

My pick for November is **THE BEST YEARS OF OUR LIVES**, running (suitably enough) on Veterans Day. Shortly after the end of World War II three soldiers are returning home to their families and to their careers if they still exist. Two are played by Fredric March and Dana Andrews. The third soldier (sailor, actually) is Homer Parrish (played by Harold Russell), who has lost his hands in battle and wants to escape the pity of his family and neighbors. The film covers the lives of these three veterans after they return to civilian life and they try to rebuild their lives. March plays a returning banking executive who considers that he should be using his position to do good in the community, conflicting with the soulless policies of his bank. Andrews returns to find his wife has a surprise or two for him. Parrish won the Best Actor Academy Award for his role.

In this small group we see several contrasts. It is not just military ranks but also age values. (Interestingly, the characters played by March and Andrews have their civilian status the reverse of their military ranks; March was a sergeant in the Army but a successful banker in civilian life, while Andrews was a captain but returns to be a soda jerk.) This is one of the best dramas of the 1940s.

THE BEST YEARS OF OUR LIVES became the highest-grossing film in both the United States and UK since the release of **GONE WITH THE WIND**. It remains the sixth most-attended film of the 1940s in the UK, with over 20 million tickets sold.

[**THE BEST YEARS OF OUR LIVES**, Wednesday, November 11, @ 5:00 PM]

[-mrl]

Changes to Mark's Turner Classic Movies Picks (comments by Evelyn C. Leeper):

For many years, Mark has been provided a *monthly* Turner Classic Movies recommendation, the column for which runs on the last Friday of the month. This was possible because TCM would provide their monthly schedule a month or even two in advance. Now, however, TCM has changed their website and only provides a four-week window. (Boo! Hiss!)

We are not dropping the recommendations, but the new process will be different. Each week Mark will check the listings for the week three weeks later, and if he has a film he particularly wants to recommend, he will recommend that in a column that will run a week or two before the film. Some months there may be more than one film, but other months (yes, February, I'm looking at you) there may be nothing new to recommend.

This new schedule will start at the end of December, since we got the listings for the rest of the year before they disappeared.

So for now continue to look for recommendations, only less calendar-bound. The good news is there probably will always be a couple of weeks' advance notice of a film. [-ecl]

Raymond Chandler (letter of comment by Kip Williams):

I recently found that the BBC did a series in which they adapted all of Chandler's novels for radio, and they're not bad. My two gripes are the occasional slip of an otherwise okay American accent or two, and an ignorance of the time period that led their sound effects people to have a just-hung-up phone immediately to go dial tone (and it's our post-1969 dial tone at that--the two-note chord). Some of the novels have been done by them twice now, and it's interesting to compare the versions. BBC have also done a series of Hitchcock movie adaptations (more accurately, new radio versions of properties Hitchcock adapted), the best of which feature Alan Rickman in "Rope", and Hugh Grant in "The Blind Man" (based on a movie Hitch ended up not making). [-kw]

Evelyn responds:

I kept all the Ed Bishop Raymond Chandler ones when they were podcast from the BBC several years ago, and have listened to them dozens of times. The only problem is that whenever I hear Ed Bishop in anything else, I immediately think, "What is Philip Marlowe doing in this?" For example, he voiced Lije Bailey in the BBC "The Caves of Steel"; at least there he is a detective as well. [-ecl]

FROM HELL IT CAME (letters of comment by Kip Williams, John Purcell, and Dorothy J. Heydt):

In response to [Mark's comments on FROM HELL IT CAME](#) in the 10/23/20 issue of the MT VOID, Kip Williams writes:

I saw a cartoon called "The Angry Beavers" once, and keep intending to look in on the series again because the one episode I saw was dead-on. This kid wants to watch a horror movie on late-night TV, and is scaring the poo out of himself with it, and keeps doing things to un-scare himself (think of young Bill Cosby spreading Jello on the floor and setting fire to the couch to avoid Arch Oboler's Chicken Heart). And what of the movie? Each time we see it, it consists of insipid black and white images in which one man is explaining the plot to another man. GAZE UPON THE ESSENCE OF HORROR, KIDDIES! [-kw]

Dorothy J. Heydt writes:

[Mark wrote,] "The New York Times, which likes to give one-line reviews for movies scheduled for TV has a quick phrase for this film: 'FROM HELL IT CAME? BACK SEND IT.'" [-mrl]

My, my. A reviewer after the model of Dorothy Parker, who reviewed plays for (IIRD) "The New Yorker" and made remarks such as "THE HOUSE BEAUTIFUL I the play lousy." [-djh]

[Mark continued,] "Do you want to see what an angry tree stump looks like? Well, it sort of looks like a cross between an angry

Orthodox rabbi and a cinnamon sticky bun." [-mrl]

Now, that's a good phrase. [-djh]

John Purcell writes:

Your comments about FROM HELL IT CAME (1957) are well taken, but personally, I adore grossly incompetent skiffy movies. The science fiction, fantasy, and horror genres abound with these cinematic bon mots, especially those produced in the fifties and sixties. They are so much fun to heckle both while watching and reviewing them. Now just think that when these flicks first appeared people loved them for what they were: mindless entertainment. That has not changed. I grant you that there are some good concepts and plot ideas in many of these films--as you note in your write-up on FROM HELL IT CAME--that are destroyed beyond recognition by the sheer ineptitude of screenplay writers, actors, cinematographers, et al, with the end result being brilliant stupidity preserved forever on film. Admit it: you love this trash just as much as I do. [-jp]

Mark replies:

No, I really do not. I have no "guilty pleasures; I love film too much. If I like a film my pleasure is not guilty, your honor. [-mrl]

Musical Accompaniments to Silent Films (letters of comment by Kip Williams and John Purcell):

In response to [various comments on musical accompaniments to silent films](#) in the last issues, Kip writes:

Anyone who lives close enough to Norfolk, VA, should watch the Naro schedule. As far as I know, Chris Kypros still accompanies silent comedies there once a year, and it's a treat. He weaves a tapestry of reaction, and once in a while throws in a hilarious audio reference (Harold Lloyd thinks he hears a ghost, and Chris tosses in the 'Etranger' theme from "The Twilight Zone"). One time in Houston, the River Oaks had a special showing of Laurel & Hardy silent comedies with a theater organ wheeled in. I snuck up to the instrument during intermission because I saw a piece of paper on the stand, and it turned out to be a simple notation of the "March of the Cuckoos", which is indispensable for L&H. [-kw]

John Purcell writes:

The comments about Musical Accompaniment to Silent Films reminded me of the one time I saw BIRTH OF A NATION (1915) at Northrop Auditorium on the University of Minnesota main campus with Steve Glennon and Ted Meulhapt, two good friends of mine at that time. We were all juniors (this was in early 1975) and big fans of old movies, and definitely of the irrepressible bent in our attitudes, and we really enjoyed the organ accompaniment that was played live during this showing. It was very well done, effectively blended into the rise and fall of the action on screen. Unfortunately, the three of us didn't see the last half hour because we were given the heave-ho by a couple ushers since our incessant snarky movie commentary was pissing off many attendees surrounding us. Oh, well. That was still an entertaining evening, quite possibly the best three bucks we ever spent that semester.

Mark replies:

I would side with the complainers. I would hate to miss a movie because audience members stole the experience from me. Yes, even over a film like FROM HELL IT CAME. [-mrl]

Arthur Conan Doyle and Offensive Attitudes (letter of comment by Fred Lerner):

In response to [Evelyn's comments on Arthur Conan Doyle](#) in the 10/23/20 issue of the MT VOID, Fred Lerner writes:

Evelyn wrote, "When I discussed offensive attitudes last week, and talked about Arthur Conan Doyle, I didn't mention the most egregious: his treatment of the Mormons in A STUDY IN SCARLET." [-ecl]

Remember that the events in Utah that formed the background to A STUDY IN SCARLET occurred at around the time of the Mountain Meadow massacre. [-fl]

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

A MEMORY CALLED EMPIRE by Arkady Martine (Tor, ISBN 978-1-250-18643-0) won the Hugo this year and is described as a classic space opera. It certainly reminded me of one--I kept feeling that it was heavily inspired by Isaac Asimov's FOUNDATION(*). Not the whole series, but the first book and in particular the first part, "The Psychohistorians", in which Gael Dornick arrives at Trantor and finds himself immersed in all sorts of politics he does not understand, and the third part, "The Mayors", which deals with a succession crisis. And there's a soupcon of China Mieville's EMBASSYTOWN, with some very linguistic stuff.

(*) One wonders if the author's name being "Arkady" is somehow connected to this. :-)

One big difference is that the main character, Mahit Dzmare, and about half the main supporting characters are female. (One need not add that Martine's portrayals of female characters is far more accurate and less condescending than Asimov's.) Needless to say, this passes the Bechdel test.

Unfortunately, the book also has the bane of many science fiction readers' existences: a glossary (nine pages) of characters, titles, and

other terms, along with two pages explaining the alphabet and pronunciation. It's a lose-lose situation: without a glossary, it is too difficult to follow everyone and everything, but who wants to keep flipping back to the glossary to figure out what's happening?

In spite of this, however, I do recommend this book for fans of classic space opera--its positives definitely outweigh its negatives. [-ecl]

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Quote of the Week:

Halloween was confusing. All my life my parents said, "Never take candy from strangers." And then they dressed me up and said, "Go beg for it." I didn't know what to do! I'd knock on people's doors and go, "Trick or treat." "No thank you."

--Rita Rudner

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