

# MT VOID 08/25/23 -- Vol. 42, No. 8, Whole Number 2290



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## Table of Contents

- [Middletown \(NJ\) Public Library Science Fiction Discussion Group](#)
- [My Picks for Turner Classic Movies for September](#)  
(comments by Mark R. Leeper and Evelyn C. Leeper)
- [A STRANGER IN THE CITADEL by Tobias Buckell](#) (book review  
by Joe Karpierz)
- [WIND RIVER, AVATAR--THE WAY OF WATER, OPPENHEIMER](#)  
(letter of comment by Taras Wolansky)
- [This Week's Reading](#) (UNTHINKING THINKING) (book comments  
by Evelyn C. Leeper)
- [Quote of the Week](#)

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## Middletown (NJ) Public Library Science Fiction Discussion Group:

The only local meetings left are in Middletown, and they are in-person. The best way to get the latest information is to be on the mailing list for it.

- Sept 14, 2023 [postponed from Sept 7]: THE ROAD (2009) & novel  
by Cormac McCarthy  
<https://tinyurl.com/RoadCormac1234>
- Oct 5, 2023: FANTASTIC PLANET (1973) & novel by Stefan Wul  
<https://epdf.pub/queue/fantastic-planet-creation-oneiros.html>

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

One of more the more enjoyable choices for the month was at one time much looked for as being collectible. The film is the 1954 GOJIRA (a.k.a. GODZILLA, as I probably do not have to inform the reader). This is perhaps the most serious monster movie ever

made, and does not have cute pudgy oversized creatures of outlandish proportions. For this special showing it will be shown back-to-back with the second Godzilla film, GODZILLA RAIDS AGAIN.

[GOJIRA (1954), Sunday, October 1, 2:00 AM]

[GODZILLA RAIDS AGAIN (1955), Sunday, October 1, 4:00 AM]

(Yes, I know those are technically in October. But TCM and other stations use what is sometimes referred to as "TV Guide time", which makes everything between midnight and 6AM part of the previous day. You would think with the advent of VCRs, DVRs, etc., everyone would start listing the day one needs to program into the machine, but apparently not.)

[-mrl]

And some comments on some other films:

THE BIG SLEEP (1946): The best-known anecdote about this film is that it was so confusing that when the studio asked writer Raymond Chandler who had killed the chauffeur, even Chandler didn't know.

CHIMES AT MIDNIGHT (1967): When a film is made based on a play by Shakespeare, people often complain that parts are edited out or slightly modernized. Welles avoided this by making this (a.k.a. FALSTAFF) by piecing together parts of five different plays rather than claiming it to be a specific play.

CROSSING DELANCEY (1988): A rom-com set where the uptown literary world and the downtown modern Orthodox world meet, with a great performance by Reizl Bozyk.

GLENGARRY GLEN ROSS (1992): David Mamet's hyper-cynical take on the shady side of the business world.

ISLE OF THE DEAD (1945): The look of this film was heavily influenced by Arnold Bocklin's painting "The Isle of the Dead", which is acknowledged in the credits.

MY DINNER WITH ANDRE (1981): This film generated a number of parodies, as well as jokes, cartoons, and other pop culture references, but seems to have fallen off the radar in the intervening forty years.

SEVEN BRIDES FOR SEVEN BROTHERS (1954): Who would have thought that Hollywood would make a musical based on the rape of the Sabine Women? Then again, Hollywood made a romantic comedy about a teenage girl being groomed to be a courtesan, complete with a song "Thank Heaven for Little Girls".

[-ecl]

Other films of interest include:

SATURDAY, September 2  
8:00 PM The Ghost and Mr. Chicken (1966)

MONDAY, September 4  
2:30 AM Baal (1970)

TUESDAY, September 5  
3:15 AM Soylent Green (1973)

WEDNESDAY, September 6  
6:00 PM Cabin in the Sky (1943)

SUNDAY, September 10  
12:00 AM The Wrong Man (1956)  
6:00 AM The 39 Steps (1935)  
8:00 AM The Lady Vanishes (1938)  
10:00 AM The Wrong Man (1956)  
12:00 PM I Confess (1953)  
1:45 PM Vertigo (1958)  
4:00 PM Rear Window (1954)  
6:00 PM Psycho (1960)

THURSDAY, September 14

8:00 PM Duck Soup (1933)  
 9:15 PM The Fearless Vampire Killers (1966)

FRIDAY, September 15  
 3:15 PM The Enchanted Cottage (1945)  
 5:00 PM The Glass Slipper (1955)

SATURDAY, September 16  
 10:08 AM Mr. Hex (1946)

SUNDAY, September 17  
 11:00 PM Isle of the Dead (1945)

MONDAY, September 18  
 8:00 PM Them! (1954)  
 10:00 PM Tarantula (1955)

TUESDAY, September 19  
 1:30 AM The Wasp Woman (1960)  
 3:00 AM The Black Scorpion (1957)  
 4:30 AM The Cosmic Monster (1958)

WEDNESDAY, September 20  
 12:00 AM Elevator to the Gallows (1958)  
 11:45 AM The Great Dictator (1940)

SATURDAY, September 23  
 10:08 AM Spook Busters (1946)

SUNDAY, September 24  
 8:00 AM The Crimson Pirate (1952)  
 5:45 PM Seance on a Wet Afternoon (1964)

TUESDAY, September 26  
 4:30 PM I Married an Angel (1942)

WEDNESDAY, September 27  
 4:45 PM Freaks (1932)

THURSDAY, September 28  
 10:00 AM House on Haunted Hill (1958)  
 11:45 AM The Exterminating Angel (1962)

SATURDAY, September 30  
 4:00 AM Jungle Book (1942)

SUNDAY, October 1  
 2:00 AM Godzilla (1954)  
 4:00 AM Godzilla Raids Again (1955)

**A STRANGER IN THE CITADEL** by **Tobias Buckell** (copyright October 2023, Tachyon Publications, ISBN: 978-1-61696-398-9 (print); 978-1-61696-399-6 (digital)) (book review by Joe Karpierz):

A great number of reviews of Tobias Buckell's latest book, *A STRANGER IN THE CITADEL*, start out with the following tag line, the one that is meant to draw the reader in:

"You shall not suffer a librarian to live."

I will admit that it drew me in. Forbidden knowledge, citadels, book banning and burning--I mean, it sure reads like a summary of modern day life, doesn't it? But as I said, the line is meant to draw in the reader, for the book is about much more than that and really something other than that. Of course it is.

Lilith lives in the walled city of Ninetha. She is a musketry of the citadel, and she and her twelve siblings are charged with protection of the city. The people of Ninetha are provided for by the cornucopia, a device left to them by the gods who demand that in exchange for the cornucopia the people abandon knowledge and the pursuit of it. Thus, books are banned, and anyone who is in possession of a book is condemned to die. Life is simple under this rule, and things are peaceful--until a traveler from outside the city wanders in with

a book in his possession. Lilith's trainer, Kira, wants the "librarian" put to death on the spot. Lilith, being curious by nature, wants to learn more about the man. Kira tries to dissuade Lilith, but as Lilith's father is the leader of the city and she is in line for his position (should it ever get to that--she is the youngest of the 13), she pulls rank and has the man imprisoned instead.

I've mentioned that Lilith is curious. She is too curious for her own good, as it turns out. She wonders what her other siblings are guarding in a room deep within the citadel, and manages to discover that they are guarding, of all things, a book. She begins to question how things are being done by her father, and what other lies he might be keeping from her. Lilith makes the mistake of confiding in Kira about the book. That single act sets in motion the rest of the story, as the city descends into chaos when the discovery is made public. And while her siblings had plans for this eventuality, and indeed saw it coming sooner or later, things did not go as planned, and Lilith's life was forever changed. Lilith vows to assemble an army and take her city back, but that is a daunting task.

The rest of the novel, then, is spent outside the city, as Lilith and librarian (whose name is Ishmael, we come to learn), wander from town to town, looking for help and shelter, and trying to figure out where to go next. There was much talk of going to New Alexandria--and this is one of the reader's hints that this world is not all as it appears to be. As the novel unfolds, Ishmael and Lilith discover much, much more about the truth of their land, and why they're in the situation they are.

The novel starts out as a fantasy, with a gift given by the gods providing for the people of the land, but as it progresses we learn that it really isn't a fantasy. There is no magic, and there is rudimentary science, but the big reveal of the novel makes me feel like this is a small part of a much bigger story, a story that I'd really be interested in reading. A STRANGER IN THE CITADEL can be read as YA, and that wouldn't be incorrect, given the protagonist and how she and the story progress. But it's clear there's much more to tell, and that's the story I want to read. Maybe Buckell didn't want or intend to tell that other story, but that story is the one that sets the table for this one, which in my mind is a story within the story, and I want that larger story.

That's not to say that the book wasn't enjoyable. It certainly was. The characters are terrific, the situation reminds the reader of what we are living through today, and family, whether by biology or choice, plays a large part. And really, who doesn't love a story about forbidden knowledge? [-jak]

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#### **WIND RIVER, AVATAR--THE WAY OF WATER, OPPENHEIMER** (letter of comment by Taras Wolansky):

In response to various comments in various issues of the MT VOID, Taras Wolansky writes:

Thanks for the many great issues you've sent me since my last LoC ...

Review of WIND RIVER: This is a corker of a modern Western by the master of the genre, Taylor Sheridan, and touches on a very real problem, violence against women on "the res". Of course, in reality this problem has much more to do with high levels of alcoholism and unemployment, than dramatically convenient outsiders.

Review of AVATAR--THE WAY OF WATER: Blue makeup? My understanding is, the Navi characters are all CGI, by way of motion capture.

I was amused to see the film follows the old NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC rules: depicting "natives" in a state of undress is regarded in the light of anthropology, not erotica. I almost laughed out loud when I noticed that only the white (and non-CGI) character's loincloth has a discreet flap in the back.

Perhaps the editors belatedly realized there was a problem, especially considering that some of the Navi characters are supposed to be barely in their teens. At any rate, it looked to me as if certain panning shots were abruptly cut off, before they got, er, too "blue"!

Review of OPPENHEIMER: You may want to take a look at Robert Zubrin's review in QUILLETTE. Zubrin was a member of a later "class" at Los Alamos. He gives the film high marks, but criticizes it for its nasty depiction of Lewis Strauss. He says Strauss was one of the few people in the FDR Administration concerned about the Holocaust, and Strauss held out for a demonstration drop of the first bomb, even as Oppenheimer was helping the military pick a city to obliterate.

I found the ending rather anticlimactic. The building of the first atomic bomb is inherently a far more important story than Robert Oppenheimer losing his security clearance years later. Which, after all, still left 99.9% of the field of physics open to him. One could argue that, after lying to counterespionage investigators in the middle of a world war, he was lucky he wasn't prosecuted.

On at least two occasions in the film, Oppenheimer expresses his confidence that, if we don't build a hydrogen bomb, neither will Stalin; a view which seems laughable, in retrospect. Even after everything, Oppenheimer apparently still believed Stalin was some

kind of benevolent humanitarian, too peace-loving to build an H-bomb unless the U.S. forced him to.

In any case, OPPENHEIMER should sweep the Oscars next year--the last year before the Academy's new diversity rules take effect. [-tw]

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

[With yesterday being the anniversary of Jorge Luis Borges's birth, I thought this would be a good time to run my complete comments on UNTHINKING THINKING. I am including the text I wrote about it in the 04/28/23 issue so as to have a full review here.]

UNTHINKING THINKING: JORGE LUIS BORGES, MATHEMATICS, AND THE NEW PHYSICS by Floyd Merrell (Purdue, ISBN 0-911198-72-5) is at first intimidating by the very academic writing. Here's an example:

"Consider the possibility that in 'The Circular Ruins' a projection of spatio-temporal synchronicity into linear existence entails a symbolic abolition of the life/death dichotomy. This assumes an implicit attempt to overcome temporal existence wherein spatial hierarchy and temporal linearity predominate."

However, as I read on, I started to see errors, or at least slips. For example, on page 4 Merrell says, "'The sun rotates around the earth' and 'the earth rotates around the sun' represent two conflicting perspectives." Actually that's not true; the Earth and the moon revolve about a point that is three-quarters of the Earth's radius from the Earth's center. And the pairs Pluto-Charon and Sun-Jupiter each revolved around points that are not within either of the bodies involved. And so it is possible to consider both true, or both false, rather than one absolutely true and one absolutely false.

But even more of a flub is that Merrell speaks of bodies "rotating" around each other, when he means "revolving" around each other. Rotation is the motion of a single body about a point or an axis.

Later, he writes about Leibniz's "binary system based on the root 2"; he means Leibniz's binary system based on the base 2 (which is actually a bit redundant).

Another, deeper dispute I have with Merrell is that he defends the argument that mathematics is invented, not discovered, by saying, "In sum, from this perspective mathematics is invention rather than discovery, a human institution rather than an eternal playground for the gods. Right and wrong mathematical behavior lies in the game, for mathematics is normative. Consequently, number systems need not be decimal, as is our Western system. To cite only two examples from among many, the ancient Mayas used a system to the base five, for reasons unknown. And within a fictive context, the inhabitants of the planet Tlon used a duodecimal system...." Merrell seems to confuse the way we express mathematics with the mathematics itself. He could as easily claim that the different shapes of the ten digits used in Egypt makes their mathematics different from ours.

"We are to suppose not only that each page of the book after page one is followed by an immediately preceding page, but also (and this is not unimportant) that each page is separated from others by a finite number of pages." This makes no sense, given the rest of the description, even in a chapter about paradoxes, unless what he meant to say was "an immediately succeeding page."

Merrell asks, "How can consciousness be one and at the same time many?" The obvious answer is the same way God can be one and at the same time three. (I will mention my engineering analogy to the three-in-one paradox: an engineering drawing of a toothpaste tube from the standard three perspectives would show a circle, a rectangle, and a triangle respectively--yet it is a single item.)

"Funes is capable of seeing only particulars. ... The problem was that his memory became a garbage heap. It contained an infinite number of individuals, but he was incapable of 'ideas of a general, Platonic sort. ... Although our imaginary Funes escaped the human penchant for hypothetical abstractions, we obviously cannot." Except that is apparently what some people with autism do, at least according to Temple Grandin, and she should know.

"In fact, science fiction writers are now borrowing ideas from physicists, rather than, as has been conceived in the past, science 'catching up' with H. G. Wells, Jules Verne, and others."

Merrell is apparently unaware that science fiction has been borrowing ideas from physicists since the very beginning. There are really two sorts of science fiction in this context: technological fiction and theoretical fiction. The former is full of submarines, short-range spaceships, invisibility sera, and so on. The latter is full of wormholes, faster-than-light travel (through some new discovery), use of the wave/particle complementarity, and so on. My first guess as to why the transition from technology to theory is that the 19th century was a technological century--the Industrial Revolution and all--while the big changes in theoretical physics did not start until late in the

19th century and into the 20th century. So Wells and Verne were based on technology, and Hugo Gernsback kept pushing science fiction as based on at least seemingly practical science. After the atom bomb, everyone--writers included--started noticing theoretical physics, at least to the level of  $E=mc^2$ .

"La indagación es fácil: basta multiplicar  $1 \times 2 \times 3 \times 4 \times 5 \times 6 \times 7 \times 8 \times 9 \times 10$ , prolija operación que nos da la cifra de 3.628.800."

I would give as a fairly literal translation: "The determination is easy: it is enough to multiply  $1 \times 2 \times 3 \times 4 \times 5 \times 6 \times 7 \times 8 \times 9 \times 10$ , a long operation that gives us the number of 3,628,800." (Note that in Spanish numbers, the use of the period and the comma are reversed.)

Merrell writes, "The investigation is easy: it is sufficient to multiply  $1 \times 2 \times 3 \times 4 \times 5 \times 6 \times 7 \times 8 \times 9 \times 10$ , a tedious operation that gives us the sum of 3,628,800."

Whether it is tedious or not is a matter of opinion; however, the result is not a \*sum\*, it's a product, and "cifra" is "number". Given that everywhere else the name is correct, I will assume that referring to "H. G. Well's 'The Crystal Egg'" is just bad proofreading.

"The fact that particles display wave properties gave evidence that they represented some kind of statistical effect, a discovery which soon led to the unending of causality and predictability. No more could be known but that a given electron had a certain probability of being at a certain place at a certain instant." Unless I completely misunderstand what Merrell is trying to say, he means "ending of causality and predictability", not "unending".

Merrell explains why the 50-50 chance of nuclear decay is not really similar to a coin flip. I understand that he is saying that with enough data on force, position, temperature, etc., we could predict the coin flip (though I'm not sure chaos theory would agree).

But I totally disagree with his statement, "... the coin, while flip-flopping, entails two alternative worlds, but in the quantum realm the two worlds are no more than a potential. We cannot speak of the existence of either until one of the two has been actualized, i.e., until it has been, so to speak, 'observed,' interacted on by another entity." For the life of me, I cannot see how the two alternate worlds of the coin are any more real than those of the nucleus.

And while we're at it, the whole Schroedinger's cat thought experiment has problems. For example, isn't the cat intelligent enough to observe whether it is alive or dead, so the wave form collapses immediately? There is no "waiting period" before the external human observer opens the box. For that matter, what changes if the human observer is in the box? Unlikely, but we can postulate a quantum "trial by ordeal" situation, where chance/God decides whether the accused is guilty and should be executed, or innocent and should not be. (Sounds like a great SF idea!) [-ecl]

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Quote of the Week:

There is something fascinating about science. One gets such wholesale returns of conjecture out of such a trifling investment of fact.

--Mark Twain

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