

Holmdel Science Fiction Discussion Group  
Club Notice - 4/23/79

MEETINGS UPCOMING:

(All meetings are in room 3H-506 on Wednesdays at noon.)

DATE ----	TOPIC -----
4/25/79	GATE OF IVREL by C. J. Cherryh
5/16/79	END OF ETERNITY by Isaac Asimov

Our library is in HO 2D-634A. Rich Ditch (x3432) is librarian.  
Evelyn Leeper (HO 1B-527 x6334) is Club Expediter in charge of book-buying.

1. Once again be reminded of this week's meeting. The book being discussed is GATE OF IVREL by C. J. Cherryh.
2. This week's meeting should also include a discussion of new policies on acquiring books due to problems in obtaining the last two selections.
3. We now are a multi-location club since we have a member from West Long Branch. We are up now to 23 members.
4. Attached are six reviews and a Hugo listing for dramatic presentation.

Mark Leeper  
HO 1B-512 x7093

## PICNIC AT HANGING ROCK

by Mark R. Leeper

PICNIC AT HANGING ROCK sounds like a Western, and in a sense it is -- a far Western. It is another Australian film by Peter Weir, who directed THE LAST WAVE. This is the poetically filmed account of a famous unsolved mystery in Australia. A number of girls from an exclusive girls' school disappeared on a Valentine's Day picnic. What happened to them remains a mystery. Weir tells us that the mystery has never been solved and proceeds to show us a very romanticized picture of what happened on that day. The school girls, most of remarkable beauty, are filmed in slow motion as visions of loveliness. Sure enough, the day ends in mystery as four girls are mysteriously drawn to climb the forbidden volcanic formation in the title. Weir shows us a rather cryptic view of the girls climbing, with unexplained sequences. For example, the girls seem to all fall in a faint on cue (or are they taking naps?), and then without a word of explanation they revive and continue their climb. All this is filmed in slow motion to make the effect more photographically mysterious.

After the girls disappear Weir continues to focus on the girls' school, as if he is saying, "But wait, there was more to this incident than met the eye." While attempts are made to find out what happened to the girls, we are given more clues. There were the financial problems of the school. What of the girl who claimed one of the victims knew she would not return from the picnic? What about the sadistic head-mistress of the school? What of the suicide? The audience is given a number of clues, none of which seems to add up to anything. Finally our narrator returns at the end of the film to say, "Of course not! We told you this was an UNSOLVED mystery."

The story is usually subservient to the photography, which is excellent. The evocation of a romanticized 1900 is hypnotic. Weir is very adept at portraying the subtle eroticism of the girls' school ruled by the sadistic head-mistress. Unfortunately, this idea has become cliché and the subject of innumerable cheap European horror films.

Overall the film is well-controlled, but the story is not a good one and smacks of yellow journalism. Stylistically this film is more polished than its successor, THE LAST WAVE (which received an earlier U.S. release), but is far less worth seeing.



## DISTANT THUNDER

by Mark R. Leeper

There is a peculiar ethnocentricity to science fiction. It often portrays events that are not uncommon in other parts of the world as happening in the U.S. or Britain and labels these stories "post-holocaust" or disaster stories. Most of LUCIFER'S HAMMER and almost all of Pangborn's DAVY could be set in the past if one were to just choose the right country at the right time. These stories, which concentrate on how change affects people, are really science fiction only in that they are set in the future. Many of the themes traditional to holocaust and post-holocaust stories could be applied just as accurately to historical events. I think science fiction makes such stories palatable to a wide audience simply because it can say that the events need not be taken seriously; they did not actually happen.

One film on the theme, commonly used in science fiction, of how great upheavals in society take a personal toll is Satyajit Ray's DISTANT THUNDER, currently showing on PBS. The film is set in India in the early days of World War II. As background to the story, when the government mobilized its army, it diverted large proportions of the rice crop to feed the army. In doing so, it either unthinkingly or callously left the more remote Indian villages without a supply of the staple food of the their economy. The result was that the villagers suddenly found rice, and consequently most of the other foods, available in very short supply. Tens of millions of people starved to death in what is now known as the "Man-made Famine". For the characters of the story, however, the government actions are either unknown or rumor. All they know is that food quickly jumps tenfold in cost, and then becomes unavailable entirely.

The main character of the story is a doctor and teacher, the most respected man in his village. He is also a Brahman, which seems to make him very much a member of the upper class. When the price of food starts rising, his services as a teacher and even as a doctor become luxuries. Now the villagers no longer gather around him, he gathers around the new idol of the village, the uneducated rice merchant. Another character, considered by the village as a social degenerate, finds that even the most beautiful women in the village can be purchased with rice. The film is one of reversals and contrasts. We see the frightening spectacle of starving people on a background of what looks like almost paradise-like nature. And, as a contrast to this, the camera keeps returning to an image of beautiful butterflies "dancing" in the mud of a nearby pond.

The film covers only the early stages of the cataclysm. It ends with the first person we actually see dying of starvation and the realization that the events we have seen are not just serious, they are actually becoming fatal. Presumably, Ray could not carry the story much further simply because, while the term



"starving actor" is a cliché, there really is no such thing.

Ray's films may seem a little slow-moving to American audiences. I assume this is not so much a question of pacing but of difference of interests. GONE WITH THE WIND would probably seem to be a slow-starting film to someone who has lived their entire life in India. Still, this film is more than a little frightening, and is perhaps more timely to American audiences today than when it was made.



THE LION, THE WITCH, AND THE WARDROBE  
A review of the book and the TV adaptation

by Mark R. Leeper

I must say that I have never had a tremendous urge to read C.S. Lewis. Lewis was an atheist most of his life and suddenly "found religion". Almost overnight, he turned into a religious fanatic. He then proceeded to write a science fiction trilogy and a children's fantasy septology(?). In both, I have been told, he intended to present his religious viewpoint and make it palatable to a wider audience than he could reach by presenting his beliefs in a more straightforward manner.

Seeing the television adaptation of the first story in his children's fantasy series and subsequently reading the book on which it was based was, then, my first real contact with this author. My impression is that he writes with a great deal of religious symbolism which could be ignored, if one wished to, and by doing so the story is much improved. THE LION, THE WITCH, AND THE WARDROBE is a simple little story of four children who walk into a closet and find themselves in a new world called Narnia. Of course, as is usual in fantasy, there is a struggle going on for dominance of this world, and our four children are the keys to victory. The actual struggle is between Aslan, the noble lion and rightful ruler of Narnia, and the evil white witch, who clearly is no match for Aslan but still seems to be in control of Narnia. We really do not get very much opportunity to see the white witch in action. She turns a few Narnians to stone, betrays one of the children, and arranges the death of Aslan. That death scene and the subsequent resurrection bear no small resemblance to the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ. (Could it be a coincidence?)

I should explain that Narnia is a sort of parallel world inhabited by all our mythical creatures: centaurs, minotaurs, unicorns, centicores, intelligent "Mork and Mindy" fans, ogres, werewolves, etc. In this world it is Man who is thought to be a myth. Incidentally, Christmas is a very important holiday in Narnia. If Narnians consider Man to be a myth, I would be curious to know what interpretation they put on the holiday.

Well, that about covers the story. It is not a particularly original fantasy, but it is enjoyable.

The television adaptation was done by Bill Melendez, best known for innumerable TV specials based on the "Peanuts" comic strip. You have probably never heard of any of the actors who supplied voices for the film, but many of the voices seem familiar from Peanuts and Bullwinkle cartoons. The animation is very limited and the artwork is as unimaginative as it could be portraying imaginary animals. In fact, of standard production values, only the music is above being merely adequate.

Yet with all of that, THE LION, THE WITCH, AND THE WARDROBE comes off as being considerably above average for television



fantasy. Why? Because it remains fairly faithful to a somewhat mediocrely written fantasy. A story that does not go far in book form goes considerably further on television. Compared to stories done in the animated series "Family Classics", for example, this fantasy was a superior adaptation. One such adaptation, JOURNEY TO THE CENTER OF THE EARTH, was loosely based on the film and not at all on the book. Whoever scripted that travesty was even unaware that the name of the professor was "Hardwigg" in the book, and gives him the film name of "Lindenbrook". When the story started having superstitious Icelanders fearing the mountain because Saknussum disappeared there, I gave out a quiet primal scream, bit my pillow, and left the room.

Compared to that troglodyte approach to adapting classics to television, THE LION, THE WITCH, AND THE WARDROBE comes off as solid entertainment. It was no WATERSHIP DOWN, but it was probably as good as the story deserved.



## BUCK ROGERS IN THE 25TH CENTURY

by Mark R. Leeper

BUCK ROGERS IN THE 25TH CENTURY is roughly as bad as it could be and still have a major release. It was made to be a pilot for a projected television series by the same people who also make BATTLESTAR GALACTICA, and when the series was canceled they decided to recoup their losses by giving it a theatrical release instead. From the looks of it, it probably was wise not to make a TV series from it. If GALACTICA imitated STAR WARS, BUCK ROGERS imitates its big brother, GALACTICA, even more.

If you were a fan of the old Buck Rogers, you are in luck -- all of the old characters are back. Buck is back. Of course, he is no longer the soldier who slept five centuries due to experimental gas. Now he is an astronaut who was propelled into the future on a space flight. Wilma Deering is no longer just an air-patrol woman; now she is the hare-brained commander of Earth forces. Kane and Ardala are no longer Earth gangsters, but emissaries from an evil interstellar empire trying to conquer Earth. Obviously, the producers wanted the audience recognition the title would bring, but did not care at all about being faithful to the traditional story.

The special effects might have been interesting had they been done before STAR WARS, but are very little different from those seen weekly on big brother GALACTICA. The effects that were designed for a television screen betray a number of serious flaws when blown up to wide-screen size. The profitable PG rating seems very calculated. The basic plot requires no more than a G rating. Then just enough flesh was exposed to the camera and dirty words added to the script, in the form of parenthetical comments and double-meaninged wisecracks, to push the film over the ratings line. My recommendation: stay home. Why pay movie prices to watch television?



## THE CHINA SYNDROME

by Mark R. Leeper

The publicity department at Columbia Pictures has an odd sort of "luck", if that is what it should be called. About ten years ago they made a film called MAROONED about a near-disaster in the space program. A little later there was a near-disaster with Apollo 13 that bore a number of surprising similarities to the plot of MAROONED. Last year Columbia made THE CHINA SYNDROME about a near-disaster at a nuclear plant. THE CHINA SYNDROME is about an accident that was somewhat different from the one that occurred in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, but the basic issues it raises do apply equally well to the Harrisburg problem.

The story of THE CHINA SYNDROME deals with Jane Fonda, a popular TV reporter, disgusted at being assigned to inconsequential stories like the tiger's birthday party at the zoo or a balloonist that accidentally landed on a camper. By coincidence, Fonda and Michael Douglas, a freelance cameraman, are able to film a near-disaster at a nuclear plant. The power company wants to cover up the accident; Douglas wants the information made public. Jack Lemmon, the shift supervisor at the time of the accident, co-operates with the cover-up until he himself decides the plant is unsafe.

THE CHINA SYNDROME paints a rather bleak picture of almost all the parties included. The power company which runs the plant in question is concerned only with the cost of running the plant. It is considerably cheaper to believe the good arguments that the plant is safe than to believe the often weak arguments that it is not, particularly after the immense investment they made to make the plant safe. The news media are concerned only with ratings. They prefer to air stories about singing message services rather than to present the controversial and less popular "hard" news.

The view of the public in this film is understated but may well be as controversial as anything else in the film. The public appears to want news-less pap masquerading as the news and idiotic game shows. Even anti-nuclear protesters at a licensing hearing seem more interested in mock-dramatic presentations or having their children's names read into the record, than they are in limiting nuclear power. Those who understand any issue at all understand only one, nuclear wastes.

THE CHINA SYNDROME functions well as a thriller and is worth seeing for that alone. But at a time when our most controversial films are saying "the war in Viet Nam was bad", THE CHINA SYNDROME tackles one of the most important issues of today. This is a film that should have stood on its own, even if there had been no nuclear crisis.



## DAWN OF THE DEAD

by Mark R. Leeper

In 1968, George A. Romero, a producer of television commercials in Pittsburgh, put together on a very modest budget a horror film that has come to be considered a classic, NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD. It took a while for NIGHT to catch on, but when it did it caught on strong and almost by itself created a new kind of audience for films, the midnight cult audience. This was the first film that, like THE ROCKY HORROR PICTURE SHOW and ERASER-HEAD, would be shown every Friday midnight to virtually the same audience. The dubious and gruesome premise of that film is that for some reason (quickly passed off as having to do with a returning Venus probe), the recently dead were returning to life and attacking and eating the living. That story told of the night-long siege by the dead against a farmhouse of frightened people.

Now Romero indicates that he wants to turn that film into a trilogy and, with the assistance of Italian filmmaker Dario Argento, he has made a sequel entitled DAWN OF THE DEAD. In spite of the title, DAWN picks up about a week after NIGHT and carries the story for another few months. Two National Guardsmen, a helicopter pilot, and a girl take over a shopping mall and set it up as a fortress against the returning dead. DAWN OF THE DEAD is in many ways a very different film from its predecessor. The first difference that becomes obvious is that this is a more polished and bigger budgeted film. It is done in color, it has an original musical score, and the main characters are played by what come off as professional actors. The dead, or "zombies" as this film prefers to call them, seem to be once again just amateurs drafted to have a good time playing monster in front of a camera. That, I suppose, was necessary because in this film they show up in the hundreds to besiege our heroes. Overall, the film has less of a feeling of immediacy and genuine fear than its predecessor. There are a number of reasons for this: 1) The film is more polished; the earlier film seemed more like newsreel footage, 2) The characters are better able to defend themselves, so are in less danger, 3) The story stretches over a number of months, so the danger is diluted over time, and 4) There is a great deal more comic relief in this film. It is not nearly so much a horror story as an anthology of gory effects. It aims not at fear but at revulsion and occasionally even at satire both of itself and of society.

While it was necessary not to mind gore in order to enjoy NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD, you would have to really enjoy gore to enjoy DAWN OF THE DEAD. The film is virtually filled with decapitations, limbs being ripped off or pieces of bodies being chewed off, and zombies being hit by trucks or splattered with bullets. I would assume Romero used dozens of gallons of bright red stage blood -- bright red obviously for the psychological effect; real



blood is a much deeper red. The zombies, even with all that bright red blood in them, uniformly had a sort of blue-grey tinge to set them apart somewhat at the expense of realism.

As for the satire, virtually everyone, living or dead, fits into a sort of humorous stereotype in this film. Toward the end of NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD there was a hint that some people were actually enjoying the task of re-killing the dead. In this film we see a great deal more of the "red necks" having a field day, figuratively and literally, on their hunting trips. The earlier film hinted that even with thousands of marauding dead, the greatest threat to the living was the living; DAWN carries that idea considerably further. Even more than in the previous film, we see that for sheer destructive power against the main characters, the dead come off a very poor second to the living. The dead are often content, in their less hungry moments, to just repeat the patterns they had in life. They wander aimlessly in the shopping mall because, we are told, "it probably meant a great deal to them when they were alive", and "memory and instinct" brings them back. Wandering through the mall, the zombies are a good deal less frightening than in the previous film; they are even given more personality. We see types now: a nun, a very obese man in a bathing suit (played by the owner of the mall), and a Krishna zombie who apparently decided after death to give up vegetarianism; somehow it is difficult to maintain the frightening effect and be humorous at the same time. Romero sacrifices the former, making his dead far less of a threat in this film. They are much slower moving and less dangerous.

One minor irritation with the film (almost lost in the major irritations) is that its scope covers so much time, we would like to know what is happening in the outside world. Early in the film the dead seem to be taking a real beating. Society is slowing down due to the disaster, but the tide of conflict definitely seems to be going against the slow-moving zombies. Once the heroes are confined to their mall, their only contact with the outside world is television and radio. As in the previous film, what little we learn of the outside world is from a TV interview of a crackpot scientist. (This one wants to bomb the major cities to rekill the dead; no more references are made to the Venus probe.) Then, inexplicably, there are no more broadcasts, but electrical power continues. Toward the end of the film we receive hints that society may have completely broken down and is in the hands of marauding gangs of the living, but there is no certainty. The natural order seems to be with the dead wandering aimlessly everywhere. That is how we first see the mall, and, like the end of ELEPHANT WALK or NAKED JUNGLE, that is the natural order that reclaims the mall at the end. Romero has come a long way (in both subtlety and the lack thereof) since his first film, but I am not sure it was worth the trip.



DRAMATIC PRESENTATION  
HUGO NOMINEES AND WINNERS

A. 1953 (Philcon II)

\* No Award

B. 1954

\* No Award

C. 1955 (Clevention)

\* No Award

D. 1956 (NYCon II)

\* No Award

E. 1957

\* No Award

F. 1958 (Solacon)

\* "The Incredible Shrinking Man"

G. 1959 (Detention)

\* No Award

- "The Fly"

- "The Horror of Dracula"

- "The Seventh Voyage of Sinbad"

H. 1960 (Pittcon)

\* "Twilight Zone" (TV Series)

- "Men into Space"

- "Murder and the Android" (TV Special)

- "The Turn of the Screw" (TV Special)

- "The World, the Flesh, and the Devil"



I. 1961 (Seacon)

\* "Twilight Zone" (TV Series)

- "The Time Machine"
- "Village of the Damned"

J. 1962 (Chicon II)

\* "Twilight Zone" (TV Series)

- "The Fabulous World of Jules Verne"
- "Thriller" (TV Series)
- "The Two Worlds of Charlie Gordon" (TV Special)
- "Village of the Damned"

K. 1963 (Discon)

\* No Award

- "Burn, Witch, Burn"
- "The Day the Earth Caught Fire"
- "Last Year at Marienbad"
- "Twilight Zone" (TV Series)

L. 1964 (Pacificon II)

\* No Award

M. 1965 (Loncon II)

\* "Dr. Strangelove"

- "The Seven Faces of Dr. Lao"

N. 1966 (Tricon)

\* No Award

O. 1967 (NYCon II)

\* "Star Trek - The Menagerie" (TV Episode)

- "Fahrenheit 451"



- "Fantastic Voyage"
- "Star Trek - The Corbomite Maneuver" (TV Episode)
- "Star Trek - The Naked Time" (TV Episode)

P. 1968 (Baycon)

- \* "Star Trek - City on the Edge of Forever" (Ellison) (TV Episode)

- "Star Trek - Amok Time" (Sturgeon) (TV Episode)
- "Star Trek - The Doomsday Machine" (Spinrad) (TV Episode)
- "Star Trek - Mirror, Mirror" (Bixby) (TV Episode)
- "Star Trek - The Trouble with Tribbles" (Gerrold) (TV Episode)

Q. 1969 (St. Louiscon)

- \* "2001: A Space Odyssey"

- "Charley"
- "The Prisoner - Fallout" (TV Episode)
- "Rosemary's Baby"
- "The Yellow Submarine"

R. 1970 (Heicon)

- \* "TV Coverage of Apollo XI" (TV Special)

- "The Bed-Sitting Room"
- "The Illustrated Man"
- "The Immortal" (TV Movie)
- "Marooned"

S. 1971 (Noreascon)

- \* No Award

- "Blows Against the Empire"
- "Colossus: The Forbin Project"



- "Don't Crush That Dwarf, Hand Me the Pliers" (Recording)
- "Hauser's Memory"
- "No Blade of Grass"

T. 1972 (LACon)

- \* "A Clockwork Orange"
- "The Andromeda Strain"
- "I Think We're All Bozos on This Bus" (Recording)
- "Los Angeles: A.D. 2017" (TV Episode)
- "THX 1138"

U. 1973 (Torcon)

- \* "Slaughterhouse Five"
- "Between Time and Timbuktu" (TV Special)
- "Silent Running"
- "The People" (TV Movie)

V. 1974 (Discon II)

- \* "Sleeper"
- "Genesis Two" (TV Movie)
- "The Six-Million Dollar Man" (TV Movie)
- "Soylent Green"
- "Westworld"

W. 1975 (Aussiecon)

- \* "Young Frankenstein"
- "Flesh Gordon"
- "Phantom of the Paradise"
- "The Questor Tapes" (TV Movie)
- "Zardoz"



X. 1976 (Midamericon)

\* "A Boy and His Dog"

- "The Capture" (Slide Show)
- "Dark Star"
- "Monty Python and the Holy Grail"
- "Rollerball"

Y. 1977 (Suncon)

\* No Award

- "Carrie"
- "Futureworld"
- "Logan's Run"
- "The Man Who Fell to Earth"

\* (A Special Committee Award was given to "Star Wars".)

Z. 1978 (Iguanacon)

\* "Star Wars"

- "Blood! The Life and Times of Jack the Ripper"  
(Recording)
- "Close Encounters of the Third Kind"
- "The Hobbit" (TV Special)
- "Wizards"

*Evelyn C. Leeper*