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An index with links to the issues of the MT VOID since 1986 is at http://leepers.us/mtvoid/back_issues.htm.

Mini Reviews, Part 25 (film reviews by Mark R. Leeper and Evelyn C. Leeper):

This is the twenty-fifth batch of mini-reviews, three older films.

DRAGONWYCK (1946): DRAGONWYCK is a little-known, little-seen film which really deserves more attention. It is similar in atmosphere to films such as WUTHERING HEIGHTS and REBECCA: a Gothic sensibility, with characters who motivation and personality are not necessarily obvious at first, but are gradually revealed, usually in scenes involving storms. But DRAGONWYCK also reveals a little-known aspect of American history, the patroon system of the Hudson Valley. Basically it is what is referred to as share-cropping when described in the South, and was the target of the Anti-Rent War touched on in the film. Patriarchy, religious zealotry, and other undesirable aspects of mid-19th century life also play a role. [-ecl]

Released theatrically 19 April 1946.

Film Credits: https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0024851/reference

What others are saying: https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0024851/reference

BABBITT (1934): BABBITT is based on the Sinclair Lewis novel of the same name, but how much can one do with a novel that tries to portray an entire social phenomenon in 82 minutes? On the other hand, movies from that era are revealing of social phenomena in ways they never intended.

For example, is the sign board in front of a new housing development that says "HIGHLY RESTRICTED" supposed to be a good thing, or a bad thing? It wasn't until 1947, with GENTLEMEN'S AGREEMENT, the whole issue of restrictive covenants was addressed in a mainstream film.

And the maid, played by Hattie McDaniel, is pretty much a stereotypical portrayal of the time of an African-American maid. At least it's at the level of Mammy from GONE WITH THE WIND, as opposed to Butterfly McQueen's Prissy. [-ecl]

Released theatrically 08 December 1934.

Film Credits: https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0024851/reference

What others are saying: https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0024851/reference

THE DOCTOR AND THE DEVILS (1985): THE DOCTOR AND THE DEVILS seems to be the latest of the films based on the West Port murders, usually referred to as the Burke and Hare murders. If the IMDb can be trusted, the first was Val Lewton's THE BODY SNATCHER (1945). As with many of the films, it is based on Robert Louis Stevenson's story "The Body Snatcher". Stevenson drew on Edinburgh history for this story, just as he drew on Deacon Brodie for "Dr. Jekyll & Mr. Hyde".

The version in particular is based on the script written in 1940s by Dylan Thomas. (Apparently producer Mel Brooks wanted to ditch Thomas's screenplay, but director Freddie Francis convinced him to retain as much of it as possible.) William Burke and William Hare are renamed Robert Fallon and Timothy Broom; Dr. Knox becomes Dr. Rock. The IMb also claims this film holds the record for longest time between completion of the script and the movie of the movie. (Clearly they are ignoring movies such as HAMLET.)

Lewton's version is pretty much straight drama. He has only one body snatcher (Cabman Gray), and the doctor is MacFarlane. HORROR MANIACS (1948) was forced by British censors to change the names to Hart, Moore, and Dr. Cox. THE FLESH AND THE FIENDS (1960) was able to use the real names, as did BURKE & HARE (1972), which injected more humor than the previous films. This should not be confused with BURKE AND HARE (2010), even more a comedy film directed by John Landis.

There is also I SELL THE DEAD (2008), another comedy inspired by Burke and Hare even if not strictly speaking based on them. [-ecl]

Released theatrically 04 October 1985.

Film Credits: https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0024851/reference

What others are saying: https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0024851/reference

THE LONGEST DAY and Other D-Day Films (letters of comment by Jay E. Morris and Hal Heydt):

In response to Mark and Evelyn's comments on THE LONGEST DAY in the 05/31/24 issue of the MT VOID, Jay E. Morris writes:

Most of the major actors in THE LONGEST DAY were much older than the actual service members. John Wayne was 55 when he played Lt. Col. Benjamin Vandervoort who was 24 in WWII. Average age of officers was around

Richard Todd played Major John Howard of the Ox and Bucks Light Infantry who led a glider force to capture the Pegasus and Ranville bridges. Under heavy German fire they were reinforced by the 7th (Light Infantry) Parachute Battalion, the first officer to report to Major Howard being Lt. Richard Todd. And yes, that scene is in the movie. [-jem]

Hal Heydt asks:

How could you overlook the 1952 TV documentary series, "Victory at Sea"? Granted, it should be subtitled "how the US Navy won WW2 with a little help from its friends" but it does cover D-Day (as well as the rest of the war) and all of the footage was actually from the war (though some was short in various studios...but during the war). The archival footage used came from all the countries involved ... on both sides. [-hh]

Evelyn responds:

We were just commenting on the films that Turner Classic Movies was running for their D-Day marathon, not choosing films on our own. It's not surprising that TCM didn't run "Victory at Sea"--it's 13 hours long. [-ecl]

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

When you get a book off the shelves at the public library, or for that matter in a bookstore, you have some idea what you're getting. If the catalog (or your feet) direct you to the fiction section, you're getting fiction. If you're sent to Dewey Decimal 937, you're getting ancient Rome through the fall of the Western Empire. So when I went looking for history books about the Year of the Five Emperors (hereafter referred to as the Y5E), I would know I wanted a 937. In Hoopla, however, there is no such clue, which is how I ended up with THE YEAR OF THE FIVE EMPERORS by Robert Eckert (actually two books: THE YEAR OF THE FIVE EMPERORS: PERTINAX and THE YEAR OF THE FIVE EMPERORS: SEVERUS). From the title, I figured they were histories—silly me. They were historical fiction, mush as in THE DAUGHTER OF TIME, when the sergeant is asked for a history of Richard III, he brings back THE ROSE OF RABY, a historical fiction about Richard's mother (which is, by the way, not a real book).

Anyway, having checked them out, I figured "what the heck?" The books got decent reviews, and I don't think I found any non-fiction books about the year that were available.

PERTINAX actually starts out on the last day of 68, rather than in 69, the actual Y5E. This is both necessary and desirable, since Commodus was assassinated on the last day of 68, and we wouldn't want to miss that, would we? (And no, he's not stabbed by Maximus in the gladiatorial circus.) And it's necessary to set up everything that comes after.

Unfortunately, unlike THE ROSE OF RABY, THE YEAR OF THE FIVE EMPERORS takes liberties with history. It describes a different death for Commodus that the histories of yhe time, and explains it away by having all those present agree to cover up the truth with a lie. It also gets wrong how Didius Julianus became emperor. There are undoubtedly other events that differ from history. And much of the real history is told in info-dumps, where two or more characters have a long discussion of how the legions are disbursed, or the political machinations of the Praetorians, or an incredibly long description of a trip through ancient Rome which indicated that the author had a detailed street map and just had to use it. [-ecl]

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Quote of the Week:

He seems
To have seen better days, as who has not
Who has seen yesterday?

--George Gordon, Lord Byron

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