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Middletown (NJ) Public Library Science Fiction Discussion Group:

September 4: THX 1138 (1971) & novel by Ben Bova (1971)

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

This September, TCM gives you the choice of "two" BEN-HUR movies--the 1925 and the 1959. Personally, I prefer the 1925; I think the chariot race is far more exciting in that version.

[BEN-HUR (1959), Friday, September 19, 2:30 AM]  
[BEN-HUR: A TALE OF THE CHRIST (1925), Monday, September 29, 6:00 AM]

I can also recommend a very strange Luis Buñuel film (or is that redundant?): THE EXTERMINATING ANGEL. For those who want to "stick it to the rich", this is a perfect film, with a group of wealthy aristocrats mysteriously trapped at after a fancy dinner party. Feel free to imagine Musk, Zuckerberg, Bezos, or some other modern super-rich person in this group.  
[THE EXTERMINATING ANGEL, Wednesday, September 24, 5:00 AM]

WORLD ON A WIRE (1973) was an early look at the idea that we may be living in a computer simulation, and is based on SIMULACRON-13, a 1964 novel by Daniel F. Galouye. The novel was remade as THE THIRTEENTH FLOOR in 1999. The novel was one of the earliest fictional looks at living in a virtual reality, though Laurence Manning's 1935 THE MAN WHO AWOKE, Stanley G. Weinbaum's 1935 "Pygmalion's Spectacles", and Stanislaw Lem's 1961 "Further Reminiscences of Ijon Tichy" pre-date it.  
[WORLD ON A WIRE (1973), Monday, September 29, 2:15 AM]

TCM also has a Tarzan festival:

MONDAY, September 1  
8:00 PM Tarzan the Ape Man (1932)  
10:00 PM Tarzan and His Mate (1934)  
TUESDAY, September 2  
12:00 AM Tarzan Escapes (1936)  
1:45 AM Tarzan Finds a Son! (1939)  
3:30 AM Tarzan's Secret Treasure (1941)  
5:00 AM Tarzan's New York Adventure (1942)  
6:15 AM Tarzan Triumphs (1943)

And a science fiction chunk as well:

THURSDAY, September 11  
7:30 AM Queen of Outer Space (1958)  
9:00 AM From the Earth to the Moon (1958)  
10:45 AM Forbidden Planet (1956)  
12:30 PM World Without End (1955)  
2:00 PM Satellite in the Sky (1956)  
3:30 PM 2001: A Space Odyssey (1968)  
6:00 PM 2010 (1984)

Other films of interest:

THURSDAY, September 4  
6:15 PM My Favorite Year (1982)

FRIDAY, September 5  
2:00 AM The Beast with Five Fingers (1946)  
3:45 AM The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms (1953)

SATURDAY, September 6  
12:15 AM The World, the Flesh and the Devil (1959)  
11:30 AM A Boy and His Dog (1946)

SUNDAY, September 7  
1:45 AM Wait Until Dark (1967)  
8:00 PM Bride of Frankenstein (1935)

MONDAY, September 8  
11:30 PM The Mouse That Roared (1959)

TUESDAY, September 9  
3:15 AM Tom Thumb (1958)  
7:15 AM Cat People (1942)  
8:45 AM The Leopard Man (1943)

WEDNESDAY, September 10  
3:45 AM Network (1976)  
6:00 PM Seven Days in May (1964)

SATURDAY, September 13  
1:45 PM Westworld (1973)

MONDAY, September 15  
8:00 PM Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb (1964)

TUESDAY, September 16  
2:45 AM A Carol for Another Christmas (1964)  
12:15 PM Designing Woman (1957)

THURSDAY, September 18  
3:15 AM The Man Who Would Be King (1975)

SATURDAY, September 20  
4:00 PM Fail Safe (1964)

SUNDAY, September 21  
1:45 AM 7 Faces of Dr. Lao (1964)

THURSDAY, September 25  
6:00 PM The Power (1968)  
10:00 PM The Devil and Daniel Webster (1941)

FRIDAY, September 26  
3:15 AM Mystery of the Wax Museum (1933)  
4:45 AM El Vampiro Negro (1953) [Argentine adaptation of "M"]

MONDAY, September 29  
12:30 PM The Phantom of the Opera (1925)  
2:15 PM The Lost World (1925)  
11:45 PM Being There (1979)

[--ml]

[An alternate version has "But a biplane put him in his grave". Which you prefer depends on whether you think "the airplanes got him" or "twas Beauty killed the Beast." --ccl]

The Ballad of King Kong (lyrics by Mark R. Leeper, sung to the tune of "The Night They Drove Old Dixie Down" by Robbie Robertson of The Band):

[I found these filk lyrics as I was going through folders of Mark's writings. This was hand-written and undated. --ccl]

The Ballad of King Kong

Carl Denham's my name;  
I brought Kong to NYC.  
Chained him up with chrome steel;  
Never thought he could pull free.  
Well, he was sixty tons, strong and brave,  
But a bleached blonde put him in his grave. (\*)

The night they brought old King Kong down  
And all the planes were flyin'.

The night they brought old King Kong down  
And all the widows were cryin'.

They cried, "Wah, wah, wah"

[--ml]

[An alternate version has "But a biplane put him in his grave". Which you prefer depends on whether you think "the airplanes got him" or "twas Beauty killed the Beast." --ccl]

SPACE SHIPS! RAY GUNS! MARTIAN OCTOPODS! INTERVIEWS WITH SCIENCE FICTION LEGENDS, compiled and edited by Richard Wolinsky (copyright 2025, Tachyon Publications, \$17.95, 246pp, trade paperback, ISBN 978-1-61696-442-9) (book review by Joe Karpierz):

The older I get, the more I want to look back. I don't know if that's because there's more to look back on (by definition), or because I have some sort of sense of nostalgia, or because I'm curious about various historical events. Or, as in the case of the history of science fiction and its fandom, I just want to learn about something. As I wrote in my review of Alec Nevala-Lee's ASTOUNDING JOHN W. CAMPBELL, ISAAC ASIMOV, ROBERT A. HEINLEIN, L. RON HUBBARD, AND THE GOLDEN AGE OF SCIENCE FICTION (that title is such a mouthful that I almost forgot what I was going to write next), "I'd also been developing a curiosity about the history of the field...". I wrote that statement back in November of 2018, and to this day I continue to be interested in the history of the field. It's gotten to the point where I'm more likely to pick up some historical non-fiction work about the field than I am a novel, collection, or anthology. Thus, when I spotted SPACE SHIPS! RAY GUNS! MARTIAN OCTOPODS! INTERVIEWS WITH SCIENCE FICTION LEGENDS, I requested and was fortunate enough to receive an eARC of the book.

In February of 1977 at KPFA-FM in Berkeley, a new radio program called "Probabilities (initially "Probabilities Unlimited") debuted. On that program, for something in the neighborhood of 20 years (give or take), Richard Wolinsky, Richard A. Lupoff, and Lawrence Davidson interviewed dozens of science fiction writers, editors, and publishers, covering the time period from the pulp magazines all the way up to 1990s. The subjects of those interviews were wide ranging, from fellow authors and editors, to the magazines, the publishing business, and much more. The list of interviewees contains names that I was familiar with, such as Jack Williamson, Anne McCaffrey, Frank M. Robinson, Forrest J. Ackerman, A. E. Van Vogt, and Isaac Asimov to names that I'd never heard of before, such as Charles D. Hornig, Harry Bates, Doc Lowndes, Ray Palmer, and more.

The subjects were wide and varied. The interviews covered the pulps magazines, the digest magazines, the slick magazines, and more. The Cast of the Book (as the interviewees were called) talked about Hugo Gernsback and AMAZING STORIES, John W. Campbell and ASTOUNDING (later ANALOG, which is still being published today), ARGOSY, FANTASY (Campbell's fantasy magazine) and many more; THE MAGAZINE OF FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION (still being published today), WORLDS BEYOND, IF: THE WORLDS OF SCIENCE FICTION, OTHER WORLDS, UNIVERSE, ROCKET STORIES, and so many more. Paperback publishers are also talked about here: Bantam, Ballantine, Ace Books, Avon Books, and more.

There was dirt--oh boy, there was dirt--about Gernsback, Campbell, and a host of other editors and publishers who wouldn't pay their authors. There is much made these days about Hugo Gernsback being cheap and not paying, but there were so many others it seems like it's impossible to count them all. One story was recounted of an editor who was chased through the streets of New York City in an effort to get the checks he owed to the authors he published.

And just in case you thought Probabilities missed a few big names, I'll just throw out Theodore Sturgeon, Ray Bradbury, Robert Bloch, C. L. Moore, Murray Leinster, Stanley G. Weinbaum, Philip K. Dick, and Algis Budrys, as well as Ursula K. LeGuin and Marion Zimmer Bradley as science fiction luminaries whose works graced the airwaves back in the day and the pages of this book.

It is fairly difficult to recount the stories that were related in the interviews. The published excerpts were not long, maybe a paragraph or two each, although if I think about it hard enough I suspect they could get some fairly substantial stuff from one member of the Cast or another if you put all their meanderings together into one section. However, it is worth noting that the wealth of material here paints a vivid picture of the growth of the science fiction field, going all the way back to the 1920s. The reading is fascinating to someone who is curious about the days of the pulps, or the Golden Age of Astounding Magazine, or even the more recent period (I will note that one writer that I would have liked to have heard from is Michael Moorcock, but he apparently was not interviewed on the program).

This book left a lasting impression on me. As someone who is curious about the history of science fiction, this book is one I didn't know I needed to read, and a terrific companion piece to Nevala-Lee's ASTOUNDING.

Finally, there was evidence of the history of the field present at the recent Seattle Worldcon. Robert Silverberg, who was also mentioned in the book, was out and about at the convention and appeared on many panels, where he did talk about some of the same people and events discussed in the book. Richard Wolinsky, the editor of the book, was briefly at the convention. As I wandered around the dealers room, I came upon a table selling some of those very same pulps that were talked about in the book. At the freeth table, I was able to snag a couple of issues of Analog from 1968. I snarfed those up in a heartbeat. While they were from the end of Campbell's reign at the magazine, they contained editorials written by Campbell, something I'd never read. Yes, the history of the field was alive and well at Worldcon.

The modern science fiction field is where it is because of the giants that came before it. We should all remember that. And SPACE SHIPS! RAY GUNS! MARTIAN OCTOPODS! INTERVIEWS WITH SCIENCE FICTION LEGENDS is there to help us with that remembering. [--jak]

First Person Singular in History Books (comments by Evelyn C. Leeper):

Last week I wrote that Judith Herrin had to make a lot of assumptions and guesses about women in the Byzantine Empire and said, "Perhaps this is why one sees the first person singular pronoun at times; traditionally historians have eschewed it for a more distant stance."

When I was reading WRITING HISTORY: A GUIDE FOR STUDENTS by William Kelleher Storey (Oxford, ISBN 978-0-19-983004-6) and he writes, "Avoid the First Person Singular. Generally speaking, historical writers do not write in the first person singular. ... Usually historians employ the first person singular only when they have personally experienced a phenomenon they are describing."

[--ccl]

Nothing Is Easy (letters of comments by Andre Kuzniarek, Hal Heydt, and Steve Coltrin):

In response to [Evelyn's comments on how nothing is easy](#), in the 08/22/25 issue of the MT VOID, Andre Kuzniarek writes:

Your Kafkaesque essay "Nothing is Easy" should be submitted to the Bram Stoker or Shirley Jackson Awards as one of the most terrifying and anxiety-producing things I've recently read--mainly because we can all relate to it, ugh! [--ak]

Evelyn responds:

Alas, I think those submissions have to be fiction. Oh, and the printer that was supposed to arrive Saturday? It arrived Tuesday. Best Buy didn't even turn it over to UPS until Friday. [--ccl]

Hal Heydt writes:

Being fair, I avoid WiFi wherever possible, which is nearly everything at home. That said...

"Most" printers, even going back 10+ years have a web access page internally. You can bring that up to do everything from status checks to config changes, so long as the printer is connected to your LAN. You just use the IP address of the printer to get into it (e.g. for one of mine... <http://192.168.1.224> and --FYI--your router will be the IP block ending in 1, which for me is 192.168.1.1). This works even if there is no display on the printer to get to this stuff, such as a nearly twenty-year-old HP2015, with its later added Ethernet interface card. [--hb]

And Steve Coltrin notes:

[Evelyn wrote,] "In March I changed the bank account Optimum withdraws from. [--ccl]

[saga clipped]

Ironic naming. I take it. [--spe]

And Evelyn adds:

The final chapter (I hope) is that my new printer arrived, not on the Saturday Best Buy promised, or the Tuesday UPS said, but on Monday. I installed it on Wednesday, which took well over an hour and involved two or three resets before I could get it on the WiFi network. But I did print something from it, and also scanned a couple of things, so it seems to be working. [--ccl]

Brother Guy Consolmagno, Hugo Awards, Atheism, Pteranodons, Romance in Movies, Lady Florence Baker, Translation Problems, Self-Sustaining Off-World Colonies, CONCLAVE, RUMOURS, MICKEY 17, At Simulations of Dead People (letter of comment by Taras Wolansky):

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

Don't know if you saw the August 4th NEW YORKER. It contains a long article on our Brother Guy Consolmagno, and a review of two books about the Renaissance, including one by Ada Palmer, scholar extraordinaire.

Hugo Awards: I was completely out of the loop this year. Turns out Seattle had added an extra letter to my email address; which I discovered only as I was doing my Montreal 2027 upgrade. As a result, I never saw anything from the Seattle committee--and ended up getting a lot of helpful exercise, walking to the convention center from my distant hotel!

Atheism: Though an infidel myself, I have a sister who might be described as a Church Lady. In her mind, it occurs to me, she has ample proof of the existence of God: accounts of dozens or hundreds of miracles.

"Pteranodons could barely lift their own weight, let alone pick up a hundred-pound woman." According to the "Jurassic World" movies, they can--if the woman is sufficiently disliked by the audience!

I was amused by the animatedversions of "Carl Denham" against the need for a romantic interest in adventure movies. Thus we see Deborah Kerr added to the 1950 adaptation of KING SOLOMON'S MINES.

The oddity here is that there was an astonishing real-life African adventure that involved a female explorer, but was never adapted into a movie: the expedition in search of the sources of the Nile by Sir Samuel Baker and his fiancée, Florence, later Lady Baker. At the time it was hushed up that they met when he--hough? stole? kidnapped? rescued?--her from an Ottoman slave market.

It is said that she later took her position in the English aristocracy in all respects but one: she was never received by Queen Victoria. Not because she had been a slave, but because, on their trip up the Nile, she and her future husband had behaved in a fashion that was not up to, er, Victorian standards.

"Russian has no single word for "blue", but instead has two words, one for "light blue" ("goluboy") and one for "dark blue" ("siniy")." Worse than that, if Russian follows Ukrainian in this, then "he is siniy"; "she is sinia"; and "it is sinia@".

"[If] Forth Worth, Texas (a city of a million people) were somehow transported to Mars in a protective bubble, everyone would starve fairly quickly, assuming they didn't run out of oxygen first." Great line! Of course, Fort Worth isn't designed to be self-sustaining.

On the other hand, if James Blish is any guide, New York City can easily be readied to travel to other solar systems.

But seriously: the real question is, how soon can we establish a self-sustaining human population somewhere off the Earth. We may be just one clumsy North Korean biowarfare lab tech away from human extinction right now.

CONCLAVE (2024) was fun. By the time the film reaches its twist ending, I got the impression that the Cardinals were so exhausted by the process of selecting a Pope that they said, "Oh, the heck with it. We've got to pick somebody!" Ironically, the real-life Conclave produced a result scarcely less surprising than the movie's.

I saw RUMOURS (2024) in the theater in October (about the same time I saw CONCLAVE). Given what had become generally known by that time last year, I wondered if the filmmakers were kicking themselves for not making their US President even more addle than they did.

There are several odd things about the film, MICKEY 17.

One thing is that the various "clones" of Mickey have different personalities. All that should differentiate them is a few weeks or months of additional experiences, memories. I thought the whole point of the movie was supposed to be the same personality reborn into a succession of bodies.

The political satire is also a little off. On the one hand, we can see Mark Ruffalo's politician in the film as a faint parody of a current political figure, but an old-timer like me was reminded more by a figure from my youth (who was forced to resign from office). Furthermore, in the film he comes with a domineering blonde wife who "was invented for the film and was not in the book", and who closely resembles the consort of an entirely different, recent political figure. Perhaps the filmmakers decided to blur the politics for box-office reasons. A further note of ambiguity is introduced when, in the end, the odious pol really does deliver a new world to his followers.

Another peculiarity of the film is that the whole climax of the movie, with a kidnapped alien baby bug causing a massive assault by the adult bugs, and the adults having to be brought back to the adults to end the attack, is all a direct steal from Hayao Miyazaki's 1984 classic anime, NAUSICAA OF THE VALLEY OF THE WINDS (a.k.a. WARRIORS OF THE WIND). Miyazaki's bugs are almost identical in appearance, though much larger, because it doesn't blow your SFX budget to steal from their way. They're not.

A "technology that creates AI simulations of dead people": it suddenly occurred to me that people should be quite familiar with this idea, as they've been seeing it in "Superman" movies for more than forty years.

[--tw]

Evelyn responds:

I know of the article about Brother Guy, but cannot read it because I don't have a New Yorker subscription.

Pteranadons also lift someone in KONG SKULL ISLAND, although it takes two of them.

I don't count conjugations or declensions as separate words. Spanish has two words meaning "to be", while we have one. The fact that each of these three words has a variety of conjugations does not mean we have dozens of words, or that Spanish has twice as many. Similarly, in gendered languages, only the root is counted. So in Spanish the word for "red" is either "rojo" or "roja", depending, but it still counts as only one word.

So is the human race in more danger from "one clumsy North Korean biowarfare lab tech" or climate change?

Well, I thought that the climax in MICKEY 17 was a steal from GORGO, which predated NAUSICAA OF THE VALLEY OF THE WINDS. (And the film itself is reminiscent of MOON.) [--ccl]

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

"The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde" by Robert Louis Stevenson was the topic of the most recent episode (after a three-month hiatus) of "Classical Stuff You Should Know" and it inspired me to re-read it.

Reading it does not solve one of the mysteries in it: how to pronounce "Jekyll". The most common pronunciation is "JEH-kuhl", but in the 1934 film, it is pronounced "JEE-kuhl". (The same problem occurs in Sherlock Holmes with Irene Adler; is it "eye-REEN" or "eye-REEN-ee"?)

The inspiration for this work is well-known. In the 18th century there lived in Scotland's home city Edinburgh Deacon Brodie. By day, Brodie was an upstanding citizen, a deacon of the guild of cabinetmakers, and very well-respected. By night, he was a burglar and a thief, defeating many of the same locks and security devices he installed by day. Early on, Stevenson wrote a play about Deacon Brodie that was not successful, so he was clearly aware of and influenced by the story.

When we first heard the story of Deacon Brodie, while on a walking tour of Edinburgh, Mark immediately recognized that it must have been Stevenson's inspiration. And the story also explained a speech in THE PRIME OF MISS JEAN BRODIE: "But I am a descendant, do not forget, of Willie Brodie. He was a man of substance-- a cabinetmaker and a designer of gibbets... a member of the town council of Edinburgh... the keeper of two mistresses who bore him five children between them. Blood tells. He played much dice and fought cocks. Eventually, he was a wanted man for having robbed the excise office. Not that he needed the money. He was a burglar for the sake of the danger. He died cheerfully on a gibbet of his own devising in 1788. That is the stuff I am made of." And indeed, legend has it that after Brodie was discovered, arrested, and convicted, he was hanged on a gallows that he designed. (As with many legends, there is no truth to the story about the gallows, other than that he was hanged, and he apparently needed the money to cover his gambling debts.)

There is a similarity of the Jekyll and Hyde story with THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY by Oscar Wilde, in that in THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY there is also a division of self, but on the level of conscience and sensual appetites.

And the Classical Guys drew yet another parallel, perhaps the most pertinent now. So many people divide themselves today between their persona in the real world, and their persona on-line. On-line people give in to their worst impulses, knowing (or at least thinking) that their real life persona's reputation will never be tainted by their on-line misdeeds. Because what Jekyll wants is to split into good and evil, not to purge the evil, but to be able to "be" evil without feeling any guilt or having any damage to his reputation. (And this is true of Dorian Gray; he wants a way to shed all his guilt onto his portrait, and feel none himself.)

And another parallel between the real world and on-line is that in both cases, eventually the evil (on-line) becomes dominant. (Somehow just as Jekyll will never have brought forth an angel, the on-line persona is never the better side of the original.)

Oh, and the Dr. Fell that Utterson invoked in his instinctive dislike of Hyde is the one referenced in the well-known poem, possibly by Thomas Brown:

I do not love thee, Dr. Fell.  
The reason why I cannot tell,  
But this I know, I know full well,  
I do not love thee, Dr. Fell.

The legend behind "Fit" can be found at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/fit\\_do\\_not\\_like\\_thee%2C\\_Doctor\\_Fell](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/fit_do_not_like_thee%2C_Doctor_Fell). (Apparently there are a lot of legends touched by Stevenson, and considerably less fact.) [--ccl]

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Quote of the Week:

You don't expect me to know what to say about a play  
when I don't know who the author is, do you?  
--George Bernard Shaw