

"As Easy as A.B.C. [Aerial Board of Control 2]" (1912)
 "In the Same Boat" (1911)
 Old Bridge Public Library, 7PM

Northern New Jersey events are listed at:

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

My Picks for Turner Classic Movies for July (comments by Mark R. Leeper and Evelyn C. Leeper):

I rarely pick just one film in a month to recommend here. However, this month TCM is celebrating the 50th anniversary of humans first landing on the moon. They have chosen to run the rarely seen THE WOMAN IN THE MOON (DIE FRAU IM MOND). This was the first science fiction film to try to be serious and accurate in depicting celestial travel. While it is not too hard to find, few science fans and science fiction fans have actually seen it. TCM is running it for the first time. It will run at 11:00 PM on July 2. As a bonus Evelyn sends along a list of films of special interest for the month in July.

In 1927 Fritz Lang made what may be remembered as one of the greatest science fiction films of all time, METROPOLIS, based on his wife's novel of the same title. Certainly the image of the female robot is one of the more notable images of early science fiction cinema. Two years later Lang was back making another SF film for the screen, DIE FRAU IM MOND (THE WOMAN IN THE MOON). It is the story of a team of people who design and create a rocket ship to be the first people on the moon.

This is not the first film of a trip to the moon, but it was the first film that seriously treated the subject of space travel. The portrayals of conditions on the moon are a good deal wide of the mark. That was to be expected. There was very little real information about what the moon would really be like. On the other hand, German rocketry was the most advanced in the world, and there was not yet a military clampdown on rocket science. Rocket scientists on the level of Willy Ley and Herrman Oberth gave their expertise to the project. The rocketry portrayed in the film was mostly either actual science or informed guesswork.

One piece of trivia was that Lang wanted the moment of the rocket firing to play as the most dramatic scene of the film. But when the rocket was fired there was not much to see until the moment of firing. Lang remembered that during the war when a big gun was to be fired people were alerted by the person firing the gun would count backwards from ten to zero, firing the gun at zero. It worked for the audience. This was the first verifiable time a rocket blast-off was associated with a countdown to zero.

Here is Wikipedia's list of what were essentially lucky guesses, cases where the film made correct guesses about the first real rocket to the moon:

--The rocket ship Friede is fully built in a tall building and moved to the launch pad.

--As launch approaches, the launch team counts down the seconds from ten to zero ("now" was used for zero), and WOMAN IN THE MOON is often cited as the first occurrence of the "countdown to zero" before a rocket launch.

--The rocket ship blasts off from a pool of water; water is commonly used today on launch pads to absorb and dissipate the extreme heat and to damp the noise generated by the rocket exhaust.

--In space, the rocket ejects its first stage and fires its second stage rocket, predicting the development of modern multi-stage orbital rockets.

--The crew recline on horizontal beds to cope with the G-forces experienced during lift-off and pre-orbital acceleration.

--Floor foot straps are used to restrain the crew during zero gravity (Velcro is used today).

--These items and the overall design of the rocket led to the film being banned in Germany from 1933-1945 during World War II by the Nazis, due to similarities to their secret V-2 project.

Evelyn has picked out all the fantastic films of TCM July and sends along the list:

2 Tuesday
 8:00 PM Trip to the Moon, A (1902)
 8:30 PM Metropolis (1926)
 11:00 PM Die Frau im Mond (1929)

3 Wednesday
 2:00 AM Things To Come (1936)
 4:00 AM Flash Gordon Conquers the Universe (1940)
 2:30 PM The Testament of Dr. Mabuse (1933)

5 Friday

10:15 AM On Borrowed Time (1939)
8:00 PM Wizard of Oz, The (1939)
11:15 PM Hunchback of Notre Dame, The (1939)

6 Saturday
3:45 AM Rabid (1977)
4:15 PM Wizard of Oz, The (1939)
6:15 PM Muppets Take Manhattan, The (1984)

7 Sunday
1:30 AM China Syndrome, The (1979)

8 Monday
6:00 AM Scared to Death (1947)
7:15 AM Nosferatu (1922)
9:00 AM Vampyr (1932)
10:15 AM Spooks Run Wild (1941)
11:30 AM Dead Men Walk (1943)
12:45 PM White Zombie (1932)
2:00 PM X from Outer Space, The (1967)
3:45 PM Little Shop of Horrors (1960)
5:00 PM Brain That Wouldn't Die, The (1962)
6:30 PM Cremators, The (1969)

9 Tuesday
8:00 PM Day the Earth Stood Still, The (1951)
9:45 PM War Of The Worlds, The (1953)
11:30 PM Invasion of the Body Snatchers (1956)

10 Wednesday
1:00 AM It Came From Outer Space (1953)
2:30 AM Thing From Another World, The (1951)
4:15 AM Forbidden Planet (1956)
6:00 AM Earth vs. the Flying Saucers (1956)

16 Tuesday
2:15 PM Sinbad the Sailor (1947)
8:00 PM Destination Moon (1950)
10:00 PM For All Mankind (1989)
11:30 PM Countdown (1968)

17 Wednesday
1:30 AM From The Earth To The Moon (1958)
3:30 AM First Men in the Moon (1964)
5:30 AM Trip to the Moon, A (1902)
6:00 AM 20 Million Miles to Earth (1957)
7:30 AM Them! (1954)
9:30 AM Blob, The (1958)
11:00 AM Fly, The (1958)

19 Friday
5:15 AM Seven Days in May (1964)

20 Saturday
2:00 AM Lifeforce (1985)
3:45 AM Invaders From Mars (1986)
2:00 PM Boy With Green Hair, The (1948)

22 Monday
6:00 AM Hillbillys in a Haunted House (1967)
12:30 PM Horror Hotel (1960)
2:00 PM Black Scorpion, The (1957)
3:45 PM Cosmic Monster, The (1958)
5:00 PM Thing From Another World, The (1951)
6:30 PM Blob, The (1958)

23 Tuesday
8:00 PM Time Machine, The (1960)
10:00 PM 2001: A Space Odyssey (1968)

24 Wednesday
12:45 AM Five Million Years To Earth (1968)
2:45 AM Marooned (1969)
5:00 AM 12 To The Moon (1960)
6:30 AM Village of the Damned (1960)

27 Saturday
10:08 AM Spook Busters (1946)
4:15 PM Fail-Safe (1964)

29 Monday
12:00 AM Haxan: Witchcraft Through the Ages (1922)

30 Tuesday
8:00 PM Close Encounters of the Third Kind (1977)
10:30 PM Star Wars: A New Hope (1977)

31 Wednesday
 12:45 AM Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan (1982)
 3:00 AM Solaris (1972)
 6:00 AM Logan's Run (1975)
 8:15 AM Westworld (1973)
 10:15 AM 2010 (1984)
 8:00 PM Star Wars: A New Hope (1977)
 10:15 PM Young Frankenstein (1974)

01 Aug Thursday
 4:00 AM Fly, The (1958)

[-mrl,-ecl]

THE CALCULATING STARS by **Mary Robinette Kowal** (copyright 2018, Tor, \$15.99, trade paperback, 431pp, ISBN 978-0-7653-7838-5) (book review by Joe Karpierz):

A notation on the bottom of the front cover of Mary Robinette Kowal's **THE CALCULATING STARS** says, "A Lady Astronaut Novel". Readers were first introduced to the Lady Astronaut in the novelette "The Lady Astronaut of Mars", which won the Hugo Award for Best Novelette in 2014. **THE CALCULATING STARS** is a prequel to that novelette, in effect telling the origin story (no, this is not a superhero story, but I think you *can* call it the story of a hero of sorts) of Elma York, the Lady Astronaut. **THE CALCULATING STARS** has already won the Nebula Award for Best Novel this year, and in addition to being a Hugo finalist is also a finalist for the Locus Award for Best Science Fiction Novel. As an aside, Kowal has won two other Hugos as well as the John W. Campbell Award for Best New Writer (back in 2008).

THE CALCULATING STARS starts off with a meteor striking the earth, causing an extinction level climate change event. It strikes near Washington D.C., which throws the United States into disarray. Of course, this is minor compared to the likely destruction of the human race, but it is important to the story. Elma, a former WASP pilot and a gifted mathematician, runs the numbers and realizes that things don't look good for the human race. Thus, the effort to reach space, and colonize the moon and Mars, must be accelerated.

The novel, of course, is an alternate history of the space race, but the race is not between the United States and Russia, but between humanity and looming disaster. There is no NASA here, but the National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics. As an aside, NACA actually did exist, and was the predecessor to NASA. NACA was formed in 1915 and gave way to NASA in 1958. Since the meteor strike occurs in 1952, we don't get to see NASA in this novel. NACA gave way to the International Aerospace Coalition, the worldwide effort to get man off the planet before the cataclysmic climate event does its job.

Elma is one of a group of women "computers", those who do the calculations for the space flights. The team of computers is invaluable of course, but they want more. Since the eventual goal is to colonize space, the women believe that they should be considered for the astronaut program. And thus begins the Elma's drive to become the "Lady Astronaut".

The novel details not only humanities drive to space, but the trials and tribulations that the computers face in their desire to become astronauts. It is the 1950s, so of course there is the usual amount of sexism--for a time, the first class of female astronauts are called astronettes (ugh), and they are paraded about initially as a publicity stunt, valuable more for their looks (briefly, in one of the later chapters, Elma notices that one of the female astronauts has her space suit "taken in" to "accentuate her figure") than for the qualities that make them suited to be astronauts. The initial position of the IAC is that space is too dangerous for women, and should just be kept in their place on Earth, doing their computer work or anything else they've been doing. There is also an element of racial prejudices in the novel as well, with obviously qualified women of color not being allowed to apply for the astronaut program or, even worse, see that the application process is skewed against them.

There is an obvious similarity between **THE CALCULATING STARS** and **HIDDEN FIGURES**, of course, but that's okay. They stand apart from each other, and yet their similarities can be enjoyed for what they are. **STARS** may be an alternate history while **HIDDEN FIGURES** is not, but they both celebrate the ability of the women behind the scenes to make their respective space programs a success against all odds.

THE CALCULATING STARS is a terrific novel, and a worthy Hugo finalist. I look forward to reading its sequel, **THE FATED SKY**. [-jak]

THE GLASS BEAD GAME (letter of comment by John Hertz):

In response to [Evelyn's comments on THE GLASS BEAD GAME](#) in the 05/03/19 issue of the MT VOID, John Hertz writes:

Hesse's **GLASS BEAD GAME** is one of the finest sf novels, indeed one of the finest novels. The architecture, characterization, and what we've called world-building are masterly. In these I include timing, and imagination and handling of the s-f element. It raises to a peak Sturgeon's great pun "Science fiction is knowledge fiction" (the Latin root of "science"

means "knowledge").

It was one of the S-F Classics we discussed at Renovation (64th Worldcon).

I rejoice to find it on the Retro Hugo ballot.

You can see an 800-word note by me via , right-hand column below "meta". [-jh]

Evelyn responds:

Rather than make everyone track through various links, a direct link to John's note at the LASFS site is <https://tinyurl.com/lasfs-hertz-hesse>.

The first time I tried reading THE GLASS BEAD GAME was in anticipation (no pun intended!) of Renovation. My comment then was, "I gave up on MAGISTER LUDI (a.k.a. THE GLASS BEAD GAME) by Herman Hesse (ISBN 978-0-312-27849-6) after about a hundred pages-- it just was not working for me. However, I did run across an interesting description of the main character, Joseph Knecht, "who [has] not been driven by a single talent to concentrate on a specialty, but whose nature rather aims at integration, synthesis, and universality..." In this he reminds me of Mia in Alexei Panshin's RITE OF PASSAGE."

De gustibus non est disputandum. [-ecl]

Five-Way Chili (letter of comment by Neil Ostrove):

In response to [Mark's comments on Five-Way Chili](#) in the 06/21/19 issue of the MT VOID, Neil Ostrove writes:

You'll be happy to know that at Skyline Chili you can get your 4- way with your choice of either onions or beans, so you can have beans without having to have everything else. Spaghetti isn't optional if you insist on a numbered dish, but you can get a Loaded Chili Bowl without it.

While most locations are in Ohio, Indiana, and Kentucky, there are six in Florida as well. [-no]

Mark responds:

On my chili report of a couple of issues back I am told the rules for combinations of chili are not what I remember them as being. They may have changed over time. [-mrl]

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

BLACKASS by A. Igoni Barrett (ISBN 978-1-55597-733-7) is consciously modeled after Franz Kafka's METAMORPHOSIS, even to the extent of beginning with an epigraph from Kafka's work, then starting, "Furi Wariboko awoke this morning to find that dreams can lose their way and turn up on the wrong side of sleep." Wariboko has not been turned into a giant insect, though, but rather into an oyibo: a white person. In Lagos, Nigeria, this presents its own problems, especially for someone living in an African neighborhood, with an African name, and raised as an African. But Warikobo still has some of his African heritage left: his buttocks are still black, hence the title.

"No one asks to be born, to be black or white or any colour in between, and yet the person we are born into becomes the hardest to explain to the world. Furo's dilemma was this: he was born black, and had lived in that skin for thirty-odd years, only to be born again on Monday morning as white, and while he was still toddling the curves of his new existence, he realised he had been mistaken in assuming his new identity had overthrown the old. His idea of what he was, of who the world saw him as, was shaken by the blemish on his backside. He knew that so long as the vestiges of his old self remained wit him, his new self would never be safe from ridicule and incomprehension."

That he is "thirty-odd years old" when he is "reborn" is probably no accident, nor is the notion that he has two essences in a sort of hypostatic union. And the whole incomprehension thing is certainly familiar.

Later, another character (Igoni), who has also transitioned (though in gender), says, "It was early yet in my journey to the far reaches of my identity. Like those before me who had transitioned into otherness, I had found out that appearances would always be a point of conflict. Male or female, black or white, the eye of the beholder and the fashion sense of the beholden, all these feed into our desire to classify by sight. The woman and the man: stuck together in a species and yet divided by a gendered history going back to the womb. But in this war of the selves, I had switched sides. Despite the snake of maleness that still tethered me to the past, I was more than man, interrupted. I was whoever I wanted me to be."

And this is the essence of the book: within ourselves, we have both the power to remake ourselves and the weight of our past tying us down. We can change how others perceive us, but only up to a point. Some aspect of our earlier self--color, body parts, whatever--remains, both affecting our notion of ourself, and other people's perceptions. [-ecl]

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Quote of the Week:

They usually have two tellers in my local bank, except
when it's very busy, when they have one.
--Rita Rudner

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