

# MT VOID 07/29/22 -- Vol. 41, No. 5, Whole Number 2234



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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](http://leepers.us/mtvoid/back_issues.htm).

## We Now Have Racist, Sexist Robots:

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2022/07/16/racist-robots-ai/>

First two paragraphs:

"As part of a recent experiment, scientists asked specially programmed robots to scan blocks with people's faces on them, then put the 'criminal' in a box. The robots repeatedly chose a block with a Black man's face.

Those virtual robots, which were programmed with a popular artificial intelligence algorithm, were sorting through billions of images and associated captions to respond to that question and others, and may represent the first empirical evidence that robots can be sexist and racist, according to researchers. Over and over, the robots responded to words like 'homemaker' and 'janitor' by choosing blocks with women and people of color."

## Science Fiction (and Other) Discussion Groups, Films, Lectures, etc. (NJ):

Meetings are still fluctuating between in-person and Zoom. The best way to get the latest information is to be on the mailing lists for them.

August 4, 2022 (MTPL): 5:30PM, THE HIDDEN (1987) & novel NEEDLE

by Hal Clement

<https://flibusta.club/b/191110/read>

**My Picks for Turner Classic Movies for August** (comments by Mark R. Leeper):

Back in 1989 Turner Classic Movies ran a gigantic triple of the three films that composed the SAMURAI TRILOGY, which told the life of Miyamoto Musashi with its highlight on the duel against Sasaki Kojiro on the morning of April 13, 1612, on Ganryu Island. (The films themselves are adaptations of Eiji Yoshikawa's novel MUSHASHI, which originally ran as a newspaper serial in Japan between 1935 and 1939. If you are a samurai film fan you cannot do much better. Well, yes, you can actually. In August TCM will run:

08/19	08:00 AM	Throne of Blood (1957)
08/19	10:00 AM	Samurai 1: Musashi Miyamoto (1954)
08/19	12:00 PM	Samurai 2: Duel at Ichijoji Temple (1955)
08/19	02:00 PM	Samurai 3: Duel at Ganryu Island (1956)
08/19	04:00 PM	Yojimbo (1961)
08/19	06:00 PM	Zatoichi Meets Yojimbo (1970)
08/19	08:00 PM	Rashomon (1950)
08/19	09:45 PM	The Seven Samurai (1956)
08/20	01:30 AM	High and Low (1963)
08/20	04:00 AM	I Live in Fear (1955/1967)

[The last two are not samurai films, but are set in the 1950s and 1960s. You probably won't know the difference.]

If you are just getting started in samurai films my 1989 review of SAMURAI may or may not help:

Capsule review: Three films make up one long story, a fictionalized account of a historical samurai and what is perhaps the most famous samurai duel ever. Rating: +2 (-4 to +4).

Perhaps the most fabled samurai duel ever was the duel between Miyamoto Musashi and Sasaki Kojiro. Musashi had been a ronin from an early age. After the great battle of Sekigahara, he became a notorious bandit until virtually forced by a Buddhist priest to learn zen. After that he became a samurai in service to a lord and traveled the country, winning more than sixty duels. Musashi is famous for, among other things, writing GORIN NO SHO (a.k.a. THE BOOK OF THE FIVE RINGS).

Sasaki Kojiro was a brilliant young swordsman using unorthodox technique. Each man had an impressive list of victories when they faced each other on the shores of Ganryu Island.

In 1953 and 1954, Hiroshi Inagaki made three films based on the life of Miyamoto Musashi. The first one--known variously as THE LEGEND OF MUSASHI, THE MASTER SWORDSMAN, and MIYAMOTO MUSASHI--tells how Musashi fought in the battle of Sekigahara, how he became a bandit, and finally how he became a full-fledged samurai.

DUEL AT OCHIJOJI TEMPLE (the continuation) finds Musashi's past catching up with him, forcing him into a great battle against tremendous odds, as well as a battle with himself in order to follow the way of the samurai code. We also meet the enigmatic young swordsman Sasaki Kojiro, whose name would be ever linked with Musashi's.

The conclusion, DUEL ON GANRYU ISLAND or MUSASHI AND KOJIRO, tells how Musashi turns his hand from samurai to farmer. Part of the story seems to have been the inspiration for Kurosawa's SEVEN SAMURAI. Finally Musashi must meet his young opponent on the beach of Ganryu.

These are not so much three films as one film in three parts and have been called SAMURAI I, SAMURAI II, and SAMURAI III. They total more than five hours in length and tell a nearly seamless story with complex characters and situations. Director Inagaki returned to the story of the famous duel, incidentally, in 1967. His KOJIRO also told the story of the duel, but gave Kojiro's history instead of Musashi's. One minor problem, at least for me, is that after the battle of Sekigahara comes the peaceful early years of the Tokugawa Shogunate. (Readers of SHOGUN should realize that Sekigahara was the real name of the great battle in SHOGUN. Toranaga's real name was Ieyasu Tokugawa.) But my point is that these were times of peace and the duels were not fought over politics but were more like sports events. They do not have great historical significance.

The production was from Toho and fans of 1950s Toho films will recognize familiar faces such as that of Takashi Shimura, who played the wise old scientist from the first two Godzilla films, the dying man from IKIRU, and the lead samurai in SEVEN SAMURAI (the part played by Yul Brynner in THE MAGNIFICENT SEVEN). Also present is Akihiko Hirata, whose oxygen destroyer was the only weapon ever to kill permanently a godzilla and whose report foretold the coming of the Mysterians.

This clearly was an expensive production and Inagaki not only used color at a time when most Japanese films were in black and white, he also made full and unorthodox use of color with (for example) surrealistically vivid skies. Just as Masaki Kobayashi did with the 1964 KWAIDAN and Kenji Sawara did with 1957's RODAN, Inagaki gets the full effect he can from the color photography.

SAMURAI is probably not classic film in the same way as Kurosawa's samurai films are, but it is a sort of light classic in the way a film such as HIGH NOON is. If it shows up at your video store it is certainly worth seeing. I rate SAMURAI a +2 on the -4 to +4 scale.

[-mrl]

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**Mini Reviews, Part 7** (film reviews by Evelyn C. Leeper):

**HULLABALOO (1940):** HULLABALOO sounded like it might be interesting, with its main character being fired from his radio job for broadcasting a fake Martian invasion. But there was so little of this, it's almost not worth mentioning. And the claim that Frank Morgan was doing all the impersonations has been pretty much debunked. Skip it.

Released theatrically 10/25/1940.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0032614/reference>

What others are saying: <https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/4f63eb49-34d9-3441-8c5c-e0ba19db8b7c>

**MAN OF THE YEAR (2006):** MAN OF THE YEAR is a political satire that is depressingly true to life. Robin Williams plays a television comedian who jokes about running for President, gets put on the ballot in a bunch of states, and then due to a programming error, is announced as the winner. The premise of one computer company being given the contract to run the election in all fifty states is impossible due to how elections are defined in the Constitution, the programming error makes absolutely no sense (even if intentional, which it wasn't), and so far the evidence (at least in Ukraine) is that a television comedian would actually be a better President than a reality show host. Still, as with other prescient films (A FACE IN THE CROWD, NETWORK), it is at times painful to watch as it is more didactic and less nuanced than those other films.

Released 04/12/2002.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0319803/reference>

What others are saying: [https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/man\\_of\\_the\\_year](https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/man_of_the_year)

**WELCOME TO MOOSEPORT:** WELCOME TO MOOSEPORT is another political satire. The ex-President of the United States decides to run for mayor of Mooseport, Maine, to keep his ex-wife from getting his Mooseport vacation home. The sincere but inept town handyman is nominated to run against him, there's a love triangle, and the whole thing is even more a waste of time than MAN OF THE YEAR.

Released 02/20/2004.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0361925/reference>

What others are saying: [https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/welcome\\_to\\_mooseport](https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/welcome_to_mooseport)

**THE SECRET OF THE BLUE ROOM (1933):** Mark and I are watching our way through the Universal Studios "horror" films of 1931-1946. In particular, we are using UNIVERSAL HORRORS: THE STUDIO'S CLASSIC FILMS: 1931-1946 by Michael Brunas, John Brunas, and Tom Weaver. This book includes a lot of "non-horror horrors" such as "old dark house" films and other mystery films (including all the "Sherlock Holmes" films). Most of the genuine horror films were familiar to us, but a lot of the "non-horror horrors" had not been released on DVD or run on channels such as TCM. However, a recent check of YouTube indicated that almost every one of these "missing films" was now available.

THE SECRET OF THE BLUE ROOM is the first of these. There is a country mansion with a "Blue Room" in which there had been three mysterious deaths. Two guests say they will spend consecutive nights in the room; the first vanishes and the second is shot and killed.

Brunas et al say this is one of the best of Universal's "non-horror horrors", but that is not saying much. However, after seeing the terrible copy of THE OLD DARK HOUSE (which was long thought lost, but actually existed in a single neglected print), it was a delight to see a film where you could actually tell what was going on.

Released 07/20/1933.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0024538/reference>

What others are saying: [https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/the\\_secrets\\_of\\_the\\_blue\\_room](https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/the_secrets_of_the_blue_room)

**MYSTERY OF EDWIN DROOD (1935):** We skipped THE MAN WHO RECLAIMED HIS HEAD (not available, and really just a melodrama about war profiteers) and LIFE RETURNS (which we had seen many years ago and is a terrible pseudo-documentary), so MYSTERY OF EDWIN DROOD (1935) was the next "unknown" Universal "non-horror" film in the sequence. It's not a horror film, but at least it's a murder mystery, and it does have the cachet of Charles Dickens's name. Alas for Universal, the great expectations they had for their GREAT EXPECTATIONS (1934) were not realized, and the lavish budget and production values for this based on those expectations made this a major financial flop. It's a pity--taken on its own, it is not a bad film (although perhaps with too many songs).

Released 02/04/1933.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0026758/reference>

What others are saying: [https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/the\\_mystery\\_of\\_edwin\\_drood\\_1935](https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/the_mystery_of_edwin_drood_1935) [-ecl]

**LIGHT FROM UNCOMMON STARS** by **Ryka Aoki** (copyright 2021, Macmillan Audio, 13 hours and 13 minutes, ASIN B08TYXZ4T7, narrated by Cindy Kay) (audio book review by Joe Karpierz):

At the Audible page for Ryka Aoki's **LIGHT FROM UNCOMMON STARS**, there is the usual attempt to describe the book in a way to draw a listener (or reader). There are two different descriptions in the same paragraph, which I present here.

The first:

GOOD OMENS meets THE LONG WAY TO A SMALL, ANGRY PLANET...

The second:

...a defiantly joyful adventure set in California's San Gabriel Valley, with cursed violins, Faustian bargains, and queer alien courtship over fresh-made donuts.

X meets Y is something that is used a lot when attempting to make a quick description of a book. Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't. So, the first doesn't work for me at all because I'm not fond of either work. And I'm not sure GOOD OMENS entirely fits, as nearly all the discussion deals with hell and damned souls, while GOOD OMENS has an angel that is a major part of the plot.

The second description is much more interesting to me, especially the donuts. Well, the other things too. But the dichotomy of the two descriptions mirrors, for me, the two ways this novel could have gone in telling its story.

Shizuka Satomi is a world class violinist and violin teacher--with a secret. She's made a pact with a demon (the origins of which I'll leave out because, well, spoilers) to win her soul back from damnation if she can provide seven souls in forty-nine years in the form of students she develops into world-class violinists. At the start of the book, the reader learns that the Queen of Hell (as Satomi is called) has provided six of those seven souls, and is roughly a year away from the deadline.

Katrina Nguyen is a young transgender runaway, slipping away from her abusive parents in the middle of the night to head to the San Gabriel Valley to stay with a queer friend who turns out not to be the person she thought he was. She doesn't have much with her, but she does have her violin--an object that her father scorns. Satomi encounters Katrina in a park and listens to her play. Katrina has talent, but is raw and untrained. And she plays video game music. Not quite the student that the Queen of Hell usually takes on, but she believes she has her 7th and final student.

Oh yeah. Aliens and donuts. Lan Tran is a starship captain who has brought her family to Earth to try to protect it from the war that is happening back in the Empire. The cover for Lan and her family is the Stargate Donut shop. Yes, they're trying to build a stargate, and the donuts they make are replicated from recipes given to Tran by the people she bought Stargate from. And Lan has a thing for Satomi. I'll leave that to the reader too.

This book could have gone two ways: action adventure with everything that is in the second description, or a much more thought-provoking story of family and relationships between people that are thrust together via unique circumstances that shows that despite our differences and all the difficult things going on in our lives, we can form bonds that can never be broken. We did get a bit of the action adventure, but in a way that supported the bonding of Katrina, Satomi, and Lan. So I apparently was mistaken in my earlier statement, because the story went essentially a third direction. And it was the right one.

LIGHT FROM UNCOMMON STARS is a well-crafted tale which kept me interested right from the start. It's well-written, too. And Aoki clearly knows her stuff with regard to violins and their history. Her description of Bartok's "Sonata for Solo Violin" caused me to run to Google to find out more about it. The weaving of the piece into Katrina's story is masterful and accurate. I didn't know much about violins coming into this book, and I may not have retained much now that I'm done, but it's clear from the novel that Aoki has much knowledge of the instrument.

Cindy Kay is a delightful narrator, and her voice worked well for this story. I've not encountered her previously in all of my audio book listening, and I would be happy to again hear her narrate a book I'm listening to. [-jak]

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**FIDDLER ON THE ROOF, HERO OF TWO WORLDS, SF Aging Well (or Not), A STUDY IN SCARLET, THE DEVIL AND MISS PRYM, and HIDDEN FIGURES** (letter of comment by John Hertz):

In response to [Mark and Evelyn's review of FIDDLER'S JOURNEY TO THE BIG SCREEN](#) in the 04/29/22 issue of the MT VOID, John Hertz writes:

I had the pleasure of seeing Zero Mostel as Tevye in FIDDLER ON THE ROOF live (MT VOID 2221, Vol. 40, No. 44, 29 Apr 22). I commend Sholem Aleichem's stories themselves. There are several English-language collections, even a website <https://sholemaleichem.org> Tevye starts out as a drayman, then becomes dairyman--alas, dissimilar in Yiddish.

In response to [Evelyn's review of HERO OF TWO WORLDS](#) in the same issue, John writes:

The title "Hero of Both Worlds" makes me think of Adam Strange or maybe Julie Schwartz. Using colloquialisms, slang, in formal language is a delicate business, not to be undertaken by the tone-deaf. Nero Wolfe is masterly at it, a credit to his author Rex Stout.

In response to [Heath Row's comments](#) in the same issue, John writes:

About SF's "not aging well". If we disabuse ourselves of the mundanes' notion that the merit of SF is predicting things--Roscoe! that's

unimaginative--we'll not be shocked at technology in an SF future described a while ago that's less advanced than we have today, or at SF, written in a racist or sexist time, that shows a future more racist or sexist than we ourselves have achieved. Verne in FROM THE EARTH TO THE MOON knew less than we of metallurgy; so? Then the Academie Francaise in 1872 gave him a prize for "works most useful to morals, and [showing] a character of moral elevation and utility." We'd better not be too quick to scorn that; it's what many of us today evidently demand; but is it the most important criterion?

In response to [Evelyn's comments on A STUDY IN SCARLET](#) in the 05/06/22 issue, John writes:

E manages to write 900 words about A STUDY IN SCARLET (MT VOID 2222, Vol. 40 No. 45, 6 May 22) remarking only what's wrong. I think that's wrong.

In response to [Evelyn's review of THE DEVIL AND MISS PRYM](#) in the 05/20/22 issue, John writes:

So as not to fall into the same pit myself, I applaud "it isn't the originality of the premise (which I spell "premiss", reserving "premise" for the physical kind) or internal stories (or lack thereof) that matters, but the way in which (the author) tells (the) story [which] makes this well worth reading (MT VOID 2224, Vol. 40 No. 47, 20 May 22)

In response to [Doug Drummond's comments on HIDDEN FIGURES](#) in the 05/13/22 issue, John writes:

I haven't seen the HIDDEN FIGURES movies (MT VOID 2223, Vol. 40 No. 46, 13 May 22). I recommend the book, see <https://file770.com/submitted-for-your-consideration/>. Once upon a time I used the IBM 704 and the 7040/7094 Direct Coupling System; debugging gave a poignant meaning to "Those were the days, my friend, we thought they'd never end." [-jh]

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

OPERATION MINCEMEAT: HOW A DEAD MAN AND A BIZARRE PLAN FOOLED THE NAZIS AND ASSURED AN ALLIED VICTORY by Ben Macintyre (Harmony, ISBN 978-0-307-45327-3) is an updated telling of the events in the better known THE MAN WHO NEVER WAS by Ewen Montagu. Montagu was a major player in the original plan, but because of various secrets acts and diplomatic considerations at the time, THE MAN WHO NEVER WAS was substantially fictionalized. (For example, the story at the time was that the British government got the permission of Glyndwr Michael's parents to use his corpse for the plan. In fact, Michael was an orphan and a vagrant whose siblings may not have even still been alive.) The only reason Montagu was allowed to publish was that an American--not under the control of the British government--was going to publish his version of the story.

Macintyre goes into a lot more detail than Montagu, and some of that is in worthy of a book on its own. For example, Montagu's brother Ivor was a dedicated Communist, and he was passing information to the Soviet Union. Before 1939, in spite of Ivor Montagu being Jewish, the pact between the USSR and Germany meant that he was effectively passing Allied secrets to the Nazis. He also invented "table tennis" (after he tried to form a "Ping Pong" group and was told the term was trademarked), and was an active filmmaker who produced a half dozen of Alfred Hitchcock's films.

Even without all the interesting sidebars, the main story is engaging enough. It is like a sort of C.S.I. in reverse, with the planners trying to make sure that they have considered every way that their ruse might be discovered and then figuring out a way around it.

This was the basis of the Netflix movie OPERATION MINCEMEAT, but is much better, because it goes into a lot more technical detail, and does not over-emphasize the "romance" between Montagu and "Pam". I must have read Montagu's book at some point. I don't remember it, but I can pretty much guarantee that this is better. [-ecl]

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Quote of the Week:

Prosperity is a great teacher; adversity a greater.  
--William Hazlitt

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