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Word Use (and Misuse) (comments by Evelyn C. Leeper):

Another editorial today.

I've given up on getting people to use the word "hopefully" correctly. The boat on "literally" has also sailed. And "fortuitous" does *not* mean "fortunate"--it means "accidental", though the chances of getting people to hew to that is vanishingly small.

But I still have hopes that people will eventually understand the difference between an "ancestor" and a "descendent". I would expect anyone who knew Latin to recognize that "ancestor" and "ancestral" and "ancient" all come from the same root. The problem is that one can't expect anyone to know Latin.

But what really gets me is the total misuse of "understated". Just as people have taken to saying, "I could care less" when they mean "I couldn't care less," they say, "The effect of such-and-such cannot be understated" when they mean either "The effect of such-and-such cannot be overstated" or "The effect of such-and-such should not be understated." [-ecl]

THE TERRAFORMERS by Annalee Newitz (copyright 2023, Macmillan Audio, 13 hours and 18 minutes, ASIN: B09XVP28BG,

narrated by Emily Lawrence) (audio book review by Joe Karpierz):

It is said that we should not judge a book by its cover. I would add "don't judge a book by its title". I feel like this warning has become more and more applicable as time goes on. Granted, titles like *TIME ENOUGH FOR LOVE* or *THE CAT WHO WALKS THROUGH WALLS*, just to name a couple from years ago, don't necessarily even give the reader a hint as to what is contained within the covers (although the fact that two Heinlein books came immediately to mind may be telling), but it seems that these days titles aren't always very indicative of what's inside. To me, anyway, a great example is the list of titles of the novels of Becky Chambers. The books are well written and contain interesting characters, but I can't tell by the titles what they are about.

THE TERRAFORMERS, by Annalee Newitz, is nominally about the terraforming of the planet Sask-E in the year 59,006 or so (give or take). It's unclear to me why this novel had to be set that far in the future, but it works for the story, since the time period is so far in the future that it's hard to argue with anything that occurs within the confines of the novel. But even here, my brain has gone off in a completely different direction, thinking that the story was about a group of terraformers traveling throughout the galaxy, well, terraforming planets and moving on to the next one. Instead, what we get is not only the physical transformation of the planet, but we get a deep-dive study into the political, social, and economic changes that take place on the planet that are brought about by the titular group of terraformers.

The story is broken up into three sections, several hundred years apart. The first section provides the set up. Destry and her band of rangers are monitoring the terraforming of Sask-E at the behest of their corporate overlords at Verdance. Verdance is planning to market Sask-E as a planet where clients can come and settle on virgin Pleistocene land, with your pure *H. sapiens* neighbors, reliving the glory days of Earth. And yes, there it is, the corporate interests versus the interests of the rangers themselves, who are employees of Verdance, no less. While setting *THE TERRAFORMERS* in the far future, where anything can be different from what it is today, we as readers learn that corporations never change. This is even more pronounced when Destry and her team find a clan living near a volcano which was supposed to die off after building the planet's infrastructure but found a way to survive. So, while yes, we're still talking about terraforming a planet, now we start asking the harder questions, which in this case are 1) does a group get to live when they weren't supposed to, and 2) where should they live, and 3) how does everyone co-exist?

Lest the reader think that *THE TERRAFORMERS* is more about these "soft" kinds of questions rather than some hard science and its implications, there's plenty of that to go around--plate tectonics and river flow are just two of them. Still, Newitz spends much of the novel investigating egalitarian (or maybe not so egalitarian) societies, oppression by those in power (back to Verdance again), and other relics of our current society that just won't go away, whether or not it's the year 59,000+. Despite all that, Newitz also chooses to highlight what humanity *could* become if given the chance to flourish and grow. One of the highlights that many folks who have read the book talk about is the relationship between two flying, talking, moose (Yes, I know there's a temptation to refer to Bullwinkle, but let's not. Oh wait.). That relationship is a byproduct of the fact that in the intervening years between now and then, we have been able to create intelligent creatures that are more like humans than you might have thought possible. However, it is my opinion that the weirdest, yet least talked about relationship in the book is that of one between a train and a cat--yeah, you read that right--and that the relationship was indeed, uh, consummated (come on, I'm not going to give all of it away).

Once again, I plead incompetence when it comes to reviewing a book narrator. Either they throw me out of the story all together, they're just fine, or they're awesome. I've listened to very few that were plain awesome, like Jefferson Mays ("*The Expanse*") or John Lee (various Peter F. Hamilton and Alastair Reynolds novels), whose names I remember. Emily Lawrence did not throw me out of the story, so she's did a fine job (that's a terrible way of reviewing a narrator, but like I said, incompetence).

THE TERRAFORMERS is a book worth picking up and digging into. It may not be what you expect, but that's okay, right? Life would be boring if everything happened the way we expected it to. [-jak]

Richard III (letters of comment by Jay E. Morris, Charles Packer, Gary McGath):

In response to [Evelyn's comments on TO PROVE A VILLAIN and Richard III](#) in the 04/26/24 issue of the MT VOID, Jay E. Morris writes:

Funny. Reading this as I'm watching a movie on Netflix, which just happens to be *THE LOST KING*.

In 2012, after having been lost for over five hundred years, the remains of King Richard III were discovered beneath a car park in Leicester. The search had been orchestrated by an amateur historian, Philippa Langley, whose unrelenting research had been met with incomprehension by her friends and family and with skepticism by experts and academics. *THE LOST KING* is the life-affirming true story of a woman who refused to be ignored and who took on the country's most eminent historians, forcing them to think again about

one of the most controversial kings in England's history. [-jem]

Charles Packer adds:

But wait, there's more! Sunday's "New York Times" had an article about Langley and her forthcoming book questioning whether Richard III murdered his nephews. [-cp]

Gary McGath writes:

Some people insist Richard III should be played only by hunchbacks. However, the discovery of the skeleton showed that any slight deformity he had could have easily been disguised with clothing.

Shakespeare went with the political winds, providing a very negative image of Richard III and a flattering one of Henry VIII. [-gmg]

Rashomon-Type Stories (letter of comment by Fred Lerner):

In response to [Peter Trei's comment on Rashomon-type stories](#) in the 04/26/24 issue of the MT VOID, Fred Lerner writes:

[Peter Trei wrote,] "Larry Niven (with Fred Lerner) Rashomons most of his own 'Known Space' stories in the '...of Worlds' books." [-pt]

Please explain this. [-fl]

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

SHAKESPEARE: THE WORLD AS STAGE by Bill Bryson (Harper Perennial, ISBN 978-0-06-256462-7) is part of a series titled "Eminent Lives". The idea was to provide a book that would cover more than those "A Very Short Introduction to" books (about 120 pages), but be shorter than the doorstop-sized books such as TRUMAN by David McCullough (1120 pages). At 200 pages, this is closer to the former, but the pages are larger, putting this fairly close to the geometric mean of the two.

Bryson does make the fairly common mistake that many popular historians make: he does not understand how life expectancy works. For example, he says that because life expectancy was at most thirty-five years, and in the poorer sections twenty-five, "[the] London that William Shakespeare first encountered was overwhelmingly a youthful place." In 1600, half the children born in London did not survive until age ten, and 20% died in their first year. Even if all the rest lived to be 90, life expectancy at birth would still be only about 50. That does not make it a particularly youthful environment.

That aside, Bryson's book has a three-part structure. He begins by giving the background for the era, and Shakespeare's family history. He then covers Shakespeare's life and career, about which surprisingly little is actually known. And he finishes up with Shakespeare's works and reputation after his death.

It is in this third part that Bryson writes, "[John] Heminges and [Henry] Condell are unquestionably the greatest literary heroes of all time. It really does bear repeating: only about 230 plays survive from the period of Shakespeare's life, of which the First Folio represents some 15 percent, so Heminges and Condell saved for the world not only half the plays of William Shakespeare, but an appreciable portion of *all* Elizabethan and Jacobean drama."

Not everything they did was perfect. Besides some inexplicable omissions, they changed the titles of several plays. "The First Part of the Contention Betwixt the Two Famous Houses of York and Lancaster" became "Henry VI, Part 2", and "The True Tragedy of Richard Duke of York and the Good King Henry the Sixth" became "Henry VI, Part 3". (It's worth noting that many lengthy titles were retained, only to be abbreviated in common use. "An Excellent conceited Tragedie of Romeo and Juliet" is now called just "Romeo and Juliet". "The Tragedy of Richard III: with the Landing of Earle Richmond, and the Battell of Bosworth Field" is now simply "Richard III". [-ecl])

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Quote of the Week:

Verboſity leads to unclear, inarticulate things.
--Dan Quayle [11/30/88]

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