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Political Films on Turner Classic Movies (comments by Evelyn C. Leeper):

When we went to check the October films, we noticed that the political film festival from October actually started in September--in fact, tonight. So here's the September schedule, with guest presenters (the times are all "TV Guide times"; that is, early morning films are listed with the previous day's):

Friday, September 6 - Night One
8:00 PM - The Battle of Algiers (1966) with Michael Tomasky
10:15 PM - All the King's Men (1949) with Steven Spielberg
12:15 AM - The Great Dictator (1940) with John Turturro
2:30 AM - Fail Safe (1964)
4:30 AM - Ivan the Terrible, Part II: The Boyars' Plot (1958)
6:00 AM - Salt of the Earth (1954)

Friday, September 13 - Night Two
8:00 PM - Reds (1981) with Bill Maher
11:30 PM - The Parallax View (1974) with Kyle Smith
1:30 AM - Germany Year Zero (1948) with Alexander Payne
3:00 AM - Gabriel Over the White House (1933)
4:30 AM - Battleship Potemkin (1925)
6:00 AM - The Fog of War (2003)

Friday, September 20 - Night Three
8:00 PM - Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb (1964) with Spike Lee
9:45 PM - Mr. Smith Goes to Washington (1939) with Stacey Abrams
12:15 AM - Hearts and Minds (1974) with Phil Mattingly
2:15 AM - The Lives of Others (2006)
4:45 AM - Born in Flames (1983)
6:15 AM - Bicycle Thieves (1948)

Friday, September 27 - Night Four
8:00 PM - Three Days of the Condor (1975) with Maureen Dowd
10:15 PM - I Am Not Your Negro (2016) with Sara Sidner
12:00 AM - The Passion of Joan of Arc (1928) with Melissa Etheridge
1:30 AM - The Last Hurrah (1958)
3:45 AM - Night of the Living Dead (1968)
5:30 AM - The Tin Drum (1979)

Of these, TCM says:

"Politics affects every part of our daily lives. Its reach is general and wide, dictating everything from the cleanliness of our water, land and air to more personal and interpersonal affairs. Though movies can be enjoyed simply as entertainment, film as a medium is an inherently political tool, a product of a creator's unified ideology and assumption about the world we live in. Every Friday night for 9 weeks beginning September 6, TCM presents a selection of films featured on the New Republic's list of the 100 Most Significant Political Films of All Time. TCM host Ben Mankiewicz will share an open dialogue with politicians, journalists, film critics, writers, musicians, scholars and filmmakers across party lines to explore the historical context and message of each film and their impact on society.

"Making Change traces more than 100 years of cinema, beginning with the highly controversial THE BIRTH OF A NATION (1915) and featuring a more contemporary dialogue on politics in the James Baldwin documentary I AM NOT YOUR NEGRO (2016). The films featured throughout the 9 weeks run the gamut of documentary (HARLAN COUNTY U.S.A., HEARTS AND MINDS), fiction (MR. SMITH GOES TO WASHINGTON, ALL THE KING'S MEN), comedy (THE GREAT DICTATOR, BEING THERE), drama (LINCOLN, I AM A FUGITIVE FROM A CHAIN GANG) and thriller (THE PARALLAX VIEW, THE BATTLE OF ALGIERS).

"The films in our showcase do not represent the best of their kind nor a definitive 'right or wrong' political message. The messages of each film also may not reflect the views of TCM or its guests. Our special programming is merely a representation of how movies can spark discussion, inspire change, influence thought and alter the course of history. The goal is not to divide. On the contrary, we seek to foster an environment for open dialogue that demonstrates how we the people can engage in softening political divisions thus recognizing the humanity in one another." [-tcm]

NEW ADVENTURES IN SPACE OPERA edited by Jonathan Strahan (copyright 2024, Tachyon Publications, \$18.95, trade paperback, 315pp, ISBN 978-1-61696-420-7) (book review by Joe Karpierz):

Anyone who has been reading my reviews for any length of time knows that I love space opera. This sub-genre of science fiction is what caused me to fall in love with the field in the first place, all those years ago. Space Opera has been around for a long time, and the term was at one point a derogatory one. That has changed, and Space Opera itself has evolved over time. I'm not going to go through all of that here. You can get a good summary of the evolution of Space Opera from editor Jonathan Strahan's Introduction. Strahan knows a thing or two about Space Opera, having edited THE NEW SPACE OPERA and THE NEW SPACE OPERA 2 with Gardner Dozois in 2007 and 2009, respectively. This volume is a reprint anthology, and indeed I've read of few of these stories in the past. I liked them then, and I still like them now.

My favorite story is "Belladonna Nights", by Alastair Reynolds. The story takes place millions of years in the future in the universe of Reynolds' novel HOUSE OF SUNS. In the story, lines of shatterlings make circuits of the galaxy over a span of several hundred thousand years, then gather at a reunion location (agree to by all the lines of shatterlings) to insert their memories into a shared repository of knowledge. Shaula has returned for one of the reunions, looking forward to seeing her friend Campion who seems to be avoiding her. Campion starts leaving Belladonna flowers at her doorstep, which turns out to be a reference of a protocol to abandon one reunion site and selecting another. This is a powerful story of loss and grief, and the ending leaves the reader as sad and Shaula is.

"Metal Like Blood in the Dark", T. Kingfisher's Hugo Award winning short story, is the story of two man-made machines who grow and learn, much like children do. They are eventually captured by a being who is out for revenge against other members of his race for something that it perceives as a slight. Whether it really is a slight is not the point here. The story really is about self-discovery, personal growth, treachery, and loyalty. Its Hugo Award was well-deserved.

Two stories that I read previously to the publication of this book and I found terrific were Karin Tidbeck's "The Last Voyage of Skidbladnir" and Sam J. Miller's "Planetstuck". Tidbeck gives us a tale of ship that isn't a ship. Rather, it's a ship that is powered, for lack of a better term, by a living creature inside a building. The creature continues to grow, and must find a new building to occupy before it can fly again. It's a really touching story about an alien and the people that come to care for it. "Planetstuck" is the story of Aran who travels the galaxy trading sex for information (and sometimes just as often looking for a quick tumble with random men) which he sells to interested parties. Travel across the galaxy is via portals that are open between systems, and there is an idiological war brewing between people who travel via the portals--offworlders--and those who think it's better to be isolated on a single planet. It's a terrific story that in many ways mirrors what's going on in our country today.

Another couple of terrific stories take place in universes that we as readers are likely familiar with. Becky Chambers gives us "A Good Heretic", a story set within The Wayfarers universe. The story follows Mas (a character from THE LONG WAY TO A SMALL ANGRY PLANET) as she comes of age and goes out among the stars to start life as a Navigator. But something is wrong with her Pairing, and due to her upbringing feels as if she is a heretic and out of place where she is. It's a tale of uncertainty and identity, and whether it's okay to be who you really are. Another is Yoon Ha Lee's "Extracurricular Activities", which takes place in the Hexarchate universe, that of NINEFOX GAMBIT and its sequels. It's a relatively straightforward adventure story involving one of the main characters in the novels, Shuos Jedao. It's a story that proves that a narrative does not have to be complex to be a good, fun story.

Speaking of fun and silly stories, Charlie Jane Anders gives us "A Temporary Embarrassment in Spacetime". It's a story that's hard to describe, what with all the zaniness going on, but any story where Hall and Oates are invoked as gods (as in "thank Hall and Oates"), and there's a spaceship named the Spicy Meatball, is at the very least very fun.

I could go on describing each story, but this would end up being a long review. In my opinion, there isn't a bad story here, and in fact I feel that most of them are quite good. And why not, given the array of authors who have stories in the book. Arkady Martine, Tobias Buckell, Lavie Tidhar, Aliette de Bodard, Ann Leckie, Seth Dickinson, and Anya Johanna DeNiro are all either household names in the field or should be.

Jonathan Strahan is a well-known and major editor in the field, and it is clear by looking at the sources of these stories that he has done his research when making selections and that he knows where to go look. There are stories here from "tor.com", "Uncanny", "Strange Horizons", "Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine", and "Clarkesworld", among other places. The Chambers story was originally published in an anthology called INFINITE STARS: DARK FRONTIERS: THE DEFINITIVE ANOTHOLOGY OF SPACE OPERA, an anthology that has been sitting on my TBR for years that I haven't gotten around to yet. And yes, I agree that to call itself a definitive anthology of Space Opera is a bit much. I mean, I have several anthologies of Space Opera here on my shelves, many of which could lay claim to that description. The point is, however, that Strahan is a fan of Space Opera and knows the field well. He searched far and wide to find some of the best Space Opera stories that have been published since THE NEW SPACE OPERA 2. This volume is a great addition to the library of Space Opera. [-jak]

Shazam (comments by Evelyn C. Leeper):

I can report that Shazam may recognize pop music fairly well, but it is terrible for opera or 1950s science fiction film themes. [-ecj]

AI Running Government (letter of comment by Richie Bielak):

In response to the comments on AI running Helena's city government in the 08/30/24 issue of the MT VOID, Richie Bielak writes:

It would be an interesting exercise to see how an AI would set up the national budget if it's programming stated that the budget must be balanced with no more than 10% going to the military and nothing to young people, say under 65, who are physically capable of working but choose not to. [-rb]

Tarzan (letters of comment by Keith F. Lynch, Gary McGath, Mike Van Pelt, and Joyce Beeson):

In response to the comments on Tarzan in the 08/30/24 issue of the MT VOID, Keith F. Lynch writes:

[Mike Van Pelt wrote] "... [Tarzan] had the superpower of being able to learn a new language in about two pages." [-mvp]

Naturally, since he was of royal blood, hence genetically superior.

Burroughs was a man of his time. [-kfl]

Gary McGath responded:

Which is especially amusing when you think of all the genetic problems people of royal blood actually had. [-gmg]

And Mike Van Pelt added:

Heh... Thinking of Sir Roger trying to explain the concept of royal blood to the aliens in THE HIGH CRUSADE. They thought the humans were doing genetic engineering to improve themselves.

Yeah, not so much. [-mvp]

Joyce Beeson adds:

And his time, it was a-changing. I don't know how many stories were told of nobly marrying a girl of common birth, only to discover that she was a mislaid princess. [-jb]

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

A MYSTERY OF MYSTERIES: THE DEATH AND LIFE OF EDGAR ALLAN POE by Mark Dawidziak (St. Martin's, ISBN 978-1-250-79249-5) is, well, about the death and life of Edgar Allan Poe. There are at least two dozen explanations for Poe's death after he was mysteriously found deathly ill on a Baltimore street, wearing someone else's clothes. He died shortly after, (possibly) calling someone named Reynolds that no one could identify. His illness has been claimed to be alcoholism (the leading contender for a long time due to attacks by his enemies), hypoglycemia, rabies, diabetes, tuberculosis, encephalitis, heart disease, a drug overdose, influenza, epilepsy, apoplexy, an enzyme deficiency, liver disease, meningial inflammation, a brain tumor, ... One explanation for the clothing is the practice at the time of political candidates' henchmen taking men from polling place to polling place giving false names and often provided with changes of clothes to help disguise them so that they could cast multiple votes.

Dawidziak covers all this, as well as Poe's life, which often makes some explanations more or less likely. For example, Poe as a young man was not the rather sickly one of his later photograph, but quite athletic and robust.

The problem (to me, anyway) is that Dawidziak decided to alternate the chapters: the even-numbered ones are his death, and the odd-numbered ones are his life (although the chapters are not explicitly numbered). I found this very disorienting: one minute I'm reading about his marriage and the next he is courting rich widows.

Whether Dawidziak's conclusion is the right one I cannot say. And in fact, Dawidziak himself says that we can never really know what Poe died of, or what happened in general in the last few weeks of Poe's life. Nevertheless, I would recommend this book as a way to see Poe as the serious writer that he was, and that Dawidziak emphasizes. (Poe's essay "The Philosophy of Composition"--available in the Library of America volume of Poe's ESSAYS AND REVIEWS--describes in detail how he wrote "The Raven".)

[-ecj]

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Quote of the Week:

The wise man doesn't give the right answers,
he poses the right questions.

--Claude Levi-Strauss

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