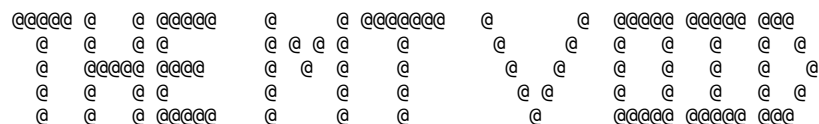


# MT VOID 06/24/22 -- Vol. 40, No. 52, Whole Number 2229



Mt. Holz Science Fiction Society  
06/24/22 -- Vol. 40, No. 52, Whole Number 2229

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[http://leepers.us/mtvoid/back\\_issues.htm](http://leepers.us/mtvoid/back_issues.htm).

### 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.

June 2, 2022 (MTPL), 5:30PM, in-person: A.I. ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (2001) & short story "Supertoys Last All Summer Long" (1969) by Brian Aldiss  
<https://archive.org/details/supertoyslastall0000alldi/>  
July 7, 2022 (MTPL), 5:30PM, in-person: THE LOST WORLD (1925) and novel THE LOST WORLD by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle  
(<https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/139> has various formats available)  
July 28, 2022 (OBPL), 7:00PM, Zoom: A PSALM FOR THE WILD-BUILT by Becky Chambers

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

First, apologies to those who looked for THE BEAST MUST DIE in June; Turner Classic Movies changed their schedule after the article was written, and replaced THE BEAST MUST DIE with another film.

Now onto July.

In 1968 Hammer Films not only had their best year to date, they also produced two of the best horror or science fiction films any film

studio had ever made. (And this is outside of their successful Dracula series). The horror film was THE DEVIL RIDES OUT and the SF film was QUATERMASS AND THE PIT. And then they made one film--a very, very strange film, THE LOST CONTINENT. It was a lost civilization story--nowhere near Hammer's best.

A tramp freighter on which everybody has some tawdry backstory finds itself tangled in the Sargasso Sea, unable to pull itself out. Also trapped in that lost world is a contingent of 16th century Spanish fighters. It is no less weird than it sounds. Oh, they are also menaced by giant jumbo shrimp.

[THE LOST CONTINENT (1968), July 29, 1:15 AM]

Also, I see that BMW (or someone) has posted THE HIRE to YouTube. This is a film composed of 9 chapters, each of which shows off how fancy BMW cars are. The pieces are each directed by a major industry director of action films (e.g., the first is directed by John Frankenheimer), and they all star Clive Owen.

See <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL4A24A64BDE6DC272> for a playlist of all of them. [-mrl]

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### Mini Reviews, Part 6 (film reviews by Evelyn C. Leeper):

OPERATION MINCEMEAT: OPERATION MINCEMEAT is a re-telling of the story from Ewan Montague's book 1953 THE MAN WHO NEVER WAS, which told the true story of the World War II operation that used a corpse to convince the Germans that the Allied invasion from the Mediterranean would be in Greece rather than Sicily. The book (and the 1956 film of the same name) were not entirely accurate due to the official secrets act. (The book was published in part to counteract the spy novel OPERATION HEARTBREAK by Duff Cooper, which used a similar plot.) So OPERATION MINCEMEAT is in some ways more accurate than the earlier film, but it also suffers (IMHO) from a superfluous romance sub-plot. Apparently using a corpse to deceive the Germans about the invasion wasn't exciting enough for Netflix. Even with its inaccuracies, I still prefer the first film. IMDB voters agree; THE MAN WHO NEVER WAS gets a 7.4, while OPERATION MINCEMEAT gets a 6.7.

Released 05/11/22 on Netflix.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1879016/reference>

What others are saying: [https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/operation\\_mincemeat](https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/operation_mincemeat)

LICORICE PIZZA: LICORICE PIZZA is the latest from Paul Thomas Anderson. Anderson has written some great movies: HARD EIGHT, BOOGIE NIGHTS, MAGNOLIA, THERE WILL BE BLOOD, THE MASTER. But he has also written some not-so-great movies (PUNCH-DRUNK LOVE, INHERENT VICE), and this is one of them.

Paul Thomas Anderson should not be confused with Wes Anderson. Both are named Anderson and make quirky independent films, but there the similarity ends.)

Released theatrically 12/25/21; available on DVD and various streaming services.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt11271038/reference>

What others are saying: [https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/licorice\\_pizza](https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/licorice_pizza)

THE BAD GUYS: THE BAD GUYS is the latest from DreamWorks, but it is strangely reminiscent of the Pixar film THE INCREDIBLES (especially the musical score) and Twentieth Century Fox film THE FANTASTIC MR. FOX (no pun intended!) (especially the characterization of the main character). Somehow, though, this story of a bunch of "Bad Guys" (a wolf, a snake, a shark, a piranha, and a tarantula) who get caught in a heist and are put through a regimen to try to make them good. I suppose the idea is that people are wrong to judge them by the stereotypes applied to them. The fact that we're apparently not supposed to ask why almost everyone else in the movie is human but the humans and animals interact on a mostly equal basis is to make children see a parallel between the characters and human beings in our world. But I can't say it did much more for me.

Released theatrically 04/22/22.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt8115900/reference>

What others are saying: [https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/the\\_bad\\_guys\\_2022](https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/the_bad_guys_2022)

THE OUTFIT: THE OUTFIT is another tour de force for Mark Rylance (BRIDGE OF SPIES). Rylance is Leonard Burling, a cutter (\*not\* a tailor--tailors just o buttons and hems, according to his character) who has left England and come to 1950s Chicago, where he ends up making bespoke suits for a family of gangsters who aspire to become part of "The Outfit", the empire that has grown from what Al Capone began. The film relies on an excellent script, with all the action contained within the two rooms of Burling's tailor shop. Rylance trained under the same real cutters from Savile Row who trained the actors in the "Kingsman" series. (One wonders if all this goes back to THE MAN FROM U.N.C.L.E.'s use of El Florio's Tailor Shop as the disguised entrance to their headquarters.)

Released theatrically 03/18/22; available on DVD and various streaming services.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt14114802/reference>

What others are saying: [https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/the\\_outfit\\_2022](https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/the_outfit_2022)

[-ecl]

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**DARK RIDE: THE BEST SHORT FICTION OF JOHN KESSEL** (copyright 2022, Subterranean Press, Publication Date June 30, 2022, \$45 Hardcover, ISBN 9781645240587) (book review by Joe Karpierz):

To be honest, I didn't know very much about John Kessel before I started reading this collection from Subterranean Press. I was aware that he had written a novel called *THE MOON AND THE OTHER*, and just before I started writing this review I discovered that I'd read and reviewed (back in 2012) an anthology that he co-edited with James Patrick Kelly called *DIGITAL RAPTURE: THE SINGULARITY ANTHOLOGY* (which, now that I think about it, is one of the best anthologies I've read in a very long time). So what caused me to pick up *Dark Ride: The Best Short Fiction of John Kessel*?

Most likely because I'd heard his name uttered enough by people in the field whom I respect that I felt reading it was worth a try. I will also have to say that Subterranean Press puts out some fantastic collections, many of which I own. What I didn't realize, once I started reading the book, that I was in for a magnificent treat.

Not knowing any of Kessel's fiction allowed me to come into the book with an open mind and little to no expectations. The works would stand on their own; I would not really be influenced by anyone's thoughts on these stories because I'd never read them before. I was prepared to discover a bunch of new favorite short stories. And I did.

I really enjoyed "Pride and Prometheus", a merging of Jane Austen and Frankenstein, in which Mary Bennet meets Victor Frankenstein (and encounters The Creature, albeit briefly). Bennet falls for Frankenstein, and Victor is impressed with her curiosity and knowledge. It was, of course, not meant to be. "Pride and Prometheus" won a Nebula Award and a Shirley Jackson Award. Little did I know that there were more stories like this in the collection.

Then there's "Another Orphan", a story in which a stock trader from Chicago ends up smack dab in the middle of *MOBY DICK*, on the Pequod herself as part of Ahab's revenge mission against the titular whale. It's not really clear whether the central character is actually on the Pequod or back in Chicago (and he does go back and forth a few times), but the longer he's around Ahab and the crew, the more he feels like he might be Ishmael, who does eventually survive the original tale. It's another one of my favorites in the book. Sure enough, another Nebula winner.

Another, "Stories for Men", in which the Society of Cousins on the moon is essentially role-reversed, where the men are pampered and protected and the women go out and do the hard labor, won a Tiptree (now Otherwise) Award. It's a powerful story about men without agency and an underground group of men who want to have meaning in their lives. The protagonist, Erno, is caught between his mother - a police officer - and that underground group who want to shake things up. "Stories For Men" takes place in the same setting as "THE MOON AND THE OTHER", and I like it enough that I will probably head to my local bookstore - yes, there is an independent bookstore in my town - and pick it up.

Another favorite is "Gulliver at Home", which doesn't actually answer the question of what Gulliver's wife does while he's off on all his travels, but instead it explores the effect of his absence on his wife. "Buffalo" is a beautiful tribute story about Kessel's father and an imaginary meeting with H.G. Wells. Wells did go to Buffalo when Kessel's father worked there, although the meeting never did take place. "The Baum Plan for Financial Independence" follows a couple looking for a quick score of cash in an empty (but not abandoned) house that has a subway station running underneath it that leads to an idyllic location where all their needs are met and requests are granted. The Baum in the title does refer to the author of the Oz books, with the female of the couple being Dorothy, and the city at the end of the subway line being Oz, a place where all wishes are granted.

Probably the best story of the collection is the last one, "The Dark Ride", which gives the collection its title. It takes the true story of the assassination of President McKinley at the Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo by anarchist Leon Czolgosz and give it a genre twist by introducing a "Dark Ride" to the moon, where Leon meets and falls in with some rebels there who want to kill the lunar leader. Leon falls in with the group after he sees what the lunar natives are doing to human slaves. The similarities between Czolgosz wanting to assassinate McKinley and the members of the rebellion on the moon is deliberate, of course, but the real question is whether the experience Czolgosz had on the moon was real, or just a figment of a deranged imagination. "The Dark Ride" is a terrifically powerful story that, as I said, is probably the best tale in the collection.

These may be the best of the stories in the book, but by no means are any of the stories weak. The stories are excellent genre fiction, with the fantastic elements doing a slow burn before they come to the forefront. Those same genre elements don't knock the reader over the head, but instead slowly insinuate themselves in the reader's consciousness until they become a natural part of the tale that Kessel is trying to tell and cause the reader to ask how they got in there when they clearly weren't there when the story started.

I may not have known much about John Kessel before I read this collection, but I do know a little more now, and it's clear that the thing to do is go out and find more John Kessel fiction to read. I'm sure I won't be disappointed. [-jak]

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**Merlin and Mathematics** (letters of comment by Kevin R and Jim Susky):

In response to [Evelyn's review of BY FORCE ALONE](#) in the 06/10/22 issue of the MT VOID, and [Keith F. Lynch's comments](#) in the 06/17/22 issue, Kevin R writes:

Evelyn wrote:

"Merlin mutters pi. Pi is an irrational number--only such numbers hold power in an irrational place--and it is transcendental, which seems appropriate. And it is infinite, just like the Weald." (Well, no it's not infinite--its decimal expression is infinitely long.)

He also goes on about the square root of two being irrational, which doesn't strike me as something the Merlin of this story would be that informed about. [-ecl]

Keith F. Lynch noted:

But there was no concept of decimal expression in those days. Nor did anyone know that pi was irrational until the 18th century, or transcendental until the 19th. But at least the Greeks of the time already knew that the square root of two was irrational. [-kfl]

And Kevin responds:

If Merlin lived his life backward, he'd know stuff discovered in Arthur's future. [-kr]

Evelyn notes:

Merlin living backwards was invented by T. H. White in THE ONCE AND FUTURE KING, so stories based on earlier Arthur legends do not have this excuse. [-ecl]

Jim Susky writes:

Pi is indeed "irrational"--Merlin's muttering reminds me of a very short "story":

i and pi were arguing.

Frustrated, i shouted:

"You're IRRATIONAL!"

pi retorted:

"Get REAL!"

[-js]

Evelyn notes:

Someone gave us a T-shirt with this dialogue on it. [-ecl]

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**Juneteenth and LINCOLN** (letters of comment by Gary McGath and Jim Susky):

In response to [Mark and Evelyn's comments on Juneteenth and the film LINCOLN](#) in the 06/17/22 issue of the MT VOID, Gary McGath writes:

It's surprising, at least to me, that Delaware was one of the "border states" that had slavery until the ratification of the 13th but didn't secede. I normally think of it as a northern state.

The Delaware Constitution of 1776 prohibited the importation of slaves but didn't, in spite of what some sources claim, outlaw slavery. It was replaced by the 1792 Constitution, which didn't have that prohibition.

Jim Susky writes:

Mark and Evelyn's remembrance of Juneteenth, the Emancipation Proclamation, the 13th Amendment and its ratification (and LINCOLN) was "provocative"--not because of its content, but because of the implications aroused by that ratification.

The film looks like it's really good--I might go find a copy--and turn on the subtitles. [-js]

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

I've decided this year to concentrate on novellas and Long Form Dramatic Presentation rather than do all the short fiction. So here are the novellas. (For what it's worth, I think there is some amazing work being done these days in the novella format.)

ACROSS THE GREEN GRASS FIELDS by Seanan McGuire (Tordotcom, ISBN 978-1-250-21359-4) is a stand-alone story in McGuire's "Wayward Children" series. Ten-year-old Regan tells her best friend a secret, except Regan didn't realize it should be a secret, and Regan also didn't realize that he best friend was no friend. When she flees the disastrous scene, she goes through a doorway to another world of centaurs and unicorns and evil queens, where she is the only human, and supposedly let in to save that world. It seems aimed more at a YA audience, though Lord knows it would get heavy pushback from the book-banners.

ELDER RACE by Adrian Tchaikovsky (Tordotcom, ISBN 978-1-259-76872-8) was "on order" for months at my local library, but luckily the library in the next town over got a copy, allowing me to finally finish this column, and I'm glad I could include it. It takes a while for the reader to figure out what is going on, so I will just say that it involves planetary colonization and the long-term effects thereof, as well as a quite unusual alien encounter with Lovecraftian overtones.. For a novella, it has a lot of science fiction ideas going on all at once.

FIREHEART TIGER by Aliette de Bodard (Tordotcom, ISBN 978-1-250-26051-2) is set in a fantasy version of pre-colonial Vietnam. That is, the names are all Vietnamese (complete with the correct typography), but the geopolitical units, the characters, and the supernatural elements are not historical. One has to recognize this as de Bodard's answer to the thousands of fantasy stories set in fantasy versions of medieval Europe, sometimes with the geography changed, and sometimes not. There is also a gender aspect which is both reasonable, and problematic. All the characters are women. On the one hand, it's probably a response to the many fantasies that are almost entirely populated by men. On the other, having a royal marriage of two women makes one wonder how procreation happens--are there no men at all? Definitely thought-provoking.

THE PAST IS RED by Catherynne M. Valente (Tordotcom, ISBN 978-1-250-30113-0) was actually pretty good for most of it, if a bit unlikely. Tetley Abednego lives on the Great Pacific Garbage Patch, a.k.a. Garbagetown, which is divided into regions such as Electric City, Pill Hill, Cardboard Flats, and Clotheschester. People get their names from things on the patch. I was willing to accept all this, and even that there supposedly was no dry land left, even though in actual fact if all the ice melted, the sea level would rise only 215 feet. (See <https://www.goodshomedesign.com/maps-of-what-the-earth-would-look-like-if-all-ice-melted/> for what Earth would look like.) But when Tetley finds a radio and has a real-time conversation with a girl on Mars (i.e., with no time lag), I gave up on accurate science. (Valente's novelette "The Future Is Blue" forms the first part of this novella.)

A PSALM FOR THE WILD-BUILT by Becky Chambers (Tordotcom, ISBN 978-1-250-23621-0) is set on a not-Earth (at least based on the description of the geography) that has gone through the Awakening (when robots became self-aware and separated themselves from humans) and the Transition (when civilization apparently scaled itself \*way\* back to fit better ecologically into the world). Dex is a monk who is trying to find their purpose. Along the way, they meet Mosschap, a robot trying to understand humans. There is more than just the usual human-robot failure to understand each other (though certainly there is that), including a long discussion of what anyone's or anything's "purpose". Recommended.

A SPINDLE SPLINTERED by Alix E. Harrow (Tordotcom, ISBN 978-1-250-76535-2) is a re-imagining of the story of Snow White in all its iterations. Not surprisingly, this twenty-first century take does not see the story as a "happy-ever-after" story, but one of female lack of agency, male dominance, and sexual assault. Though at times the "multiple worlds" explanation seems a bit shaky, it's still a different way of looking at the story.

Ranking: A PSALM FOR THE WILD-BUILT, A SPINDLE SPLINTERED, ELDER RACE, FIREHEART TIGER, ACROSS THE GREEN GRASS FIELDS, No Award, THE PAST IS RED

[-ec]

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Quote of the Week:

If we would have new knowledge, we must get a whole world  
of new questions.

--Susanne K. Langer

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