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Mt. Holz Science Fiction Society
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Table of Contents

[History of the MT VOID](#) (comments by Mark R. Leeper and Evelyn C. Leeper)
[What Is the MT VOID?](#) (comments by ChatGPT)
[THE SAINT OF BRIGHT DOORS by Vajra Chandrasekera](#) (audio book review by Joe Karpierz)
[This Week's Reading](#) (MAXIMINUS THRAX) (book comments by Evelyn C. Leeper)
[Quote of the Week](#)

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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.

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 #2335, making it (I'm pretty sure) the perzine with the most issues ever, and at 46 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/ec1]

What Is the MT VOID? (comments by ChatGPT):

And for a second opinion:

The MT VOID is a weekly science fiction fanzine that has been published continuously since 1978. Edited by Mark and Evelyn Leeper, the fanzine is well-known within the science fiction community and provides a platform for discussions on a wide range of topics, including science fiction and fantasy literature, movies, television, conventions, and other related subjects.

The title "MT VOID" stands for "Mark and Evelyn Leeper's MT (empty) VOID," playing on the idea that a void is empty, which fits with the newsletter's informal and often humorous tone. The fanzine includes reviews, essays, letters from readers, and various musings by the editors. Over the years, it has garnered a loyal readership and is considered an important part of science fiction fandom. [-ChatGPT]

Evelyn adds:

Well, this doesn't make any egregious errors, although I might say the last part overstates its importance. [-ec1]

THE SAINT OF BRIGHT DOORS by Vajra Chandrasekera (copyright 2023, Tordotcom, Macmillan Audio, 12 hours and 20 minutes, narrated by Sid Sagar, ASIN: B0BFG6JNJ3) (audio book review by Joe Karpierz):

THE SAINT OF BRIGHT DOORS, the debut novel by Vajra Chandraseker, is the darling of the genre world right now. In addition to being a Hugo finalist, it is also a finalist for the Locus Award for Best First Novel, won the Crawford Award for best first fantasy book of 2023, and just recently won the Nebula Award for Best Novel. This happens every few years, when a book comes out of nowhere to snap up every award in sight. And yet, as we all know, there are some people that will declare a novel the greatest thing since sliced bread, while other people will bounce off that same novel, wondering what all the fuss was about.

I find this book difficult to review because I bounced right off it. A large portion of my novel reading these days is via audio books. As I was listening, I found myself drifting away from the narrative, wondering about work that day, or maybe what I was going to have for breakfast. This book did not hold my interest in the least. I freely admit that it's most likely that this book just isn't for me, and I do accept that. It's beautifully written, and narrator Sid Sagar does a wonderful job of portraying the characters to the reader, as well as the physical setting the story takes place in and the social and political landscape of the novel. For me, the story was not compelling or interesting. But, as your humble reviewer, I will try to give a coherent review of this novel that a lot of people love so much.

Fetter is a young boy with supernatural abilities who is trained by his mother to assassinate his father, who just happens to be the powerful head of a cult. Fetter goes to the big city to follow through on his training. He just ... doesn't. Doesn't care. Doesn't want anything to do with it. Instead, he makes a bunch of friends, gets a boyfriend, settles down, and becomes involved in the study of the titular Bright Doors that are scattered all over the city. He gets involved in other things too, just trying to live a normal life away from his mother. As you might guess, he can't get away from his heritage, his mother, father, and anything else he wants to avoid.

Another problem with reviewing this book is actually trying to tell readers what it's about. It doesn't follow the norms of storytelling, or at least any norms that we're used to. Fetter really has no direction in his life, isn't trying to do anything heroic, and really only wants to go about his business. It is very difficult to relate what a particular book is about when the person trying to relate the story has no idea how to summarize it to begin with. You might almost say that it defies summarization. In fact, at one point I was talking with my wife about the book, and she asked the usual question: "What is it about?" My answer was that I was three quarters of the way through the book and I had absolutely no idea what was going on, and no idea where it might be going.

Yes, there are genre elements in the book. The Bright Doors are mystical. There are devils, and people with magical power. Heck, Fetter's mother takes away his shadow early in the book. But for me, if a book's title implies it's about Bright Doors, it really ought to be about those Bright Doors.

Again, this is a beautifully written, highly literary, and terrifically narrated book. It's just not for me. [-jak]

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

There were dozens of Roman emperors (a precise count is not possible, given the number of usurpers whose "reigns" lasted only a few days). But many were fairly boring. The worst emperors were colorful in their own ways, but Maximinius Thraz managed to be colorful without being a total dumpster fire. (For a colorful dumpster fire of an emperor, I would nominate Elabagablus, a.k.a. Heliogabalus, as the leading contender.)

Unfortunately, little is definitively known of the colorful aspects of Maximinius Thrax. His origins are obscure, his early life mostly undocumented, and even his physical characteristics seem to be in question. So MAXIMINUS THRAX: FROM COMMON SOLDIER TO EMPEROR OF ROME by Paul N. Pearson (Pen & Sword Military, ISBN 978-1-399-07478-0) spends a lot of time giving us the background of the Roman empire and the emperors preceding Maximinius, and then the empire and the emperors following Maximinus instead. Indeed, the first third of the book is basically a history of Rome from Commodus through Pertinax, Didius Julianus, Septimus Severus, Geta, Caracalla, Macrinus, Elagabalus, and Alexander Severus, with occasional references to what Maximinus might have been doing at the time. (He joined the army when Septimus Severus was emperor, so he was around for at least some of this time.) The last quarter is a series of appendices on sources, chronology, etc. And about 5% is devoted to a discussion of a single statue in the Metropolitan Museum of Art which may or may not be Maximinus.

Pearson does discuss Maximinius's physical appearance. One of the leading theories of what made Maximinius a giant was acromegaly. (Think Richard Kiel or Andre the Giant.) The descriptions of his brow, nose, and jaw fit the effects of acromegaly. He was described as "eight feet one finger tall" (2.4 meters) and while this is probably an exaggeration, he was definitely taller than normal. He apparently got into the army because he managed to defeat something like ten gladiators in a row, and then ran alongside the emperor's horse for many miles without tiring. Surely this would make an exciting movie. [-ec1]

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Quote of the Week:

Nothing is more miserable than man,
Of all upon the earth that breathes and creeps.
--Homer, Iliad

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