

Hollywood but at no point was I on this film's side. Released 12/04/20; available on Netflix streaming. Rating: 0 (-4 to +4)

SHIRLEY: Elizabeth Moss plays Shirley Jackson in this tedious biopic, which is more an experiment in style than in entertaining narrative. It uses a completely fictional young couple to create a long dull telling of Jackson's personal life. It does have some odd experimental uses of color, similar at times to Douglas Sirk's. Released 06/05/20; available on Amazon Prime and others. Rating: low 0 (-4 to +4)

THE BLACK EMPEROR OF BROADWAY: This film tells the story of Charles S. Gilpin, the first Black actor to star on Broadway (in the 1920 production of Eugene O'Neill's *THE EMPEROR JONES*). The story is the right story, but some of the actors do not have the strength to carry the characters as written. Shaun Parkes does fine as Gilpin, but John Hensley in particular needs more power and gravitas in the role of Eugene O'Neill, which he underplays what is written in this script. On the whole, this feels like a summer production, and has difficulty making a play's central issue seem like it's worth the sound and fury. Released 09/15/20; available on Amazon Prime and on DVD. Rating: low +1 (-4 to +4)

RESISTANCE: This biopic about a little-known period in Marcel Marceau's life concentrates on moral decisions such as weighing the importance of saving Jews versus killing Nazis. It has nice art design for a low-budget film, as well as some striking camerawork. Jesse Eisenberg (as Marceau) and Clemence Poesy (of *IN BRUGES*) give outstanding performances. Released 04/17/20; available on Amazon Prime and others and on DVD. Rating: low +3 (-4 to +4)

[-mrl]

TOGETHER WE WILL GO by **J. Michael Straczynski** (copyright 2021, Gallery/Scout Press, ASIN: B08LDWZHR8, ISBN: 9781982142582, 304pp) (book review by Joe Karpierz):

J. Michael Straczynski, or JMS as he is known to his legion of fans, is a giant in the science fiction visual media community. He is best known as the creator of the television series *BABYLON 5*, as well as *JEREMIAH* and *SENSE8*. He's worked on movie screenplays, such as *THOR*, *WORLD WAR Z*, *CHANGELING*, and others. He has also worked extensively in the comics field--to this day I still have his complete run of Spiderman comics. He recently wrote a gut wrenching autobiography. But he's not known for writing mainstream novels--until now.

I was curious about the book, not sure if I was really interested in it, or was I just a fan of JMS wanting to read everything he writes. Well, I'm not the latter in the sense that I haven't read everything he's written. But I was curious, given the subject matter of the book.

The high-level elevator pitch is that a man named Mark Antonelli, who has not succeeded in his chosen career path--that of being an author--has decided to put together an east coast to west coast road trip like none other. He buys an old and rickety tour bus, and hires an army veteran to drive it. He then puts out an ad, recruiting people for the trip. The people have one thing in common: they've been beaten down and are discouraged with life, and are on the trip to end it all. At the end of the trip in San Francisco, "they will find a cliff with an amazing view of the ocean at sunset, hit the gas, and drive out of this world."

Of course, it really never is that simple. Sure, you put a dozen or so people on a bus with a common goal: commit suicide (I should point out that the bus driver is only along to drive. He's not in it for the ending of things.), but as these things go, people develop relationships, become close--even lovers--and things change. And of course, because there is no story without conflict, events result in the bus being chased by the authorities, and folks start thinking about why it is they are on the trip and whether the end of it all is really what they want.

TOGETHER WE WILL GO has all the hallmarks of a typical Straczynski story: well-developed and complex characters, a deeply moving story about those characters, and of course there's always something that the reader (or viewer) isn't expecting--and it doesn't always happen at the end of the narrative (yes, that's a close to a spoiler as I'm going to provide). As with other Straczynski stories, we come to care about some, if not all of the characters, no matter what their backstory really is.

One of the things we are repeatedly told that life is a journey, and the end of that journey isn't always what we expect it to be. *TOGETHER WE WILL GO* really is the story about the journey of the characters with a common goal--not the end. As it should be. [-jak]

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

I'm reading *THE BLACK DEATH: A PERSONAL HISTORY* by John Hatcher (Da Capo Press, ISBN 978-0-306-81792-2). This is sort of the counterpoint to Truman Capote's description of *IN COLD BLOOD* as a "non-fiction novel"; this is what Josephine Tey would call "history-with-conversation", and I definitely recommend it. It is certainly similar to Connie Willis's *DOOMSDAY BOOK*, but without the time travel and modern characters, and based much more closely on actual records of the time.

One of the effects of the Black Death that Hatcher describes is that due to the much smaller population trying to manage the same amount of land and animals, it was impossible to find laborers who would work for the previous wages, or indeed often for any wages at all. Previously an extended family might have five households managing fifteen acres amongst them; after the Black Death there might be only one household left, and they had no extra time to work for minimal pay, or for that matter to do the work they were legally obliged to provide for their lord for free.

Clearly our current situation is not so dire. But restaurants have announced (temporary) closures because they are unable to find staff. Why? Workers are being asked to contend with similar strained circumstances, exposing themselves to working in close quarters and with patrons who often care little about caution. And at home they may have more work to do because family members are sick or

have died. The kitchen staff wants more than what they were being paid before, and the wait staff wants more to make up for the lower tips due to lower occupancy. All this makes the question of wages similar, even taking into account the restaurants that have closed, leaving their staff available.

None of this is surprising. I have noticed prices at a couple of my favorite restaurants going up 20% even before indoor dining came back. The push for a \$15 minimum wage is just going to exacerbate this, so we need to be prepared for higher prices all around. [-ecl]

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Quote of the Week:

One dog barks at something, the rest bark at him.
--Chinese Proverb

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