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Mt. Holz Science Fiction Society
10/11/24 -- Vol. 43, No. 15, Whole Number 2349

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

The Great Courses: "A Historian Goes to the Movies: Ancient Rome" (Part 3: Interregnum) (comments by Evelyn C. Leeper):

I, CLAUDIUS (1976):

This came after a long gap in the "ancient epic", but was more an "anti-epic": it had a very low budget and had no spectacles or even large scenes. The Senate was represented by a few actors, rather than dozens (or more). The battles took place off-screen--possibly you might hear battle sounds, but that was it. Nevertheless, it achieved a popularity that, e.g., THE FALL OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE never did.

MONTY PYTHON'S LIFE OF BRIAN (1979):

Professor Aldrete goes through the movie, noting how the film parodies every cliche of previous Roman epics: the birth of Jesus, the outdoor oration, the gladiators in the arena, the exotic Roman food, ... But here the birth is undercut by showing a reverential scene with the Three Wise Men, only to have them suddenly realize they are in the wrong manger. The crowd at the Sermon of the Mount is not awed; they are baffled, because they cannot hear the speech, And so on. Even the film poster uses enormous stone block letters in the same style as that of BEN-HUR, but here the stones are cracking and crumbling.

There is the classic scene where someone painting "Romans, go home!" on a wall is not arrested by a centurion, but instead instructed in tedious detail of all the grammatical errors he has made.

As a summary of Roman accomplishments, one could do worse than the question one character asks: "All right, but apart from the sanitation, the medicine, education, wine, public order, irrigation, roads, the fresh-water system, and public health, what have the Romans ever done for us?"

And one timeless trope is the rival religious/political groups: the Judean People's Front, the People's Front of Judea, and the Judean Popular People's Front. (One is reminded of the old joke that if you ask two Jews, you get three opinions.) Just last summer, David Horovitz wrote an article in the Times of Israel comparing the various groups then protesting actions by the government and how they end up fighting (either verbally or physically) with each other.

[-ecl]

AGE OF REVOLUTIONS: PROGRESS AND BACKLASH FROM 1600 TO THE PRESENT by Fareed Zakaria (book review by Gregory Frederick):

Fareed Zakaria's Age of Revolutions: Progress and Backlash from 1600 to the Present offers a sweeping analysis of major political, social, and technological revolutions that have shaped modern society. Zakaria traces the rise of liberal democracy over the last four centuries, emphasizing that progress has been marked by continuous cycles of action and reaction. He highlights the Dutch and British revolutions, as well as the Industrial Revolution, as key transformative moments, each restructuring political, social, and economic foundations.

The book is divided into two parts: the first explores historical revolutions, while the second examines contemporary upheavals driven by globalization, technology, and cultural change. Zakaria argues that the current era, defined by rapid transformation, is sparking a strong backlash, particularly against migration, multiculturalism, and what some perceive as a loss of identity and tradition. He points to the rise of populism as a reaction to these changes.

Zakaria's central message is that successful revolutions occur gradually, rooted in societal engagement rather than imposed top-down. His recommendations for strengthening democracy include fostering family and community bonds through policies like paid parental leave and national service, as well as maintaining a balance between freedom and order.

While some reviewers appreciate Zakaria's nuanced perspective and accessible writing, others criticize his approach as too cautious and Western-centric, particularly in downplaying the role of more radical revolutions, like those in Russia and China, which led to significant, if tumultuous, changes. Nonetheless, his contextual analysis remains a hallmark of his work, making Age of Revolutions an insightful read for those interested in understanding the long arc of modern history and its implications for today's political climate. [-gf]

CLEOPATRA (letter of comment by Sam Long):

In response to Evelyn's comments on CLEOPATRA in the 09/20/24 issue of the MT VOID, Sam Long writes:

I remember seeing that film when it first came out. An epic, to be sure, but, as the article pointed out, with lots of inconsistencies and the like. I couldn't help but be reminded of a short poem titled "The Lay of Ancient Rome" by one Thomas Russell Ybarra that was published in the Harvard Lampoon back in the '20s or so:

> "Oh! the Roman was a rogue,
> He erat, was, you bettum;
> He ran his automobilis
> And smoked his cigarettum;
> He wore a diamond studibus,
> An elegant cravatum,
> A maxima cum laude shirt,
> And such a stylish hattum!
>
> He loved the lucious hic-haec hock,
> And bet on games and equi;
> At times he won; at others, though,
> He got it in the nequi;
>
> He winked (quo usque tandem?)
> At puellas in the Forum,
> And sometimes even made
> Those goo-goo oculorum.
> He frequently was seen
> At combats gladitorial,
> And ate enough to feed
> Ten boarders at Memorial;
>
> He often went on sprees,
> And said on starting homus,
> "Hic labor-opus est,
> Oh, where's my hic! hic! domus?"
>
> Although he lived in Rome
> Of all the arts the middle
> He was (excuse the phrase)
> A horrid individl');
> Ah! what a diff'rent thing
> Was the homo (Latin, hominy)
> Of far away B. C.
> From us of Anno Domini."

[-sl]

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

I mentioned a few weeks ago I had ordered some books as a run-up to our annual trip to Second Time Books in Mt. Laurel. (I wish it could be semi-annual, but there you have it.) Well, we went to Second Time books, and I got nine books. It doesn't sound like much but the stack is ten inches tall.

Continuing my dive into ancient Roman history, I got Richard C. Beacham's "Spectacle Entertainments of Early Imperial Rome", G. W. Bowersock's "From Gibbon to Auden: Essays on the Classical Tradition", Denis Feeney's "Caesar's Calendar", and Peter Heather's "The Fall of the Roman Empire" (600 pages).

I also noticed a plethora of Michael Grant books on ancient Rome. I asked whether he had sold the store his backlog of author's copies, but they said it was just coincidence from a few different people who brought books in.

The two really thick books I got were "The Everyman Chesterton" (at 900 pages) and George Orwell's "Essays" (also Everyman publishing, at 1370 pages). They would be even thicker if the paper weren't so thin.

Rounding my purchases out were three of thinner books: Peter Manseau's "The Jefferson Bible" and John Steinbeck's "Zapata", and a math book for Mark. "The Jefferson Bible" and the math book were from their new "Annex", which contain vintage and antique books, and dollar books. This seems like an odd combination, but the books are "antique", not "antiquarian", in the sense that they are old but not rare and valuable. (One of the dollar books they had was a Greek interlinear New Testament; I can remember paying $23 for one decades ago when $23 was real money.)

Once again, I cannot recommend this store highly enough. It specializes in science fiction and history, and has huge selections of both, at very reasonable prices. (For example, the Orwell was my most expensive book, in pristine condition, for $15.) They have a web site, , if you really are too far away to visit their store (which is set in a quite charming little "cultural and arts village"). If you visit, mention that the "Bucket Lady" sent you--I bring my books to sell in old Costco/Kirkland detergent pails. [-ecl]

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Quote of the Week:

> All philosophies, if you ride them home, are nonsense,
> but some are greater nonsense than others.
> --Samuel Butler

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