

save the good stuff for a more promising month. TCM runs something on the order of 430 different films a month. I doubt that anyone knows for all the films which are all the good ones and which are not so hot. Have patience. October and the horror film blowout are coming. In the meantime horror fans should give the under-rated KONGO (1932) a try. This is a sound remake of Tod Browning's silent horror film WEST OF ZANZIBAR (1928), with Walter Huston in the lead role.

Here that role is filled by Walter Huston. It was remade four years later with Huston out-doing the Lon Chaney original in morbidity. From a wheelchair a handicapped white man governs an expanse of Africa as a living god whose word is law. He rules the local natives through superstition and stage magic. He controls few white people through sadism and he keeps them virtual prisoners. He lives for the day he can avenge himself horribly on the man who stole his wife and crushed his spine. Strong and macabre stuff in a nearly forgotten horror film. [Tuesday, August 14, (9:15)].

[Do not confuse this with CONGO (1995) or KONGA (1961). -ecl]

Back in 1946 Robert Montgomery directed and starred in his own screenplay of Raymond Chandler's murder mystery LADY IN THE LAKE. Montgomery played Chandler's popular hard-boiled detective Philip Marlowe. What made this version particularly of interest was that it claimed that the audience was invited to be the detective. Well, that was always true in a whodunit, but it was to be shot through the eyes of the detective. It was entirely filmed in the first person. It was shot with subjective cameras. Montgomery must have thought that this was a good idea. He starred in the film but his face did not appear in the film. The viewer could hear Montgomery's voice throughout, but could see Montgomery's face on camera only when the detective looked in a mirror. MGM Studios made this movie, which had to be one of the first attempts at virtual reality for a mass audience. It is the way it was shot that makes it interesting, not that it is a cracking good story. It seems to me that there is a lot of Christmas ornamentation to go with the story. MGM never made another film in attempted VR. This film got decent but lackluster ratings.

Evelyn sends along listings for two small TCM film festivals in August. One is a collection films to commemorate Lionel Atwill's oeuvre (do ya like that word? Oeuvre. Classy, huh?) of ... Lionel Atwill. The other fest celebrates the 114th birthday (actually his birthday was June 26, 1904) of Peter Lorre.

3 Friday (Lionel Atwill)
8:00 PM Mystery Of The Wax Museum, The (1933)
9:30 PM Secret of the Blue Room (1933)
11:00 PM Doctor X (1932)
12:30 AM Absolute Quiet (1936)
2:00 AM Vampire Bat, The (1933)
3:15 AM Mark of the Vampire (1935)
4:30 AM Gorilla, The (1939)

24 Friday (Peter Lorre)
6:00 AM Face Behind the Mask, The (1941)
7:30 AM Arsenic and Old Lace (1944)
9:45 AM Silk Stockings (1957)
12:00 PM You'll Find Out (1940)
2:00 PM All Through the Night (1942)
4:00 PM Comedy of Terrors, The (1964)
5:45 PM Scent of Mystery (1960)
8:00 PM M (1931)
10:00 PM Crime and Punishment (1935)
11:45 PM Mask of Dimitrios, The (1944)
1:30 AM Verdict, The (1946)
3:15 AM Mad Love (1935)
4:30 AM Island of Doomed Men (1940)

[-mrl]

WAR OF THE SATELLITES (1958) (film retrospective by Mark R. Leeper):

CAPSULE: Shortly after the Soviets put in space the world's first man-made satellite, Sputnik I, Roger Corman produced and directed a very low-budget sci-fi film to exploit the recent real-world launch. Aliens have put up an invisible barrier to prevent humans from advancing into space. The acting and writing are inconsistent but perhaps just because it is a 1950s science fiction film, it does have fun for the right sort of audience. Rating: low +1 (-4 to +4) or 5/10

On October 4, 1957, the Soviet Union put into orbit Sputnik I, the first man-made satellite. Not surprisingly, it made headlines all around the world. Up to this time few United States citizens knew even what a "satellite" was. Suddenly it was a word on everybody's lips. There were still many people who did not know what the thing was, but they knew it was important and science-fictional. They may have thought it was some kind of spaceship. Roger Corman saw the advantage of making a sci-fi movie (however weak) with which to exploit the public's interest in "satellites." Jack Rabin and Irving Block, who frequently worked together on science fiction films, provided a story.

A message from the aliens is sent to the United Nations. Two comic teenagers who seem like a holdover from the Jazz Age find the message etched on a rocket. The kids do not fit into the film's style. (Did 1950s teenagers really borrow "ring-a-ding-ding" from Frank Sinatra?)

As humans push their way into space, there is some unknown interplanetary space presence determined to keep us earthbound. After some debate the United Nations decides it will send up one more space mission to take on the aliens. Its Captain will be Dr. Pol Van Ponder (played by Richard Devon). What the humans do not know is that the aliens have captured Von Ponder and made him their slave. What is more they can create an identical copy of the captain who is also their slave. The battle for space will be fought in space, but maybe it will be fought with clones of humans.

Some of the science is suspect, to say the least. In one scene a satellite stops dead in space, ignoring momentum. There is reference to possible beings "from a distant nebula." [Spoiler] The final words of the film are "we are passing through Andromeda at the speed of light." (So much for Einstein.) The story shows no evidence that Rabin and Block knew much about satellites orbiting the Earth. But the basic idea is that aliens might be sabotaging our space program--actually the United Nations' space program--by destroying our satellites.

Several of the actors are familiar from later Corman films. That includes Susan Cabot (WASP WOMAN), Dick Miller (later to be Walter Paisley in several films) and Corman himself as one of the Mission Control team. If Corman uses the same actors in other films, it has been claimed that Corman reuses everything.

And there are a few other actors who are just familiar, like Robert Shayne who was in TV's "The Adventures of Superman" as Inspector Henderson. Michael Fox appeared multiple times on "The Rifleman".

Corman saves some expenses by borrowing footage and sound effects from films like WAR OF THE WORLDS and GODZILLA. A stormy sea scene is borrowed from GODZILLA VS. THE THING. Much of the action of the film is following characters up and down wide, empty corridors of the Earth satellite. Their satellite is about as big as the International Space Station with much wasted space.

Probably the best aspect of this film is the poster art. It is rumored that the first thing Corman does when producing a film is pick a sexy title. The second thing he does is to organize a competition at a local art school and have the students compete to create the best poster that fits the title. WAR OF THE SATELLITES is not a very good piece of science fiction and not a good film. But 1950s science fiction needs to be cut some slack. Ring-a-ding- ding.

I rate the film a low +1 on the -4 to +4 scale or 5/10.

Film Credits: https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0052379/?ref_=fn_al_tt_1

[-mrl]

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

I recently re-read PARADISE LOST by John Milton (ISBN 978-1-420-95330-5) and have three questions.

One, what is the deal with the Trinity? Okay, it's an old question, but I still do not get it. In the New Testament, and even more so in PARADISE LOST, there are scenes which have God and Jesus talking to each other. If God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit (who always seems to get the short end of the stick) are all aspects of one Being, how an they talk to each other? That would be talking to oneself, and generally that is not considered a positive sign.

Two, it is never clear exactly how the war between the heavenly angels and the fallen (rebellious) angels will be decided. In normal wars, the decision is based on which side has the most casualties, or at any rate, more casualties than they are willing to endure. But when two armies of immortals fight, the concept of casualties is, if not meaningless, at least much less decisive. There are no deaths, and if there are injuries, they must automatically heal. (I cannot envision an angel getting an arm lopped off and spending the rest of eternity as a one-armed angel.)

(If the goal is just to lock them out of Heaven, or in Hell, I wouldn't think a war would be necessary or even useful.)

And three, Milton seems to be writing about Greek and Roman mythological beings as if they really existed. I could understand using them as fictional examples, just as one might compare someone to Snape in the "Harry Potter" books. But if I recall correctly, he actually writes about them as existing in the world of the poem. (I should have taken better notes.) This seems totally counter to what I thought was Christian belief in regard to other gods and goddesses. [-ecl]

[And if one of the players on one side of a war is all-powerful doesn't that "fix" the game? In any case, it is a very bad example of sportsmanship for the warriors. -mrl]

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Quote of the Week:

The man who makes no mistakes does not usually make anything.

--Edward John Phelps

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