

# MT VOID 08/26/22 -- Vol. 41, No. 9, Whole Number 2238



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## Table of Contents

- [Science Fiction \(and Other\) Discussion Groups, Films, Lectures, etc. \(NJ\)](#)
- [My Picks for Turner Classic Movies for September](#) (comments by Mark R. Leeper)
- [Mini Reviews, Part 8 \(NIGHT LIFE OF THE GODS, THE GREAT IMPERSONATION, NIGHT KEY, THE BLACK DOLL, THE MISSING GUEST, THE HOUSE OF THE SEVEN GABLES\)](#) (film reviews by Evelyn C. Leeper)
- [This Week's Reading](#) (THE DISPLACEMENTS) (book comments by Evelyn C. Leeper)
- [Quote of the Week](#)

Co-Editor: Mark Leeper, [mleeper@optonline.net](mailto:mleeper@optonline.net)  
Co-Editor: Evelyn Leeper, [eleeper@optonline.net](mailto:eleeper@optonline.net)  
Sending Address: [evelynchimelisleeper@gmail.com](mailto:evelynchimelisleeper@gmail.com)  
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### 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.

- September 8, 2022 (MTPL), 5:30PM: BETWEEN TIME AND TIMBUKTU (1972): Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.  
<https://tinyurl.com/borrow-Timbuktu>
- September 22, 2022 (OBPL), 7:00PM: SIRENS OF TITAN by Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.
- October 6 (MTPL), 5:30PM: THE QUATERMASS CONCLUSION (1979): Nigel Kneale
- November 3 (MTPL), 5:30PM: NOSFERATU (1922) & DRACULA by Bram Stoker

### My Picks for Turner Classic Movies for September (comments by Mark R. Leeper):

In September TCM will be showing A FACE IN THE CROWD, which in spite of the title is one of the great stand-out films of the 1950s.

The film tells the story of "Lonesome Rhodes" from being a no-account bum to being one of the most powerful and most dangerous men in America. A FACE IN THE CROWD features Andy Griffith in one of his almost-serious roles. In this 1957 political drama Andy Griffith (in one of his almost-serious roles) plays Lonesome Rhodes, a bum in a drunk tank who gets a chance to perform on the radio. He is amazingly popular with his listeners and soon he is a media sensation. As his popularity builds across the country and soon he becomes aware of the political influence he has over his audience and he makes himself one of the most powerful and most

dangerous men in the country. The film is an entertaining essay in how the public can be swayed and controlled. This is a powerful film that is timelier today than when it was made in 1957. It also features Patricia Neal and Walter Matthau, and was directed by the great (and controversial) Elia Kazan from a screenplay by Budd Schulberg.

[A FACE IN THE CROWD, September 20, 2:00AM]

[-mrl]

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### **Mini Reviews, Part 8** (film reviews by Evelyn C. Leeper):

This column covers more of Universal's lesser-known "horror" films. (To some extent, I am defining these as ones we have no previously seen, and which aren't on the various DVD sets of Universal films that we have.) Some are so obscure that they have no Rotten Tomatoes entry.

**NIGHT LIFE OF THE GODS (1935):** In 1990, UNIVERSAL HORRORS: THE STUDIO'S CLASSIC FILMS, 1931-1946 described NIGHT LIFE OF THE GODS (1935) as virtually a lost film, with 16mm prints having "all that disappeared" and "only a couple" of 35mm prints remaining. Now it's available on YouTube. (And it must have been available in 2005, since my records indicate I saw it back then.) One of several Thorne Smith novels filmed in the 1930s and 1940s, NIGHT LIFE OF THE GODS never achieved the success of TOPPER or I MARRIED A WITCH, probably because its humor flatters, it is not until three-quarters of the way through that the gods actually appear, and the ending [SPOILER WARNING] is a cheat.

Released theatrically 03/01/1935.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0026776/reference>

What others are saying: [https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/night\\_life\\_of\\_the\\_gods](https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/night_life_of_the_gods)

**THE GREAT IMPERSONATION (1935):** THE GREAT IMPERSONATION is basically an espionage murder mystery marketed as a horror film. As an espionage film, it holds its own; just don't expect a horror film.

Released theatrically 12/09/1935.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0026438/reference>

What others are saying: [https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/the\\_great\\_impersonation\\_1935](https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/the_great_impersonation_1935)

**NIGHT KEY (1937):** NIGHT KEY was one of Channel Thirteen "Thirteen Horror Films" that ran back in the 1980s (I think) and motivated us to buy a VCR--the series, not this particular film. This is the weakest of the batch. Probably included only because Karloff was the star, it is \*marginally\* science fiction, with Karloff having invented a new sort of burglar alarm. Only worth seeing for Karloff fans.

Released theatrically 05/02/1937.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0029309/reference>

What others are saying: [https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/night\\_key](https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/night_key)

**THE BLACK DOLL (1938):** THE BLACK DOLL was a Crime Club mystery with pretensions of horror (the black doll of the title is a Mexican doll but appears to be a voodoo doll). The film really has nothing to recommend it: the music is recycled from other Universal films, the obligatory comedic elements aren't funny, and the ending weak.

Released theatrically 01/30/1938.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0029918/reference>

What others are saying: [https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/the\\_black\\_doll](https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/the_black_doll)

**THE MISSING GUEST (1938):** THE MISSING GUEST is a remake of THE SECRET OF THE BLUE ROOM, but anything that made the original good was jettisoned and replaced by cliches, bland settings, and bad comedy.

Released theatrically 08/12/1938.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0030455/reference>

**THE HOUSE OF FEAR (1939):** THE HOUSE OF FEAR is a murder mystery set in a theater, again with supernatural elements suggested, but ultimately revealed as purely mundane. As with many of these non-horror horrors, it needs to be taken on its own merits rather than as the horror film that it is not. It is not to be confused with SHERLOCK HOLMES AND THE HOUSE OF FEAR (1945), which is also known as THE HOUSE OF FEAR.

Released theatrically 06/30/1939.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0031449/reference>

THE HOUSE OF THE SEVEN GABLES (1940): THE HOUSE OF THE SEVEN GABLES is another adaptation of a classic work of literature. Apparently Hawthorne was considered on a par with Dickens, in that the original story is recognizable in the film (as opposed to THE BLACK CAT and THE RAVEN, in which Poe would find nothing familiar). That is not to say that Universal did not make a lot of changes, but the underlying story is still there, and Universal did not cut corners on the production. I realize that the book THE HOUSE OF SEVEN GABLES has a bad reputation as having been inflicted on high school students in schools where Hawthorne's better-known THE SCARLET LETTER was considered too racy. Still, I would have thought this would have shown up occasionally because of Vincent Price. (It is available on regular DVD, while most of these films I have commented on are available on DVD-R of [at times] dubious legitimacy, if at all.)

Released theatrically 04/12/1940.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0032610/reference>

What others are saying: [https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/the\\_house\\_of\\_the\\_seven\\_gables\\_1940](https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/the_house_of_the_seven_gables_1940)

[-ecl]

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

THE DISPLACEMENTS by Bruce W. Holsinger (Riverhead, ISBN 978-0-593-18971-9) is a "cli-fi" novel (in other words, a science fiction novel based on climate science) marketed as mainstream fiction. But perhaps the fact that it is marketed as mainstream is why it is much "softer" than the "cli-fi" of Kim Stanley Robinson, Paolo Bacigalupi, and other unabashedly science fiction authors.

Even though the premise is that a Category 6 hurricane has totally wiped out Miami, much of the Florida coast, and Houston, THE DISPLACEMENTS focuses on a few main characters, rather than the millions who have been affected. There is Daphne, a rich white woman who is a sculptor with three bratty children and a husband who has some serious flaws. There is Rain, a FEMA worker with an unfortunate name, because every time a sentence starts with her name, I think I am reading about the weather, and then trip over the rest of the sentence, in which Rain walks into a tent, or does some other clearly non-weather thing. There is Tate, an insurance agent with a profitable drug business on the side. There are a few other significant characters, but these are the main ones.

SPOILERS: And their situation is comparatively mild. They manage to get to what must be the best-run refugee camp in the history of the world: plenty of water and real food (including popsicles), good sanitation and showers, bus service to the local mall, no violence until the end, and then only very limited violence, Daphne starts a pottery school in the camp, her stepson starts a story group for the younger children and manages to extricate himself from a gang of drug dealers without suffering any harm, her daughter has caused her Guatemalan friend's entire extended family to be deported but suffers no real consequences. Daphne and her family gets enough money to get started again, as well as a home and a job, and also gets back the SUV they had to abandon in Florida and (in a totally unlikely coincidence) their dog that was taken to a shelter when they evacuated. The various bad guys get their just desserts. Rain briefly feels guilty about how badly she did until she hears some talk about other camps which sound like real hellholes, and then feels better and goes off to tackle ICE. END SPOILERS

I suppose there is a point to populating a disaster novel about Miami and Houston with white Anglos, and this seems to have garnered uniformly good reviews, but it struck me as the sort of thing that we saw back in the 1950s. The disaster itself may be more realistic, but nothing else seems to have changed. [-ecl]

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Mark Leeper  
mleeper@optonline.net

Quote of the Week:

My friends are like my teeth: I'd find it strange  
at my age if all of them were straight and white,  
and some came out years ago.

--Paul Bassett Davies

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