



Mt. Holz Science Fiction Society
01/31/25 -- Vol. 43, No. 31, Whole Number 2365

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Middletown (NJ) Public Library Science Fiction Discussion Group:

(there will be no February meeting)
March 6, 2025: STAR WARS - A NEW HOPE (1977)
play: "William Shakespeare's Star Wars: Verily, A New Hope" (2013) by Ian Doescher
audio/text:libby:

Mark's Picks for Turner Classic Movies for February (comments by Mark R. Leeper and Evelyn C. Leeper):

Okay, we are into the "31 Days of Oscar", so you can't throw a dart at the schedule without hitting something worth watching. Okay, that's an exaggeration--some of the older films, or those whose nominations were in the more technical aspects, are more there as filler. But seriously, if there are any films you've heard of but haven't seen, now's the time.

(To keep to the "31 Days of Oscar" name, TCM is letting it run three days into March as well as all of February. They seemed to have lumped a lot of the science fiction and fantasy into the last day.)

We suppose one lesser-known film to recommend would be BABETTE'S FEAST (1987). This may well be the first film that seduces the viewer with its photography of food. (We're sure people will tell us of earlier ones.) It may not have led to LIKE WATER FOR CHOCOLATE (1992), THE AGE OF INNOCENCE (1993), EAT DRINK MAN WOMAN (1994), BIG NIGHT (1996), CHOCOLAT (2001), but it almost definitely influenced them.

The basic plot is that Babette, a refugee from Paris, arrives at a Danish village. She works for room and board as a cook and housekeeper for two religious sisters, and gradually improves their abstemious meals. And when she wins 10,000 francs on a lottery ticket, she offers to make the villagers a real French dinner.

At the time the release of BABETTE'S FEAST, New York City restaurants offered a dinner to go with viewing it, but it was about \$100 a plate (\$275 a plate in 2024 dollars). Maybe the thing to do if you're on a budget is to watch TAMPOPO (1985), which predated BABETTE'S FEAST by a couple of years, and then get a bowl of ramen, which is about \$15 for the most expensive ramen at Rai Rai Ramen in East Brunswick, and about twice that in New York.

But you can still watch BABETTE'S FEAST. [-mrl/ec]

[BABETTE'S FEAST (1987), Monday, February 17, 2:00 PM]

For those in the New York area, PBS (Channel Thirteen) is running several science fiction films:

[GALAXY QUEST (1999), Saturday, February 86, 9:00 PM] ["Sigourney Weaver: The Most Iconic Action Heroine", Saturday, February 6, 10:50 PM]

[SPACEBALLS (1987), Saturday, February 15, 9:00 PM] [""Mel Brooks: The Genius Entertainer"" , Saturday, February 13, 10:45 PM]

[WARGAMES (1983)], Saturday, February 13, 10:50 PM]

Other films of interest on TCM:

SATURDAY, February 1
9:45 AM The Great Dictator (1940)

MONDAY, February 3
4:00 PM Brigadoon (1954)

TUESDAY, February 4
8:00 PM Harvey (1950)

WEDNESDAY, February 5
2:45 AM Being There (1979)

FRIDAY, February 7
12:45 AM Ship of Fools (1965)
12:30 PM Cabin in the Sky (1943)

SUNDAY, February 9
2:45 PM Gigi (1958)

MONDAY, February 10
10:00 AM The Thief of Bagdad (1940)

TUESDAY, February 11
3:45 AM The Bad Seed (1956)

WEDNESDAY, February 12
10:15 AM Camelot (1967)

THURSDAY, February 13
4:15 AM Cries and Whispers (1972)
10:00 AM The Picture of Dorian Gray (1945)

SATURDAY, February 15
4:45 PM Around the World in 80 Days (1956)

SUNDAY, February 16
5:30 AM A Midsummer Night's Dream (1935)
4:00 PM Ben-Hur (1959)

TUESDAY, February 18
8:30 AM Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde (1932)

SUNDAY, February 23
10:30 PM The China Syndrome (1979)

MONDAY, February 24
12:45 AM Network (1976)

TUESDAY, February 25
7:30 AM Great Expectations (1946)

FRIDAY, February 28
9:00 AM The Wonderful World of the Brothers Grimm (1962)
11:30 AM What Ever Happened to Baby Jane? (1962)

MONDAY, March 3
8:00 AM Tom Thumb (1958)
9:45 AM 7 Faces of Dr. Lao (1964)
2:00 PM The Time Machine (1960)
3:45 PM Mighty Joe Young (1949)
5:30 PM 2001: A Space Odyssey (1968)

FRANKENSTEIN (pointer to article):

From The Guardian:

https://tinyurl.com/mtvoid-shelley-suicide

Frankenstein inspired by suicide of Mary Shelley's half-sister, book reveals

New collection of author's diary entries provides tragic insight

"Frankenstein's monster, as horror fans know, did not really spark into life with a bolt of lightning, but was born inside the mind of Mary Shelley during a dreary holiday on a mountainside above Geneva. The inspiration came as volcanic ash clouds unexpectedly blocked out the sun that summer of 1816 and she and her friends, including the infamous, 'bad boy' poets Lord Byron and Percy Bysshe Shelley, competed to tell scary stories.

"But a new collection of the young author's personal diary entries, out in March, provides strong evidence that, although the stay in the Alps set the grim mood of her novel, her imagination was ignited by something personal and much closer to home. ..."

Octavia Butler and Los Angeles (pointer to article):

From the New York Times:

https://tinyurl.com/mtvoid-octavia-butler

As California Burns, 'Octavia Tried to Tell Us' Has New Meaning

The phrase, which gained momentum in 2020, has resurfaced, in part because it can seem like Octavia Butler was more than a fiction writer.

"In the wake of the devastating fires in Los Angeles, many people are referencing the work of the science fiction writer Octavia Butler. Butler, who grew up in Pasadena, was the daughter of a housekeeper and a father who was a shoeshiner. She went on to become the first science fiction writer to win a MacArthur 'genius' award. Her book 'Parable of the Sower,' published in 1993, paints a picture of a California ravished by the effects of climate change, income inequality, political divisiveness and centers on a young woman struggling to find faith and the community to build a new future.

"The phrase 'Octavia tried to tell us,' which began to gain momentum in 2020 during the pandemic, has once again resurfaced, in part because Butler studied science and history so deeply. The accuracy with which she read the shifts in America can, at times, seem eerily prophetic. One entry in 'Parable of the Sower,' which is structured as a journal, dated on 'February 1, 2025' begins, 'We had a fire today.' It goes on to describe how the fear of fires plague Robledo, a fictional town that feels much like Altadena, a haven for the Black middle class for more than 50 years, where Butler lived in the late '90s. ..."

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

I finished THE GATHERING STORM by Sir Winston Churchill (Harper, ISBN 978-0-395-41055-4), which is the first volume of his six-volume history of World War II, called collectively THE SECOND WORLD WAR. I say "six-volume" but it also appeared in a twelve-volume set (each volume in the six-volume set is actually labeled internally as two "books"), a four-volume set (I assume with three "books" in each), and a one-volume abridgment. Given that the whole work is 1,600,000 words (not counting appendices), many may opt for the abridgment. (By comparison, Gibbon's HISTORY OF THE DECLINE AND FALL OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE is "only" about 1,162,000 words, and has no appendices.)

Several things need to be said about this work as caveats to the reader. While most people agree that Churchill could craft prose, there is more to history than that. It is not that he is grossly inaccurate, but first of all, the work concentrates on Britain's role in the war, with other countries' participation as an adjunct. While I haven't gotten far enough into the volumes to be sure, I suspect that means the Eastern Front and the Soviet Union's participation is not covered as fully as it should be, nor events in China. (I am not sure how the rest of the "Empire/Commonwealth", e.g., Australia, Singapore, and so on, will fare.)

The second caveat is that Churchill is basically making himself the center of attention, and this results in more focus on what he was personally involved in. This is understandable for an autobiography, but less so for what is presented as a history.

The third caveat is that when Churchill wrote this right after World War II, much information was still classified. For example, he could say nothing about code-breaking at Bletchley Park.

The result is that in spite of its size, this is not an exhaustive history of World War II. Then again, it's not clear that any one person, or even group of people, would write such a thing. Wikipedia merely says that "thousands" of books have been written about World War II, and I think that may be only in English.

And one reason that the work is so long is that Churchill included a huge number of already-composed sections: speeches, letters, reports, and so on. Some of these might have been better served by a summary, and in fact, if he seemed to have summarized the contents in introducing one, I often skipped over it, or at least only skimmed it.

It remains to be seen whether I still "stay the course." In many ways, the examination of the causes of the war, and the events leading up to it, are more interesting (to me, anyway) than long descriptions of troop movements. For now, I am taking a break from Churchill and reading some of the books I bought a few months ago at Second Time Books, as they are probably starting to feel neglected and that I have forgotten them. [-ec]

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Quote of the Week:

Every day you may make progress. Every step may be fruitful. Yet there will stretch out before you an ever-lengthening, ever-ascending, ever-improving path. You know you will never get to the end of the journey. But this, so far from discouraging, only adds to the joy and glory of the climb.
--Sir Winston Churchill

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