

MT VOID 12/28/18 -- Vol. 37, No. 26, Whole Number 2047



Mt. Holz Science Fiction Society
12/28/18 -- Vol. 37, No. 26, Whole Number 2047

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Science Fiction (and Other) Discussion Groups, Films, Lectures, etc. (NJ):

- January 24, 2019: THREE-BODY PROBLEM by Cixin Liu
- February 14, 2019: EDGE OF TOMORROW (2014) (a.k.a. LIVE. DIE. REPEAT) & ALL YOU NEED IS KILL by Hiroshi Sakurazaka
<http://www.libros.am/book/read/id/336609/slug/all-you-need-is-kill-1>
- March 28, 2019: WE by Yevgeny Zamyatin (1920)
- May 23, 2019: DIASPORA by Greg Egan
- July 25, 2019: THE STRANGE CASE OF DR. JEKYLL AND MR. HYDE by Robert Louis Stevenson (1886)
- September 26, 2019: TBD from Europe/Latin America/Africa/Canada
- November 28, 2019: THE SLEEPER WAKES by H. G. Wells (1910)
- January 23, 2020: TBD from Europe/Latin America/Africa/Canada
- March 26, 2020: TBD by Edgar Rice Burroughs
- May 28, 2020: TBD from Europe/Latin America/Africa/Canada
- July 23, 2020: TBD by Jules Verne
- September 24, 2020: TBD from Europe/Latin America/Africa/Canada
- November 19, 2020: Rudyard Kipling:
 - "A Matter of Fact" (1892)
 - "The Ship That Found Herself" (1895)
 - ".007" (1897)
 - "Wireless" (1902)
 - "With the Night Mail [Aerial Board of Control 1]" (1905)
 - "As Easy as A.B.C. [Aerial Board of Control 2]" (1912)
 - "In the Same Boat" (1911)

Northern New Jersey events are listed at:

<http://www.sfsnnj.com/news.html>

My Picks for Turner Classic Movies for January (comments by Mark R. Leeper):

Most of what I suggest here I suggest in the name of fun. Every once in a while I throw in a film I think is really powerful and important. At one time I considered A MAN FOR ALL SEASONS (1966) to be the best film that I had ever seen. It is mostly

all talk, but Paul Scofield--one of the great actors of all time--plays Sir Thomas More, a brilliant lawyer and a close friend of Henry VIII. But in the name of his religion he cannot endorse Henry's divorce of Catherine of Aragon and his (Henry's) subsequent marriage to Anne Boleyn. More wants to be inoffensive and simply insists on remaining silent on Henry's behavior. And Henry wants More's endorsement no matter what he must do to get it. The script is beautifully written with More having almost superhuman self- possession and clarity of thought and speech. Robert Bolt, who wrote the play, had previously written the screenplay for the better-known LAWRENCE OF ARABIA. Sir Thomas More, as created by Bolt is for me one of the great heroes of cinema. A MAN FOR ALL SEASONS was directed by Fred Zinneman who directed great films like HIGH NOON and THE DAY OF THE JACKAL. Those are thrillers, but A MAN FOR ALL SEASONS is a deep personal story and a great film. And if you happen to see parallels in the plot to current politics, well, the film is 53 years old. What could the filmmakers possibly know about our urgent events. This film [A MAN FOR ALL SEASONS SATURDAY, JANUARY 12 @ 03:30 PM (ET)]

TCM will run a short festival Thursday nights into Friday mornings the first four weeks of January. These will be films of the so-called "Peplum" or "Sword and Sandal" genre. Like December's FROM HELL IT CAME, for the most part these were slipshod productions but done with an absolutely straight face. The subgenre was created by imitators of HERCULES (1959). They never got up into the quality range of the Spaghetti Westerns, but they had no equivalent to the Westerns' composer Ennio Morricone, who changed the face of film music. TCM will include a two non-Italian Peplum films from the high end. They are BEN-HUR (1959) and SPARTACUS (1960), also the best film of the month. The latter may be one of the most politically important films ever made. But I will not go into that here. The following are the very large collection of Peplum films that TCM will be showing in January.

3 Thursday
 8:00 PM BEN-HUR (1959)
 12:00 AM DEMETRIUS AND THE GLADIATORS (1954)
 2:00 AM SPARTACUS (1960)
 5:30 AM SLAVE, THE (1962)

10 Thursday
 8:00 PM Helen of Troy (1956)
 10:15 PM Damon and Pythias (1962)
 12:15 AM Colossus of Rhodes, The (1961)
 2:45 AM Minotaur, The (1960)
 4:30 AM Atlas (1961)

17 Thursday
 8:00 PM QUO VADIS (1951)
 11:15 PM FALL OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE, THE (1964)
 2:30 AM REVOLT OF THE SLAVES (1961)
 4:30 AM AMAZONS OF ROME (1963)

24 Thursday
 8:00 PM Hercules, Samson & Ulysses (1963)
 9:45 PM Tyrant of Lydia Against the Son of Hercules (1963)
 11:30 PM Terror of Rome Against the Son of Hercules (1964)
 1:30 AM Hercules Against the Mongols (1960)
 3:15 AM Hercules Against the Barbarian (1960)
 5:00 AM Tartars, The (1961)

[-mrl]

RED MOON by **Kim Stanley Robinson** (copyright 2018, Orbit, 464pp, ASIN: B079L5PTZS; copyright 2018, Hachette Audio, 16 hours, 46 minutes, ASIN: B07HR1BGTD, narrated by Maxwell Hamilton, Joy Osmani, and Feodor Chin) (audio book review by Joe Karpierz):

Kim Stanley Robinson is something of an oddity in the field of science fiction these days. While the awards finalists lists are dominated by a group of extremely diverse relative newcomers, Robinson is old guard. He doesn't fit the demographic of today's genre writers. He's a 66-year-old white male, one that is having a nice late career surge. While he's probably most well-known for his Mars Trilogy of books from back in the 1990s (RED MARS, GREEN MARS, BLUE MARS), his late period novels have garnered him a lot of attention, making the Hugo finalist list with NEW YORK 2140 and 2312 (as an aside, I think a better book, AURORA, should have made the list as well).

Robinson's latest book is RED MOON, a novel that is apparently in the same timeline as that of New York 2140. The moon has been colonized mostly by the Chinese; they basically control the south polar region of the moon, while the north polar region is left for everyone else. The year is 2047, a year that I felt was wildly optimistic to have full colonization of our satellite until I read that the Chinese are launching an expedition to the far side of the moon, and I'm now wondering just how far off Robinson really is.

The story, such as it is, kicks off with an American bringing a revolutionary (now that I think about it, that's a funny way of putting it) quantum communications device to the moon as part of a deal made with the Chinese administration there. He gets caught up in a successful assassination attempt, and thus begins the wild ride of Fred Fredericks (the American) and his

unlikely involvement with a Chinese revolutionary named Qi as they traverse the moon north to south and back again, and while they're at it, travel back and forth from the Earth to the Moon as well. But all that running around the moon and the Earth have almost nothing to do with that communications device. That little item was just a way to get the story started.

Robinson recently stated in an interview in *Locus* magazine that *RED MOON* was about the Chinese colonization of the moon. Quite frankly, I don't buy that. Qi's father is involved in the latest Chinese dynastic succession on Earth. Qi is a wild card in that story. Her father is involved, but she is extremely outspoken in her opposition to the Party. She is also pregnant, which happened while on the moon and is not allowed. She is sent to earth, along with Fred, early on in the story to get her off the moon and hidden so the embarrassment to her and her father can be hidden from the authorities. From that point on, the story deviates from that of Fred and the communications device to that of the next great Chinese dynastic succession. One note about Qi's pregnancy. I'm not really sure what it adds to the story, unless I'm missing some subtle point (always a possibility). There certainly is a great deal of symbolism between her pregnancy and the new regime on Earth. But beyond that, I'm at a bit of a loss.

And this is why I don't think this book is about the Chinese colonization of the moon. Just as Robinson originally wanted to write a book about financial markets and ended up with *NEW YORK 2140*, he wanted to write a book about the next great Chinese dynastic succession, and he was able to do so by setting it in the future and showing how technological advances would affect that succession, while at the same time showing that the succession really still is a succession, no matter what causes and influence it.

Robinson is well known for being an ardent supporter of infodumps, and is not shy about including them in all of his novels. *RED MOON* is no different, although this time around the infodumps are not always about science--although we get more than our share about the colonization of the moon. They are about Chinese philosophy, government, finances, history, and motivation. They are about Chinese society, and eventually how all these things led to where we are in *RED MOON*. To this reviewer, it all points to the fact that Robinson wanted to write about the succession, not about moon colonization. The colonization was just a convenient vehicle for telling his story.

Yes, I know, who I am to say what Robinson's motivation really was for writing the book? I can't argue with that point of view. To put a bit of a gentler spin on the novel, it sure seems to me that he wanted to tell the succession story, and that I could be wrong about that.

Don't get me wrong. *RED MOON* is well written. As was once put to me about something else entirely, it's written in a way that would make your high school literature teacher proud that you read it. But like most of Robinson's other novels recently - the notable exception being *AURORA*--it's light on traditional story telling structure and plot.

As with *NEW YORK 2140*, multiple narrators are used in the audio production. I liked the way the multiple narrators were used in that book, but not so much here in *RED MOON*, and I'm not sure why. I guess they just didn't work for me this time around. Also, I feel like Joy Osmani was under-utilized. She read very few chapters in comparison to the two male narrators. In any event, the narration was serviceable and worked well enough; it just wasn't as outstanding as the narration in *NEW YORK 2140*.

I could say the same for the novel itself. [-jak]

THE ADVOCATES (film review by Mark R. Leeper):

CAPSULE: This documentary is a serious look at the problems of extreme poverty in the City of Los Angeles. It is a city with many of the most successful corporations in the country but at the close of 2018 there are more than 53,000 people living homeless on the streets. This is a look at these homeless who have very little income and almost no political power. It also looks at the people who volunteer their time and money to improve the lives of the destitute. Directed by: Remi Kessler. Rating: low +1 (-4 to +4) or 4/10

Los Angeles is the home of many large and profitable corporations. But in some ways it has more poverty than any other big city in the United States. When adjusted for the cost of living the median income is \$1300 a month. There are tens of thousands of people living on the streets in Los Angeles. There are more than 53,000 homeless living in Los Angeles County disenfranchised. These people are too easily ignored because their money goes to just surviving so they have almost no political power of their own. There are, however, volunteers who are willing to stand up and advocate for the well being and rights of the homeless. This is a documentary that looks at those disenfranchised and those who make sacrifices to help them.

THE ADVOCATES looks at people living in poverty in Los Angeles. It introduces the viewer to a little of the history of the problem of homelessness in the city. Also it examines those standing up for the people living in these neighborhoods. Examined are the programs of support for those living on the street and for those working at what are barely subsistence wages, one of which is an organization that has in eight years prepared and served over half a million meals to people on the streets. It is highly stressful to day after day deal with really unfortunate people in various stages of hunger. It is even more

stressful to deal with issues of substance abuse. The growth of funds allocated to support low- income housing has simply not kept pace with the costs of housing for several decades.

The film goes into political wrangling on ballot issues that have improved the lives of the homeless, and have funneled political help in high poverty areas. These are held toward late in the film. Remi Kessler injects a spirit of some optimism toward the end of the film showing a ballot victory and the case of a homeless man whose condition was significantly improved by the extensive help of a volunteer. The overall condition of the problem does show improvement. This however takes the viewer away from covering a wide piece of the issues and concentrates only on a very narrow one-person sliver of the problem.

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

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt8679160/reference>

What others are saying: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/the_advocates

[-mrl]

Super Powers (letters of comment by Radovan Garabik and Andre Kuzniarek):

In response to [comments on super powers](#) in the 12/21/18 issue of the MT VOID, Radovan Garabik writes:

[Daphne Eftychia Arthur wrote,] "Heh. Me too! Has to be a very light touch, slow movement parallel to the surface increases the effect (and can be the difference between detecting it or not), & it feels like a 60 Hz not-exactly-a-vibration." [-dea]

I can confirm you are not the only one--I can also feel the electricity sometimes, by brushing my fingertips gently along the surface. I am living in a 50Hz 230V region, it happens with only some appliances (on my notebook it is rather noticeable since you usually touch the notebook). I assume it is an inductive coupling of the mains frequency to the (perhaps unearthed) chassis, or very badly filtered low voltage DC...

ObSF: Well, senses that detect electricity is SF enough ... but there are people who implanted tiny magnets into their fingertips and developed novel senses that feel magnetic fields, AC currents, and ferromagnetic metals. [-rg]

Andre Kuzniarek writes:

Jim Susky's theory is correct. He says:

'I have noticed this myself on various items of audio equipment--in my case detectable by lightly rubbing fingers on equipment chassis's--but have never "tested" it. The "test" would be to reverse the prongs on a two prong power plug and try again.' and goes on:

'In the (not so) "old days", with equal width prongs, the plug could be reversed thus putting the refrigerator enclosure (and door) (and audio equipment chassis) at voltage significantly above "neutral voltage"--which itself is normally close to "ground voltage".'

I run into this all the time with old pinball machines I work on. And my wife happens to like using an old metal percolator-style coffee maker/pot, with equal-width prongs. I felt that buzzy sensation with it a few days ago, and tested it just now by reversing the plug. Indeed, the buzzy sensation went away. [-ak]

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

[This is part three of three parts.]

In *INSIDE THE THIRD REICH* by Albert Speer (ISBN 978-0-684-82949-4), Speer comments on various aspects of the war itself, particularly the technical issues:

"Even though our programs had top priority, in September 1941 the amounts of fuel assigned to them had to be reduced by a third, and by January 1, 1942, to a sixth of our needs. That is just one example of how greatly Hitler had overextended his resources by embarking on the Russian campaign."

"Actually, Professor Heisenberg had not given any final answer to my question whether a successful nuclear fission could be kept under control with absolute certainty or might continue as a chain reaction. Hitler was plainly not I delighted with the possibility that the earth under his rule might be I transformed into a glowing star."

"On the suggestion of the nuclear physicists we scuttled the project to develop an atom bomb by the autumn of 1942, after I had again queried them about deadlines and been told that we could not count on anything for three or four years. The war would certainly have been decided long before then."

"Peenemunde was not only our biggest but our most misguided project."

"The whole notion was absurd. The fleets of enemy bombers in 1944 were dropping an average of three thousand tons of bombs a day over a span of several months. And Hitler wanted to retaliate with thirty rockets that would have carried twenty-four tons of explosives to England daily. That was equivalent to the bomb load of only twelve Flying Fortresses."

Speer is frank about his own culpability:

"For being in a position to know and nevertheless shunning knowledge creates direct responsibility for the consequences--from the very beginning."

"It has repeatedly surprised me, in later years, that scarcely any anti-Semitic remarks of Hitler's have remained in my memory. Out of the scraps that remain, I can reconstruct what crossed my mind at the time: dismay over the deviation from the image I wanted to have of Hitler, anxiety over the increasing deterioration of his health, hope for some letup of the struggle against the churches, a certain puzzlement at his partiality for utopian-sounding remote goals, all sorts of odd feelings--but Hitler's hatred for the Jews seemed to me so much a matter of course that I gave it no serious thought."

"But in the final analysis I myself determined the degree of my isolation, the extremity of my evasions, and the extent of my ignorance."

"Whether I knew or did not know, or how much or how little I knew, is totally unimportant when I consider what horrors I ought to have known about and what conclusions would have been the natural ones to draw from the little I did know. Those who ask me are fundamentally expecting me to offer justifications. But I have none. No apologies are possible."

"Hanke must have been speaking of Auschwitz. During those few seconds, while Hanke was warning me, the whole responsibility had become a reality again. Those seconds were uppermost in my mind when I stated to the international court at the Nuremberg Trial that as an important member of the leadership of the Reich, I had to share the total responsibility for all that had happened. For from that moment on, I was inescapably contaminated morally; from fear of discovering something which might have made me turn from my course, I had closed my eyes."

"But what preys on my mind nowadays has little to do with the standards of Nuremberg nor the figures on lives I saved or might have saved. For in either case I was moving within the system. What disturbs me more is that I failed to read the physiognomy of the regime mirrored in the faces of those prisoners--the regime whose existence I was so obsessively trying to prolong during those weeks and months. I did not see any moral ground outside the system where I should have taken my stand."

"Much as I believed in principle that as one of the leaders of the regime I must take responsibility for its crimes, it was hard for me at first to adjust to the reality."

"I have always thought it was a most valuable trait to recognize reality and not to pursue delusions. But when I now think over my life up to and including the years of imprisonment, there was no period in which I was free of delusory notions. The departure from reality, which was visibly spreading like a contagion, was no peculiarity of the National Socialist regime. But in normal circumstances people who turn their backs on reality are soon set straight by the mockery and criticism of those around them, which makes them aware they have lost credibility. In the Third Reich there were no such correctives, especially for those who belonged to the upper stratum. On the contrary, every self-deception was multiplied as in a hall of distorting mirrors, becoming a repeatedly confirmed picture of a fantastical dream world which no longer bore any relationship to the grim outside world. In those mirrors I could see nothing but my own face reproduced many times over. No external factors disturbed the uniformity of hundreds of unchanging faces, all mine."

"But since then I had been bribed and intoxicated by the desire to wield pure power, to assign people to this and that, to say the final word on important questions, to deal with expenditures in the billions. I thought I was prepared to resign, but I would have sorely missed the heady stimulus that comes with leadership."

Speer is even critical of his work in his own area of specialty, architecture:

"Nowadays, when I leaf through the numerous photos of models of our one-time grand boulevard, I see that it would have turned out not only crazy, but also boring."

"Whenever, nowadays, I look through the plans and the photos of the models, even these varied parts of the avenue strike me as lifeless and regimented. When on the morning after my release from imprisonment I passed one of these buildings on the way to the airport, I saw in a few seconds what I had been blind to for years: our plan completely lacked a sense of

proportion."

"Designs of such scale naturally indicate a kind of chronic megalomania, which is reason enough to dwell on these grandiose plans. Yet that broad boulevard, those new central railroad stations with their underground communications, are not so excessive by present-day standards when skyscrapers and public buildings all over the world have reached similar proportions."

"During my imprisonment, this design, with its red mosaics, its pillars, its bronze lions and gilded silhouettes, had assumed in my memory a bright, almost pleasant character. But when I once again saw the color photographs of the model, after a lapse of more than twenty-one years, I was struck by the resemblance to a Cecil B. De Mille set. Along with its fantastic quality I also became aware of the cruel element in this architecture. It had been the very expression of a tyranny."

"The more technical the world imposed on us by the war, the more dangerous was this indifference of the technician to the direct consequences of his anonymous activities."

"Witness my ironic reaction to the destruction of the Ministry in the air raid of November 22, 1943: "Although we have been fortunate in that large parts of the current files of the Ministry have burned and so relieved us for a time of useless ballast, we cannot really expect that such events will continually introduce the necessary fresh air into our work."

At the same time, Speer also tries occasionally to make himself less culpable than some might think:

"[In] November and December 1943, I addressed a letter to all Gauleiters in which I recast most of my prewar philosophy: no more pretentious artistic notions, but economy-mindedness; broad-scale transportation planning to save the cities from traffic congestion; mass production of housing, cleaning up the old quarters of the cities, and establishing businesses in the city centers. There was no longer any talk of monumental buildings. My enthusiasm for them had faded, and so in all probability had Hitler's, for he let me describe this new planning concept to him without the least protest."

"At first the factory managers complained that the prisoners arrived in a weakened condition and after a few months had to be sent back, exhausted, to the regular camps. Since their training time alone required several weeks and instructors were scarce, we could not afford to train a new group every few months. In response to our complaints the SS made considerable improvements in the sanitary conditions and rations of the camps. Soon, in the course of my rounds through the armaments plants, I saw more contented faces among the prisoners and better fed people."

And the Allies seem to have provided some basis for his feelings, since he writes of the period while he was awaiting trial after the war:

"Although this meant that I was facing charges of the gravest sort, one would never have known it from the behavior of the guards toward me. The Americans said cheerily: 'You'll soon be acquitted and the whole thing forgotten.' Sergeant Williams increased my rations so that, as he said, I would have my strength for the trial, and the British commandant invited me for a drive the day we met."

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Quote of the Week:

Politics are not my concern... they impressed me as
a dog's life without a dog's decencies.
--Rudyard Kipling

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