

fortunate than him. But more important is the relationship he forms with the artist in town who tries to teach the boy the meaning of being an artist. The story has been adapted to silent films and to Japanese anime, but a standout performance by Theodore Bikel makes this the best of the three sound and live-action adaptations. This film is a personal favorite of mine. Rating: +3 (-4 to +4) or 9/10

One of the great double features of my youth was 20th Century Fox's pairing of JOURNEY TO THE CENTER OF THE EARTH with James B. Clark's A DOG OF FLANDERS. I came away liking the co-feature as much as the film I had gone to see. (Okay, almost as much, but I was a *real* science fiction fan.) Over the years I have looked several times to find it on video. It was available only on a rare VHS tape. Finally it has been released to DVD, digitally re-mastered, and I could not be more pleased.

So why would a film that outwardly looks like it is just a boy-and- his-dog story set in Belgium be such a find? First of all, the dog story is just a sub-plot. The film is more about the struggles of an impoverished boy to dedicate his life to creating art. But there is something more about it that is very unusual. It is honest in a way that very few family films ever are. Life is very hard for its main character and the film does not pull its punches.

This film is not sugarcoated. (Admittedly the ending is not as grim as the ending of the book.) There are themes in this film of cruelty, of loss, but also of love and of the redemptive power of art. Does that sound like a lot to put into a single film, a family film? It is there and it all works.

Nello Daas (played by David Ladd, son of Alan Ladd) lives with his grandfather (Donald Crisp), the town milk deliveryman in a Belgian town. Nello's one obsession is art. He is fascinated by the local painter Piet van Gelder (played by the wonderful Theodore Bikel). The boy has tried doing his own art using what little he has-- iodine and charcoal, which are far from ideal materials. Nello knows that there is supposed to be a magnificent painting in the local cathedral, a work of Peter Paul Rubens, but the painting is behind a curtain and the cathedral charges a franc to see the painting. Grandfather knows how unlikely it is that Nello could be a successful artist and has planned a very different career for his grandson. One day Nello and his grandfather find a dog that had pulled a cart, but is now collapsed from overwork and mistreatment.

Nello adopts the dog in spite of the fact that he and his grandfather barely have enough food to keep themselves alive. But the heart of the film is in the relationship that Nello forms with the self-doubting artist van Gelder.

This is a classic and one of the best family films every made. It is moving and says a very great deal about life and about art. Some major changes were made from the original story, but it does not tell children that life is never hard. I rate the 1960 version of A DOG OF FLANDERS a +3 on the -4 to +4 scale or 9/10.

Though never said, the town is really the City of Antwerp and the cathedral is the Cathedral of Our Lady. The great Rubens painting the boy wants to see is Rubens's The Elevation of the Cross:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Peter_Paul_Rubens_068.jpg

We see the actual city, cathedral, and painting in the film.

The title dog, named in the film Patrasche, is played by Spike, who also played the title role in OLD YELLER. The screenplay was written by Ted Sherdeman who co-wrote the screenplay for another famous animal film, THEM!

Film Credits: <http://us.imdb.com/title/tt0052745>

[A DOG OF FLANDERS (1935), Tuesday, December 12, 6:00 AM]

[-mrl]

And some comments on some other films:

CLOUDS OVER EUROPE (1939): Also known as Q PLANES, it involves experimental aircraft. Mark wrote in 2016: "Okay, you 1960s spy film fans, TCM is running something like a James Bond film crossed with a 1960s Avengers story. (I am talking about the Avengers John Steed and Emma Peel, not Marvel Comics.) 1939's CLOUDS OVER EUROPE, a.k.a. Q PLANES, looks like it bears the same relation to James Bond films that FORBIDDEN PLANET bears to "Star Trek"."

TEVYA (1939): The original non-musical version of Sholem Aleichem's stories of Tevya the Dairyman, later made into FIDDLER ON THE ROOF. It was thought lost until 1978.

FLIPPER (1963) and FLIPPER'S NEW ADVENTURE (1964): Perhaps marginally science fiction.

NETWORK (1976): This seems more and more like reality these days.

TOPPER (1937): Based on a Thorne Smith novel. These days drunk driving is not usually a subject for comedy.

THE GREAT RUPERT (1950): An early George Pal "Puppetoons" film.

LADY IN THE LAKE (1947): In keeping with my Raymond Chandler reviews, I'll mention this one, shot entirely from the point of view of Philip Marlowe.

SEANCE ON A WET AFTERNOON (1964): Remade in 2000 by Kiyoshi Kurosawa as SEANCE.

[-ecl]

Other films of interest include:

FRIDAY, December 1

2:30 PM Arsenic and Old Lace (1944)

SATURDAY, December 2

4:30 PM A Christmas Carol (1938)

MONDAY, December 4

8:00 PM Cabin in the Sky (1943)

WEDNESDAY, December 6

7:30 AM Clouds over Europe (1939)

FRIDAY, December 8

9:00 AM Blithe Spirit (1945)

SATURDAY, December 9

2:00 PM The Night of the Hunter (1955)

11:15 PM Tevya (1939)

SUNDAY, December 10

2:30 AM Chimes at Midnight (1967)

1:45 PM The Man Who Knew Too Much (1956)

10:00 PM Bananas (1971)

TUESDAY, December 12

9:00 AM Flipper (1963)

10:45 AM Flipper's New Adventure (1964)

WEDNESDAY, December 13

8:00 PM Network (1976)

THURSDAY, December 14

2:30 AM Altered States (1980)

4:30 AM Z Channel: A Magnificent Obsession (2004)

12:00 PM Sinbad the Sailor (1947)

2:15 PM Treasure Island (1934)

FRIDAY, December 15

11:45 AM On Borrowed Time (1939)

SATURDAY, December 16

12:00 AM Topper (1937)

2:00 AM Suspicion (1941)

4:00 AM North by Northwest (1959)

11:30 AM Star in the Night (1945)

SATURDAY, December 16

8:00 AM Alias St. Nick (1935)

8:00 PM The Great Train Robbery (1979)

SUNDAY, December 17

1:30 PM King of Kings (1961)

MONDAY, December 18
1:15 AM Ben-Hur: A Tale of the Christ (1925)

MONDAY, December 18
5:00 PM The Great Rupert (1950)
6:45 PM A Christmas Carol (1938)

TUESDAY, December 19
2:00 AM The Curse of the Cat People (1944)
5:45 AM Star in the Night (1945)

THURSDAY, December 21
1:30 AM Lady in the Lake (1947)

THURSDAY, December 21
8:30 AM The Curse of the Cat People (1944)
10:00 AM The Rocking Horse Winner (1949)

FRIDAY, December 22
4:30 AM Beyond Tomorrow (1940)
2:00 PM A Carol for Another Christmas (1964)
5:30 PM The Lion in Winter (1968)

SUNDAY, December 24
7:30 AM Beyond Tomorrow (1940)
9:00 AM The Great Rupert (1950)
11:45 PM A Christmas Carol (1938)

MONDAY, December 25
8:00 PM Vertigo (1958)
10:15 PM Rear Window (1954)

TUESDAY, December 26
12:15 AM The Man Who Knew Too Much (1956)
2:30 AM Rope (1948)
4:00 AM Strangers on a Train (1951)

WEDNESDAY, December 27
8:00 AM East of Eden (1955)
10:00 AM Cat on a Hot Tin Roof (1958)
12:00 PM Dial M for Murder (1954)
5:45 PM A Streetcar Named Desire (1951)
11:00 PM The Body Disappears (1941)

THURSDAY, December 28
12:30 AM The Invisible Boy (1957)
3:45 PM Wait Until Dark (1967)
5:45 PM Seance on a Wet Afternoon (1964)

FRIDAY, December 29
4:15 AM Blow-Up (1966)
8:00 AM The Most Dangerous Game (1932)
9:30 AM Rudyard Kipling's Jungle Book (1942)

SATURDAY, December 30
2:00 PM Five Million Years to Earth (1968)
4:00 PM The Birds (1963)

Completist Actors (comments by Evelyn C. Leeper):

Yes, David Suchet played Hercule Poirot in all the Agatha Christie "Poirot" stories (with a bit of fudging on the stories from THE LABOURS OF HERCULES). But Clive Merrison played Sherlock Holmes in all 64 of the Doyle stories, as well as another 16 original stories. The fact that Poirot was on television, and the Holmes on the radio probably had something to do with this. However, Merrison was also in a Sherlock Holmes adaptation on television, as Bartholomew Sholto in the 1983 British "The Sign of Four". (Michael Williams played Watson in all the radio Doyle stories as well, though not in the original ones that followed.) [-ecl]

THE GLASS BOX by **J. Michael Straczynski** (copyright 2024 (January 9,2024), Blackstone Publishing, 350p., ISBN-13: 979-8212007795 (hardcover edition), ASIN: B0CD9PJNYY (Kindle edition)) (book review by Joe Karpierz):

The Wikipedia entry for J. Michael Straczynski says that he is a film maker and a comic book writer. While he is certainly a film maker, and a good one at that, I feel that comic book writer is too limiting a term. He has written for a significant amount of television series and movies, as well as the aforementioned comic books. In fact, I would say that he is an "writer", with many credits to his name. JMS, as he is known (and I will refer to him here as that since it's a lot easier than typing out Straczynski), is probably best known for writing *92* of the 110 episodes of the science fiction television show "Babylon 5". But I would suggest that even though he is mainly known for writing genre works, he has a talent for writing books that are not genre, such as the novel TOGETHER WE WILL GO and the autobiography BECOMING SUPERMAN. His latest novel is THE GLASS BOX, and while it may be marketed as science fiction, I don't think it's sf at all. In fact, I'm not convinced that it's completely fiction.

Riley Diaz is a resistance fighter, raised by her parents to question authority and not be quiet about it. You might almost call her a professional protester. She works with an organized group of protesters who know what they're getting into every time they step out on the front line. If they are not careful, they will be arrested even if their protests are lawful. She views the government as something that is not to be trusted, and the government has pretty much earned that lack of trust. The powers that be are cracking down on the freedoms that all citizens have become accustomed to, but especially the freedom to gather peacefully in public. And this rankles Diaz and her colleagues to no end.

At the latest protest, Diaz is arrested and taken to one of the many American Renewal Centers (ARCs) for what amounts to mandatory reeducation. And getting into an ARC was part of the plan, as the idea was to get inside and find out exactly what is going on at the shadowy ARCs. What she didn't count on was not being able to get out once she was in there. The "patients", if you will, are incarcerated for six months, and, based on a points system that no one but the people who run the ARCs knows, could be let out early or detained for a longer period of time. Diaz, the freedom fighter that she is, doesn't give in to the system. She resists the authorities there, and her fellow patients don't trust her very much. In fact, with all of them wishing to get out and at the same time facing a "if one of you does something bad, you're all going to suffer" situation, they shun Diaz at first. Slowly but surely, by her actions, her fellow inmates (lets call them what they really are) begin to trust her and work with her to fight the system and hopefully eventually find a way out. Diaz also finds an unlikely ally in the form of a character nicknamed Frankenstein. She is the only person there able to break through to him, and they form a bond that is touching and heartfelt. As you might expect, Frankenstein becomes important to the plan for breaking out of the ARC Diaz is in.

What's frightening about THE GLASS BOX is that it's easy to see that this sort of thing could happen today. A government that is interested in staying in power, invoking a decades old law, and doing everything it can to put down and silence protesters, is something that should terrify everyone, whether here in the U.S. or anywhere around the world. THE GLASS BOX portrays a very real and scary scenario, where it takes courage, persistence, and valor to fight back and beat the system. I found myself rooting for Diaz as the novel went on, as it became clear that there were very sinister things going on all the way up to the top.

THE GLASS BOX is a thriller, a great read, and a frightening and thought provoking look at what a government could become if it is not held in check. I feel as if JMS was writing with some insider's knowledge, and he does a terrific job from beginning to end in the novel. While he may have made his name in other areas of entertainment, such as television, movies, and comic books, I believe that he is growing stronger as a novel writer. I eagerly look forward to his next novel. [-jak]

Science News (comments by Greg Frederick):

The supermassive black hole of M87--also known as M87*--has a mass equal to around 6.5 billion suns. It especially came to the public's attention in 2019 when an image of M87*, captured by the Event Horizon Telescope (EHT)

Two years after the release of the image of the supermassive black hole in M87, in 2021, the EHT Collaboration released a second stunning look. The newer image showed, for the very first time, polarized light around a black hole. (Polarized light has a different orientation and brightness than unpolarized light.) The 2021 data also revealed the direction of oscillating (vibrating) electric fields, providing the first hint that magnetic fields around M87* are strong and ordered.

See the image at <https://www.space.com/first-black-hole-image-polarized-m87>

SpaceX had it's second test launch yesterday; all 33 booster engines did fire continuously and the hot stage separation was really good but yes the booster blew up and the Starship was eventually lostâ€¦.some successes but new problems too. But with each launch they learn and improve the rocket.

SpaceX's gargantuan deep-space rocket system, Starship, safely lifted off Saturday morning but ended prematurely with an explosion and a loss of signal:

"The Super Heavy booster and Starship spacecraft successfully separated after liftoff, as the Starship lit up its engines and pushed away. That process ended up destroying the Super Heavy booster, which erupted into a ball of flames over the Gulf of Mexico. But the Starship spacecraft was able to briefly continue its journey.

The Starship system made it much farther into flight than the first attempt in April. The rocket and spacecraft lifted off the launchpad at 8 a.m. ET, with the Super Heavy booster igniting all 33 of its Raptor engines. Even during ground tests, SpaceX has had a hard time getting all of those engines, clustered together at the base of the rocket, to power on consistently at the same time."

More at <https://www.yahoo.com/news/spacex-loses-rocket-spacecraft-over-142845952.html>. [-gf]

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

On a recent podcast discussing *THE FROGS* by Aristophanes, one of the podcasters asked the others if any of them had read any of the other dramatists named in *THE FROGS* besides Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides. I noted that if they had, they should alert the media, because those three are the only ancient Greek tragedians who have any plays that have survived intact.

I have been reading a couple of books about ancient historians and histories, and discovered that what we have of Ammianus and of Tacitus' *ANNALS* are each due to the survival of a single manuscript--well, in Tacitus' case, two non-overlapping manuscripts, and we still lost some of his work. Those manuscripts can join that of *BEOWULF* in the "sole survivor" category. So it isn't that surprising that Greek dramatists as a whole fared worse. Of three hundred or so known tragedies, only about thirty have survived intact. And all are by the "Big Three".

Why? First, Attic Greek (500 B.C.E. - 300 B.C.E.) never had the audience Latin did, or even Koine Greek (300 B.C.E. - 600 C.E.). Second, at the time, manuscripts of plays were not distributed as widely as works of history, philosophy, or science. And later copyists added works of theology to what they were prioritizing. The copyists were busy copying Plato and Aristotle, and the New Testament, and Herodotus and Thucydides (with a side of Xenophon), and why copy pagan dramas anyway? So one could conclude that (e.g.) the seven surviving Sophocles plays were the best (by some metric) of the hundred and twenty that he wrote. Again, I don't think any of the thirty surviving plays had only a sole surviving manuscript (at least I've never heard this).

(All this is my theory; I could be totally off.)

Oh, and of the comedies, the only ones surviving are all by Aristophanes.

What if 2300 years from now, all that remains of 20th century English-language drama are seven plays of Andrew Lloyd Webber (words only, no music), six plays of Tennessee Williams, and eighteen plays of Eugene O'Neill? [-ecl]

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Quote of the Week:

There's nothing wrong with being shallow as long as
you're insightful about it.

--Dennis Miller

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