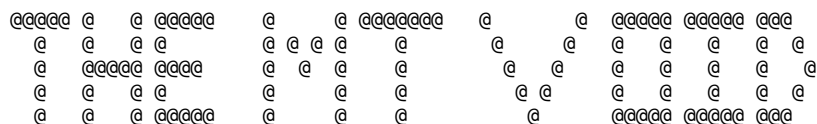


MT VOID 01/28/22 -- Vol. 40, No. 31, Whole Number 2208



Mt. Holz Science Fiction Society
01/28/22 -- Vol. 40, No. 31, Whole Number 2208

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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.

MT VOID Typeface:

Someone has reported that the MT VOID was now arriving in a typeface that was very hard to read on his iPad. We upgraded our Mac OS, which meant we upgraded our MS Word, which now has a really thin-line typeface as its default. I hadn't realized it carried over to email we sent, though. I will try a different method of sending mail to try to improve the typeface. [-ecl]

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

Alas, both groups have returned to Zoom meetings, due in part to COVID, and in part to unpredictable weather. Movies for the Middletown meeting will be ones people can watch on YouTube, archive.org, or other free services.

February 3 (MTPL), 7PM: Black History Month: FIVE (1951)

prose poem: "The Creation" (1927) by James Weldon Johnson

<https://poets.org/poem/creation>

February 24 (MTPL), 7PM: THE TIME MACHINE by H. G. Wells

March 3 UNDER THE SKIN (2014) & novel by Michel Faber

<https://tinyurl.com/UnderSkin-Faber>

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

One of the best films of men and the sea is Peter Ustinov's 1962 adaptation of Herman Melville's BILLY BUDD. Now note I am not saying the book is all that good. But the film made from the book is actually good. Terence Stamp is an American seaman impressed aboard a British warship during the Napoleonic wars. Melville goes a little overboard (not literally) to make Billy the so-called "handsome sailor," a wonderful person loved by all on the crew on the boat. That is all, that is but for a sadistic Master at Arms. Soon, quite innocently, Billy becomes embroiled in a conflict between duty and justice.

[Just as Melville's MOBY-DICK was based on the true story of the whaleship "Essex", so BILLY BUDD was based on the true story of the mutiny at (don't laugh) Spithead in 1797, as well as a subsequent mutiny in 1842 involving a cousin of Melville's as arbitrator in the trial of two midshipmen on the U.S.S. Somers.]

[BILLY BUDD, February 4, 11:30AM]

Also, for those of you watching the Masterpiece Theatre of AROUND THE WORLD IN EIGHTY DAYS, TCM is running the 1956 movie:
02/18/2022 12:00 PM Around the World in 80 Days (1956)

Online Film Critics Society Annual Movie Awards:

BEST PICTURE – THE POWER OF THE DOG
BEST ANIMATED FEATURE – THE MITCHELLS VS. THE MACHINES
BEST DIRECTOR – Jane Campion (THE POWER OF THE DOG)
BEST ACTOR – Benedict Cumberbatch (THE POWER OF THE DOG)
BEST ACTRESS – Olivia Colman (THE LOST DAUGHTER)
BEST SUPPORTING ACTOR – Kodi Smit-McPhee (THE POWER OF THE DOG)
BEST SUPPORTING ACTRESS – Kirsten Dunst (THE POWER OF THE DOG)
BEST ORIGINAL SCREENPLAY – PIG
BEST ADAPTED SCREENPLAY – THE POWER OF THE DOG
BEST FILM EDITING – THE POWER OF THE DOG
BEST CINEMATOGRAPHY – THE POWER OF THE DOG
BEST ORIGINAL SCORE – THE POWER OF THE DOG
BEST PRODUCTION DESIGN – THE FRENCH DISPATCH
BEST COSTUME DESIGN – DUNE
BEST VISUAL EFFECTS: DUNE
BEST DEBUT FEATURE – Maggie Gyllenhaal, THE LOST DAUGHTER
BEST FILM NOT IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE – DRIVE MY CAR
BEST DOCUMENTARY FEATURE – SUMMER OF SOUL (...OR, WHEN THE REVOLUTION COULD NOT BE TELEVISED)

TECHNICAL ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS:

- DUNE for Sound Design
- IN THE HEIGHTS for Choreography
- MEMORIA for Sound Design
- NO TIME TO DIE for Stunt Coordination
- WEST SIDE STORY for Choreography

BEST NON-US RELEASE

- 1970 (Poland)
- BANK JOB (United Kingdom)
- BENEDICTION (United Kingdom)
- THE GIRL AND THE SPIDER (Switzerland)
- THE MEDIUM (Thailand)
- NINJABABY (Norway)
- PETITE MAMAN (France)
- PLEASURE (Sweden)
- THE TSUGUA DIARIES (Portugal)
- VENGEANCE IS MINE, ALL OTHERS PAY CASH (Indonesia)

LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS:

- John Carpenter
- Tony Leung Chiu-Wai
- Sheila Nevins
- Paul Schrader
- John Williams

SPECIAL ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS:

IATSE Workers, for bringing attention to labor issues in the film industry and fighting for better standards.

Turner Classic Movies (TCM) for providing worldwide access to classic films, including silent movies.

The Association of Moving Image Archivists (AMIA) is an important non-profit organization devoted to the preservation of film.

Founded in 1997 by film critic Harvey Karten, OFCS is a professional association that comprises of online film critics, film journalists,

historians and scholars from around the world. The membership is dedicated to its mission of furthering the growth of the informed film audience by utilizing the Internet as a valuable source of news and commentary. OFCS provides a forum for its members to communicate and discuss ideas about journalism and cinema and encourage a high standard of journalism across online media platforms.

[Mark is a member of the OFCS.]

Mini Reviews by Evelyn, Part 1 (film reviews by Evelyn C. Leeper):

THE COLONY: THE COLONY is a typical post-apocalypse story, the apocalypse being radical climate change which seems to have left the earth as a giant mud flat (and oceans, whose tides regularly wash over these flats. The rich left the earth, but have discovered they are now infertile because of their and so want to return to Earth. But Earth is populated by your usual bands of survivors, who speak some incomprehensible language that has fourteen words for water. (How much time has passed anyway? If the rich spaceship people became infertile because of conditions at Kepler-209, it's either and still managed to send a ship back to Earth before the colony died off, they must have some sort of interstellar travel at near light speed, but when was that developed? This is a bleak film, set in a gray, misty world, and imminently skippable.

Released theatrically 08/27/21; available on Netflix streaming.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt6506264/reference>

What others are saying: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/the_colony_2021

FREE GUY: FREE GUY seems to crib a lot from STRANGER THAN FICTION, and I'm sure if I knew more about video games it would be clearer what is going on. I mean, I understand NPCs, but what are skins? It's got some clever ideas particular to video games, and even with my inexperience with video games it was enjoyable enough, if not up to many of the "this is not the real world" movies.

Released 08/13/21; available on DVD from Netflix.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt6264654/reference>

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

SYNCHRONIC: Netflix has been running a lot of "new" science fiction films. (Well, new to me, anyway.) THE DOOR INTO SUMMER, THE COLONY, THE HOUSE, FREE GUY, and now SYNCHRONIC. SYNCHRONIC assumes a drug that has strange effects, not just hallucinations, but actual changes to reality, and in specific, time perceptions. It's a clever idea, and watching the characters figure out the rules is interesting, but there is too much else dragging down the film to make it recommendable.

Released 10/22/20; available on Netflix streaming.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt9016974/reference>

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

[-ecl]

TREKNOMICS: THE ECONOMICS OF STAR TREK by Manu Saadia (a book review in the form of an extended essay by Dale Skran) (part 1):

[This is the first part of a review of TREKNOMICS: THE ECONOMICS OF STAR TREK.]

A fundamental flaw in TREKNOMICS: THE ECONOMICS OF STAR TREK by Manu Saadia (published in 2016) is that it seems more a collection of essays that are somewhat related than an organized argument or analysis. Sloppy thinking abounds, although there are points to agree with as well.

As an example of sloppy thinking, we are asked to believe that the "replicator" is some kind of matter printer, and that the Enterprise contains reservoirs of various elements somewhere. This is virtually impossible to credit, especially given the apparent consensus that the replicator is just a variant of the transporter, as is the holodeck. And surely the transporter is not a "matter printer"--if it was, how does the matter get to the surface of a distant planet?

No--the replicator is pure magic--energy is converted to arbitrarily complex matter. The author is correct that this takes a lot of power--and a lot of data. The author seems to be making the case for the replicator being a "matter printer" since we are actually building "matter printers" right now, with some success, and more likely to follow.

The author does have a good point with regard to Star Trek--the replicator does not appear until "Next Generation", yet money is already obsolete in "Original Trek". Thus, the replicator per se was not needed to create the abundance that is everywhere in Star Trek.

Another example of sloppy thinking is that the author never considers who might, say, clean the toilets, in the Trek universe. We never see any cleaning robots or uplifted animal servants, so someone must be doing this. Does everything clean itself???

The author paints a picture of a utopian future where everyone is well-off, money does not exist, and people are motivated to excel only for reputational glory. This may well work for the most talented 1% who could plausibly participate and succeed in a never-ending scientific and artistic competition, but what of the other 99%? The author, a well-educated writer, may live a sufficiently elevated life that he believes that he and his friends would function well in the Trek utopia, but what of the great mass of humanity with average and below average abilities? Will they engage in constructive artistic, musical, and scientific activity? Or more likely will we see the "Brave New World" with most of the population high on "soma" and engaged in debasing entertainments?

The author appears to believe many will be engaged in the creation of various arts and crafts, but Trek never addresses any issues related to intellectual property. If I purchase some beautiful hand-crafted glass, can I replicate it and give it to all my friends, claiming that I created it? Can I put the "pattern" for this item on the Net so anyone replicate their own even if this is not the desire of the creator of the item? Or is there a prohibition on replicating hand-crafted items? Are replicated items marked "replicated" and there is no status in having "replicated" items? Can I replicate the original Mona Lisa? What is the status of an original in a world of perfect copies? We are currently heavily engaged in these issues on the Internet right now, but via the lens of copyright, patent, and trade mark law, none of which appear to exist in the Trek future.

Another issue Trek does not address is what are called "Network Effects." Basically, once everyone has a replicator, and if there is no protection for Intellectual Property, everyone can copy anything. But the "best" creators will, just as on the Internet, come to dominate, leaving little room for the great majority of those creating art/crafts. Everyone may be rich in material goods, but only a few will have "Galactic Scale" reputations.

The author--and Trek itself--does not concern itself with personal property such as a home. Most Star Fleet officers/crew roam the galaxy, and appear to have no permanent abodes. Picard's family owns a vineyard, and presumably inheritance laws still work or it would no longer be in the Picard family. But if the family does not want it anymore, how is it transferred to someone else? Can it only be given away? Perhaps more important, Trek does not say anything about how prime real estate is allocated. A committee of savants that give nice houses to the "worthy?" This sounds like the "Party" in Soviet Russia passing out the "goodies." Who is allowed to build a new house? Since you can't replicate an entire house, who builds it, given that you can't pay anyone to work on it?

Although Trek is silent on how access to living space is managed, no matter how it is handled there will always be a scarcity of great views on the ocean, etc. One "pressure release" for Trek World is colonies on new worlds, which no doubt offers a plethora of unique vistas for the taking, with a minimum of competition. In fact, a desire for a really nice, big house with a great view may be one of the major motivations to move your family to a remote colony. One advantage of replicators, fusion, etc. is that living in a remote colony is not going to be materially different than living in San Francisco, although at first social interactions will be limited. What you will not get on any official Federation colony is the opportunity to pursue your own vision of a better society, and especially to pursue a forbidden technology. For that you need to found a secret colony that the Federation does not know about. We see examples of such attempts now and then in Trek-world, but they always come to a bad end in just-so stories designed to show of the superiority of the Federation way of life.

Yet another issue Trek does not address is the motivation for the accumulation of wealth. There is an assumption that if everyone has "more than enough" and a sure knowledge that their kids will as well, so there is no need to be concerned about providing for your descendants, and further there is universal free health and elder care of very high quality, this seems to remove most motivations to accumulate wealth. Indeed, in this circumstance, the great bulk of humanity would be content to engage in idle leisure low-key hobbies.

However, for a limited number of people, the purpose of wealth is the accomplishment of goals. Elon Musk, the richest person in the world right now, has wealth beyond dreams of avarice. And yet he owns no yachts, works 100-hour weeks, lives in a \$50K "tiny house" or sleeps on a cot in one of his many factories, and is selling all his mansions. Musk has enough money to buy anything that can be bought, but what he wants--a city on Mars, civilization running on solar energy, a human response to artificial intelligence--are not luxury items that can be purchased at some exclusive department store. For him money is just the lever he uses to move the world, and as such he can never have enough money to create the transformations he envisions.

The mere existence of Musk is antithetical to the Trek utopia, which is apparently run by a series of university committees and similar structures that engage in endless, tedious debate. Once base material needs are met, the accumulation of money becomes related to the accomplishment of goals. Personally, I like Musk's goals, but society should neither privilege his goals over those of, say, George Soros, nor prevent him and his allies from pursuing those goals. Yet in the Trek universe the Musk equivalent--Dr. Noonian Soong--must work in a secret lab to build an android.

We need only compare what Musk has accomplished with regard to space to what the government-run space program has accomplished (which is more or less what you would get in the Trek "utopia"), to see a vast difference in vision and achievement. A world with both approaches is demonstrably better than one that excludes the other. This is why the Trek "utopia" while seeming wonderful is really a kind of nightmare, similar to Jack Williamson's "With Folded Hands." In Trek world, all resource allocation is via committee. Science has a very poor record of responding to new theories with open arms. Consider plate tectonics as an example. Resource allocation by committee inevitably leads to group-think and stagnation, as well as lots of wasted time persuading others you are right.

The author repeats the commonplace error of describing the Star Trek universe as having very advanced, and rapidly advancing technology. Nothing could be further from the truth. The Star Trek universe features a rather limited number of technologies, and a glacial pace of technological advancement outside certain limited areas. The core technologies Trek has that we don't have are:

- Some source of essentially unlimited, safe, cheap energy, variously derived from "dilithium crystals" or somehow involving antimatter Fusion is reliable and common, but appears to be used more like a "backup generator" that is not the main source of power. Fusion is used to drive the "impulse" engines of the Enterprise.

- Warp Drive
- The "transporter", and derivative technologies, including the replicator and the holodeck
- The tractor beam
- Various types of force shields
- Sub-space communications
- Cloaking devices
- The Universal Translator

That's about it. The "transporter" is a gimmick the writers invented to speed up storytelling, and neither it, nor the related replicator or holodeck represent technologies that are ever likely to exist in the form described in Star Trek. Warp Drive and sub-space communication are ancient McGuffins of SciFi that allow the writer to tell an exciting story about interstellar adventure, but are only marginally more likely to be possible than the "transporter." The magical "dilithium crystals" that act as matter/anti-matter catalysts are just that--magic that does not exist in the real world.

Controlled fusion is very likely possible, and success now seems more like ten years away rather than the traditional thirty-year timeline. Creating anti-matter is more a compact energy storage method than a power source, but it may eventually be a useful technology once we have sufficient cheap energy to manufacture it. The same is true of "force shields." We may well someday create powerful magnetic shields to protect space craft and free space settlements from radiation, but this kind of technology seems less than relevant to everyday life.

Pretty much all the other technology shown in Star Trek--tricorders, communicators, computers, androids, medical technology, universal translators, and even cloaking devices--are actually much less advanced than what we might reasonably expect to have in the 22nd century ("Star Trek: Enterprise") and certainly by the 24th century ("Star Trek: Picard"). The Star Trek universe posits the "Eugenics Wars" in the 1990s which led to a nuclear war lasting from 2026 to 2053. Even granting the Earth was substantially devastated in 21st century, Trek technology seems to have advanced to a remarkably small degree over what we actually have in 2022. Of course, we didn't spend the 1990s fighting Kahn Noonian Soong.

The only way the Star Trek future makes any sense is if it is understood not as the result of rapid technological progress, but instead what society might look like if science is grossly constrained to avoid doing anything that might change human nature or the basis of human civilization. Secret agencies like Section 31 in "Star Trek: Deep Space Nine" must work behind the scenes to ensure that progress moves very slowly or not at all.

Additionally, with no possibility of any personal gain from your efforts, productivity is likely greatly reduced from what it would otherwise be. I'll come back to this in more detail, but I worked for seventeen years at Bell Labs, perhaps a reasonable approximation of the productivity the Federation might achieve in its various science institutes--thousands of Ph.D.s paid well enough and treated well enough and given enough freedom to be one of the most productive R&D organizations the Earth has ever seen. And yet when I went to work for a series of startups, I found the them to be at least 10x more productive per person, and likely much more than that. In large part this was due to the fact that everyone at the company stood to make a large sum of money if the products succeeded in the market, while at Bell Labs you could win the Nobel prize and change the entire world while making only modestly more than the other employees. [-dls]

[This essay will conclude in the next issue of the MT VOID.]

"Enoch SOames" (letters of comment by Paul Dormer and Dorothy J. Heyday):

In response to [Evelyn's comments on "Enoch Soames"](#) in the 01/21/22 issue of the MT VOID, Paul Dormer writes:

[Evelyn quotes the devil as saying,] "You wish to be in the reading-room just as it will be on the afternoon of June 3, 1997?"

I have a memory of a BBC radio programme back in 1997 where someone went to the British Museum on that date to see if Soames appeared. (He didn't.) [-pd]

Dorothy J. Heydt replies:

Different universe, obviously. [-djh]

Bibles (letters of comment by Gary McGrath, Paul Dormer, and John Kerr-Mudd):

In response to [Jim Susky's comments on Bibles](#) in the 01/21/22 issue of the MT VOID, Gary McGrath writes:

My go-to Bible is the New Jerusalem Bible. It's in readable modern English, and it includes books which the Catholics accept but the Protestants don't.

I'm an atheist, so I don't have a doctrinal preference among Bibles. The book is on my shelf for research or curiosity. [-gmg]

Paul Dormer responds:

Same here. I think the copy I have was a special offer from the Book of the Month Club in the Eighties. [-pd]

John Kerr-Mudd writes:

Feh, shudda nicked one from a hotel (do the Gideons still supply them?). [-jkm]

Paul Dormer replies:

A few years ago, I stayed in the George Hotel in Huddersfield which was where the Rugby League as formed in 1895. There was a history of Rugby League in each room. [-pd]

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

The film THE DOOR INTO SUMMER is a Japanese adaptation of Robert A. Heinlein's novel. One major change is that the story has been moved to Japan and updated. (Heinlein got some stuff about 1970 right in his 1956 novel, but (not surprisingly) a lot wrong, and the movie time shifts to avoid this.) The other major change--and quite a good one, in my opinion--is that the movie doesn't have any of Heinlein's long commentaries on cats, or (more importantly) any of his blatant lechery, in particular the "betrothal" between an adult male and a girl of eleven. (That she initiates it and the marriage takes place when she is an adult does not really lessen the off-putting nature of the whole exchange.) It also drops the nudist camp (which was good for one twist in the book, but then served no further purpose).

Most of the rest of the film is (as far as I could tell) faithful to the novel. Another criticism I have of the novel, though, that is carried through to the film, is that there are too many convenient inventions. I could accept a lot of robots and AI (running on vacuum tubes, no less!), but there's null-gravity and time travel as well, which is pushing it. I am reminded of the "Black Star" series by John W. Campbell, Jr., in which the three main characters just whip up whatever invention or material they happen to need at the time. When I read that I thought it was pretty cool. I was twelve at the time.

The cold sleep companies in the book THE DOOR INTO SUMMER promote the idea that if you go into cold sleep for thirty years, 5% compound interest will make you rich, giving you \$4 for every original dollar you deposit. This assumes there is no inflation, but inflation over that period in our world (1970-2000) meant that you would have needed about \$4.50 for the buying power of that original dollar. Heinlein does acknowledge the existence of inflation, but sort of hand-waves around it.

At any rate, the movie is definitely recommended for Heinlein fans, and mildly recommended for others. [-ecl]

Mark Leeper
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Quote of the Week:

... Thus mathematics may be defined as the subject
in which we never know what we are talking about,
nor whether what we are saying is true.

--Bertrand Russell

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