

Mt. Holz Science Fiction Society
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There are three stories. The first, about the Grand Vizier, supposedly inspired Douglas Fairbanks to make *THE THIEF OF BAGDAD*. This story takes up half the running time of the film.

The second is about Ivan the Terrible, with Conrad Veidt as Ivan. Veidt is very striking, especially his eyes. This talent also appears in *THE MAN WHO LAUGHS* (1926).

The Springheel Jack story is very short, and may have been included to pad out the running time.

I had a choice of two versions to watch. One was the Sinister Cinema VHS copy we had: an N-th generation transfer, with the text often unreadable, but in black and white with musical accompaniment. The other was apparently restored, but colorized, and silent, and had ads. I chose the second.

Released theatrically 13 November 1924 (Germany), 18 March 1926 (United States).

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0014586/reference>

What others are saying: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/waxworks_1926

MÜNCHHAUSEN (1943): The 1943 German film *MÜNCHHAUSEN* (two 'H's) is also known in English-speaking countries as *THE ADVENTURES OF BARON MUNCHAUSEN* (one 'H').

I have just a few random comments. *Münchhausen* seems to think Copernicus had something to do with saying the earth was round. Not surprisingly, given the politics in Germany at the time, Russian peasants shown as somewhat barbaric. It includes characters such as Cagliostro and Catherine the Great. And it is very much in the style of the lavish MGM musicals of the time, though with various authentic exotic settings such as Venice.

Released theatrically 03 March 1943 (Germany).

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0036191/reference>

What others are saying: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/baron_muenchhausen

[-ecl]

The TCM Wine Club (comments by Evelyn C. Leeper):

I watch films on Turner Classic Movies (TCM) and I keep seeing ads for the TCM wine club. I have never understood their claim about pairing particular wines with particular films, and still don't, but I have figured out what the scenes of their hosts drinking and talking reminds me of--the midnight drunk panels at science fiction conventions.

It is not a complimentary comparison. [-ecl]

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

SPQR: A HISTORY OF ANCIENT ROME by Mary Beard (Liveright, ISBN 978-1-63149-222-8) is not so much a history of Rome as a history of the history of Rome. Much of what Beard writes is analysis of the commonly accepted history of Rome. Some of it is fairly standard--how likely is the story of Romulus and Remus, and what might the underlying truth behind the story be. Other speculation is more along the lines of recognizing that much of the history was written by people who had axes to grind. For example, Beard suggests that Caligula did not send his troops to gather seashells and rather had them dismantling a camp, the same word in Latin ("musculi") meaning either "seashells" or "military huts".

And some things Beard relates have renewed relevance. A lot of what she says, Actually, but one observation struck me: "Julius Caesar ... was the first living person whose head was featured on a coin minted in Rome. Up to that point, Roman change had paraded only images of long-dead heroes, and the innovation was a blatant sign of Caesar's personal power." Sound familiar?

Beard covers Rome from its founding to 212 C.E. Why 212? It wasn't the year of a transition between dynasties, there was no civil war or invasion, and no one declared Christianity the official religion or banned entirely. It was the year when the emperor Caracalla made all free men in the Roman Empire citizens. (Again, Beard is skeptical of the usual reason assumed by historians: that Caracalla wanted to gather more taxes.) This emancipation, according to Beard, removed the final special position of Rome (and its close environs) in the Roman Empire. A man in a tent next to Hadrian's Wall in Britain was as much a citizen as one born in the shadow of Hadrian's Pantheon in Rome. To her, this was the end of the exceptionalism of Rome.

All this sets SQPR apart from the various other histories of Rome I have been reading, and so I can recommend this even if you have read other histories. [-ecl]

Evelyn C. Leeper
evelynchimelisleeper@gmail.com

Quote of the Week:

A burro is an ass. A burrow is a hole in the ground.
As a reporter, you are expected to know the difference.
--UPI Stylebook

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