

Well, I don't care for Chop Suey but it was quite popular in the Detroit area back in the late 1970s when I was living there. No good Chinese restaurant could survive long if it did not have a big neon sign that said "Chop Suey." And on the menu were hamburgers and hot dogs for the families that brought their children in.

There is a huge international following for pizza. Contrary to a common belief pizza really is Italian, but by all accounts there is no comparison between American Pizza and Italian Pizza. Popular Italian actor Marcello Mastroianni used to say that he wanted to do more American films because only when he came to America could he get good pizza. Of course that was also back in the 1970s.

American pizza is a wholly different animal from authentic Italian pizza. But most people prefer the imitation. The same thing seems to be happening in other countries also.

The Japanese dish Sukiyaki was invented by the Japanese for the Japanese but it was supposed to be "this is what westerners eat." But her the original version is what is preferred.

Next week I will say a little about Balti. [-mrl]

You'll Know One When You See One (comments by Tom Russell):

Read an article yesterday about dinosaur fossils found in Australia. It said the fossils gave evidence those dinosaurs lived in herds. But wouldn't it be more correct to say they lived in flocks?

Perhaps paleontologists are ornithologists. [-tlr]

Mark responds:

If dinosaurs were discovered today they might be named to emphasize "birdy-ness." Whenever I hear this discussed my mind goes back to a comic book about dinosaurs. They showed the farmer who turned up the first dinosaurs with his plow and he is thinking "there sure must have been some big birds living around here." The idea was to teach the reader that they were not big birds but dinosaurs. But now they would have to admit the farmer was right all along. [-mrl]

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

This week I'll cover the Retro Hugo, Best Dramatic Presentation, Long Form category.

BATMAN is a serial in fifteen parts. The narration is overblown, to say the least, and Batman's "ears" look more like the Devil's horns. Not surprisingly, the Batmobile looks a lot different than the ones we have seen from the 1960s television and onward. As with all the superheroes with secret identities, writers had to come up with explanations of why they were not fighting the Axis or even in the army. In this case, apparently the government knows Bruce Wayne is the Batman (they use the definite article at this point), and he tells Robin that to keep his secret, he has to say that he is 4-F.

Alas, there is a heavy dose of anti-Japanese racism in this. Yes, it was common during the war, but it is definitely beyond cringe-inducing. (It is not helped by the fact that it is done in yellowface, with Dr. Daka played by J. Carroll Naish.) What astonishes me is that the IMDB claims that many racial slurs against the Japanese were edited out from the first home video release. I thought that was what I had, which makes me wonder if it was even worse than it seems. If I have problems with MUNCHHAUSEN as a German propaganda piece (see below), I have even more to this as blatant racism.

CABIN IN THE SKY is quite unusual in that it was made by a major Hollywood studio (MGM) but featured an African-American cast, only the fourth such sound film. Its importance has little to do with its fantasy content, and everything to do with its place in the history of African-Americans in films and their image in American culture. Although the script was apparently submitted to and approved by the NAACP, it still has some negative stereotypes, particularly in the character of Little Jose and his friends. The religion aspect is the fantasy element, and bears a strong resemblance to the fantasy element in HEAVEN CAN WAIT (see below). Both are about someone being judged after their death: will they go to Heaven, or to "the other place"? (I don't think either film actually uses the word "Hell", probably due to the production code.)

The character of "Little Joe" is an embarrassment, but CABIN IN THE SKY is worth watching for the musical numbers with Ethel Waters and Lena Horne. As a *fantasy* film, however, it has little to offer.

A GUY NAMED JOE is yet another "afterlife" film (see CABIN IN THE SKY [above] and HEAVEN CAN WAIT [below]), but it adds a war-related story, making it a sort of doubly-cliched film of its time. Joe dies in a fighter plane, so he is assigned to help a new (live) pilot gain enough skill and confidence to help win the war. Apparently he does this by whispering motivational suggestions in the pilot's ear during his flights. Was this supposed to make people whose loved ones had died in the war feel that they were still helping the war effort from beyond the grave or something? This is even more dated than

most of the Retro Hugo Dramatic Presentation finalists (though perhaps not as offensive as some).

HEAVEN CAN WAIT has a gorgeous set design for Hell, but is basically a comedy about the life of a ne'er-do-well in the late 19th and early 20th century. As with several of the Retro finalists, the amount of true fantastical content is fairly small.

MUNCHHAUSEN was an attempt to provide the German audience with the lush Technicolor films they were not getting from Hollywood in 1943. And the film is beautiful, with some scenes reminiscent of Brueghel paintings, and the scenes on the moon quite fantastical. As a Hugo finalist, though, it has two flaws. One is that long stretches are fairly boring--I just don't find Munchhausen's intrigues with Catherine the Great very interesting. The second is that if people balk at giving an award to a film directed by someone accused of sexual misconduct and possible rape, what should one think of awarding a Hugo to a film made by the Nazis as a propaganda film (of the "Volksfilm" style)? It's a fine line, I agree, but while I think the film worth watching (it's available free on YouTube, and if you get it on DVD, whoever is getting the royalties, it's not the Nazi party), I cannot vote to give it a Hugo.

There are those who feel that PHANTOM OF THE OPERA should not be on the ballot, because it has no science fiction or fantasy elements. As noted, this complaint could be applied to many of the finalists in both the Long Form and Short Form categories. Its big advantage is that it doesn't shoehorn a war story in, or Heaven and Hell.

Rankings: PHANTOM OF THE OPERA, no award, CABIN IN THE SKY, A GUY NAMED JOE, HEAVEN CAN WAIT, BATMAN/MUNCHHAUSEN [tie]

[It's tough to decide which of BATMAN and MUNCHHAUSEN should rank lower. BATMAN is more blatantly racist, but MUNCHHAUSEN was made by actual Nazis. If I were actually voting, I would not even rank them, so that neither would get my vote even if other entries were eliminated.]

Next week: Retro Hugo, Best Dramatic Presentation, Short Form

[-ecl]

Mark Leeper
mleeper@optonline.net

Quote of the Week:

The greatest pleasure of a dog is that you may make a fool of yourself with him, and not only will he not scold you, but he will make a fool of himself too.
--Samuel Butler

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