

reasonably accurate depiction of those events.)

One problem in war movies is balancing the chaos of battle with the need to let the audience follow what is going on. *MIDWAY* leans more toward the former than the latter.

Another problem with the film is that it may be too accurate. We are introduced to a lot of actors with unfamiliar faces who are much less familiar than those in, say, the earlier *MIDWAY*, making it harder to keep the characters straight. This makes it harder to follow the events.

The script also takes the story from 1937 to 1942, chops it in pieces, and although it shows them in chronological order, the script jumps a few months or years with only minimal warning.

Mark summarizes: "I never actually followed a historic battle for accuracy. This one I did. The Battle of Midway is one of the most amazing stories in military history and I was very pleased to see a new film featuring that story."

This is the rare war film that gets more points for historic accuracy than for entertainment.

Rating: low +3 (-4 to +4) [-mrl/ecl]

THE FATED SKY by **Mary Robinette Kowal** (copyright 2018, Tor, \$15.99, trade paperback, 384pp, ISBN 978-0-7653-9894-9; copyright 2018, Audible Studios, ASIN B07G8KZRST, 10 hours and 14 minutes, narrated by Mary Robinette Kowal) (audio book review by Joe Karpierz):

THE FATED SKY is the second book of the Lady Astronaut of Mars series, the sequel to the Hugo winning *THE CALCULATING STARS* and the predecessor to this year's Hugo finalist, *THE RELENTLESS MOON* (I have seen that there is a fourth book in the works, *THE DERIVATIVE BASE*, but the only thing I know about it is that it continues the story from *THE FATED SKY*), although the word predecessor may be the wrong word. There are a lot of cases where the second book in a series tends to be weak; not so with *THE FATED SKY*, although I don't think it lives up to the standards of *THE CALCULATING STARS*. In fact, in my review of that novel I wrote, "*THE CALCULATING STARS* is a terrific novel, and a worthy Hugo finalist. I look forward to reading its sequel, *THE FATED SKY*". Still, this novel is a good one.

So, the human race has colonized the moon, and trips to and from the Earth are commonplace enough. Elma York is a pilot on those runs, and she makes periodic visits to her husband back on Earth, Nathaniel York. One of those runs back to Earth results in a terrorist attack of the shuttle by a group that thinks the space program is a waste, and that the money should be better spent here on Earth (now where have we heard that before). There is also some sentiment that space travel is for the privileged few, and that it will never be truly opened to every one on the planet. Remember, the opening scene of *THE CALCULATING STARS* has an asteroid crash on Earth, destroying Washington D.C., and the space program development is accelerated in response to that disaster. There is a point, we can admit, to wanting the money spent on the planet to rebuild instead of looking to get off this rock. It's an interesting angle that really isn't explored in this novel.

Elma is still the face of the space program; she is still the Lady Astronaut. She is not only a pilot, but a computer. Since mechanical computers are still primitive and can't do the calculations necessary for space travel, human beings still do it better. The fact that she is the Lady Astronaut and a computer plays heavily into the story. A mission to Mars is revving up, and training is underway. As much as Elma would like to go--and she really would like to go--she is satisfied to stay with her job as a pilot shuttle as it allows her to see Nathaniel on a periodic basis. Out of the blue, long after training has started, she is reassigned to the Mars mission, and discovers that she has been tabbed to take the place of one of the other computers. Why? Not because she is any better than the other person, but because she is the Lady Astronaut. The space program needs positive attention which leads to continued funding, and what better way than to assign the Lady Astronaut to the project. This causes strained relationships between Elma and the rest of the mission team, and is the first of many events which causes conflict within the team. And so *THE FATED SKY* is the story of the flight to Mars, complete with technical issues, emotional problems, racial conflicts, and a host of other problems that contribute to the tension of the novel. And all the human issues are relevant to the time period. It is the early 1960s; racism and sexism are rampant not only in society on Earth, but within the mission team. The women are the ones assigned the laundry duty. The Blacks are assigned clean-up duty, and as a rule don't get assignments within their fields of expertise. The messy situation is made worse by the presence of a racist South African on the mission team.

And yet, even with all the problems, it is a human story, as people band together in times of difficulty to do their best to make the mission succeed. And speaking of it being a human story, there is something on the back cover of the book that I find a bit lacking. In describing Elma, there is the description "Mathematician, Computer, Astronaut". What is missing in that description is "Wife". That may sound sexist, but given that Elma has given up a good number of years of her life with her husband--a decision that agonizes Elma throughout the novel--as well as the family they wanted to have, I believe it is a term that should be included. Still, I supposed that's a nit pick, as it really has nothing to do with this terrific novel.

Kowal is the perfect person to narrate this novel. She knows the characters well, she knows how she wants them to sound, and she knows how she wants them to act. Her narration is, in my mind, flawless, as one would expect. After hearing her read this story, I can't imagine anyone else narrating a Lady Astronaut book. [-jak]

THE HUMAN COSMOS: CIVILIZATION AND THE STARS by **Jo Marchant** (book review by Gregory Frederick):

THE HUMAN COSMOS is about the disconnect between humanity and the heavens. According to the author for 20,000 years, we have led an earthly existence which was intimately connected to the cosmos. The heavenly cycles drove every aspect of our daily lives.

Our relationship with the stars shaped who we were in art, religious beliefs, social status, and scientific advances. Even our biology is effected by heavenly cycles. In current times, for example instead of living by the rising and setting of the Sun as in the past we follow the strict order set by our clocks. During the last few centuries we have separated ourselves from the universe that surrounds us. Per the author, this disconnect comes with a major cost.

Our relationship to the stars and planets has moved from one of awe, wonder and superstition to one where technology is king. The cosmos is now explored through data on our screens, not by the naked eye observing the cosmos. Today, in most countries modern light pollution obscures much of the night sky from view. That experience of viewing the cosmos and experiencing its awe inspiring effect has been lost to many. This experience has been the source of our greatest creativity in art, in science, and in life. These days, people will stare at screens on their phones or PCs for hours and never even look around at the natural world surrounding them.

Jo Marchant shows many examples of how in the past humans used the awe and wonder from viewing the heavens to create art, religion, and science. One example mentioned occurs during the summer solstice at a 5,000-year-old tomb at New Grange in England. In the book, we visit medieval monks coming up with methods to measure time separate from nature and Tahitian sailors navigating by the stars in tune with nature. We learn how experimenters examined light to reveal the chemical composition of the sun. We see how Einstein worked out that space and time are one and the same. This book puts a different perspective on our history and warns us not to be too separated from the natural world. [-gf]

SONG OF FREEDOM (letter of comment by Kevin R):

In response to [Evelyn's review of SONG OF FREEDOM](#) in the 06/25/21 issue of the MT VOID, Kevin R writes:

[Evelyn wrote,] "Zinga ([played by Paul] Robeson[, American singer and political activist]) wants to improve the lives of his people, but he wants to make change by fiat--in other words, be a dictator (even though it is softened to "king"). So he tells people what they should do without any consideration for their opinions. What makes this all even more noteworthy is that Robeson had final cut approval, meaning he apparently had no issues with the various portrayals." [-ecl]

I don't find it strange that a committed Stalinist would go along with a dictator-protagonist.

<https://www.the-american-interest.com/2019/08/27/the-price-of-self-delusion/>

Great singer, but Robeson was a political knucklehead. If I had been of African descent in the early 20th Century USA, perhaps I would have been similarly sucked in. [-kr]

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

As I noted earlier, 2020 was not a great year for films of the fantastic (or films in general), but here goes on the Best Dramatic Presentation, Long Form, Hugo Awards category.

BIRDS OF PREY (AND THE FANTABULOUS EMANCIPATION OF ONE HARLEY QUINN): Well, I suppose there had to be some superhero film on the ballot, and Marvel did not release a film last year, so it was this or WONDER WOMAN 1984. I have not seen WONDER WOMAN 1984, but if this is the better of the two, I probably don't want to.

EUROVISION SONG CONTEST: THE STORY OF FIRE SAGA: Seriously? I mean, I know it was a bad year, but there were plenty of films with more fantastical content more worthy of nomination: I'M THINKING OF ENDING THINGS, SHE DIES TOMORROW, WOLFWALKERS, THE WOLF HOUSE, POSSESSOR, ... The amount of fantastical content is equivalent to that of HAMLET, and less than MACBETH. I know that THE RIGHT STUFF was nominated on the basis of perhaps even less fantastical content, but at least one could argue it was on a related topic and in fact the description of the category was modified to explicitly include such works. But EUROVISION SONG CONTEST: THE STORY OF FIRE SAGA? I think not.

THE OLD GUARD: This "immortal superheroes" story was so unremarkable that I did not even remember that we had seen this last year until I went to schedule it on Netflix. Even so, it is far from the worst in the category.

PALM SPRINGS: This has the same "time loop" premise as GROUNDHOG DAY, so everyone who reviews this has to confront that. But one can argue that just as not all time travel stories are unworthy copies of H. G. Wells's THE TIME MACHINE, so not all time loop stories are just copies of GROUNDHOG DAY. (Yes, it's its own sub- genre now, with GROUNDHOG DAY; RUSSIAN DOLL; LIVE. DIE. REPEAT.; SOURCE CODE; HAPPY DEATH DAY; BEFORE I FALL; NAKED; and now PALM SPRINGS. As reviewers have pointed out, there are aspects of GROUNDHOG DAY that are disturbing (e.g., the female lead is basically manipulated the entire time, and Murray is never bothered by this), but that PALM SPRINGS avoids. And there is also J. K. Simmons, who always perks up a movie.

SOUL: I had a couple of problems with this. First, it is very centered on jazz, and I don't understand jazz. Maybe it's even broader in that I may not understand music in general. For example, I don't understand how one musician can just go off on a solo and the others can instantly figure out what to play as background accompaniment. I also have no sense of what is coming next, in the sense that with some music you can sort of predict the next few notes. The other problem is that I just didn't buy the premise of the Great Before. (Yeah, I know about willing suspension of disbelief.) And the cheat at the end didn't help. I can totally understand why some/many people like this; I'm just not one of them.

TENET: I really wanted to like this, but Christopher Nolan's decision to crank up the sound effects and muffle the dialogue made it very difficult to even hear, and what I could hear (or read subtitles for--Ghu bless the ADA!) I could not always make sense of. But I

have to admit the premise was more interesting (if no more likely) than many of the other finalists.

Ranking: PALM SPRINGS, TENET, no award, THE OLD GUARD, SOUL, BIRDS OF PREY (AND THE FANTABULOUS EMANCIPATION OF ONE HARLEY QUINN), EUROVISION SONG CONTEST: THE STORY OF FIRE SAGA

[-ecl]

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Quote of the Week:

People asking questions, lost in confusion, well,
I tell them, there's no problem, only solutions.
--John Lennon

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