

Lincroft-Holmdel Science Fiction Club
Club Notice - 7/13/83 -- Vol. 2, No. 2

MEETINGS UPCOMING:

Unless otherwise stated, all Lincroft meetings are on Wednesdays
in LZ 3A-206 (HO meetings in HO 3N-418) at noon.

<u>DATE</u>	<u>TOPIC</u>
7/19 (tue)	Video meeting: PHASE IV pt. 1
7/20	Video meeting: PHASE IV pt. 2
8/10	Hugo nominees, prose and film
8/10	HO: TALES FROM THE WHITE HART by A. C. Clarke
8/30 (tue)	Video meeting: ??? pt. 1
8/31	Video meeting: ??? pt. 2

LZ's library and librarian Lance Larsen (576-2668) are in LZ 3C-219.
Mark Leeper (576-2571) is chairperson. HO's library and librarian
Mike Lukacs (949-4043) are in HO 4B-510. John Jetzt (834-3332) is
HO-chairperson.

1. Some of you may know that I have a rating scheme and that I rate every film that I see. Of the films of the 70's I gave my top rating to only two films. One was a sort of a space opera that became one of the most successful films of all time, the other one really died at the boxoffice and only a handful of people have heard of it. PHASE IV concerns the after-effects of some strange celestial event that triggered an evolutionary change in certain ant populations. A scientist and a mathematician go to Arizona to investigate unusual behavior in the ant populations there and suddenly find themselves confronted with an enemy that REALLY is alien. In most science fiction films aliens are just funny looking humans with very human thought patterns. In PHASE IV the ants clearly do not think in human thought patterns. They have their own ways of collecting intelligence about their enemy and their own ways of waging war -- all seeming to exploit their physical and biological differences. Insect photography is by Ken Middleham, best known for HELLSTROM CHRONICLES and he manages to set up some remarkable sequences. Our next video meeting features what I consider to be an intelligent science fiction film, PHASE IV.

2. As you may remember, we are currently updating our mailing list. People who do not respond that they want to remain members will be dropped from the list. Since we could have considerably fewer members and still get the same funding (a generous \$50 per annum) I try to increase the mailing list only to increase the sense of science fiction community rather than for any gain to the club. I am not going to try to sell anyone on joining or re-enlisting. Nonetheless, the following are the Lincroft people who will be dropped from the mailing list if they do not send notification by

*****Presorted*****
* Leeper, Evelyn C. *
* LZ 1D-216 *

the end of the month: Robert W. Daniels, Andy Gauld, Sherry Klus, Dana Moore, Karen Randell, and David J. Warling. I guess that is not that many. If you want to stay on the list, let me know. Even if you just see me in the halls. The rest of you people who aren't lucky enough to see me in the halls, send notification to me at the address below or to John Jetzt, [alias John Jetzi, alias D. B. Cooper, alias Rufus T. Firefly] at HO 1F-615A, x834-3332.

3. "Nigel" is Nigel Haslock, who is (by default) our new book reviewer.

4. CLASSIFIED SECTION:

WANTED TO BORROW: January 1982 issue of AMAZING STORIES (or any anthology containing "Unsound Variation" by George R. R. Martin). Contact Evelyn Leeper (LZ x2378).

WANTED TO BORROW: Patricia McKillip's THE THROME OF THE ERRIL OF SHERILL (Atheneum House, 1973). Contact Nigel Haslock (LZ x2499).

Mark Leeper
LZ 3E-215 x2571

Mercury Capsules - 13 July 1983

"Mercury Capsules": SF review column, edited by Paul S R Chisholm. Appears in the "Lincroft-Holmdel SF Club Notice". A medium for quick reviews of anything of interest in the world of science fiction. I'll pass along anything (not slanderous or scatological) without nasty comments. Send in your opinions on movies, books, short stories, TV shows, conventions, other people's reviews, or whatever. I encourage different reviews on the same subject. (Think of this column as a paper fa.sf-lovers, if you wish.) I prefer to get reviews by electronic mail: send to mhtsa!lznv!psc or houxa!mhtsa!lznv!psc from the Holmdel Computer Center, or nv!psc from the Lincroft Computer Center. If that's impossible, I'm at LZ 1D-212, 576-2374.

Paul S R Chisholm

"Wishman": TV show. A genetic research lab develops a "prototype biological worker". Will our heroes save the little fellow from the nasty security man every week? If so, will the poor midget get a better costume? Or will he bring a machine gun to the studio one day, sparing himself (and us) from hours of dreadful television? Or is it a deservedly failed pilot? Uranus's Rings nominee for worst ripoff of E.T. this season.

Paul S R Chisholm

"Sur": short story, Ursula K LeGuin. Appears in The Compass Rose and Terry Carr's Best Science Fiction of the Year #12 Hugo nominee. Terse, funny, but calling it SF is a real fantasy. I've no idea how it got nominated, or why.

Paul S R Chisholm

"Wishman": TV show. Paul is being much too easy on it.

Evelyn C Leeper

No Window, No Doors: collection, Harlan Ellison. No good. Well, that's going a bit far, but what can you say about a bunch of cutsie tomato surprises? Ellison is not a great mystery writer (or at least, these are not great mystery stories). The exception is only marginally a mystery: "The Wimper of Whipped Dogs" is not (quite) worth the price of the book.

Paul S R Chisholm

BOOK REVIEWS by Nigel.

I review the books I have read within the last few days. Since this reflects the books I have bought or borrowed or even read again because I liked them they selection is random in both subject and time since publication. If anyone cares to suggest titles to me I will be more than happy to extend my reading list. The next review should include THIEVES' WORLD and THE NONBORN KING (the third of the "Many Coloured Land" series). Send suggestions complaints or invitations to a duel to lznv!nrh or phone 576-7030.

SATORI by David Schmidt

This book is the third of a series which started out in life as occasional short stories in GALAXY a few years ago. The book is not new; copyright date is 1981. The stories track the development of a colony over many generations. The first book, KENSHO, is the easiest to read. SATORI is quite difficult.

The problem for the reader is that conditions force the characters to develop into Zen masters in order to survive. Thus the stories turn into Zen teaching exercises, or descriptions of how the protagonists are taught. I strongly recommend that you read KENSHO first and only continue with the series if you enjoy it.

I like the series because I can take the philosophy and because there are no glaring flaws in the plots.

THE WARLOCK UNLOCKED by Christopher Stasheff

Another 'third of a series' book. This time Rod Gallowglass has his adventure on a similar but parallel world.

This is definitely a frivolous book. The theme is the same as in each of the previous books: Rod must do something to save democracy on his adopted home planet. We are shown the threat and then given updates for the rest of the book on how the threat is developing until it disappears in the finale. Rod's adventure is totally unrelated, pointless and hardly worth the effort of reading.

To understand the allusions you need to have read the first two books and if you have done that you don't need to

read this book. There is simply too much 'deus ex machina' in all of them.

My main criticism of this book is that I fail to see why Rod's double recognizes him instantly while none of his double's enemies ever do.

THE NAGASAKI VECTOR by L. Neil Smith

The action of this book takes place in the world of THE PROBABILITY BROACH, which I read afterwards and burble about further down.

Once again we have time travel and parallel worlds all mixed up together. We also have lots of references to U.S. history which went straight past me, me being an ignorant Englishman.

Just for the hell of it we are presented with a functional anarchist society that works perfectly and that arose out of some variant of U.S. history.

Ignoring all of this trivia, we have a moderately exciting chase story in which the hero rescues his girl and goes to live with happily ever after, or at least until the next story. At least the gods are part of this story and have very little to do with resolving the plot.

I liked it enough to want to find the other titles but it is not going to be one of my prize possessions.

THE PROBABILITY BROACH by L. Neil Smith

Life gets easier every day. This book I found in our very own library, and it was even on Lance's list of the books to be found there.

This is obviously the seed book for the anarchist America of THE NAGASAKI VECTOR. There is even a history of the variant world, which assumes a better knowledge of U.S. history than I have.

The basic idea is still good but in this book the story is wrapped up in too much explanation of how the anarchy was set up. Again if you ignore this background clutter it is a reasonable story.

If you pay attention to the background you may not be quite so happy about it all. As a cynical European, I cannot accept his version of world history. It is a common

fault of most Americans, or at least American writing, to assume that the U. S. of A. is now, always was and always will be the leading nation of the world. The corollary being that if something is done within the borders of the federation, it will be copied by every other nation as soon as they notice. I dispute this and would be happy to argue at great length against this proposition. It seems to me that most readers are so conditioned to this proposition that they do not notice when it being used even though they would not agree with it if asked directly. (Could this be a theme for a discussion meeting?)

THE DRAGON LORD by David Drake

Had enough of King Arthur and his Round Table? Hate dragons? Did you ever like a Conan story? This is a book you should borrow.

I enjoyed this book. Since I bought my copy, I will read it again but not soon. It has about as much plot as is normal for heroic fantasy, which is not much. However, the background is nicely depicted in many shades of gray instead of the usual clearcut black and white. Just do not expect verisimilitude.

The main thing that is wrong with the book is blurbs. If I had not read the preface I would have left it on the shelf in the shop. As it was, it stayed on the shelf at home for nearly two months before I got around to reading it.

THE BELGARIAD by David Eddings

On the showing of the first three volumes (out of five), this is very good. It is sorcerous fantasy with a trainee sorcerer as hero. Do not read book 1 (DAWN OF PROPHECY) alone as too much of it is setting up the conditions and the background for the rest of the series. Do read the prologue in each volume because it is never a summary of the story so far, rather it is additional background material the current book.

There are two features that I do not like. It is now clear that the hero will get married, or at least betrothed, in book 4 and that the final battle between the gods must

take place in book 5. This telegraphing of the plot does not impress me. The other flaw is that a group of companions is forming according to a prophecy that we are not shown. At various points we learn how each of the characters are referred to but we are never told that there are more to found until after they are introduced. This suggests that the outline of the plot is very stable but the details are being made up as the tale progresses. To me this means that inconsistencies are likely to arise and the result will not feel as cohesive as it might.

My feeling is that the story will be good when finished but not as good as the "Riddlemaster of Hed" series of Patricia McKillip.

LITTLE SHOP OF HORRORS

A drama(?) review by Mark R. Leeper

As Charlie Chan points out in THE BLACK CAMEL, Hollywood has given rise to many strange mysteries. Chan could easily have been referring to the inexplicable popularity of Roger Corman's films. Roger Corman has made several films that seem to be respected by some film buffs. I have always felt that any quality in a Roger Corman film has gotten there through some oversight at the film factory. And factory made is what most of Corman's films are. One of Corman's most respected films is LITTLE SHOP OF HORRORS, the story of a man-eating plant in a Skid Row flower shop. How much was this film the result of artistic filmmaking? Let's let Corman tell us himself:

After the success of BUCKET OF BLOOD, a comedy-horror picture shot on a five-day schedule, I determined to attempt a similar style of picture on a two-day schedule. Once again, since the cast and crew were mostly all friends making this film was an enjoyable experience. At 9:00 a.m. on the first day of shooting the production manager informed us that we were already behind schedule and we'd have to pick up the pace. We did, and finished in two days. It still plays on college campuses and at midnight screenings, and has become something of a cult film. [Roger Corman as quoted in THE WORLD OF ROGER CORMAN]

The film featured ersatz Yiddish humor mouthed by ersatz Jewish actors. In spite of its humble origins, the film did, as Corman points out, strike a responsive chord in some. I have even heard people say it is their favorite horror film.

Well, about a year ago an off-Broadway musical was produced based on the film. LITTLE SHOP OF HORRORS demonstrates, quite effectively, the difference in expectations one has for the two media. As a rendering of the story, the play is not as good as the film. There are several points where good touches in the film were replaced by bad ones in the play. Yet somehow the play turns out to be a brash but enjoyable romp where the film seemed to be a strained piece of mediocrity.

The star of the play is Audrey II, a set of carnivorous plant puppets, each larger than the one before. They start houseplant-sized and grow until the final Audrey II looks like the plant kingdom's answer to the Great White Shark. It has a big toothed bole in the center and a set of toothed leaves on the side, like some botanist's nightmare. Audrey II is discovered by Seymour Krelboin, the totally incompetent assistant in a flower shop owned by Gravis

TWILIGHT ZONE: The Disappointment

A film review by Mark R. Leeper

Of late science fiction and fantasy have dominated the summer film market, but another market where they've always been strong is television syndication. STAR TREK is much more popular in syndication than it ever was in its original broadcast. Series like OUTER LIMITS and ONE STEP BEYOND have found new life and a new audience during TV's off-hours. One of the most venerable and respected TV series is Rod Serling's THE TWILIGHT ZONE. It has been available to local TV stations for about a decade now and if anything, THE TWILIGHT ZONE shows signs of getting more popular. Recently a book has been published to act as a guide to THE TWILIGHT ZONE episodes (THE TWILIGHT ZONE COMPANION), there is a TWILIGHT ZONE magazine, and now there is a new film based on the old series.

TWILIGHT ZONE: THE MOVIE is an anthology film with five stories, including a brief introductory piece whose main purpose is to remind the audience that there was a TV series called THE TWILIGHT ZONE and that Burgess Meredith, who just happens to be the narrator of the film, was actually in episodes of the TV series. While this piece seems a little overly drawn-out, it actually turns out to be one of the more entertaining sequences in the film, due to some pleasant touches by John Landis, who also directed the second story, "Time Out." "Time Out" is thematically very similar to an episode of the original series ("Quality of Mercy"). It, in fact, could almost have been done as a lesser TWILIGHT ZONE episode. The story is well-intentioned but a didactic and simplistic lesson about bigotry. This, too, is true to the spirit of the original series. (This, incidentally, is the story that was being filmed when Vic Morrow and two children were accidentally killed.)

Steven Spielberg's adaptation of "Kick the Can" is a sad and beautifully filmed story which has been underrated by word-of-mouth. The theme that to act young is to be young is a little irresponsible and the characters do not seem well-motivated, but Spielberg comes off as the best and most disciplined director of the film. The result is a sequence second only to the finale in quality. But before the film gets to the finale it must get through Joe Dante's infuriatingly bad adaptation of "It's a Good Life" (from the excellent episode of the original series based on the Jerome Bixby story). This might almost have been an acceptable story as a companion piece to "It's a Good Life," but the gimmicky retelling of the story falls miles short of the mark. Every single change dilutes the mood and the effect. "It's a Good Life" is a miasma of stupid in-jokes and tongue-in-cheek direction. To do this to what was, in all

Mushnik (actually in the film the name was sometimes spelled "Mushnick" -- checking for consistency might have taken another half hour, which could have added a day to the shooting schedule). Because the presence of Audrey II (whose namesake is another shop assistant) is very good for business, the monstrous plant is kept around even after Seymour discovers the plant's curious appetites. The play takes the same basic plot as the film but adds a chorus of three black singers, Chiffon, Crystal, and Ronnette, and a peculiar romance between Audrey and a sadistic dentist. It also adds several inches to Audrey's bustline, completely changing the impact of the character.

One would think that with so many changes for the worse from a poor film to a play, the play would be even worse. Not so. The play's spontaneity and immediacy compensate for a multitude of sins. One really does not expect much plot from a musical play and the plot which is a little sparse for a film fits the medium of stage musical like a glove. The songs are witty and the jive-talking Audrey II is pure pleasure. The LITTLE SHOP OF HORRORS is a pleasure to visit as long as one doesn't stay for dinner.

probability, Serling's best horror episode appears more a slap in the face than a tribute.

George Miller's "Nightmare at 35,000 Feet" featured a frantically unbalanced airline passenger who sees a gremlin on the wing of the plane. Miller undercuts the effect of the horror story by filling the plane with the unlikeliest set of passengers since AIRPLANE. Nonetheless the intensity of John Lithgow's performance refocuses the horror to make this the best piece of the film.

The film has its moments now and then, but only moments and they are all too quickly fleeting. To put it simply, TWILIGHT ZONE: THE MOVIE is a sad mixture of good and bad that could have represented the best from a great TV series. See it for the few good parts and have patience with the rest.