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> Mt. Holz Science Fiction Society 07/26/24 -- Vol. 43, No. 4, Whole Number 2338

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Middletown (NJ) Public Library Science Fiction Discussion Group:

August 1 (postponed from July) THE LITTLE SHOP OF HORRORS (1960) & two short stories: "The Flowering of the Strange Orchid" by H.G. Wells (1894) https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/12750 hoopla: https://tinyurl.com/WellsOrchid "The Reluctant Orchid" by Arthur C. Clarke: (1956) https://archive.org/details/talesfromwhiteha0000clar_g2a5/ September 5: THE HUNGER GAMES (2012) & novel by Susan Collins (Book 1) October 10 (not October 3): TBA November 7: Halloween Horror fest: THE METAMORPHOSIS & novella by Franz Kafka December 5: Xmas double feature TBA

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

PAT AND MIKE (1952) is one of several Spencer Tracy/Katherine Hepburn comedies, and one of two featured in this month's set of ten Katherine Hepburn films. In this sports film, Tracy starts out as a confirmed sexist who is promoting a gum teacher as the world's top athlete, but who ends up having his world view shaken. It is the same message you could see today, but with Tracy and Hepburn it is presented more politely. The main criticism is that it spends too much time with cameos of famous sports stars of the time. WOMAN OF THE

YEAR (1942) is the other Spencer Tracy/Katherine Hepburn film this month (and was the first of their nine films together), and is also a sports film, but neither are athletes; Hepburn is a political reporter and Tracy covers the sports pages. [-mrl/ecl]

[PAT AND MIKE, Sunday, August 18, 12:15AM] [WOMAN OF THE YEAR, Monday, August 19, 10:15 AM]

Other films of interest include: SUNDAY, August 11 8:15 AM Topper (1937) 10:00 AM Arsenic and Old Lace (1944) THURSDAY, August 15 8:00 AM From the Earth to the Moon (1958) MONDAY, August 19 9:30 PM Flesh and the Devil (1926) WEDNESDAY, August 21 6:00 AM The Swarm (1978) FRIDAY, August 23 4:00 AM The Nanny (1965) MONDAY, August 26 11:00 AM The Picture of Dorian Gray (1945) WEDNESDAY, August 28 6:00 AM Around the World in 80 Days (1956) THURSDAY, August 29 10:15 AM Spooks Run Wild (1941) 11:30 AM Ghosts on the Loose (1943) 8:00 PM Angels in Disguise (1949) 11:45 PM Ghost Chasers (1951) Bowery to Bagdad (1955) 2:15 AM

WITCH KING by Martha Wells (copyright 2023, Macmillan Audio, 13 hours and 9 minutes, narrated by Erik Mok, ASIN: B0BFG5HVR9) (audio book review by Joe Karpierz):

I came upon Martha Wells late. She had an establish career writing fantasy when she started her Murderbot series with ALL SYSTEMS RED. I've read all the Murderbot books, but as I've said lately in those reviews it's time for her to take a break from them. The original premise was terrific, but the stories were, in my mind, becoming stale. Everybody loves the Murderbot character, and wants to see more of them. I think that as the series has gone on we're not really seeing anything new, either with the stories or our favorite SecUnit. Again, this is my opinion; please don't send me angry emails.

So, Martha Wells did what I suggested, which was to write something else. Now, to be fair, she released a new Murderbot AND a new fantasy novel in the same year, but she did branch out. And while I was more interested in SYSTEM COLLAPSE, the latest Murderbot novel (and not really all that interested at this point), it was time to give her fantasy a try as 2023's WITCH KING is up for the Hugo this year for Best Novel.

Side note. It's been a very difficult reading year for me, and as a result, I've been mostly listening to audiobooks rather than reading print or e-books, and this is especially true for consuming several of the Hugo finalists as audiobooks. There was no way I was going to have time to consume all of them by the deadline if I were to read them traditionally. So I pulled up the audio book of WITCH KING and began to listen.

I knew I was in trouble when the first thing being read was a list of the Dramatic Personae. I'm not one to shy away from complex books, but if the first thing I have to know is every character in a book that I just happen to be consuming in audio format I know I'm in for a rough ride.

Yes, the book is complex. It takes place in two different timelines, both of which involve the main characters. In the past timeline, Kaiisteron (Kai, as we come to know him), is a demon, a race of creatures who have to ability to take over the bodies of folks who live in the upper worlds (this is an agreed upon thing with the residents of the upper world). His people were overrun by the invading Hierarchs and Kai was captured. The story in the past tells of how Kai escaped and started a rebellion against the Hierachs.

In the present timeline, Kai is the titular Witch King, and we first encounter him as he is escaping a watery trap with his companion, another witch named Zeide. Of course, they have a desire to find out what happened to them and why. They go in search of Zeide's wife, who is missing as well, who they believe will be able to help them find out who is behind their capture. It should be noted that in the present timeline, the Hierarchs have been defeated and there is a new group coming to power.

I should note that I personally believe that WITCH KING should not be consumed as an audio book. In a book as complex as this, where there is a lot of work the reader is expected to do to put everything together and keep up with what's going on, the reader needs to go back and forth within the text (well, at least I would) to review what has occurred in relation to what is happening right now. I don't mind doing that, but it's awfully difficult in an audio book.

On the positive side, like THE SAINT OF BRIGHT DOORS, this is a beautifully written and wonderfully complex story. The characters are rich with backstory and the world itself is beautifully laid out without so many world building details that the reader is bogged down in them (unless, of course, you like that kind of thing, then that is a different story).

I don't think it's fair of me to, given the circumstances, make any comments about the narrator. My belief is that if I'm struggling with the audio book for reasons that are totally unrelated to the narrator, it's not reasonable to try to review the narrator's performance as my opinion might be skewed toward the negative. Also, I suspect that I've learned a valuable lesson in that I probably shouldn't consume the Hugo finalists as audio books, since I'll end up including the audio performance (or, in this case, consider the appropriateness of audio) as part of my evaluation of the material. We'll see if I can change things up next year. [-jak]

THE HOUND OF THE BASKERVILLES (letter of comment by Paul Dormer):

In response to Evelyn's comments on THE HOUND OF THE BASKERVILLES in the 07/19/24 issue of the MT VOID, Paul Dormer writes:

There was also the 1978 version with Peter Cook and Dudley Moore as Holmes and Watson. I've not seen it but I gather it was really bad. [-pd]

Evelyn responds:

There was, and it was. My watching of the various versions was on hold for a long time as I had hit that one next, but didn't want to watch it. Eventually I decided I would just skip it, as I wasn't watching *every* version anyway. (It gets a 4.5 in the IMDb, and a 0% in Rotten Tomatoes.) [-ecl]

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

We "finished" watching "Epic Engineering Failures", which became available on Kanopy. I put "finished" in quotation marks, because we did not watch all of the lectures. The checkout period for the entire course is 21 days, and we didn't watch it every day. There seems to be a lot of repetition, and after "The Great Molasses Flood", we had only another day, so we did the three remaining ones of most interest: "The Leaning Tower of Pisa", "Chernobyl", and the final lecture, "Learning from Failure: Hurricane Katrina".

We could check it out again for the ones we skipped, but will wait until we've done others that we are interested in (or the end of the month). We get 15 points to check out a Teaching Company course (and 2 or 3 points for a movie). So come July 31, I'll see what points we have left for July and spend them all.

We also watching another Teaching Company course on Hoopla. (It's called "Wondrium" rather than either "Teaching Company" or "Great Courses", but it seems to be the same company.) This one is "A Historian Goes to the Movies: Ancient Rome". On Hoopla, each lecture counts as a check-out good for 3 days, and you get 8 check-outs a month, so it is easier to spread a course out. We have so far watched the introductory lecture as well as the ones on QUO VADIS, BEN-HUR, SPARTACUS, CLEOPATRA, and THE FALL OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE. I'm finding this really interesting, undoubtedly because I'm on an ancient Rome reading binge (as you may have noticed in my review column). Coming up next are I, CLAUDIUS and THE LIFE OF BRIAN.

(And co-incidentally, QUO VADIS is showing up on TCM in September, so I'll probably watch it then.)

Also on Hoopla is a documentary, PERIODICAL, about menstruation--definitely not a film that would play at your local multiplex. For the multiplex sort of film, there's always Netflix and Tubi, although THE WANDERING EARTH is also on Hoopla. I've been using Hoopla mostly for its ebooks and have a half-dozen on my list. (Books get a 21-day check-out; movies and TV get a 3-day.) Again, come July 31, I'll use my remaining July check-outs.

(Actually, we have twice the number of check-outs, since Mark has his own library card, and hence Kanopy and Hoopla accounts. But so far we haven't needed that many, and it's easier to stick with one login.)

[-ecl]

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Quote of the Week:

Infidel: In NY, one who does not believe in the Christian religion; in Constantinople, one who does. --Ambrose Bierce

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