



Mt. Holz Science Fiction Society
03/14/25 -- Vol. 43, No. 37, Whole Number 2371

Table of Contents

- [Mini Reviews, Part 6 \(COWARDS BEND THE KNEE, THE DRAGON PAINTER, THE TONG MAN\)](#) (film reviews by Mark R. Leeper and Evelyn C. Leeper)
- [DESTINATION: VOID by Frank Herbert](#) (audio book review by Joe Karpierz)
- [Bell Works/Bell Labs Holmdel](#) (pointer to article)
- [Baseball](#) (letters of comment by Gary McGath and Paul Dormer)
- [THE MAN WHO WOULD BE KING](#) (letter of comment by Tom Russell)
- [This Week's Reading](#) (A WALK IN THE PARK) (book comments by Evelyn C. Leeper)
- [Quote of the Week](#)

Editor: Evelyn Leeper, evelynchimisleeper@gmail.com
All material is copyrighted by author unless otherwise noted.
All comments sent or posted will be assumed authorized for inclusion unless otherwise noted.

To subscribe or unsubscribe, send mail to evelynchimisleeper@gmail.com
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.

Mini Reviews, Part 6 (film reviews by Mark R. Leeper and Evelyn C. Leeper):

Three silent films:

COWARDS BEND THE KNEE (2003): COWARDS BEND THE KNEE is a film by Guy Maddin, which says it all. You either like Guy Maddin films, or you don't. We were first introduced to his films through "The Heart of the World", a science fiction film done in the style of Russian constructivism, and was shown at the 2000 Toronto International Film Festival. Both "The Heart of the World" and COWARDS BEND THE KNEE are silent films, and both use rapid cutting ("The Heart of the World" supposedly averages two shots per second).

The film is in ten chapters. The first uses a hockey game as a symbol for sex, and scoring a goal as conception. The whole thing reminded me of the sperm sequence in Woody Allen's EVERYTHING YOU ALWAYS WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT SEX ("BUT WERE AFRAID TO ASK"). The entire film is said to be based somewhat on "Medea" by Euripides, though it looks more like THE HANDS OF ORLAC by Maurice Renard to me (with a dash of FIELD OF DREAMS).

(Am I the only one who watches JASON AND THE ARGONAUTS and doesn't see the happy, romantic ending as anything but a lead-in for the horrific actions of Medea in their future?) [-ecl]

Released theatrically 11 August 2004.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0346800/reference>

What others are saying: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/cowards_bend_the_knee

THE DRAGON PAINTER (1919): This is an early film of Sessue Hayakawa's. (Side note: Why is it "an early film of Sessue Hayakawa's" rather than "an early film of Sessue Hayakawa"? Both "of" and the possessive form for Hayakawa seem redundant. Then again, we say "of mine" rather than "of me" so I guess it's consistent.)

Anyway, back to the movie. Hayakawa is best known as the camp commander in THE BRIDGE ON THE RIVER KWAI (1957). He made 109 films in all, but 90% of them predated KWAI. Almost half were before THE DRAGON PAINTER (1919). Clearly Hayakawa's career was somewhat uneven, due in part to his strong accent which affected his casting after sound came in.

Hayakawa plays a painter who is obsessed with the legend of a princess turned in a dragon. Indara, a master painter, takes him under his wing, and has him marry Indara's daughter, claiming she is the reincarnation of the original princess. This has unexpected consequences.

One line that is accurate to the time and culture is when Indara, who has no sons, looks at a painting his daughter has done and says it is good for a woman, but he really wishes he had a son.

One revealing goof is the waterfall, which appears in several scenes in the background, and was done in rear projection. Back when this film was made, cameras were hand-cranked, and although cameramen were trained to crank at a given speed and evenly(*), apparently the camera for the waterfall footage was cranked faster than the camera for the main action. The result is that when the two are projected together, the water in the waterfall falls slower than it would in Earth's gravity. Maybe it was intentional, to give the waterfall an eerie, almost supernatural look. Or maybe the second unit cameraman just cranked faster.

Another revealing goof is that in one scene when we seen the house and the sky above it, the sky has two vertical lines, which were the seams where the background was placed in the studio. [-ecl]

Released theatrically 27 September 1919.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0150388/reference>

What others are saying: <https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/dragonPainter>

THE TONG MAN (1919): This was shown on Turner Classic Movies along with THE DRAGON PAINTER (reviewed in the FINDME issue of the MT VOID). Both starred Sessue Hayakawa, but in this one he plays a Chinese character, rather than a Japanese one. According to the IMDb, Hayakawa did not want to contribute to the negative views of the Japanese, so tried to avoid playing Japanese villains, and instead playing Chinese or other Asian villains. All this did, though, was to lump all Asians in the minds of the viewers.

In addition to the Japanese Hayakawa playing a Chinese villain, two other principal (Chinese) characters were played by Caucasians, and two more were played by Japanese actors. It's possible there was a Chinese extra in there somewhere, but not credited. [-ecl]

Released theatrically 14 December 1919.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0010791/reference>

What others are saying: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/the_tong_man_1919

DESTINATION: VOID by Frank Herbert (copyright 1966 and 1978, Berkley Science Fiction, 276pp, ISBN 0-425-10326-9, 2014, Blackstone Audio, 9 hours and 42 minutes, narrated by Scott Brick) (audio book review by Joe Karpierz):

I've always meant to read more Frank Herbert, and by more I mean something other than Dune and the original five sequels. I seem to remember having read THE DOSADI EXPERIMENT, but if I did it would be back before February 17th, 1999, as that is the oldest one I have in my electronic files. (For those of you who may be curious, that book was COSM by Greg Benford. But I digress.) I've had DESTINATION: VOID on my bookshelf since, well, I don't know when. The printing history of the paperback copy I have indicates that it is the twenty-sixth printing, dated November 1986. So it's been on my to be read stack for a long time. Why did I decide to read it now? Audible had a sale and DESTINATION: VOID was one of those audio book on sale. Since a vast majority of my reading these days is in the form of audio book, I snapped it up. Complicating matters to an extent is the fact that the mass market paperback copy I have is an updated edition. There's no way of telling which edition of the novel was read for the audio book, but I think that's okay. The essence of the story is the same, no matter which edition is being read. So, with that in mind...

Whenever a group of people--scientists, politicians, educators, what have you--embark upon a rather large and important endeavor, said endeavor must always have a pretentious name. In this case, it's Project Consciousness, in which humanity is attempting to create artificial intelligence. For those of you who may be thinking, "well, we've got something like that", by the time you finish DESTINATION: VOID you'll understand that what we have today is a child's toy compared to the undertaking in Herbert's novel. The first attempt was on an island in Puget Sound, and it went horribly wrong. The experiment ended with mass destruction and the disappearance of the island.

The project headquarters was moved to the moon, and a series of space flights manned by clones is made to the Tau Ceti system to colonize a habitable planet there. The ships are controlled by a disembodied human brain called the Organic Mental Core. Each ship is equipped with three OMCs, two of which are backups. The mission is somewhat of a ruse. There is no habitable planet in the Tau Ceti system. The mission is designed to put the crew under high amounts of stress in order to force them to create the artificial intelligence mentioned earlier. The mission we are following in the novel is the seventh attempt; the first six failed.

And while they didn't fail by design, they were set up for failure. The intent was to make the crew work together in high stress situations in the hope that their individual talents would come to the fore and allow them to work together to finally create, in space, the artificial intelligence that was birthed so disastrously on earth. To that end, all three OMC's failed. In order to get to Tau Ceti, the crew had one choice. They had to develop an artificial intelligence which would guide the ship to Tau Ceti or face an abort order from Earth. And that would not be a pleasant thing for any of the crew.

DESTINATION: VOID is not a straightforward story of a spaceship making the journey from Earth to a far star to begin human colonization. It is a fascinating study into the nature and definition of consciousness. There are long stretches of dissertations of what it means to be conscious, how consciousness can be attained, and whether a man-made consciousness is truly conscious, or is it some highly complex computer making decisions based on a series of rules, learning as it goes?

Frank Herbert displays a fascination with the mind and consciousness in DESTINATION: VOID that reveals another side to his writing. But as in Dune and its sequels, DESTINATION: VOID shows Herbert's talents for writing stories that have layers upon layers upon layers of meaning. And while this book is the first in the Pandora Sequence of novels, it stands alone quite nicely, and it comes complete with a very chilling final line that I presume sets up the rest of the series. I suspect I'll be adding the other three books in the sequence to my TBR stack. If they are anything like this book, they'll be well worth it. [-jak]

Bell Works/Bell Labs Holmdel (pointer to article):

NYTimes: Step Into the Real-Life Lumon Industries, the Breakout Star of *Severance*

<https://www.nytimes.com/2025/03/07/realstate/severance-lumon-industries-building-bell-labs.html?smid=nytcore-ios-share&referringSource=articleShare>

It's a long article, with lots of photos, about how and why Bell Works/Bell Labs Holmdel was chosen for the series "Severance". [-ecl]

Baseball (letters of comment by Gary McGath and Paul Dormer):

In response to [Evelyn's comments on baseball and fathers](#) in the 03/07/25 issue of the MT VOID, Gary McGath writes:

[Evelyn's brother wrote.] "Here's an example: we always went to day games. One game lasted 14 innings. Many years after that game (in 1969), I looked up the box score on BaseballReference.com. It lasted 5 hours and 1 minute, at a time the average 9-game lasted about 2:30. We stayed the entire time because he knew I wanted to. I think I did understand it then. I certainly did understand it 'later on' and now." [-ecl]

That reminds me of a Red Sox game in the Sixties that ran into many extra innings. In those days, commercials were on their own tapes, or something like that, and the TV crew had packed away all but two of the commercials, thinking the game would be over soon. They showed those two commercials over and over. I'll never forget the carnivorous "Walla Walla" plant, though I don't remember what it was advertising.

Maybe we're talking about the same game. [-gmg]

Paul Dormer responds:

In the UK, Channel 5 for many years showed games live over night. It was fronted in London by an American ex-pat and an Englishman. One year a playoff game went to extra innings. It finished about seven in the morning in the UK. (My recording stopped long before the end.) The Englishman was due to front a quiz show in Bristol that lunchtime. He'd long missed his train, but somehow he got there and did the show. [-pd]

THE MAN WHO WOULD BE KING (letter of comment by Tom Russell):

In response to the comments on THE MAN WHO WOULD BE KING in recent issues of the MT VOID, Tom Russell writes:

The DVD cover does not recognize the actors who played the translator nor the village leader.

Were all the marchers and fighters played by real on-site extras? Who provided lunch? [-tr]

Evelyn responds:

The DVD (and in particular the poster on which the cover was based) was from a time when credits were sparse, both on posters, and at the end of the movie. [-ecl]

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

A WALK IN THE PARK: THE TRUE STORY OF A SPECTACULAR MISADVENTURE IN THE GRAND CANYON by Kevin Fedarko (Scribner, ISBN 978-1-501-18305-8) is A WALK IN THE WOODS: REDISCOVERING AMERICA ON THE APPALACHIAN TRAIL by Bill Bryson on steroids. (Even the name hints as much.) Fedarko decided to walk the Grand Canyon even though he was completely unprepared. He even knew he was unprepared, as was his friend, but they convinced each other that they could do this. Luckily some more experienced hikers decided to accompany them, or they would have died on the first leg--and as it was, they almost did.

An example of how intense the experienced hikers' preparation is, not only do they have super-expensive, super-light ground cloths, while the newbies are planning to carry ordinary tarps, but the old hands go so far as to cut the labels out of their clothes, since each one saves about 0.2 ounces.

I mentioned "the first leg" and it's worth noting that they never intended to do the hike in one go. They would walk a stretch and then arrange for a pickup at the far end. When they resumed they would start from the same spot. They also had caches of food and water stashed along their path. And their path was not a walk along the river--a lot of it was on the plateaus and mesas along the river. So in addition to the horizontal distance, there is also a lot of distance climbing and descending, as well as a lot of hiking away from and back to the main canyon.

Fedarko was inspired by THE MAN WHO WALKED THROUGH TIME: THE STORY OF THE FIRST TRIP AFOOT THROUGH THE GRAND CANYON by Colin Fletcher, but they all go back to John Wesley Powell, who became the first Euro-American to travel the length of the canyon, but he did it primarily on the river. Unlike Fedarko, who had detailed maps of a lot of the route, plus GPS and satellite phones, Powell had no idea what he would find, and if he reached a rapids that he couldn't take the boats through, and the water was too fast to go back, and there wasn't enough flat land along the sides to portage, and the cliffs were impossible to climb, they would basically starve to death. Our modern hikers had all that support and backup, yet they still almost died from heat, from cold, from lack of water, and from lack of food, not to mention that they were hiking where falling over the edge was a clear possibility.

Powell may have been the first Euro-American to traverse the Canyon, but Fedarko's party found conclusive evidence that the various tribes of that area had inhabited the Canyon for thousands of years--and not just the parts along the river, but areas far from easy water and moderate temperatures. Fedarko also recounts the mis-treatment of these tribes from the times well before Powell's journey, but until very recently. And even now, there is a lot of conflict about the "development" of the Canyon. Some tribal members feel that is the only way to make the tribe self-sustaining; others feel it is a betrayal of sacred lands.

I have to say that I found the physical descriptions confusing. This was partly intentional by Fedarko, because he doesn't want people to try to use his book as a guidebook, and because he doesn't want people to visit some of the places he did. The former is mostly because it was so dangerous, but the latter just sounds like privilege. [-ecl]

Evelyn C. Leeper
evelynchimisleeper@gmail.com

Quote of the Week:

Don't accept your dog's admiration as conclusive evidence that you are wonderful.

--Ann Landers

Go to [our home page](#)