

at 7 PM, we will show:

CITY LIGHTS (1931) dir. by Charles Chaplin
MODERN TIMES (1936) dir. by Charles Chaplin

THE MT VOID

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CITY LIGHTS has Chaplin's "Little Tramp" in love with a poor blind girl in the streets. She thinks he is a wealthy man when, in fact, he is as penniless as she is. The film centers on his efforts to earn money to keep her fed and to get an operation for her eyes. It is also about her illusion that her benefactor is a wealthy man. Leonard Maltin gives it his highest rating and says, "Eloquent, moving, and funny. One of the all-time greats." Steven Scheuer agrees with Maltin's rating and calls it "one of the great works in the history of cinema."

In MODERN TIMES once again we have the triumph of the little man over a cruel and unfeeling society. This time out Chaplin starts as a factory worker more a cog in a machine than a human. Included is the hilarious feeding-machine sequence. In this unfeeling world Chaplin falls in love with a female "Little Tramp" (played by Paulette Goddard) and together they try to survive and maintain both dignity and humanity. Maltin and Scheuer each give MODERN TIMES their highest rating of four stars.

For both these films Chaplin wrote the story, the screenplay, and the music, and also directed. Chaplin maintained tight control to make the film exactly what he wanted. And the films are nearly perfect.

2. At the request of one of our members, we have swapped the meeting dates for S_t_e_e_l_B_e_a_c_h and W_e_s_t_o_f_E_d_e_n. Reminder on availability: S_t_e_e_l_B_e_a_c_h by John Varley is available at the Old Bridge and Monmouth County (Headquarters) libraries. W_e_s_t_o_f_E_d_e_n by Harry Harrison is available at the Monmouth County (Headquarters, Extension, Eastern, and Holmdel branches) and Old Bridge libraries. A_r_i_s_t_o_i by Walter Jon Williams is available at the Old Bridge library. T_h_o_m_a_s_t_h_e_R_h_y_m_e_r by Ellen Kushner is available at the Monmouth County (Headquarters, Eastern, and Extension branches) library. W_o_r_l_d_a_t_t_h_e_E_n_d_o_f_T_i_m_e by Frederik

Pohl is available at the Monmouth County (Headquarters, Extension, and Eastern branches) and Old Bridge libraries. T_h_e_U_s_e_o_f_W_e_a_p_o_n_s by Iain Banks is available at the Monmouth County (Extension branch) library. S_i_g_h_t_o_f_P_r_o_t_e_u_s by Charles Sheffield is available at the Old Bridge library. (Don't forget, the Hogan, Harrison, Kushner, Banks, and Sheffield are also available in paperback.) [-ecl]

Mark Leeper
MT 3D-441 908-957-5619
...mtgzfs3!leeper

We must respect the other fellow's religion, but only in the sense and to the extent that we respect this theory that his wife is beautiful and his children smart.

-- H. L. Mencken

RED MARS by Kim Stanley Robinson
Bantam Spectra, ISBN 0-553-37134-7, \$11.95.
"Green Mars" by Kim Stanley Robinson
Tor Double #1, ISBN 0-812-53362-7, \$2.95.
Book reviews by Evelyn C. Leeper
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RED MARS by Kim Stanley Robinson

Kim Stanley Robinson has taken a big subject--one might almost say sprawling--the colonization and terraforming of Mars. It is so big that it needs three books, of which this is the first. But this book is independent enough to stand on its own.

Robinson's works often derive from history or historical trends, and so one isn't surprised to see that outlook brought to this book. Yes, it is a book about its characters, but it is about them as shaping (and being shaped by) history. Though the plot of the space colony torn between loyalty/duty to the parent government(s) on earth and desire for their own freedom is scarcely

new, Robinson lifts it above a simplistic parallel to the American Revolution or some other familiar event. It becomes its own event, similar in some ways to earlier events, different in others. He deals with the idea that the Mars colonies will be in many ways less heterogeneous than the American were, for example. In many space colonization stories, we see only the main characters, with everyone else seeming to be sheep following the leaders of various factions. In R_e_d_M_a_r_s the later colonists are not sheep to follow the "First Hundred" blindly; everyone is an individual and everyone has a point of view. The politics of the novel encompasses all the nations of Earth, not (as is all too common) merely the superpowers. The effort of the developing nations to "get their share of the pie" is one of the main forces behind much of what goes on in (and on) R_e_d_M_a_r_s.

Robinson also assumes his characters know their history-- discussions of terraforming Mars are not the totally technical and scientific discussions one has come to expect, but include references to projects and events which affected Earth's environment. R_e_d_M_a_r_s is an adventure story, true, but it is not a simple-minded one and there is much to chew on. It seems to be a descendent of Heinlein's T_h_e_M_o_o_n_I_s_a_H_a_r_s_h_M_i_s_t_r_e_s_s, only more sophisticated and writ large. More sophisticated because Heinlein stacks his deck: he doesn't give any "responsible spokespersons for the opposing view." All Heinlein's characters speak "self-evident" truths ("why should anyone trust someone else to license a doctor instead of making his own decisions?") that always work (the successful line marriages, clan marriages, and other social structures in T_h_e_M_o_o_n_I_s_a_H_a_r_s_h_M_i_s_t_r_e_e_s work because Heinlein

writes them as working). Robinson, on the other hand, gives two--or rather all--reasonably balanced sides to every argument and lets the reader decide. Writ large, because Heinlein's Lunar colony is fairly small and compact while Robinson covers, if not all of Mars, certainly a substantial part.

Not only are the philosophies and their expositions more sophisticated, but the style is as well. For example, Robinson's use of color is both expected and surprising. There are the Reds and the Greens, and we as readers have some already-wired reactions

to those names. But here the Reds are not the Communists or even the Russians--they are the "environmentalists" who want to preserve Mars in its pristine state: red. And the Greens want to terraform Mars to serve the people--a more Marxist approach in a sense. This total reversal of expectations is just one way in which Robinson makes the reader think about his or her automatic assumptions and quick reactions to certain words or phrases. (Some of this may be from having read "Green Mars" as well; I am not absolutely sure that the Reds or the Greens are specifically named as such in R_e_d_M_a_r_s. See my review of "Green Mars" below for more details.)

I definitely recommend R_e_d_M_a_r_s, and in fact intend to nominate it for a Hugo. (While the copyright date of this edition is 1993, the first publication was in Great Britain in 1992, so this book is eligible for the Hugo t_h_i_s time around.)

"Green Mars" by Kim Stanley Robinson

People have told me that Kim Stanley Robinson has said that this will not be part of his "Mars" trilogy, but his interview in L_o_c_u_s last year says that it was certainly the first step toward writing it. Even if he does not incorporate the text into one of the three novels, "Green Mars" will clearly remain a part of the same timeline. The basic story of "Green Mars" is of a group of people climbing Olympus Mons, but the real beauty is in the filling in of detail for the world around the volcano. You are _o_n Olympus Mons, but you see all of Mars, not only at this instant, but also its past and its future. Thus may sound like Jorge Luis Borges's "Aleph," so let me make clear that I am not talking about the climbers finding some magical window--I am saying that the story is that magical window for the reader.

I am sure a rock climber would appreciate the descriptions and details of the climbing itself, but even a person whose only exercise is opening the door to the library will enjoy this novella. If you are reading Robinson's "Mars" trilogy starting with R_e_d_M_a_r_s, this is a must-read as an adjunct to that.

THE DIFFERENCE ENGINE by William Gibson and Bruce Sterling
A book review by Frank Leisti
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It is a rare opportunity to receive a book from someone these days. In the time of fashionable gifts, Nintendo games are much more the expected gift. Yet, when someone knows your passion for science fiction and far out ideas, then the sense of presenting a science fiction book becomes a welcome change from the ordinary. So it was that I was presented with the paperback version of T_h_e_D_i_f_f_e_r_e_n_c_e_E_n_g_i_n_e.

However, as I was in the midst of touching and stroking my roots in reading science fiction, with stories of the Lensmen and of the Skylark saga, I refrained from diving into this alternate history story, until my second rare opportunity came in the form of a business trip to London, England. Serendipitously, I packed this book amongst my clothing and set out on my first visit to this noble city. And thence came the matching of experience with the story.

For you see, T_h_e_D_i_f_f_e_r_e_n_c_e_E_n_g_i_n_e takes place in London, England, as part of remembrances of three important and key figures in the case with a certain set of computer cards, designed by the Lady Ada. Of course, this takes place at the early turn of the century, however, the story takes place about fifty years earlier, around 1855. The world has changed greatly because of the influence of Lord Babbage's device--the analytical engine. A set of gears and other mechanical devices that work with cards to bring organization and order to the universe of the European courts.

Sybil Gerard, Dr. Edward Mallory--Leviathan Mallory, and the civil servant Laurence Oliphant are the main characters in this story, whose lives touch upon the cards created by Lady Ada. So, the story is told in three sections, each built on the other, in chronological time, so that the mystery can unfold in its unexpected splendor.

Imagine the world with a working computer before the invention of radio tubes or electronic calculators. As each step in the world is like a rung on an endless ladder, the direction of that ladder becomes embedded in the events that have preceded. Consider the world where Communism has a stronghold, not in Russia, but in the Manhattan Commune. What forces could have been at work where the United States was not united, but split apart into USA, CSA, French Mexico, Russian America and the Republics of California and Texas? As scientific discoveries developed, what impact would this analytical engine provide with car manufacturers, with weaponry, and with the state of sanitation with the polluted Thames River?

Yet, with all of the wonder and events blossoming in the story line of the novel, I was able by circumstance to make my way to those places of Flower-and-Dean Street, Piccadilly, Down, Half-Moon Street. Even, the famous London Docklands, the repository of commerce was available to live the experience of the main characters. And so, with novel in hand, I was able to retrace some of the movements and locations which were mentioned in the story.

With any alternate history story, especially when faced with the reality that we perceive, what other stories are there for us to know, if we were the brick within a wall, or the steps to the street?

I found this to be an interesting alternative history with the major occurrences still happening in the world, with the slight twists as fate or time can bring when a different viewpoint is given. On the Leeper scale, I would rate this story as +2.

TIME TRAX
A television review by Mark R. Leeper
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The year is still young and this is our third science fiction series to debut. Apparently we have another time travel television series that looks as if it could follow in the time tracks of T i m e T u n n e l and Q u a n t u m L e a p. It certainly is the silliest of the newest science fiction shows.

Our story begins in the present with a time traveler falling into a stall in the women's restroom in the Smithsonian Institute (well, they call it an "institute"). This is Darien Lambert, a fancy cop from 2193. What is he doing in our time? We flash back to 2193 ... uh ... we flash forward to Lambert's past in 2193 ... uh ... we flash forward back to Lambert's past in the future. (Yeah, that's what we do.) In this future police have gotten more technical, computers have gotten much smaller, criminals have become much cleverer, and matte painters have lost the secrets of their ancestors.

Lambert is born on August 17, 2160, which seems to fall on a Monday contrary to all current expectations that it will be a Sunday. Lambert has an IQ of over 200 which he either chooses not to use or which may indicate downward recalibration. Advanced

technology has made him a super-athlete and has given him the ability to "slow down visual images" until it is too late. He makes himself a super-cop. Then he stumbles onto a mad Nobel Laureate who has been sending something like a hundred criminals back to 1993 where they are trying to take over the government, just like Burr, Bonaparte, and Brutus. (Brutus? Brutus was a follower of Pompey who was forgiven and given a governorship by Caesar, but allowed himself to be goaded into joining the assassination plot. He was no empire builder!)

Lambert is given an AT&T smart card that is just a little smarter. It is a tiny super-computer that projects a hologram of a frumpy know-it-all librarian who can answer Lambert's questions. It is called SELMA (short for "Special Encapsulated Limitless Memory Archive") Gee, the computer has a female name which is an acronym. Gosh, that has a nostalgic feel. I thought that went out with 1950s science fiction films! he finds out the mechanics of time travel from a beautiful super-genius, then goes back two hundred years and finds a woman who looks just like the one he just left. (Oh, boy! Now they're borrowing from Mummy movies.) So Lambert is now in 1993 hunting down criminals from 2193 who are trying to take over our world. When he needs to send a message back to 2193 he places an ad in the Washington Post. His trusty old police captain is scanning the 200-year-old papers for ads that he could not find the previous

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week, but were placed two hundred years earlier. Luckily the captain has not thought to look at the front page or he would know if the coup succeeded. I guess the idea is that the past is changing the future, and there are allusions to something never explained about parallel universes having something to do with time travel. I don't understand it, the writers don't understand it, only Lambert understands it because he took a course in Parallel Universe Theory at the Police Academy. Confused? Hey, I spared you the whole bit about the time travel drug.

All this is produced by Harve Bennett, usually associated with "Star Trek" movies. Whether this series becomes something creative and interesting, or falls into being just a souped-up I n v a d e r s remains to be seen. We will all know some time in the future.

