

Truman Burbank (played by Jim Carrey) is now thirty and through his whole life he has been off-camera only in his most private moments. In some unspecified number of years, in the future people all over the world tune in to watch THE TRUMAN SHOW and track how his life is progressing. As sort of a cross between AN AMERICAN FAMILY and CANDID CAMERA, "The Truman Show" follows one character through his every day and even his every move. Truman has no idea that he is being watched. If he knew it would spoil the entire project. And a phenomenal investment has been put into creating the huge domed studio the size of a town with cameras everywhere to relay to the world everything that happens to Truman.

The whole project is the brainchild of the godlike producer Christof (Ed Harris). No effort has been spared to build the unbelievable domed studio or to ingrain phobias into Truman so that he is afraid to stray too far from his home. As part of the latter effort we see a visit to a travel agent who has decorated her office with marvelous anti-travel posters. Christof has programmed nearly everything that has ever happened to Truman. Christof has cast the important people in Truman's life including his supposed parents and his wife Meryl (Laura Linney of TALES OF THE CITY). Meryl's responsibilities include keeping Truman in line and unsuspecting, delivering charming commercials for sponsors' products placed into Truman's world, and above all to keep smiling. But things are getting a little difficult for Meryl as Christof's production staff gets a little sloppy: lights fall from a clear sky and supposedly dead characters from Truman's past find their way back onto the show set. Truman is starting to get suspicious that there is something not right about his reality.

Does Jim Carrey do a good job of playing Truman Burbank? That is a very difficult question to answer. At first brush it would seem not. Carrey is his usual weird and does his trademarked brand of clowning around. Is this the way someone raised on camera with scripted experience would behave? Probably not, but it is unclear how he would behave. He almost certainly would lean to some form of weird. Whether this is one way he could be weird is hard to tell. The constantly smiling Laura Linney is at first charming and quickly becomes grating, but again these are unusual circumstances. She would not behave like an actress because this is like almost no acting job has ever been. She would have to be constantly improvising and be onstage 16 to 24 hours a day, year in and year out. Her role would have to be her primary life. Perhaps her little Stepford wife is precisely what would result. Rounding out the major characters is Ed Harris as the de facto god of Truman's world. Harris takes his role in a quiet understated manner and does a fine job.

I would have loved to have seen THE TRUMAN SHOW cold, having no idea what the film was about. Unfortunately the ads give much too much away. There is a slow build to where the viewer is told the information in the trailer. Much of the mystery of Andrew Niccol's script (as complex as his script for GATTACA) is lost. One of the big holes, however, is that this is a much less believable story if taken literally rather than as allegory. One must believe that there are thousands of actors in Truman's world who are just waiting months or years to be cued. There are probably parts of Truman's town that he never visits, but the actors have to be prepared if he does. Fantastic preparedness must be arranged for contingencies that probably will never occur. In addition, the number of cameras needed to produce THE TRUMAN SHOW must be literally phenomenal. At one point Christof estimates that 5000 cameras are used to cover all the places that Truman might possibly go. A little back of the envelope calculation will show that figure has got to be orders of magnitude low without a fair risk of losing Truman. The town as shown must be about nine square miles and then Truman goes off into the woods in the course of the film. The logistics of setting up and running this pseudo-town seem more and more complex the more one thinks about them. But again, this is more a religious allegory than a science fiction story to be taken literally. Niccol has a lot of fun playing with the various features of the artificial sky as a recurrent theme in the film, but also giving the film a sort of medieval cosmology.

Music is by Burkhart (von) Dallwitz and seems to consist mostly of easy listening and classical music on a sort of celestial, New Age theme. The idea for THE TRUMAN SHOW is one that has been done in science fiction several times previously. Then there are ideas borrowed from other sources like the 60s TV show THE PRISONER. I would rate THE TRUMAN SHOW a 9 on the 0 to 10 scale and a +3 on the -4 to +4 scale. This is Weir's best film since THE LAST WAVE by a wide margin. [-mrl]

Film Triangles (comments by Evelyn C. Leeper):

A couple of days ago we watched a perfect triangle of films. A perfect triangle of films is one in which film A and film B have something in common, film B and film C have something in common, AND film A and film C have something in common (with none of the commonalities applying to all three films).

The three films were RAT FILM, AMERICAN BEAUTY, and HAIRSPRAY.

RAT FILM and AMERICAN BEAUTY both have real estate dealings as a subplot.

AMERICAN BEAUTY and HAIRSPRAY both have Allison Janney in the cast.

RAT FILM and HAIRSPRAY both talk about rats in Baltimore.

This was purely accidental. And somehow it's easier to stumble across these than to actually construct such a triangle. [-ecl]

Oscar Micheaux and DANGEROUS VISIONS AND NEW WORLDS: RADICAL SCIENCE FICTION, 1950 TO 1985 (letter of comment by John Purcell):

In response to [Mark and Evelyn's comments on Turner Classic Movie documentaries](#) in the 05/26/23 issue of the MT VOID, John Purcell writes:

Some solid comment hooks in this morning's edition of the VOID, and I am especially interested in all those documentaries coming up on TCM channel. Lots of intriguing topics, and I am a lot like Mark in enjoying a good documentary. The one that really stands out for me is the one on June 14th, "Oscar Micheaux: The Superhero of Black Filmmaking" (2021). When I cover the Harlem Renaissance in my Literature class Micheaux's name comes up in a short video I show in class. Obviously, this is one I plan on not only watching but recording as well. There are also a ton of fun sf and fantasy flicks listed here, and I thank you for this. My wife and I tend to forget about TCM's thematic broadcasting since we got our Dish service and usually watch assorted series that we enjoy on Hulu, Netflix, Amazon Prime, and others. What else can we do but check into these other good shows and movies on our rather extensive broadcast options. Decisions, decisions. This is obviously a happy situation to have, in my humble opinion.

In response to Evelyn's comments on DANGEROUS VISIONS AND NEW WORLDS in the same issue, John writes:

Evelyn's capsule review of DANGEROUS VISIONS AND NEW WORLDS: RADICAL SCIENCE FICTION, 1950 TO 1985, edited by Andrew Nette and Iain McIntyre, mentioned a good fan friend of ours, George "Lan" Laskowski, Jr. It surprises me at how long he has been gone. I know he died very young of cancer, and checking Fancyclopedia 3 just now confirmed that: Lan was only 50 years old when he passed away in July of 1999. His fanzine won the Hugo Award for Best Fanzine twice and featured great tributes to many authors. I had no idea that you two introduced Lan to fandom, so that's news to me. Very cool that this book quoted from LAN'S LANTERN regarding R. A. Lafferty. That tempts me to search out this book. It sounds like interesting reading even without the personal angle. Again, thank you for the heads-up on the book.

Well, that should do it for now. Next up for me is maybe finish off another letter of comment and get back into working on the next issue of my fanzine. Having a break between semesters is always a good time to catch up on enjoyable creative projects. [-jp]

Tree of Life Plant (letter of comment by Art Kaletsky):

In response to something in [the 05/26/23 issue of the MT VOID](#), Art Kaletsky writes:

Tree of Life in Glasgow along with taxi parts and repairs ?

Never mind, I'm much too old. :([-ak]

Evelyn replies:

I must be too old as well; I have no idea what you're talking about. [-ecl]

Art responds:

You may be too young!

Larry Niven's RINGWORLD and the rest of his "Known Universe" series has the Pak and their Tree of Life plant which makes them superheroes as central. [-ak]

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

Grow old along with me!

The best is yet to be,

The last of life, for which the first was made:

Our times are in His hand
Who saith "A whole I planned,
Youth shows but half; trust God: see all, nor be afraid!"
--Rabbi Ben Ezra

Robert Browning wrote this when he was 52. I realize that the advice to "write about your own experiences" is not a hard and fast rule (Shakespeare was never a fourteen-year-old Veronese girl or a Moorish general), but it is worth at least thinking about. [-ecl]

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Quote of the Week:

No self-respecting fish would be wrapped in a Murdoch
newspaper.

--Mike Royko

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