >40% of the novel's word-count. [-js]

Evelyn notes:

If spell-checkers are any example of AI proof-reading (and I suppose they are not), I'm not holding my breath. [-ecl]

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

"On Germania" by Tacitus was written around 98 C.E. As was the case with many of the ancient historians, Tacitus wrote about distant lands without ever visiting them, and how accurate the various statements in his work are is sometimes questionable. But that almost doesn't matter, because over the centuries, Germany's detractors have fixated on the negative statements and mis-translated the positive ones, while Germans have fixated on the positive statements and mis-translated the negative ones. (For example, various German translations have translated mentions of Germans performing "human sacrifices" as performing just "sacrifices".)

A MOST DANGEROUS BOOK: TACITUS'S "GERMANIA" FROM THE ROMAN EMPIRE TO THE THIRD REICH by Christopher B. Krebs (Norton, ISBN 978-0-393-34292-5) covers all this. Krebs begins with the re-discovery of the single remaining copy of "On Germania" (the Codex Hersfeldensis) in 1425. He then goes on to detail how scholars since then have interpreted and mis-interpreted, used and mis-used, quoted and mis-quoted Tacitus to support their own theories (or wishes) about the ancient Germans and their origins, their accomplishments, their morals, their language, and their "racial purity".

One has to wonder what the world might look like if this single copy had been lost. Without Tacitus, could Germany have built a social movement based on the (reported) virtues of the ancient Germans "enhanced" with a racial philosophy not found in Tacitus?

(The racial policy was the subject of a whispered joke during the Third Reich: "The Aryans--athletic like Goebbels, slim like Goering, and blond like Hitler.")

One problem is that Krebs invents (or possibly re-defines) various very similar words to distinguish among the Germanic people of various times and places. The "Germanen" are the (old, ancient) Germanic tribes, as opposed to the "Germans", but Krebs also says he uses "Germans" if he is quoting or translating a work that uses that term for the ancient tribes, and similarly for "Germanien" versus "Germany". This may be the way academia does it, but it is very confusing to the general reader. [-ecl]

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Quote of the Week:

In high school I was voted the girl most likely
to become a nun. That may not be impressive to you,
but it was quite an accomplishment at the Hebrew Academy.
--Rita Rudner

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