

Lincroft-Holmdel Science Fiction Club
Club Notice - 12/21/83 -- Vol. 2, No. 25

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>
01/03/84	Audio/visual meeting: WHEN WORLDS COLLIDE, pt. 1
01/04	Audio/visual meeting: WHEN WORLDS COLLIDE, pt. 2
01/25	COURTSHP RITE by Donald Kingsbury
02/15	Audio/visual meeting
03/07	NOR CRYSTAL TEARS by Alan Dean Foster
03/28	Audio/visual meeting
04/18	DAY OF THE TRIFFIDS by John Wyndham

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. Again, not much for me to say, this week. There is just the
usual accumulation of reviews to send out.

2. Happy Winter Solstice!

Mark Leeper
LZ 3E-215 x2571
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Mercury Capsules - December 21, 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. I prefer to get reviews by electronic mail: send to mh1tsa!lznv!psc, houxal!mh1tsa!lznv!psc, or hocse!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.

+ Time Storm: novel, Gordon Dickson.

This is an interesting book, in that it's so atypical of Dickson, and yet is so very much like much of his work. I didn't pick up on it until I reread an old review from Analog, but this "novel" is really two stories. (It not only reads that way, it was written and originally published that way.)

The first is an eerie, intensely personal story about a man, a mute girl, and an insanely tame leopard, in a deserted world. A system of "time storms" has swept the Earth, either decimating the population, or isolating a few loners. The storms are still active, sweeping their victims to different times and places. The survivors band together for protection, and because some of them want others to dominate. The protagonist is not satisfied to survive; he wants to combat the time storms themselves (and, not incidentally, try to find the wife he was separated from).

The second half is the more typical Dickson: the survivors have stabilized their local situation, a huge army of misfits is trying to conquer the empty Earth, and the time storms are revealed as a more cosmic phenomenon.

The book as a whole has an aspect that is common to Dickson in particular, and much SF in general: the scope grows exponentially with the page number. On the first page, there are exactly three characters, one an animal, with no one else in sight. By the end, our hero is literally going one-on-one with the universe. I was a little uncomfortable with that, but I can certainly recommend the book to Dickson fans: you may see a side of him that's not often visible.

Paul S R Chisholm

+ The Keep: film, directed by Michael Mann.

Beautiful but confusing film version of F. Paul Wilson's novel. Excellent special effects (though a bit "Star Warsy" at times) and set design, but the props occasionally fail to convince and the script shows signs of last-minute cuts. Recommended. +2/[-4...+4]

Evelyn C Leeper

+ Christine: film, directed by John Carpenter.

Better than average movie based on Stephen King's novel. Carpenter's music is very effective, but the movie takes too long to get off the ground. +1/[-4...+4]

Evelyn C Leeper

THE KEEP

A film review by Mark R. Leeper

I have a book of Arthur Rackham's illustrations for Wagner's four-opera cycle The Ring of the Nibelungs. Apparently there was a published version of the operas that was very profusely illustrated by Rackham, and beautifully illustrated at that. The illustrations were so beautiful that they have been published separately. I can recreate in my mind the story of the Ring by seeing just the illustrations. When I got the book I did not know the story of the fourth opera, and after a fashion I could pick up the story just by looking at the illustrations--at least after a fashion. The problem with trying to pick up a story this way is that many of the ideas of the opera are not visual and not even all the ones that are are illustrated. I was left with a vague impression of the story but I was not always sure what the story was about.

Michael Mann's screen adaptation of F. Paul Wilson's novel The Keep (book reviewed in the 02/15/83 issue of this notice) profusely and beautifully illustrates the book. Not all the ideas are visual, so much is left out of the film. When it was all over there were many very puzzled faces in the audience, but those people who had read the book were impressed, even stunned. The Keep is a very beautiful film, superbly photographed. There are moments of sheer visual joy, not just in the special effects sequences but throughout the film. The advertising says that the effects were contributed by Industrial Light & Magic (the credits do not, incidentally). That seems to indicate a recognition somewhere along the line that effects by ILM were a boxoffice draw, while the filmmaker may not have used them throughout or may have used the talents of only some ILM people. In any case, this is not a trivial piece of fluff; it is a carefully and poetically photographed movie filmed by people no less expert in their visual art than was Rackham in his. But neither created a work of art that stands on its own.

The story, set in World War II, has the Germans occupying a mysterious, centuries-old fortress in the Carpathian mountains of Romania. Soon there are mysterious deaths and the S.S. steps in to investigate. A Jewish scholar, on his way to a death camp, is brought in to bring to bear his unique knowledge of ancient writings found on the walls. It soon becomes clear to the viewer that the Germans have released a titanic, evil force. They have blundered into a battle that was beyond anybody's comprehension. of necessity the scope of that battle is significantly smaller in the film than it was in the book.

I cannot in good conscience recommend a film that will befuddle an audience. Nor can I criticize so beautiful a film as The Keep. The film simply must be taken for what it is, a very artistic illustration of a fairly good novel. Sort of the reverse of Kubrick's The Shining, it is people who have read the book who will enjoy the film. Some of them will like it a lot. But the film will die at the box office because it just does not stand up on its own. If you want to see the film, know the story first. But read the book quickly. It is a thick book and the film will have a short run.

CHRISTINE

A film review by Mark R. Leeper

It seems that all the current horror directors are adapting stories by Stephen King into films. Brian De Palma started it with the best of the King films, Carrie. Stanley Kubrick wanted to try his hand at horror and did The Shining. Tobe Hooper (Texas Chainsaw Massacre) did Salem's Lot for television. George Romero (Night of the Living Dead) started to do The Stand, and when that project foundered he did Creepshow. Luigi Cozzi (Starcrash) made Cujo. David Cronenberg (Scanners) made The Dead Zone, and now John Carpenter (Dark Star, Halloween, The Fog, The Thing) has taken his crack at King.

The title character is a red 1958 Plymouth Fury with a taste for rock and roll and a murderous streak that Ralph Nader could scarcely imagine. After a colorful past only hinted at, Christine is adopted and repaired by Arnie Cunningham (played by Keith Gordon). Christine is probably King's novel most similar to Carrie, and Cunningham is sort of the male equivalent of Carrie: persecuted by unfeeling parents, tormented by classmates, exploited by adults. On top of this, he proves with a vengeance that when you buy a used car you are only buying someone else's troubles. In this case the troubles are a domineering car who makes a man of Cunningham, but wants to rule his life. When he tries to use his new-found confidence to woo the prettiest girl in school, Christine breaks up the relationship, preferring Cunningham to go in for auto-eroticism. When three school bullies smash up Christine, she goes a step further: she heals herself and goes out looking for--and finding--revenge.

While the novel Christine was below average for King novels, the film is one of the best. More so than in any other Carpenter film or any King film since Carrie, the main character is likeable and sympathetic. Christine, on reflection, is as sympathetic as Karloff's Frankenstein monster. In fact, Christine is just an updating of the Frankenstein monster, a man-made being with human feeling but clumsily uncontrolled strength. Only her first attack on a human, just moments after her birth, seems unprovoked (unless it was to tell the human to watch where he puts his hand). Christine is throughout portrayed simply as a car with the personality of a jealous woman. When she is attacked she avenges herself and applies her considerable strength. As such the film is as much a study of stigma as it is a horror film. Carpenter's direction is adequate to good. He opens the film with what appears to be a re-creation of images from Paul Schaefer's Blue Collar: an auto assembly line and a rock and roll song with a drum beat that pounds like a steel foundry. It is an effective scene matched by only one image later in the film, that of Christine, sheathed in fire, chasing a victim like a flaming, avenging angel. Mediocre novels sometimes make some of the better horror films.

Gaming

Rob Mitchell

This is my last column for a while; I've run out of games and the editor won't buy me any more. Maybe Santa will help me out...

For my final column I'll discuss my all-time favorite game -- Cosmic Encounter by Eon Products. It's a classic, having won all sorts of awards and acclaim since it came out in 1979. In my (biased) mind, no other game can match it for humor, drama, and mind-exercising interaction with other players.

Each player is an alien race, and holds a hand of seven varying cards. Some cards are numbered (the ATTACK cards), some say "Compromise," and some are Edict cards (explained later). To win the game, you must be the first to establish 5 bases outside your home system (multiple wins are possible). Bases are established by combat. To fight a "battle," the offensive and defensive players collect allies from the bystanders, and then play cards. If both play ATTACK cards, then the winner is determined by which side has the highest total (card plus armies). If both play Compromise cards, no one wins directly, the allies return home, and the two main players may negotiate with each other to establish a deal, such as giving free bases in each other's systems. There are other cases I won't explain here...

So far, the game sounds a lot like showdown poker, and so is not particularly stimulating. The Edict cards I mentioned improve the game somewhat by adding some additional ways for a player to manipulate the combat, the timing of game actions, etc. But what really makes CE fun and stimulating is the alien. What I've just briefly describe are the rules to the game. Each player's alien has a unique, precise way in which it can distort or ignore one of those rules. Every power has its particular strengths, but correspondingly can be counteracted. For example, instead of adding the ATTACK card and his armies, Virus multiplies them. Macron's armies are worth 4 times normal value, and so on.

The basic version of Cosmic Encounter comes with 12 aliens and equipment to allow 2-4 players to have a moderately good time for the \$20 outlay. But Eon Products is fiendishly clever; they've developed 9 expansion sets, at \$5 each, that enormously add to the game. The original 12 aliens can now number 75. Up to 9 players may be accommodated. New cards have been added. An economic aspect, Lucre, may be used. Moon bases may be thrown in. Star systems have been adjusted. Each of these changes adds another layer of interaction, another set of considerations when planning moves, another batch of tools to use in your struggle for galactic supremacy. The expansion sets are worth the money if you like the initial game, and you may buy some or all of them as you want, without sacrificing playability (although you should in general buy them in order; sets 4 and 8 rely on previous sets).

The strengths of the game are its flexibility (you've lots of options at every turn, and you're never out of the game until the very end), its casual humor, and its unmatched opportunities for player interaction. Its only weakness in my eyes is the financial investment required before the game reaches a "supercritical mass" of interesting action (the basic set plus the first 4 expansion sets). On the Leeper scale, the basic game is a 0, the basic game plus the first 4 sets is 2.5, and the whole shebang is a perfect 4.