



Table of Contents

[Middletown \(NJ\) Public Library Science Fiction Discussion Group Picks for Turner Classic Movies for June](#) (comments by Evelyn C. Leeper)  
[Twilight Zone: "Steel"](#) (link)  
[Extra-Terrestrial Life--Not So Fast](#) (comments by Evelyn C. Leeper)  
[PHYSICS OF THE IMPOSSIBLE](#) by [Michio Kaku \(2008\)](#) (book review by Dale Skran)  
[Live Toad](#) (letters of comment by Fred Lerner, Jay Morris, and Gary McGath)  
[A CLOSED AND COMMON ORBIT](#) (letter of comment by Hal Heydt)  
[THE MAN WHO LAUGHS](#) (letter of comment by Gary McGath)  
[AURORA, Willy Ley, WHEN THE MOON HITS YOUR EYE, Color-Blind Casting...](#)  
[The Court of Tartary...](#), [Ancient Rome in Movies](#), [THE RETURN...](#)  
[and Diego Rivera](#) (letter of comment by Taras Wolansky)  
[This Week's Reading](#) (POIROT AND ME) (book comments by Evelyn C. Leeper)  
[Quote of the Week](#)

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An index with links to the issues of the MT VOID since 1986 is at [http://leepers.us/mtvoid/back\\_issues.htm](http://leepers.us/mtvoid/back_issues.htm).

Middletown (NJ) Public Library Science Fiction Discussion Group:

June 5, 2025 METROPOLIS (1927) & novel by Thea Von Harbou (1925)  
<https://www.hoopladigital.com/title/11607476>  
<https://gutenberg.org/ebooks/73727>  
<https://gutenberg.net.au/ebooks06/0601891h.html>

Picks for Turner Classic Movies for June (comments by Evelyn C. Leeper):

Okay, I can't pick A FACE IN THE CROWD \*again\*. So instead I'll recommend a film with some equally chilling and topical moments, CABARET, which sets a love triangle against the back-drop of the decadence of the Weimar Republic cabaret scene and the rise of Nazism.

[CABARET, Monday, June 30, 10:15 AM]

There is also BRIGHT LEAF, of which Mark wrote in the 07/30/99 issue of the MT VOID (in an article about tobacco). "BRIGHT LEAF [is] the stirring story of how a real he-man, played by Gary Cooper, builds a tobacco empire." And in the 02/11/00 issue he wrote, "I am going back and re-watching a bunch of 1950s science fiction films. And in just about every cheap one the characters stop and discuss things over a cigarette. Do you think that is coincidence? Go back and see the movie BRIGHT LEAF with Gary Cooper about the brave American heroes who founded our country's tobacco industry. In films people who fight disease are played by Edward G. Robinson types. People who sell disease to the public for good money are played by the Gary Coopers."

[BRIGHT LEAF, Thursday, June 19, 7:30 AM]

There is also a whole afternoon of monster SF on June 18 (I have no idea why June 18): 12:00 PM Them! (1954)  
1:45 PM The Hypnotic Eye (1960)  
4:45 PM The Green Slime (1969)  
6:30 PM Godzilla vs. Hedorah (1971)

Other films of interest:

MONDAY, June 2  
1:00 PM The Ghost Ship (1943)  
TUESDAY, June 3  
12:00 AM Cries and Whispers (1972)  
4:00 AM The Seventh Victim (1943)  
10:45 AM The Boy with Green Hair (1948)  
THURSDAY, June 5  
8:00 AM The Hunchback of Notre Dame (1939)  
6:15 PM Forbidden Planet (1956)  
FRIDAY, June 6  
10:00 AM Kismet (1955)  
12:00 PM Brigadoon (1954)  
8:00 PM A Face in the Crowd (1957)  
SATURDAY, June 7  
8:00 PM Carnival of Souls (1962)  
9:30 PM Rosemary's Baby (1968)  
SUNDAY, June 8  
8:00 PM Apollo 13 (1995)  
10:30 PM For All Mankind (1989)  
WEDNESDAY, June 11  
11:30 AM Africa Screams (1949)  
1:00 PM Tarzan and His Mate (1934)

MONDAY, June 16  
8:00 PM The Last Wave (1977)  
WEDNESDAY, June 18  
4:30 AM So Long at the Fair (1950)  
6:00 AM A Bucket of Blood (1959)  
12:00 PM Them! (1954)  
1:45 PM The Hypnotic Eye (1960)  
4:45 PM The Green Slime (1969)  
6:30 PM Godzilla vs. Hedorah (1971)

THURSDAY, June 19  
7:30 AM Bright Leaf (1950)  
THURSDAY, June 26  
11:30 PM Sisters (1972)

FRIDAY, June 27  
3:30 AM Dead Men Walk (1943)  
SATURDAY, June 28  
6:00 AM Black Orpheus (1959)  
6:00 PM Field of Dreams (1989)

SUNDAY, June 29  
8:30 AM Plan 9 from Outer Space (1959)

MONDAY, June 30  
10:15 AM Cabaret (1972)

[-ccl]

Twilight Zone: "Steel" (link):

"Two humanoid robots traded punches while fans watched on, in a competition held in Hangzhou, China, on Sunday. The fight was part of the China Media Group World Robot Competition and featured robots developed by Unitree Robotics. The event included both fighting demonstrations and matches, marking a world-first combat sports event featuring humanoid robots."

Thirty-seven second video at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/videos/cgeg2x3lwepo>

Extra-Terrestrial Life--Not So Fast (comments by Evelyn C. Leeper):

In response to [Greg Frederick's comments on extra-terrestrial life](#) in the 04/25/25 issue of the MT VOID (where he provides the link to an article claiming the "strongest evidence so far" of extra-terrestrial life), I am saddened to report: New Studies Dismiss Signs of Life on Distant Planet

In April, astronomers said they had detected a possible signature of life on the exoplanet K2-18b. Now, three independent analyses discount the evidence.

In April, a team of astronomers announced that they might--just might--have found signs of life on a planet over 120 light-years from Earth. The mere possibility of extraterrestrial life was enough to attract attention worldwide. It also attracted intense scrutiny from other astronomers.

Over the past month, researchers have independently analyzed the data, which suggested that the planet, called K2-18b, has a molecule in its atmosphere that could have been created by living organisms. Three different analyses have all reached the same conclusion: They see no compelling evidence for life on K2-18b.

...

<https://www.nytimes.com/2025/05/23/science/astronomy-extraterrestrial-life-k218b.html?smid=nytcore-android-share>

[-ccl]

PHYSICS OF THE IMPOSSIBLE by Michio Kaku (2008) (book review by Dale Skran):

My nomination for the best futurist book of all time has always been and remains Arthur C. Clarke's PROFILES OF THE FUTURE. Clarke's technique was to avoid short-term extrapolation, and go all way to the impossible, and then work backward. The result is still worth reading decades later. Most other futurist books often have little of value, offering bland consensus predictions that never get better than 50/50, and are often wildly misleading.

I have not been a big fan of Kaku, and found his big futurist book VISIONS lacking in many ways--but that is a topic for a different review! However, PHYSICS OF THE IMPOSSIBLE is a remarkable achievement. Kaku takes the approach of defining three kinds of impossibility:

1. Class I: "...technologies that are impossible today but that do not violate the known laws of physics"
2. Class II: "...technologies that sit at the very edge of our understanding of the physical world. If they are possible at all, they might be realized on a scale of millennia to millions of years in the future."
3. Class III: "...technologies that violate the known laws of physics." This means that for them come about, we would need to discover new laws of physics.

This path leads to a very interesting examination of many things traditionally thought to be impossible. The resulting structure groups the technologies thus:

1. Class I: force fields, invisibility, phasers and death stars, teleportation, telepathy, psychokinesis, robots, extraterrestrial life, starships, and anti-matters/anti-universes.
2. Class II: faster than light travel, time travel, and parallel universes
3. Class III: perpetual motion machines, and precognition.

The Class I impossibilities vary quite a bit in terms of achievability. The book was written in 2008, and there can be little doubt that in the intervening years we have seen enormous progress in robotics and AI, mental control of physical devices, knowledge of exo-planets that might support life, and practical invisibility using meta-materials. Progress toward force fields and starships, not so much, but Kaku is not suggesting all these things are just around the corner, but that over a time span of decades to centuries it is reasonable to suppose they will be achieved in practice.

The Class II impossibilities fall more into the far-out side of things--theoretically possible but with really difficult to achieve engineering requirements. These are the kind of things we might try after millennia of continuous technological progress and the establishment of an interstellar civilization, and that would be the optimistic assessment.

The Class III impossibilities are those things that really are impossible according to physics as we understand it today. I suspect, however, that we know so little about dark matter and dark energy that it is not impossible that we are just one breakthrough away from something that in practice might seem like perpetual motion.

An interesting final chapter delves into the future of impossibility, with general conclusion that the frontiers of knowledge will always generate "new impossibilities" which over time will be come not just possible, but commonly known facts.

Overall, Kaku's book is a worthy successor to PHYSICS OF THE IMPOSSIBLE, and is well worth your time to read although now a bit dated. My biggest complaint is that the book roused within me a desire to read a book titled "Biology of the Impossible" focusing on other kinds of impossibility--immortality, immunity to all disease, regeneration of the spinal cord, and so on. Much as "Star Trek" posited a future of very advanced physical technology combined with biological technology little advanced from the modern day, this seems a failing of science written large. We are far closer to achieving our physical dreams than our biological ones, although it remains possible that the looming advent of true artificial general intelligence will deal a new deck of cards--or doom us all. [-dls]

Live Toad (letters of comment by Fred Lerner, Jay Morris, and Gary McGath):

In response to [the quote](#) at the end of the 05/23/25 issue of the MT VOID, Fred Lerner writes:

"Eat a live toad the first thing in the morning and nothing worse will happen to you the rest of the day."

I suppose that nothing worse will happen to the toad, either. [-fl]

Jay Morris writes:

To you or the toad. --Niven's restatement  
Well, most of the time, anyway. ...-programmer's caveat to Niven's restatement

Quote Investigator believes that the statement evolved from a quotation written by a famously witty French writer named Nicolas Chamfort who socialized with the aristocracy but supported the French Revolution. Chamfortâ€™s collected works were published in French in the 1790s, and a memorably caustic remark about high-society was included. The words were actually credited to a person named Mr. de Lassay who functioned as a mouthpiece for Chamfort.

<https://quoteinvestigator.com/2013/04/03/eat-frog/>

[-jm]

To which Gary McGath adds:

Rostand's Cyrano makes a reference to it, apparently expecting the audience to get the allusion. [-gmg]

A CLOSED AND COMMON ORBIT (letter of comment by Hal Heydt):

In response to [Paul S. R. Chisholm's review of A CLOSED AND COMMON ORBIT](#) in the 05/23/25 issue of the MT VOID, Hal Heydt writes:

I ran into a problem with this book that nearly caused me to utter Dorothy's "Eight Deadly Words" [\*]. It's not the characters, or the plot or anything like that.

My educational background is in Electrical Engineering and Computer Science (EECS major at UC Berkeley), and thus a rather thorough grounding in and awareness of physical sciences. As such, I know about things like tidal locking.

Chambers planetary system is a gas giant with a tidally locked moon large enough to retain an atmosphere. This is fine, no problems. However, she also asserts that it is tidally locked to the system sun. While tis is possible (there are two locations where the habitable moon could be), it's not possible in the case, as she has it, that the gas giant is a large object in the sky of the side facing it. The orbital mechanics simply won't work, and that nearly made me give up on the book.

Some time after the book came out, Chambers was GoH at FogCon and I had a chance to ask her about this. Her answer was that she wanted it that way. To me, that renders to book a work of fantasy, for all the SF trappings. [-hh]

["(\*) "I don't care what happens to these people." A phrase coined by Dorothy Heydt in 1991 on Usenet.]

THE MAN WHO LAUGHS (letter of comment by Gary McGath):

In response to [Evelyn's comments on THE MAN WHO LAUGHS](#) in the 05/23/25 issue of the MT VOID, Gary McGath writes:

THE MAN WHO LAUGHS may also have served as an indirect inspiration, through a book illustration that was quite different from the movie Gwynplaine, or Alfred E. Newman.

For me and many others, Veidt's most memorable role was the sleepwalking murderer in THE CABINET OF DR. CALIGARI.

[Evelyn writes,] "Oh, and the ending is not Hugo's ending."

You can tell because the protagonists survive. [-gmg]

Evelyn notes:

Well, in LES MISERABLES, Marius and Cosette survive, and Valjean lives to a normal lifespan rather than dying early. (Apparently Thenardier survives as well.) Obviously, if you're telling a multi-generational story, by the time you tell all the events of the younger generation(s), the older protagonists will have died of old age. [-ccl]

AURORA, Willy Ley, WHEN THE MOON HITS YOUR EYE, Color-Blind Casting, "The Court of Tartary", Ancient Rome in Movies, THE RETURN, and Diego Rivera (letter of comment by Taras Wolansky):

In response to everyone's comments on everything in various issues of the MT VOID, Taras Wolansky writes:

Thanks for carrying on.

Kim Stanley Robinson's AURORA creeps me out because it reminded me of an exchange between Winston Smith and the torturer, O'Brien, in George Orwell's NINETEEN EIGHTY FOUR:

"But the whole universe is outside us. Look at the stars! Some of them are a million light-years away. They are out of our reach for ever."

"What are the stars?" said O'Brien indifferently. "They are bits of fire a few kilometres away. We could reach them if we wanted to. Or we could blot them out. The earth is the centre of the universe. The sun and the stars go round it."

There is no escape from Earth. Don't even dream of an escape. Though I suppose in Robinson's future, instead of O'Brien's "boot stamping on a human face -- for ever", it's a bedroom slipper!

Willy Ley: It would be fitting if his rediscovered ashes made it to the Moon. After all, in Heinlein's "Future History", that's where "Leyport" is. Best of all if it's carried by Elon Musk's "Starship", which closely resembles a Chesley Bonestell Moon rocket.

Review of WHEN THE MOON HITS YOUR EYE by John Scalzi: "How does a pastor ... deal with the effect it has on the children in Sunday school? Or, for that matter, how does he deal with a distraught parishioner who is losing his faith?" Actually, religious people would have the least problem answering that question in a way entirely understandable and believable to both husband and wife: Poseidon was mad at him.

Penelope's qualms about violence also seemed very anachronistic to me. Women in past ages, I think, were more the "Gospel writ in fiery rows of steel" variety.

Artist Diego Rivera's bad personal behavior reminds me of Pablo Picasso's bad personal behavior, which reminds me of Harvey Weinstein's bad personal behavior. It's as if they thought their public virtues canceled out their private vices.

Macho revolutionaries like Rivera in the 20th century were hardly feminists. The wisecrack in the antiwar movement when I was at Columbia in the Seventies was that "the position of women in the movement is horizontal." With traditional morality removed from the equation, I suppose, it was hard for a woman to rebuff a man's advances without it being interpreted as a personal insult. [-tw]

Evelyn responds:

Actually, the original quote was "the only position of women in the movement is prone" (sometimes cited as "the only position for women in SNCC is prone"). To paraphrase Inigo Montoya, I do not think "prone" means what he thought it meant. The change to "horizontal" (if that is an accurate remembrance) would seem to be to correct that. [-ccl]

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

POIROT AND ME by David Suchet (Headline, ISBN 978-0-755-36422-0) is a memoir of Suchet's many years portraying Hercule Poirot, first for LWT and then ITV, a total of seventy times, covering every Poirot story (except for a few parts of THE LABOURS OF HERCULES and the minor "The Lemesurier Inheritance"(\*)). The only comparable feat was Clive Morrison's portrayal of Sherlock Holmes in all sixty canonical stories, as well as sixteen additional stories, but this was on radio, which is considerably easier.

(\*) The name "Lemesurier" is used in the episode "The Labours of Hercules", possibly to be able to say that all the Poirot stories were included, because "The Labours of Hercules" was the next-to-the-last story/book broadcast. "Curtain", of course, was the last.)

I have often talked about tropes Christie re-uses (MT VOID issues 07/14/06, 12/14/12, and 02/01/13), but Suchet mentioned one that somehow I hadn't noticed: time-shifting. A classic example, used by many mystery writers, is to have the detective (or police) take the time given on a broken watch as being the time of death when in actuality the killer changed the time to when they had an alibi and "then" broke the watch. (In MURDER ON THE LINKS, Christie turns this on its head very elegantly.) There is also having a someone mis-report the time they discovered the body or saw the killer (to give the killer an alibi). This can be either a confederate intentionally, or an innocent person who is misled.

Anyway, add that to the mis-identification of the body, the false target, the serendipitous remark, and the tendency (in the "Miss Marple" series) for women to marry disreputable or unsuitable men. [-ccl]

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Quote of the Week:

I like work: it fascinates me. I can sit and look at it for hours.  
--Jerome K. Jerome

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