

Holmdel Science Fiction Discussion Group
Club Notice - 8/30/79

MEETINGS UPCOMING:

(Unless otherwise stated, all meetings are on Wednesdays at noon.)

DATE	TOPIC
9/4/79 (Tues.)	"war of the Worlds - Pt. 1", rm 4A-227
9/5/79	"war of the Worlds - Pt. 2", rm 3A-216
9/19/79	CHILDHOOD'S END by Arthur C. Clarke, rm 3A-216
10/10/79	A FAR SUNSET by Edmund Cooper, rm 4A-215
10/31/79	[to be announced], rm 4A-215

Our library is in HO 2D-634A. Rich Ditch (x3432) is librarian.
Evelyn Leeper (HO 4E-507B x6334) is Club book-buyer.

1. Note that Tuesday and Wednesday of next week (the first two days after Labor Day) we will be having joint meetings with the Audio Club to hear Jeff Wayne's WAR OF THE WORLDS.

2. The following are the awards that were given at the World Science Fiction Convention, Sunday night, August 26:

Hugo Award for Best Novel: DREAMSNAKE - Vonda McIntyre
Hugo Award for Best Novella: "Persistence of Vision" - J. Varley
Hugo Award for Best Novelette: "Hunter's Moon" - Poul Anderson
Hugo Award for Best Short Story: "Cassandra" - C. J. Cherryh
Hugo Award for Best Dramatic Presentation: SUPERMAN
Hugo Award for Best Professional Editor: Ben Bova
Hugo Award for Best Professional Artist: Vincent DiFate
Hugo Award for Best Amateur Fanzine: Science Fiction Review
Hugo Award for Best Fan writer: Bob Shaw
Hugo Award for Best Fan Artist: Bill Rotsler
Grand Master of Fantasy Award: Ursula K. Le Guin
John W. Campbell Award: Stephen R. Donaldson
Gandalf Award for Best Novel: WHITE DRAGON - Anne McCaffrey
First Fandom Award: Raymond Z. Gallun
Big Heart Award: George H. Gallet

3. Because we have had an influx of new members we have decided to throw out our list of nominated, but as yet unscheduled, reading books, compiled in those halcyon, pre-influx days and replace it with a list nominated by our current membership. Please get to me at or before the September 19 meeting your suggestion for a book to be discussed at a future meeting. You may also list one alternate book, in case your first choice is out of print. Please also include your name. (Your name will be kept in complete confidence, just in case Rich Ditch doesn't like the book.) If you want a guide

to what books are in print, see Evelyn Leeper who has the current F&SF catalog.

4. I rarely editorialize in these notices, but it turns out in this one I have some space to fill. While I was at Seacon, I heard that A. E. Van Vogt, encouraged by other science fiction personalities, was in the process of suing 20th Century Fox over plot similarities between ALIEN and his short story "Discord in Scarlet". That story dealt with an alien brought aboard a spaceship that turns out to be powerful, vicious, and uses humans as host for its egg-laying. At one point the captain does say that it should not have been brought aboard the ship. That is just about the only similarity I saw in the the two stories. Their differences were far more numerous than their similarities.

I do not feel that the the plot elements in common were intentional, nor do I feel that Fox would deserve the lawsuit even if the similarities were intentional. The fact seems to be that much of science fiction is well-trodden ground. It gets to be more and more difficult to write an original story and not trip across an idea that someone else has included in a story at one point. In fact, different approaches to similar themes have often been encouraged in the past. FOREVER WAR can be seen as just a different treatment of some of the material in STARSHIP TROOPERS.

ALIEN, however, was not even intended to be a different treatment of the ideas in "Discord in Scarlet", it was a natural evolution from an originally planned horror story set in World War II called GREMLINS. Eventually the bomber became a spaceship and the gremlins became a single alien. Had ALIEN been done as a magazine story and earned its author a few hundred dollars there would never have been any question of legal action. The fact that ALIEN was a multi-million dollar film which would earn a very large boxoffice profit is the only reason for the lawsuit. Everybody wants a dip from the honeypot and Fox is quite likely to settle out of court, cheaply by Fox's standards but generously by Van Vogt's.

If the lawsuit is successful it will be a step toward a situation in which film companies will have to hire science fiction experts to see what ideas in their films have been used before in written science fiction. It will be good for those few experts, but a very bad situation for the science fiction film in general. It is the nature of the science fiction film that it will lose much of its audience if it deals with themes that are too deep, but there are not that many lighter themes that have not been treated at some time in some science fiction magazine. Written science fiction stories are expected to build upon each other and reuse ideas that become part of the science fiction vocabulary, surely we do not want to deny that same right to a filmmaker, just because he has a larger budget. I hate to side with a big corporation against a respected science fiction author, but occasionally even big corporations are right.

Ironically, I think that man who said he had encouraged Van Vogt to sue 20th Century Fox was Forrest J. Ackerman (editor of FAMOUS MONSTERS) who also said he was acting as a science fiction expert helping 20th Century Fox sue Universal over similarities between STAR WARS and BATTLESTAR GALACTICA. I think he does not care whose side he is on as long as he gets the pay and the ego-hype for being a "science fiction expert." He is the literary equivalent of an ambulance-chasing lawyer.

Mark Leeper
HO 18-512 x7093

THE ROCKY HORROR SHOW

A Review by Mark R. Leeper

On the London stage, THE ROCKY HORROR SHOW is a superior piece of entertainment for the somewhat limited audience that can appreciate it. For those who do not know what ROCKY HORROR, or the film based on the play (THE ROCKY HORROR PICTURE SHOW), is, there is little I can do to enlighten you. Until you have seen at least some version of the story, describing the play is futile. I will only say it is a science fiction, horror, rock and roll, sex comedy that is basically about a disgustingly sweet young couple who are gloriously perverted while being held prisoner by an alien transvestite satyr who creates monsters. I'm sorry, that came out making more sense than it does in the play. The film has become a cult favorite that shows almost exclusively on the midnight movie theater circuit.

On stage, the play is solid non-stop entertainment. There is no way to catch everything funny or strange that is going on on stage. If you fall within the narrow spectrum that can appreciate the play, you will watch with a grin on your face for one hundred minutes of intermission-less joy. Those who have seen the film, which was shot with the original stage cast (for the most part) will wonder how successfully the play can run with a different cast, since in many ways the characters are very closely associated with the actors who played them. Peter Blake plays Frank N. Furter very much in the style of Tim Curry. Perhaps he must do that since the character of Frank, as Curry played him, is an integral part of the play, and audiences probably would not accept another interpretation. That being the case, however, the best anyone can say of the role is that it was a good approximation of Curry in the role. It was. Still, Blake is a bit beefy for the part. Neil McCaul makes a much more original Riff-Raff. Whereas Richard O'Brien played the part with icy coldness, McCaul plays the part steaming hot. He constantly uses exaggerated facial expressions, many of which use a tongue painted bright red. Onstage he is constantly fondling Magenta. Kathryn Drew is excellent as Magenta and constitutes the biggest single improvement of the current stage cast over the film cast. She has an excellent singing range and a very attractive stage presence, so much so that she steals scenes from Frank and Riff-Raff, a feat the original Magenta could never have hoped to do. She also doubles as a candy concessionaire to sing the play's theme song "Science Fiction Double Feature" at the beginning and end of the play. So the actress does a lot to carry the play, even though she plays what was only a minor character in the film. Frederick Marks and Pippa Hardman play a sufficiently nurdy Brad and Janet. Hardman embellishes her part with a sort of baby-talk voice which fits her character perfectly.

The staging of the play is inventive and impressive. Overall the play's immediacy makes it an improvement over the film and a surprisingly enjoyable theater experience.

NOSFERATU

A Review by Mark R. Leeper

To paraphrase JACOBOVSKY AND THE COLONEL, Werner Herzog's new film, NOSFERATU, is one of the truly great films of the silent era. While the film is a color film -- just barely -- and a sound film -- just barely -- it comes off as if Herzog had contritely decided to subject himself to the limitations and constraints of the pre-sound classics. Herzog's film takes advantage of neither color nor sound. The entire film is shot through a heavy blue filter leaving the photography with a bloodless, lifeless feel. It also makes minimal use of dialog, seemingly so as not to take unfair advantage over the original silent NOSFERATU. It does, however, repeat many of the same scenes with camera angle and acting style intact.

The dialog, and there is not much more of it than one would find in a silent film, is mostly delivered in a monotone and often seems inappropriately pseudo-metaphysical. A prematurely bloodless Lucy is prone to spontaneously give forth lines like, "Dr. Van Helsing, is it possible we are all insane and one day we will awake in straight-jackets?" or, "I fear an inner, nameless, deadly fear." Dracula, too, has his share of quotable bon mots like, "Time is an abyss, profound as a thousand nights." The photography is much in the style of the silent film, with fifteen-second shots of characters devoid of motion or emotion. These shots do provide considerable time to contemplate Klaus Kinski's vampire makeup, which looks like something between the original Schreck vampire and Milton Berle. The only acting that involves the audience in any way but cerebrally is that of the constantly chuckling Renfield and that of a reluctant city official who has a curious scene toward the end of the film reminiscent of MONTY PYTHON AND THE HOLY GRAIL.

Even though this film is indirectly based on DRACULA and has some excellent photography, combining some of the style of German Expressionism and some of THE SEVENTH SEAL, I cannot see the film having a wide general appeal in the United States. It will go down well with the art film crowd and the rest of the viewing public will probably avoid it.