

Holmdel Science Fiction Discussion Group
Club Notice - 5/22/80

MEETINGS UPCOMING:

(Unless otherwise stated, all meetings are on Wednesdays at noon.
Book discussions at South Plainfield are 3 weeks after dates shown.)

| <u>DATE</u> | <u>TOPIC</u> |
|----------------|---|
| 5/28/80 | Book Exchange, rm 1A-305 |
| 5/29/80 (thur) | record: THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK sides 1,2, rm 1A-305 |
| 5/30/80 (fri) | record: THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK sides 3,4, rm 1A-305 |
| 6/4/80 | EYES OF THE OVERWORLD by Jack Vance, rm 4H-205 [MASTERS OF SOLITUDE by Kaye & Godwin, at HP] |
| 6/19/80 (thur) | Film program in auditorium |
| 6/25/80 | JEM by Frederik Pohl, rm 4H-205 |
| 7/16/80 | THREE HEARTS AND THREE LIONS by Poul Anderson, rm 4H-205 |

Our library is in HO 2D-634A. Rich Ditch (x3432) is librarian.
Evelyn Leeper (HO 1E-321 x6334) is Club book-buyer.
Debi Bennett (HP 1B-368 x2408) is in charge of South Plainfield activities.

1. On Wednesday, May 28 we will have another book exchange. This is a swap and sell session for science fiction related materials. Anyone is free to come and browse and/or bring books to trade or sell. The room is 1A-305.

2. On the two days following the book exchange, Bob Hallock will be playing the music from THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK for the club. It takes two days because it is a two-record set and cannot be finished in a single lunch hour. Hallock will be using the Audio Club sound system, so this may be your best chance to hear the music outside a movie theater. The room is 1A-305 for this event also.

3. Bad news: HARDWARE WARS is unavailable from our sources, so it will not be shown on June 19. We will be showing ALL THE TROUBLES OF THE WORLD, a Canadian film based on a story by Isaac Asimov and QUACKSEY AT THE QUACKADERO, a short and strange cartoon on a science fiction theme. HARDWARE WARS would probably have gone over better, but hopefully this will still be a reasonable program.

4. Evelyn Leeper, our club Secretary/Treasurer/Expediter, is now in room HO 1E-321. [Well, perhaps not this instant.]

5. This issue includes reviews of SIMON, THE CHANGELING, and

THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK

Mark Leeper
HO 2B-502A x7093

THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK
a film review by Mark R. Leeper

THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK is a non-disappointing sequel to STAR WARS. If that sounds to you like faint praise, perhaps you ought to see the film STAR WARS. I would have thought that to make a follow-up to STAR WARS that would not disappoint the fans of that film would have been a nearly impossible task. THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK is at worst almost up to STAR WARS and perhaps, in some ways, a bit better.

The plot of THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK is just exactly what the title says. STAR WARS chronicled a major battle in a rebellion against an intergalactic empire. In THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK, that is just what the empire does. It attacks a rebel base and the characters we met in the first film are forced to flee. The film tells the story of their flight and their eventual getting back together. Along the way Luke Skywalker learns more about The Force and about the father he never knew. If that sounds a little dull, it does not come off that way in the film, though, admittedly, the plot lacks some of the punch of its predecessor.

What has not changed is the fact that this too is a film that delivers. THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK is solid entertainment. Every moment of the film, every corner of the screen is packed with something wonderful. The special effects, while not always 100% convincing, are present in vast arrays. As with STAR WARS, THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK represents state-of-the-art visual technology. One can be fairly certain watching the film that no effort was spared on the special effects. Producer George Lucas has a proven track record for financial return on his films (to put it mildly). He will invest nearly whatever it takes to achieve the effect he wants for a scene. Early in the film a walking four-legged armored tank is destroyed by winding a rope around its legs. It is an impressive scene, certainly, but it required three months for a special effects team to film it properly. This for a scene that lasted about a minute on the screen.

A slight disappointment was the musical score. John Williams developed a spectacular musical score for STAR WARS, and I would have expected a similar effort for its successor. His score for EMPIRE fell a good deal short of the one for STAR WARS, choosing to reuse much of the same music. Much of the new music seems not quite as effective. In a number of minor areas like this, EMPIRE falls short of STAR WARS. On the other hand, character development, for the main character at least, is more complete in the newer film.

In summary, THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK, is the best science fiction film to be made since STAR WARS and is probably one of the ten best fantastic films ever made. Even with inflated ticket, admission to THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK is something of an entertainment bargain.

SIMON

a film review by Mark R. Leeper

What can one say about a film like SIMON? I have to say that I cannot in good conscience recommend the film to anyone in spite of the fact that I enjoyed it. This is a very uneven comedy with much more strangeness than polish. If this sort of weird comedy is not your cup of tea, you will probably be bored by the film. The audience who will like this film will be limited, but some people will like it very much.

The story borrows heavily from a number of familiar film plots, though the main premise is borrowed from an episode of OUTER LIMITS. Five super geniuses at a think tank, whose main joy in life is tinkering with mankind, decide to perform a strange experiment. Just to see what will happen, they brainwash a man to believe that he is a being from outer space and biologically change him just enough to convince the world that the story is true. Simon Mendelson (Alan Arkin) is a college professor who was apparently always a little off the deep end. Convinced that he was born on another planet, Simon soon comes to see himself as a messiah who has come to save the world from the petty annoyances that are sapping our ability to become truly great. Simon rails against drivers who creep into intersections, against catsup in plastic envelopes, and against paper bands around hotel toilet seats.

The major problem is that the film lacks cohesion. Instead of telling a continuous flowing story, it is a collection of scenes, most of which add something to the plot but really are unnecessary. Many of the scenes fall flat and just miss the spark that would make them funny; some of the scenes are clever, but not funny; some are riotously funny. Every once in a while, the film hits on a good idea and takes off. Alan Arkin gives a five minute pantomime of the history of life on Earth that is a classic, but then the film wastes an equal amount of time to showing an eccentric scientist trying to seduce a computer shaped like a telephone headset, a scene that leaves the audience wondering if it has missed something.

This lack of cohesion in SIMON perhaps is not so lamentable. BANANAS, which is my personal choice for Woody Allen's funniest film, suffered from the same disjointedness. The connection between SIMON, and the films of Woody Allen is more than coincidental. SIMON was written and directed by Marshall Brickman who collaborated with Allen on the screenplays for SLEEPER, ANNIE HALL, and MANHATTAN (though probably not on BANANAS). This is, to the best of my knowledge, the first film Brickman has directed and it shows. This may well have been an attempt to make a film in Woody Allen's style with Arkin standing in for Allen, just as INSPECTOR CLOUSEAU was an attempt to make a film in Peter Sellers's style with Arkin standing in for Peter Sellers. At any rate it seems unlikely that Arkin will make any more ersatz-Allen

films. Arkin is a very gifted actor who never plays a role similar to anything he has ever played before. This may have been his Woody Allen experiment, and now that he has tried that sort of role, he will never play it again. If that is the case, I would say that it was only a semi-successful experiment with some scenes in which the script let him down, some scenes in which he let the script down, and just a few scenes in which magic does happen. And with some scenes of magic, SIMON may be better than a lot of what passes for film comedy today.

THE CHANGELING

a film review by Mark R. Leeper

The cinema and ghost stories seem to go together. They have seemed made for each other ever since Melies discovered that a double exposure made people look as if they were translucent and ghostlike. Additionally, since a movie theater is a dark room, it lends itself particularly well to the telling of ghost stories. It is no surprise then that there have been literally thousands of ghost story films. Yet curiously enough very few films have been effective ghost stories. We make ghosts cartoon figures (like Casper); we make them comedians (like in TOPPER); the Japanese make ghost stories that are highly artistic films but not at all frightening (like KWAIDAN). But there are very few ghost stories that put their effort into simply telling a frightening story, in the manner of what we usually expect from literary ghost stories.

Strictly speaking, I guess, when we think of a literary ghost story, we think of ghosts as avenging spirits. Many of the literary ghost stories are really mysteries. In them a ghost is the driving force to the solving of a mystery surrounding the circumstances that caused the person to become a ghost in the first place. One would expect that there would be a lot of ghost stories on film of this type. In fact, there are very few. The classic such film is THE UNINVITED, a 40's ghost story starring Ray Milland. Other ghost stories in the classic tradition that come to mind are THE HAUNTING and THE FOG (though the latter film may break as many conventions as it follows).

It comes as a breath of fresh air (or perhaps it should be musty, damp air) to see a new ghost story in the classic tradition. In THE CHANGELING, widower George C. Scott moves into an immense brooding (literally?) old mansion that is the site of ghostly happenings. An avenging spirit tries desperately to contact Scott and force him to unravel a seventy-year-old mystery. The story is a little predictable, as many ghost stories are, but the strong point of a ghost story is atmosphere, and THE CHANGELING creates that atmosphere exceptionally well. A lesser actor than George C. Scott might have made the film much less effective. The most important factor in an effective ghost story is how well it makes the audience suspend their disbelief. It requires no small acting skill to show emotion and evoke it from the audience. That ability is a necessity in making a credible ghost story. Most of what this film has to offer is his performance.

THE CHANGELING is not a classic; it simply follows a formula that has been common in literary ghost stories since the last century, but which is, nevertheless, rarely done in film. The film is nothing more a fairly atmospheric and engrossing ghost story. As such it is worthwhile entertainment.

THE TERRA DATA: DUMAREST OF TERRA #22, by E.C. Tubb. DAW, New York, 1980, 172p, Paper, Novel, \$1.75. ISBN 0-87997-533-4.

Earl Dumarest is back, still searching for the mythical planet of Earth in the latest chapter of his seemingly interminable saga. (If it sound like "Battlestar Galactica", it is, but Tubb started his story over a decade before Glen Larson gave the world the story of humans versus Cylons. Tubb's villains, by the way, are the Cyclans.) The book suffers from all the defects of formula writing: the plot is predictable, the characters are unconvincing, and the assumption that every woman involved finds Dumarest irresistible is unbelievable. Those who have followed the earlier books will be interested, and if you are stranded in an airport it is a harmless enough way to kill an hour or two, but to others the book has little to offer.

Evelyn C. Leeper