

Holmdel Science Fiction Discussion Group
Club Notice - 4/24/81

MEETINGS UPCOMING:

(Unless otherwise stated, all Holmdel meetings are on Wednesdays at noon in room 4H-405.)

<u>DATE</u>	<u>TOPIC</u>
4/29/81	LONG ARM OF GIL HAMILTON by Larry Niven (WHO GOES THERE? by John Campbell)
5/17/81 (Sun)	Videotape showing FIVE MILLION YEARS TO EARTH, Leeper home, 2pm
5/20/81	QUATERMASS AND THE PIT and film FIVE MILLION YEARS TO EARTH by Nigel Kneale
5/27/81	Book exchange
6/10/81	SOMETHING WICKED THIS WAY COMES by Ray Bradbury
7/1/81	THE MAN WHO SOLD THE MOON by Robert Heinlein

Our library is in HO 4B-510. Mike Lukacs (x4043) is librarian. Debi Bennett (HP 1B-368 x2408) is in charge of South Plainfield activities. Evelyn Leeper (HO 1E-321 x6334) is Club book-buyer. This notice publishes anything (not slanderous or libelous) submitted by club members. Members, feel free to submit.

1. Just when you thought it was safe to jog around the fourth floor -- another discussion meeting. This one will be a discussion of Larry Niven's LONG ARM OF GIL HAMILTON. If there is time (and when has discussion time ever been a problem at meetings?) we will also discuss his shorter arm. Actually, for those of you who are considering reading the novel, the title is a misnomer. The arm in question is actually shorter than the other arm. Even with its imaginary extension it isn't any longer than the other arm. With this exciting revelation made in the notice, will there be anything else noteworthy to say about the novel at the discussion. Show up at the Wednesday meeting this week and you will find out!!! [You can tell we are getting desperate]. HP people and other their sympathizers (if any) may choose not to discuss the Niven book but instead to discuss John W. Campbell's philosophical blockbuster trilogy: WHO GOES THERE?, WHO WENT THERE?, and WHAT THE HELL WAS THAT?

2. We got 25 responses on the poll, last issue. The results follow:

Several people expressed no opinion about meetings saying that they were from other sites. Incidentally, three people said that they would like to attend meetings but were "exiled" to West Long Branch. If people at West Long Branch want to form a discussion

group there like the people at South Plainfield did we will be more than happy to cooperate. There are currently nine members at WB and it takes only 3 or 4 people who want to meet regularly to make meeting worthwhile. If somebody out there wants to just schedule a room to see if there is interest there, let me know. You can also talk to Debi Bennett (HP 1B-368, x2408) to find out what is involved with getting meetings going at another site.

Some people expressed an interest in SF gaming. I will look into organizing some gaming meetings. I don't know a lot about gaming, but if someone is interested in running some gaming meetings, please let me know. While I am looking for volunteers, I will mention that a number of people thought it would be good if the notice would publish original short stories, art, articles, etc. Be informed, if you don't already know, that I exercise almost not editorial control over the notice. What is published is what has been submitted. I have added two lines to the heading of the notice so that it will be unnecessary to repeat.

I now have a large collection of sf videotapes that I would like to show on lunch hours (as we did with LATHE OF HEAVEN). Unfortunately, there is no longer a videotape machine to show them on for the club. I will continue to press for the labs to get another VHS format machine, I have been told that there is one in the 1982 budget for the conferencing people, but that sill will be a while in coming. We have already had one meeting with audio science fiction, and we will probably have more. As for speakers, if I were still in California, I might know of people we could get free or very cheaply (a discussion group I was in out there had Poul Anderson drop in one evening; another group had William Tenn).

As for the length of time between meetings, I counted a month as 30 days and averaged together the number of days apart people wanted meetings. While the standard deviation was high, the mean was still very close to 3 week intervals, so that will probably stay about the same. I realize now that I probably should have had people tell what there locations were. It is hard to know if the meeting scheduling information is relevant to Holmdel only. On the whole the results (summarized elsewhere this issue) seem to just follow the status quo. The results seem to indicate that we might have marginally better attendance if we changed the meeting day from Wednesday to Thursday, but either of these days would be better than any other day. We will consider a change to Thursday for the future (perhaps when the current set of scheduled meetings run out).

There was some interest in group discounts on science fiction. This is easily arranged. The way we will work it is as follows: Next month F&SF book company will come out with their annual catalog. Evelyn and I will keep copies in our offices. People who want to peruse the catalogs may do so. If you find something that

you want, we can collect the money (we have to collect selling price less about 5%, just to be sure nobody stiff us. We then will send in the order to F&SF. They give a 10% discount on orders over \$10, 15% on orders over \$25, and 20% on orders over \$100, so discount is dependent on response. We will pay the bill with the money we have taken in and proportion the remainder among the participants. Please note that F&SF is not like Tupperware. Nobody in the club gets anything in the way of cash back or extra merchandise out of this transaction except for the same discount that all the other participants get. [I am always afraid when I try to set these things up that people will think that I am trying to make a profit out of club members. I'm not. I am making these arrangements purely as a service for the club.] Of the people who expressed opinions, 3 to 1 were in favor of me slamming Rich Ditch in the notice (I guess Rich knows who his friends are) and one person said I should be slamming anyone in the notice. I never expected this to turn into such a hotly contested issue. Some people are telling me that I should be doing it more because they enjoy reading it (a lot of sadistic HPers are in this faction) and other people say it has no place in the notice. The jury is still out on whether this particular stylistic convention will continue. Just about everything else in the notice has fair support, and basically I was really looking for what other suggestions people had. One person asked for "entertaining dialog." I agree this should be a goal but the klutzes we have currently writing for the notice can just barely spell (myself included). It's amazing there is a notice at all!

That brings me to the comment sections. The following are suggestions for activities that would involve a number of people. Please contact me, all who are interested.

- Have a group go to a science fiction convention. Empiricon is coming up July 4th weekend. Anyone interested in going with a Bell group let me know.
- Production of a short film.
- Construction of fictional world, committees of people design the physics of the world, the animal life, etc.
- A mass burning of Colin Wilson's books (the handwriting on this anonymous questionnaire looked remarkably like Rich Ditch's).
- A special interest group specializing in cinema only. If there is sufficient interest, I have to admit (for those that haven't already guessed) that this is an area of particular interest for me. Any ideas here will be especially welcome.

return to: % Mark Leeper %
% HO 2B-515 %
%%%%%%%%%

(a,b) means: a answered "yes"
b answered "no"
25-(a+b) did not respond
(effectively a "no")

SCIENCE FICTION CLUB QUESTIONNAIRE

Fill in only those answers for which you wish to express an opinion. Use the back if you would like to continue any of your answers.

name (optional): _____

1. What would you like to do at meetings:

- Discussion:
- (13,0) books in general (11,0) films (16,0) chosen discussion books
- (6,1) unstructured, rambling conversation about sf, films, etc.
- (8,1) play sf-oriented games (17,1) if possible, show sf videotapes
- (9,0) listen to recorded science fiction (records, old radio, etc.)
- (10,0) have speakers, if possible (and it is probably not)
- ___ other (specify):

2. How often should we have meetings? mean answer: 20.895 days

- 3. What days are best for meetings (circle 1 or more)? M T W Th F M: (4,9)
T: (11,1)
- 4. What days are worst for meetings (circle 1 or more)? M T W Th F W: (14,1)
Th: (15,0)
F: (5,11)
- 5. Which of the following would you participate in?

- (14,0) Discussion meetings
- (13,0) Book swaps (how often should we have swaps? ___ weeks)
- (22,0) Lunch hour films, if possible
- (15,0) Group discounts on science fiction
- (9,0) Saturday morning trips to the F&SF Book Company warehouse
(F&SF is a major dealer in sf/horror/fantasy materials,
their warehouse is open for browsing and discount buying)
- ___ other (specify):

6. The notice should contain:

- (22,0) club news (23,0) sf news (23,0) book reviews (20,0) film reviews
- (11,0) stupid arguments (9,3) digs at Rich Ditch
- ___ other (specify):

Please use the back to express any opinions about the club.

EXCALIBUR

a film review by Mike Lukacs

EXCALIBUR (produced and directed by John Boorman) is a modern film retelling of the Arthurian legends (as recorded in Malory's Le Morte D'Arthur and Tennyson's Idylls of the King) produced in the cinematic tradition of STAR WARS. The staging and special effects, while not as large and expensive as those in recent big budget space movies, are well done and very well integrated with the rest of the action. There are not many rough edges. The cinematography is superb, many of the scenes are hauntingly beautiful, and the movie sticks quite closely to its literary sources.

This production is not without its faults, all of the characters wear heavy plate armor as if it were made of thin aluminum foil (at one point Uther Pendragon even makes love to another man's wife while wearing full armor, a neat trick for the very brave or exceptionally foolhardy, but since he is portrayed as both, it sort of fits). Merlin's magic realm looks too much like any small cave in Pennsylvania, and the moderate-to-heavy dose of gore looked to my eyes rather artificial and poorly executed, but taken as a whole, the film is a triumph. This is the film that people will remember years from now as the images of the legend. CAMELOT and Disney's THE SWORD IN THE STONE will now be reduced to secondary positions.

EXCALIBUR

A Film Review by Mark R. Leeper

EXCALIBUR is John Boorman's retelling of the story of King Arthur. Like the life of Arthur, the film is born in magic, founders toward the middle, and redeems itself at the end. Visually, EXCALIBUR is dazzling: 140 minutes of powerful camera work. From the first scene of mist-shrouded horses spout steam from their nostrils and towering over the camera, to the last moments when the mystical barge carries off Arthur's body, this is a superbly visual film of hard steel, misty magic, and flowing blood. The visual is everything, the intellectual content is just a bit lacking.

Previous film renditions of Arthurian legend (the best of which were probably the film SWORD OF LANCELOT and the British telefilm KING ARTHUR) have tended to downplay sorcery and the role of Merlin. The magician is usually there in the background, but as a minor figure. Here at last is a film in which the story can be told without minimizing the magic. The film treats as main characters with equal importance Arthur, Merlin, and the sword Excalibur itself. Each interplays with the others but has a life of its own. But if the magic content is accurate, the rest of the film is less than faithful to its source, Malory's Morte D'Arthur. Asking accuracy to Malory's work may be asking a bit much for any film, but in Excalibur the revisions are far more extensive than necessary. On irritating point is the way in which characters are merged to save explanations. Among its other errors, the film has Morgana (Morgan le Fay) giving birth to Mordred and it shamelessly confuses Excalibur with the sword Arthur pulled from the stone (as well as with Uther Pendragon's sword). In addition, important sequences (like Arthur's war against Lancelot) have been reduced to minor incidents.

The real problem, which makes itself felt toward the middle of the film, is that the story of Arthur is just too long to be told in one sitting. After the first hour much of the joy of the visual magic has worn off, not just for the viewer, but also, apparently, for the film editor. Around the quest for the grail, the editing becomes sloppy and the imagery starts wearing somewhat thin. It is also at this point that we first see the Arthur's "castle of gold," which looks a lot more like gold paint on cardboard. By the time the film gets to the story of the holy grail (not as enchanting for the modern viewer as it was for it was for Malory's readers, I'm afraid) people were walking out of the theater. It is only in the last 20 minutes that the editor seems to shake off his lethargy and the film gets interesting again.

The youthful casting is adequate to excellent with one exception. The most familiar actor, Nicol Williamson, seems miscast in the pivotal role of Merlin. It would have been

acceptable to have such an unconventional Merlin as Williamson had the actor been able to get his act together. But though the whole film Williamson seems to be experimenting but never succeeding, in getting the tone and accent of his voice right--a task that should have been reserved for the dressing room. His voice is serious and deep one moment, an octave higher and sing-songy the next.

Stylistically, the film seems a tribute to Fritz Lang and Richard Wagner. Boorman imbues the film with a definite Germanic air. The musical score, probably the film's weakest link, is mostly excerpts from Wagner's Ring of the Niebelung. While at times Wagner's music lends power to the film, the reuse of the same pieces of music over and over, much as the music was handled in the old FLASH GORDON serials, grows a little tiresome. The anachronistic armor that Boorman has chosen is based, for visual impact, on German armor of the Middle Ages. That's inaccurate to the period, but the muzzle-line or geometric helmets add an unexpected air of their own. Much of the camerawork is reminiscent of German silent films, specifically Fritz Lang's SIEGFRIED.

It has been an adage since the days of radio and before that one cannot show on the screen a scene as fantastic as one can create in one's mind. Since STAR WARS, filmmakers have tried more than ever before to take the images one sees in the mind's eye when reading fantasy (or listening to it on the radio) and accurately putting those mental images on the screen. STAR WARS proved modern technology has brought that goal closer to fruition than anyone thought, that films may be able to surpass the average viewer's mind's eye in portraying fantastic images. With EXCALIBUR, the eye of the camera is another step closer to catching up with that of the mind.