

Lincroft-Holmdel Science Fiction Club
Club Notice - 3/14/84 -- Vol. 2, No. 37

MEETINGS UPCOMING:

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

<u>DATE</u>	<u>TOPIC</u>
03/27	Video meeting: LAST MAN ON EARTH pt. 1
03/28	Video meeting: LAST MAN ON EARTH pt. 2
04/18	DAY OF THE TRIFFIDS by John Wyndham
05/09	Audio/visual meeting
05/30	1984 by George Orwell

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 (577-5316) is
HO-chairperson.

1. Thursday, March 22, 7:30pm the Leepers will be showing two
recent versions of a popular science fiction comic strip:

FLASH GORDON (1980) dir. by Mike Hodges
FLESH GORDON (1972) dir. by Mike Benveniste

FLASH GORDON, with a few minor problems, is quite a decent
adaptation, actually, that seems to have a core of loyal fans in
spite of generally poor reviews. It lies somewhere between the
comic tradition of awesome sights and the serial tradition of
cheesy props, at times loyal to each tradition. Sam Jones won't
get any prizes in the title role but actors like Max Von Sydow and
Brian Blessed are excellent. FLESH GORDON is an irreverent, often
hilarious, X-rated satire on the comic hero. Some of the stop-
motion animation is quite good and one of the monsters has quite a
cult following in and of himself. Warning: nudity and strong
language may offend some, titillate others.

2. Saturday is the deadline for having Hugo nominations postmarked.

Mark Leeper
LZ 3E-215 x2571
hocse!lznv!mrl
houxa!mhtsa!lznv!mrl
hogpd!lznv!mrl

(THIS NOTICE IS PRINTED ON BOTH SIDES -- TURN THE PAGES OVER)

DEADLY EYES
a film review by Mark R. Leeper

What is the difference between a throwaway film and a memorable one? Why is it that there are so many films that you see once and forget, and there are others, like Deadly Eyes that stick in one's mind and one remembers years later? Deadly Eyes does not have a very good story. It is an adaptation of a James Herbert book, The Rats. Herbert writes cheap disaster novels. Deadly Eyes is a cheap disaster film concerning giant, steroid-fed rats in some unspecified Canadian city. Nor does it have a great cast. It stars Sam Groom, one of those actors halfway between an has-been and a never-was, veteran of a little known TV show "Police Surgeon." It features Scatman Crothers (One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest, The Shining), a likable actor who always seems to be playing Scatman Crothers, and Cec Linder. Linder is one of those character actors who has been in dozens of films but has never achieved stardom. He is probably best remembered as Felix Leiter in Goldfinger.

So what is it that turns a forgettable film with a forgettable cast, based on a forgettable novel, into a memorable film? Why, the special effects! Is this a bad film with good special effects? No, it is a bad film with creatively bad special effects. The filmmaker was faced with the question of how to portray giant rodents. He may or may not have been aware of a 1959 film called The Killer Shrews, in which dogs in fur coats stood in for the title characters, but he had the same idea. Ah, but what breed of dog to pick? They were something the size of collies in Killer Shrews; Deadly Eyes called for something slung a little closer to the ground. The answer is obvious. Dachshunds! Take my word for it, boys and girls, you don't know stark terror until you have seen a pack of ravening dachshunds with long fur coats and limp rat tails trailing behind. It's a film I had to see twice just to believe it. I am not sure I believe it even now. Deadly Eyes easily beats out Green Slime for the cutest hostile monster in memory. Where does HBO find these things???

Mercury Capsules - March 14, 1984

"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 mh1sa!lznv!psc, houxa!mh1sa!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.

+ Heechee Rendezvous: novel, Frederik Pohl. Serialized in the January, March, and May issues of Amazing (it's a bi-monthly magazine).

Gateway was a happy surprise for those of us who like Pohl's short fiction, but have always been unsatisfied with his novels. It's the only convincing story I've ever read about a group of people working a usually fatal job. There are two possible reactions: the people can treat themselves as heroes, and be treated as such, or they can spend most of their time really depressed. Life and fortune were both dependent on apparently random factors. Gateway's employees were paid only for dangerous missions, and spaced if they couldn't pay their oxygen bills. Worse, Gateway encouraged heroism slightly less than NASA does today (I.E., not at all). It was a depressing place indeed, and Gateway dealt with the fears of the victims, and the psychological scars of one of the survivors, Robinette Broadhead. Depressing, but good stuff.

Beyond the Blue Event Horizon is about Broadhead's continuing search for knowledge about the Heechee, a mysterious race that visited our solar system an eon ago, then disappeared, leaving enigmatic remains (e.g., Gateway). This second book raises some interesting questions about artificial intelligence and cosmology, but there's not a lot here about the people.

Heechee Rendezvous is sort of a grand reunion of the trilogy. Only the computers are more deeply characterized. (If an artificial personality goes insane, do you need a debugger or a psychiatrist?) There doesn't seem to be a unified story line; most of the events don't really lead to the ending. And Pohl, like Spinrad in The Void Captain's Tale, thinks that maybe first person omniscient is a good point of view for a novel. Pohl uses it for a reason, but that doesn't make it work; it just telegraphs even more of the ending. Ah, well.

Paul S R Chisholm

+ Damiano: novel, R A MacAvoy.

Another terrific novel from the author of Tea with the Black Dragon. MacAvoy knows how to put words together to convey feeling as well as plot. This is the first novel of a trilogy (the other two, Damiano's Lute and Raphael, will be published later this year). Damiano is a young Piedmontese alchemist/wizard in the fourteenth century. He has been learning alchemy--first from his father, now from books--and how to play the lute--from the archangel Raphael, when war comes to his village. His struggle to understand and control the realities of life in general and war in particular are carefully drawn by MacAvoy's prose, which is at times vaguely reminiscent of Dante (surely no accident). Damiano, however, has not yet "arrived at the midpoint of [his] life," being only twenty-one years old, and so does not see the full scope of Heaven and Hell, merely the earthly reflection of it. The denouement is neither so obvious as to be predictable nor so artificial as to leave the reader unsatisfied. Though the first third of a trilogy, this story will stand on its own.

But why are all the laudatory quotes on the cover and first page from women? (I am reminded of the cover of Tanith Lee's first novel, whose cover declared it "to rank with Le Guin, Brackett, Norton," Tanith Lee to be "a science fiction talent to be compared only with those of C L Moore, Leigh Brackett, or Andre Norton," and which promised--though didn't deliver--an introduction by Marion Zimmer Bradley. The only thing these five writers have in common with Tanith Lee is--you guessed it--their sex.)

Evelyn C Leeper

COMIC BOOK ROLL CALL

Jay A. Johnson

The topic for today was supposed to be the Justice Society, All-Star Squadron and Infinity, Inc. As I started to write the column, I came up against a problem. I don't have a whole lot of time to write this column and therefore would like to hold it to two pages at a time. The topic of the Earth-2 teams has a whole lot of history behind it, both in the DC Universe and on our Earth. A knowledge of this history is not critical to the understanding of the current adventures of the JSA, All Stars, and Infinitors, but it does add depth to the subject. When I started to write that column, my two pages were over before the history had gotten to All-Star Squadron #1. Therefore this topic will take at least two columns, and probably three. I have some anxiety over who the audience for this column is, and what level of knowledge that audience has. I don't want to bore everybody who knows all about Earth-2 with the history, and I don't want to bore those who don't care about the history but would like to know about the current books, but it is an interesting (to me, anyway) topic. I would appreciate some feedback (lznv!jaj) on how much history and detail I should go into in these columns.

As a substitute topic I would like to offer some thoughts on the nature of super-hero teams. Most of these thoughts are not original, but are taken from a series of articles written by Don and Maggie Thompson for one of the fan magazines (AMAZING HEROES, I think) about two years ago. The growth of the team books (ALPHA FLIGHT, NEW MUTANTS, OUTSIDERS) since that time adds some validity to their theories.

In general, super-hero teams can be divided into three types: all star teams, unit teams, and hybrids. The all star team was the first type to be used in comic books, although the unit teams are older historically (Robin Hood's Merry Men, Three Musketeers, etc.) The first comic team was in ALL STAR comics and was the Justice Society of America. All star teams are just that: teams of established stars. All of the founding members of these teams have existed before the team was formed and usually have their own strips or books. The members all have different origins and wear different costumes. Other teams of this type are the Justice League, the Avengers, the original Defenders, the original Teen Titans, the Seven Soliders of Victory, the All-Winners Squad (Invaders), and the Champions. These groups get together to fight menaces bigger than any single member can handle, and to put the top-selling heroes into another book. The books tend to be long on action and teamwork and short on character development, because major changes to any of the heroes are reserved for their own books. Most of the teams have added second stringers or created new heroes (Vision, Scarlet Witch, Hawkeye, Red Tornado, Zatanna, etc.) to have somebody the writers could play with as time goes on.

The second group are the unit teams. These teams tend to have a common group origin and usually wear the same basic costume. Examples are the Blackhawks, Challengers, Fantastic Four, the original X-Men, and the New

Mutants. These teams also have a single theme, as a family (FF), a school (X-Men, New Mutants), a war (Blackhawks), etc. There is more time spent in civilian identities in the stories, and usually more characterization. Over time the characterizations may dissolve into tag-lines (a cliché, 3 or 4 word phrase to describe the hero, for example, Blackhawk's Olaf: the big, acrobatic Swede). These teams will go through phases where each member will switch to a individual costume, a member will leave and be replaced, or the team will break up, but when the dust settles, it's back to basics.

The third group, the hybrids, have elements of both the all star and the unit teams. Teams in this group include the Legion, the New X-Men, the New Defenders, the New Titans, the Outsiders, the Micronauts, Infinity, Inc. and Alpha Flight. These teams actually do have several things in common. They tend to be recently formed, usually since the middle 1970's. They are linked very strongly to a single creator or creative team (X-Men: Claremont/Cockrum/Byrne, Titans: Wolfman/Perez, Alpha Flight: Byrne, All-Stars/Infinity, Inc: Thomas). They have one or two established stars (Cyclops, Robin) and several more members who were created for the team book (Storm, Nightcrawler, Colossus, Cyborg, Raven, Starfire). They will also usually include a second stringer or one-shot who becomes a star (Wolverine, Wonder Girl). They will usually wear different costumes, but also usually live or at least hang out together. Some lean more toward an all star team (All-Star Squadron, Outsiders) and others are closer to being an unit (Legion, X-Men).

The explosion of the number of teams (Alpha Flight, New Mutants, All-Star Squadron, Outsiders and Infinity, Inc. are all less than 3 years old, the Titans are pushing 4 years, and the Blackhawks and Defenders have just had major revisions) can almost be directly linked to the phenomenal success of the new X-Men, who are just over seven years old. Chris Claremont has redefined the team book, weaving innumerable sub-plots, teasing the readers with the past of the characters, blending multi-issue epics with quiet interludes that may only feature one character, giving every character some room to grow and develop. Of course the art, from Cockrum to Byrne to Smith to Romita, Jr. has been excellent nearly every issue.

Comics run in cycles. Eventually the team craze will hit bottom and many of these books will disappear. The JLA and the Avengers will be around as long as DC and Marvel are doing super-hero comics. The unit teams have been down lately, with only the FF a sure bet to survive a cutback. The X-Men and the Titans are now the sales leaders and will be around a long while. The rest could be vulnerable, particular if their creators lose interest or leave their current company.