

# MT VOID 12/25/20 -- Vol. 39, No. 26, Whole Number 2151



Mt. Holz Science Fiction Society  
12/25/20 -- Vol. 39, No. 26, Whole Number 2151

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

Both the Old Bridge and Middletown groups have (temporarily, we hope) switched to Zoom meetings. For Middletown meetings, participants need to watch the film on their own ahead of time as well as reading the book.

January 7, 2021 (MTPL), 7:30PM: 1984 (1984) & novel  
by George Orwell  
[no film link yet; the disc is available from Netflix]  
<https://www.hoopladigital.com/title/12248757>  
<https://www.hoopladigital.com/title/12097121>  
January 28, 2021 (OBPL), 7:00PM: I, ROBOT by Isaac Asimov  
February 4, 2021 (MTPL), 7:30PM: THE PRESTIGE (2006) & novel  
by Christopher Priest  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MHijGNSQ6TI>  
rental: <https://www.amazon.com/gp/video/detail/B003QS67F0/>  
<https://tinyurl.com/Priest-The-Prestige-1995>

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

The political thriller seems in large part to have been created in the early Sixties and had its heyday at that time, but remains with us. This January it is represented on TCM by THE MANCHURIAN CANDIDATE. This is part of the "package" of what I consider to be the two best, each with a great script and a great cast, and each directed by John Frankenheimer.

THE MANCHURIAN CANDIDATE (1962) features a deliciously convoluted and clever plot. Pulled from circulation for many years, its re-release was considered a major cinematic event. Bennett Marco (Frank Sinatra) recently returned from the Korean War is having odd and violent nightmares concerning his war buddies and particularly Raymond Shaw (Laurence Harvey), winner of the Congressional Medal of Honor. While he knows Shaw was hated by everyone, Marco finds he has a strong mental block against saying anything negative about Shaw. George Axelrod adapted Richard Condon's novel. Janet Leigh, Angela Lansbury, and Henry Silva co-star.

[THE MANCHURIAN CANDIDATE, January 29, 8:00 PM]

If you are looking for its "partner", you will have to find it on your own; TCM does not have it scheduled at this time. For SEVEN DAYS IN MAY Rod Serling adapted the novel by Fletcher Knebel and Charles Bailey. There is something fishy going on behind closed doors at the military's Joint Chiefs of Staff. An odd pool on the Preakness, a lie here, a rumor of an unfamiliar military base there. Something is going on and the Director of the Joint Chiefs, Jiggs Casey (Kirk Douglas), wants to know more. His superior, a charismatic James Mattoon Scott (Burt Lancaster) seems to be at the core of the mystery. Fredric March, Ava Gardner, Martin Balsam, Edmond O'Brien, George Macready, and John Houseman co-star.

[-mrl]

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**WORLD WITHOUT END, ATTACK OF THE 50 FOOT WOMAN, TIME's 100 Best Fantasy Books, GALILEO AND THE SCIENCE DENIERS, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Convicts and Television, and THE MEN WHO UNITED THE STATES** (letter of comment by Taras Wolansky):

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

Some comments on recent--well, recentish--issues of MT VOID:

#2147: The review of WORLD WITHOUT END reminded me of Philip Jose Farmer's joyfully risqué novel, FLESH (1960), in which the belated astronauts discover a world dominated by a fertility cult: the capital now has two domes (and the less said about Washington Monument, the better).

#2145: The 50-Foot Woman makes another memorable appearance, voiced by Reese Witherspoon in the 2009 animated hit, MONSTERS VS. ALIENS, a love letter to several classic cinematic monsters. Reduced to normal size by an invading alien overlord, she chooses to become giant again to help defeat the invasion; introducing a poignant subtext the kids didn't get, as she gives up any chance of a normal life.

#2144: Darrell Schweitzer and I discussed TIME's 100 best fantasies during Virtual Capclave. We were both rather dismissive- -no Apuleius? Nothing from the Middle Ages? No E. R. Eddison?-- and suspected its "presentist" bias had to do with identity politics. Darrell said Neil Gaiman had given the editors an erudite list of suggestions, including Hope Mirriès' classic LUD- IN-THE-MIST, but they had ignored it.

#2143: The review of GALILEO AND THE SCIENCE DENIERS reminded me of a comment I made to James Morrow at the last "real" Capclave. How odd it is, I said, that we are constantly reminded of Galileo being put under house arrest 400 years ago; yet we never hear about Darwinists persecuted to death in the Soviet Union, less than 80 years ago. The Soviet government (rightly!) considered natural selection incompatible with Marxism.

Thus, I was gratified when the latest series of COSMOS devoted a one-hour episode to biologist Nikolai Vavilov, who achieved quite a lot before he died in a Soviet prison. Can't help but wonder if James Morrow saw the program and, if he did, remembered our conversation.

#2141: Evelyn remarks on "the Jews" in Conan Doyle's original Sherlock Holmes stories. In at least one of Anthony Trollope's novels, an improvident character goes to "the Jews" to borrow money; but when we meet the "Jew", he is named McPherson or MacDonald. Just as "Bach" became a synonym for "musician" in parts of 18th century Germany, in 19th century England Jew became a synonym for moneylender.

#2140: Forcing convicts to read, instead of watching cable TV, sounds like a good idea. They would come out of prison better readers than when they came in, and thus more employable.

A few years back, Editrix Extraordinaire Sheila Williams was the speaker at a North Jersey SF group. She told us prisoners used to be avid readers of porn Westerns, a genre I had not known existed.

The review of Simon Winchester's THE MEN WHO UNITED THE STATES moved me to look up what I had posted on Amazon. I concluded that where in his previous books he had made dull topics interesting, here he made an interesting topic dull. Possibly as a Brit he did not realize how familiar and old hat some of his subjects are to every American schoolchild.

Evidently mistaking National Public Radio to be the American equivalent of the BBC, Winchester ranks it as one of the things "uniting the States". In reality the growth of television had rendered radio a backwater long before NPR was founded, even if its distinctly left-liberal slant had not been off-putting to a mass audience.

The book is at its best when it tells the story of that Magnificent Man in His Flying Machine, Calbraith Perry Rodgers, who was first to fly (mostly crash) his way from New York to California in 49 days in 1911. And then died during a routine demonstration just days later. He deserves to be remembered.

#2139: I don't think I agree with Mark's criticism of Conan Doyle's "The Speckled Band".

In extremis, people will say the strangest things. When I broke my foot while walking to the PATH station one morning, many years ago, to my own astonishment I blurted out, "GO-O-O-OD'S DEATH!"

People of a certain age will remember Glenda Jackson as ELIZABETH R. This was one of Queen Liz's favorite oaths; but why it surfaced in my mind at that particular moment I cannot explain.

Also, the murder victim in Conan Doyle's story may not have understood what killed her, or even that she was being killed, just that what she thought a speckled band of cloth had moved in a horrifically unnatural way.

Many thanks for many great issues! [-tw]

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

Many years ago I reviewed *THE PROFESSOR AND THE MADMAN* by Simon Winchester (Harper Perennial, ISBN 978-0-060-83978-9), about the creation of the Oxford English Dictionary and its greatest volunteer, but also about the history of dictionaries, the American Civil War, and a variety of other digressions. The professor is James Murray, the editor of the project. The madman is Dr. W. C. Minor, who contributed thousands of quotations for the project--while confined in Broadmoor Asylum for having committed a murder while insane. Having just seen the movie I will reprint that review, as well as commenting on the film.

There are a few unexpected lessons to be learned. While Murray started the project, he estimated it would take two years to produce the first volume; it took twenty. All his other estimates were equally off. But the fact is, if anyone had realized how long the project would take, they never would have undertaken it.

And Murray also helped, merely by thinking about the process. The editor had volunteers reading from a list of books, sending in quotations for whatever words they thought worthwhile. Copying the quotations in a standard format took a long time, and often words were skipped that would have been useful. Murray took a two-step approach. He \*indexed\* each book in a booklet, jotting down all the words that might be of use, along with the page number, and did this in such a way that it was in alphabetical order. When he had a few of these, he wrote Murray, explaining his method, and asking what words Murray could use quotations for right away. Then he needed merely to look them up and copy those quotations. This meant he was not wasting his time copying quotations for words that would not be worked on for years, while Murray struggled with other words than he could help out with.

There are a couple of more things I want to mention. First, this was an early example of distributed processing, with people all over the world doing the same task with different books, and then a team bringing together the results. Also, the decision to make the Dictionary descriptive rather than prescriptive was crucial. In general, English-language dictionaries are descriptive, while French-language dictionaries are prescriptive.

I recommended this book for anyone who is interested in either the English language, or managing large projects.

The film is a fairly accurate recounting of the book, though it gets some details wrong. (Murray was never confused about Minor position at Broadmoor, for example.) The plot is somewhat obscured by being related in thick accents, making it hard to follow, and the dark lighting seems to put most scenes into shade. But viewers with an interest in things literary should definitely catch this one. Released 03/27/20; available on Netflix streaming and Amazon Prime. Rating: high +2 (-4 to +4) [-ecl]

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Quote of the Week:

I'd never been in play long enough for the flowers  
to die in the dressing room.

--Mercedes McCambridge

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