



Table of Contents

- Middletown (NJ) Public Library Science Fiction Discussion Group
Mark's Picks for Turner Classic Movies for November
THE MERCY OF THE GODS by James S.A. Corey
THE LIFE OF BRIAN
This Week's Reading
Quote of the Week

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Middletown (NJ) Public Library Science Fiction Discussion Group:
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 November (comments by Mark R. Leeper and Evelyn C. Leeper):
TCM has several "festivals" in November worth recommending, plus the tail-end of their series of political films.

The political films have one more Friday night before the election ends:
FRIDAY, November 1
8:00 PM Being There (1979)
10:30 PM The Candidate (1972)
SATURDAY, November 2
12:30 AM Harlan County, U.S.A. (1976)
2:30 AM The Manchurian Candidate (1962)
4:45 AM Weekend (1967)

Before that, though, TCM has an entire day of feature films based on W. Somerset Maugham's works:
FRIDAY, November 1
7:45 AM The Magician (1926)
9:15 AM Isle of Fury (1936)
10:30 AM Rain (1932)
12:15 PM Our Betters (1933)
1:45 PM The Letter (1940)
3:30 PM Strictly Unconventional (1930)
4:30 PM The Painted Veil (1934)
6:00 PM Of Human Bondage (1946)

Then there is a full day of ghost stories:
FRIDAY, November 15
7:00 AM The Canterville Ghost (1944)
8:45 AM The Woman in White (1948)
10:45 AM Gildersleeve's Ghost (1944)
12:00 PM Tormented (1960)
1:15 PM Topper Returns (1941)
3:00 PM Beyond Tomorrow (1940)
4:30 PM Blithe Spirit (1945)
6:15 PM Sylvia and the Phantom (1946)

Since this was originally a Bell Labs clubzine, we have to mention the day of films about scientists:
WEDNESDAY, November 27
6:00 AM So Goes My Love (1946)
7:45 AM The Story of Doctor Carver (1938)
8:00 AM Dr. Ehrlich's Magic Bullet (1940)
9:45 AM Servant of Mankind (1940)
10:00 AM Young Tom Edison (1940)
11:30 AM Edison, the Man (1940)
1:30 PM The Story of Louis Pasteur (1936)
3:00 PM Madame Curie (1943)

And last, but certainly not least:
FRIDAY, November 29
8:00 PM Monty Python and the Holy Grail (1975)
9:45 PM Monty Python Live at the Hollywood Bowl (1982)
11:15 PM Monty Python's Life of Brian (1979)
SATURDAY, November 30
2:45 AM The Meaning of Monty Python (2013)
4:30 AM Monty Python's Flying Circus: Live at Aspen (1998)

And as always, there are other films to note:
SATURDAY, November 2
11:30 AM A Boy and His Dog (1946)
8:00 PM A Face in the Crowd (1957)
10:15 PM Ace in the Hole (1951)
SUNDAY, November 3
2:30 AM Soylent Green (1973)
4:15 AM The Omega Man (1971)
6:00 PM Touch of Evil (1958)

MONDAY, November 4
12:00 AM The Prisoner of Zenda (1922)
2:00 AM Rome, Open City (1946)
4:00 AM Les Carabiniers (1963)
SATURDAY, November 9
5:00 AM Un Partie de Campagne (1936)
SUNDAY, November 10
6:00 AM Forbidden Planet (1956)
8:00 AM Things to Come (1936)

MONDAY, November 11
12:15 AM The Dragon Painter (1919)
THURSDAY, November 14
10:00 PM Made in England: The Films of Powell and Pressburger (2024)
FRIDAY, November 15
12:30 AM The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp (1943)
3:30 AM A Canterbury Tale (1944)
5:45 AM Crown v. Stevens (1936)

FRIDAY, November 15
8:00 PM Invaders from Mars (1953)
11:00 PM The Thing (1982)
SATURDAY, November 16
2:30 AM Five Million Years to Earth (1968)
4:30 AM Village of the Damned (1960)
12:00 PM The Glass Slipper (1955)
3:30 PM Close Encounters of the Third Kind (1977)
6:00 PM Psycho (1960)
10:00 PM Forty Guns (1957)

SUNDAY, November 17
2:00 AM Blue Velvet (1986)
6:00 AM The Wonderful World of the Brothers Grimm (1962)
8:30 AM Fantastic Planet (1973)
8:00 PM The Movie Man (2024)
MONDAY, November 18
3:30 PM Seven Days in May (1964)

THURSDAY, November 21
12:15 AM Sisters (1972)
8:00 AM The Fearless Vampire Killers; or, Pardon Me But Your Teeth Are in My Neck (1966)
6:15 PM The Enchanted Cottage (1945)
9:45 PM Black Narcissus (1947)
FRIDAY, November 22
7:45 AM Green Mansions (1959)
9:45 AM Kismet (1955)
10:00 PM Laura (1944)
11:45 PM Murder, My Sweet (1944)

TUESDAY, November 26
6:00 PM Forbidden Planet (1956)
FRIDAY, November 29
6:00 AM The Power of Film Episode 1: Popular and Memorable (2023)
6:45 AM The Power of Film Episode 2: Trapped (2023)
7:30 AM The Power of Film Episode 3: Character Relationships (2023)
8:15 AM The Power of Film Episode 4: Heroes and Villains (2023)
9:00 AM The Power of Film Episode 5: The Power of Paradox (2023)
9:45 AM The Power of Film Episode 6: Love and Meaning (2023)
12:15 PM Mighty Joe Young (1949)

SATURDAY, November 30
2:00 PM The Thief of Bagdad (1940)
5:45 PM Made in England: The Films of Powell and Pressburger (2024)
8:00 PM A Matter of Life and Death (1947)
10:00 PM Wings of Desire (1987)
[-mrl/ec]

THE MERCY OF THE GODS by James S.A. Corey (copyright 2024, Orbit (print edition), 422pp, hardcover, ISBN 978-0-316-52557-2; copyright 2024, Recorded Books (audio edition), 14 hours and 54 minutes, ASIN: B0CQZ5RD9R, narrated by Jefferson Mays) (audio book review by Joe Karpierz)

After the completion of the nine books (ten if you count MEMORY'S LEGION, a collection of short fiction) series "The Expanse", fans of both Corey and "The Expanse" could rightfully wonder a couple of things: what's next, and how do you top that?
What's next is a projected three-book series (I can't remember whether I heard Ty Franck or Daniel Abraham, the duo who make up James S.A. Corey, say it was only going to be three books because they didn't want to write nine again) entitled "The Captive's War", and whether it tops "The Expanse" is yet to be seen. Book One is THE MERCY OF GODS, and while there are many similarities with "The Expanse", THE MERCY OF GODS is a different kind of story.

The novel begins on the planet Anjiin, where the humans co-exist with the native life that has a completely different biochemical basis. The humans themselves are not native to Anjiin, but their history seems to indicate that they arrived on the planet a few thousand years in the past. As the story opens, a research team, lead by Tonner Freis, has just reconciled the two different types of life. Tonner and his team are celebrity researchers, having solved the secret that has been baffling scientists for centuries. There are the usual squabbles between teams, of course, as others are trying to poach members of Tonner's team to join their own. All of that comes to a screeching halt as an alien species, the Carryx, invade Anjiin, kill one eighth of the human population (just to show who's boss), and capture the best and brightest of the rest. They are taken, under qualified conditions and via a massive transport ship, to a expansive world-city where they are given quarters, food, shelter, and a task, all under the watchful eye of a Carryx simply known as the Librarian. The Librarian informs them that while the task is somewhat similar to what they worked on back on Anjiin, the test is of their usefulness. If they prove useful to the Carryx, they will survive. If not, the remaining humans will be destroyed.

The group must overcome many challenge, both from without and within. The alien species known as The Night Drinkers attack them and destroy their lab and work, and it becomes apparent that it's every species for itself. One of the group, Jessyn, is battling mental health issues and is rationing her medicine to the point where it is basically ineffective. Relationships within the group are strained; Tonner and Else are a couple, but Else drifts away from Tonner and takes up with Dafyd, a research assistant who is the wild card in all of this. It becomes clear that Dafyd will be the key to humanity's survival, although the path to that survival is not that straightforward.

And then there are the Carryx. They are engaged in a long, drawn out bitter war they have been unable to win against a resourceful enemy. While we don't see the war or the enemy, we do see an emissary of the enemy, an entity known as the Swarm, which infiltrates groups captured by the Carryx in an effort to get knowledge back to its masters. And so we come to a tipping point in the story. There is an organized rebellion growing within the human camp, and the success or failure of that rebellion may be the key to the survival of the human race. Dafyd plays a key role here, and Corey sets up quite a dilemma for him.

THE MERCY OF GODS is a throwback to an earlier era of science fiction, but one with modern sensibilities. One of the main differences between The Expanse and The Captive's War is that in the new series, there are aliens. Lots of aliens. Lots of different aliens, that all look different, sound different, and smell different. And they have their own views on their current situation and the human rebellion. While THE MERCY OF GODS is still a human-centric story, that story is affected by the aliens around them. The similarities? Great character development, great writing, and great storytelling. And it's Space Opera. Well, I guess that's fairly obvious from what I've said here so far.

Jefferson Mays once again narrates for Corey, and he too does not disappoint. While there is certainly a danger that Mays' narration may make THE MERCY OF GODS sound like an Expanse novel, and to a certain extent it does, the text makes it that this is something completely different. Mays' voice give weight to the story, the weight that it deserves. I can envision no one else narrating this book.

THE MERCY OF GODS is a terrific and riveting start to "The Captive's War", and I highly recommend it. [-jak]

THE LIFE OF BRIAN (letters of comment by Peter Trei and Paul Dormer):

In response to Evelyn's comments on THE LIFE OF BRIAN in the 10/11/24 issue of the MT VOID, Peter Trei writes:

Two bits of background.
I attended an English boarding "public school" (ie, private and expensive) in the 60s and 70s. Latin was mandatory.

John Cleese's torturing the correct grammar out of Brian matches my Latin teacher's approach (barring the sword to the throat), and instantly recognizable as such.

Similarly, the litany of resistance groups was a clearly a play on the alphabet soup of Palestinian resistance groups opposing the Israeli government at the time the film was made.

Here's just the P's:
Palestine Liberation Army
Palestine Liberation Organization
Palestinian Freedom Movement
Palestinian Joint Operations Room
Palestinian Liberation Front
Palestinian Liberation Front (Abu Nidal Ashqar wing)
Palestinian National and Islamic Forces
Palestinian Popular Struggle Front
Palestinian Popular Struggle Front (1991)
Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine
Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine â€œ General Command
Popular Resistance Committees

Plenty more at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:Palestinian_militant_groups

[-pt]

Paul Dormer replies:

Although, my father, who was in the Labour Party in the UK from the late forties, reckoned that part of that bit was influenced by all the left-wing splinter groups that were around in the Forties and Fifties. [-pd]

Peter says:

I suppose its possible, but the Palestinian groups were active at the time the film was being made, in the right place, and like Brian's group, fighting against a colonial power. [-pt]

And Paul says:

Could have been both, of course. [-pd]

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

THE BOOKSHOP by Evan Friss (Viking, ISBN 978-0-593-29992-0) is a history of bookshops in the United States, consisting of chapters about various famous bookshops (including the Strand) interspersed with chapters on various aspects of bookselling. Obviously, the chapters about Friss shops one is familiar with are more interesting than those about totally unfamiliar bookshops, but there is plenty of interest for anyone who loves bookshops.

THE FURTHER ADVENTURES OF SHERLOCK HOLMES: THE ALBINO'S TREASURE by Stuart Douglas (Titan, ISBN 978-1-783-29312-4) captures the flavor of the Sherlock Holmes stories, but the solution is far more convoluted than anything Doyle would have written. Even so, as with the Titan series in general, this is certainly worth a read for Holmes fans.

Our book and film discussion group read THE HUNGER GAMES by Suzanne Collins (Scholastic Press, ISBN 978-0-439-02352-8). Reading it did not inspire me to read the rest of the series. Oddly, somewhere in the middle, after some long period of time in the wilderness, I got to wondering about well, periods. I mean, I'm all for having girls as heroes of YA books, but the author's book never deal with how they deal with menstruation when they are in the wilderness for months on end. There's a lot about food and water, and shelter, and even urination and defecation, but I cannot recall ever seeing menstruation mentioned. [-ec]

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Quote of the Week:

... Thus mathematics may be defined as the subject in which we never know what we are talking about, nor whether what we are saying is true.
--Bertrand Russell

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