

Lincroft-Holmdel Science Fiction Club  
Club Notice - 3/20/85 -- Vol. 3, No. 37

MEETINGS UPCOMING:

Unless otherwise stated, all meetings are on Wednesdays at noon.  
LZ meetings are in LZ 3A-206; HO meetings are in HO 2N-523.

<u>DATE</u>	<u>TOPIC</u>
04/03	HO: Book Swap (HO 2N-529)
04/03	LZ: HELICONIA SPRING by Brian Aldiss
04/24	LZ: MISSION OF GRAVITY by Hal Clement
05/01	HO: CIRCUS OF DR. LAO by Charles G. Finney
05/15	LZ: DOOR INTO FIRE by Diane Duane
06/05	LZ: TACTICS OF MISTAKE by Gordon R. Dickson

HO Chair is Mark Leeper, HO 1E-412 (834-2657). LZ Chair is Rob Mitchell, LZ 1B-306 (576-6106). LZ Librarian is Lance Larsen, LZ 3C-219 (576-2668). HO Librarian is Tim Schroeder, HO 2G-427A (949-5866). Jill-of-all-trades is Evelyn Leeper, HO 1B-437A (834-4723).

1. Well, your old fearless leader has put his little, petite foot in his oral cavity again. But not too greatly. I reported here that the upcoming Brooksfilm, THE DOCTOR AND THE DEVILS was about the Burke and Hare murders. Well, I saw some publicity about the film including who plays what and there are no characters named Burke, Hare, or Dr. Knox. I did see what the names were, but they do not come to mind. I still am pretty sure from everything that I have seen that the film is about that same incident, but the names appear to have been changed to protect the victims or something like that. It is also reported that Brooksfilm is in the process of remaking the classic science fiction film, THE FLY. They will have some job if they want to make it scientifically feasible, but it is a good story anyway.

2. Well, a while back I talked about the styrofoam swans here at Holmdel. Of course at that time referred to them as being "over in Holmdel" since I was still a Linky at that time. ("Linky" is an affectionate term for someone who works in Lincroft rather than here in Holmdel where the action REALLY is!) In any case, I have had a chance to see the amazing plastic swans a little closer over here. Sad to say, I think that some of them are ailing a little. One that I had grown quite fond of has come down with Ostran's Disease. I should explain what happens with Ostran's Disease. Apparently it is a rather new disorder. What happens is that the neck starts getting soft and wet in the narrow part and then one day the head falls off. Now if a natural swan came down with Ostran's, it would invariably be fatal. Luckily, there have been

\*\*\*\*\*Presorted\*\*\*\*\*  
\* Leeper, Evelyn C. \*  
\* 114A HO 1B-437A \*  
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no cases reported of natural swans contracting Ostran's Disease. It appears to be a complaint of styrofoam swans only. (Realize that when I use the term "complaint" it is sort of an abuse of the language. One of the nice things about styrofoam swans is that they do not complain or at least not that anyone has ever noticed. Natural swans only seem to complain to each other, but they do complain. They do not complain to humans, they just attack and honk and bite and leave booby traps on the lawn. As yet we have found no way that styrofoam swans complain and many can appear to be happy and healthy right up until the time their heads fall off.)

In any case, only styrofoam swans seem to suffer from Ostran's and they appear to have adapted to it quite nicely. Many seem to float along perfectly happily even after their heads have fallen off implying that for a styrofoam swan, the head is not a vital organ. Just what are the vital organs of a styrofoam swan is still a subject for further research.

Mark Leeper  
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...{ihnp4,houxn,hogpd}!ahutb!leeper

## GODZILLA

A film review by Mark R. Leeper

Way back in the early Fifties, Toho Pictures of Japan made a serious monster film inspired by Beast from 20,000 Fathoms. The film was called Gojira (pronounced GO-jee-RA) and was reportedly about how the Americans used a nuclear bomb to try to kill a centuries-old dragon or dinosaur that was worshiped by the natives of a local island. The enraged and now radioactive monster vented his wrath on Tokyo. The film became an allegory of the closing days of World War II. Japan was being hit by something incomprehensively powerful of unknown origin that just totally wiped out any place it appeared. Finally a courageous Japanese scientist uses his own powerful weapon against Gojira, but only after he has taken safeguards to be sure his force is never used against humans (are you listening, American nuclear scientists?). The film was extensively re-edited to be much less anti-American, scenes with American actor Raymond Burr were added, and the film was released in the U.S. as Godzilla, King of the Monsters. The film became an international success and spawned a whole series of films with Gojira/Godzilla and eventually created a whole subgenre, the Japanese monster movie.

Of Toho's followups to Godzilla none had much real quality, but some were fun on a junior high school level of complexity. Most notably, Godzilla Vs. the Thing had a certain charm. At the end of the next film, Ghidrah, the Three-headed Monster Godzilla turns into a good guy and after that the films became more and more silly and childish. They maintained a small audience for a decade or so, but they eventually died out. Presumably the executives at Toho began to lament their own degradation of their monster. They have just finished making a film tentatively to be called either Godzilla or Return of Godzilla. It is another sequel to the original Godzilla, King of the Monsters, but to only that film.

As the film begins there has been one and only one appearance of Godzilla, and that was some thirty years earlier. A second monster of the same species rises out of a volcano to threaten Japan and to spark an international nuclear incident.

It had been rumored that Toho Pictures had been working on a Godzilla film that would employ stop-motion technology. If, in fact, this is the film that resulted, it is something of a disappointment. This Godzilla is another "man-in-suitosaurus," to use Don Glut's term. But at least the producers have returned to an earlier and less cute visualization of the creature. This Godzilla looks much like the one in the first Godzilla films with a face like a crumpled sheet of newspaper. The camera uses low-angle camera shots effectively to make the beast look impressively large, a technique used in the first films and not again since. The special effects of the monster walking through Tokyo at night look much like a similar effect in the 1976 King Kong.

The new Godzilla film (and it isn't dubbed in English yet--I saw it in Japanese with a narrator explaining what was going on) is not a very good film on any sort of absolute scale; I guess I have never seen a Japanese science fiction film that was. But for those of us who grew up with hokey Godzilla films, it has considerable nostalgia value. The quality is not up to that of the 1976 King Kong, so expect very little, but if you liked the old Toho science fiction films in their best years, it might be worth watching for. It was a pleasure to see, but I cannot fairly give the 1984 version of Godzilla anything better than a -1 on the -4 to +4 scale for fear that someone might see the film and realize what rotten taste I really have.



## ROPE

A film review by Mark R. Leeper

One of the traditions of the live stage is the murder play: Dial M for Murder, The Mousetrap, Sleuth, Deathtrap, and a host of others. The main advantage that a murder play has over a murder story on film is its immediacy. Because it is a play, it is limited to three or four intervals of time, each covered by a scene. The audience shares a room with the characters, and with a very limited set of scenes sees the crime and the solution. The audience knows when the final scene starts, that in the next few moments in these characters' lives in this room the crime will be solved. A film, which can jump forward in time, backward in time, and from any location in the world to any other just does not capture its audience in the same way. Hitchcock apparently recognized this ironic limitation of film and attempted to overcome it in Rope (1948).

Rope is a single-act play, 80 minutes long, covering 80 minutes in one room. In that 80 minutes, there is a murder, a party, and the aftermath of the party when the murder is solved--perhaps a record for fast crime solution. Two college students, Brandon Shaw (John Dall) and Philip (Farley Granger), murder a friend, David, just for the sake of proving that they can get away with it. The characters and the crime are presumably based on the very similar real case of Leopold and Loeb. (That crime was also the subject of the film Compulsion.)

Top billing (but only third place in screen time) went to James Stewart. Stewart plays a college professor with a laconic view of murder. (Later when Hitchcock appeared weekly on TV, and edited books of mystery stories, he affected the same attitude.) The boys base their ideas on Stewart's philosophy, taking his callousness toward killing seriously.

The real problem with Rope is that the story is not up to the the film's production values. In fact, the killers are unrealistically incompetent. Philip, who is coerced by Brandon into a part in the murder, proceeds in the most obvious guilty manner possible. At the mention of the victim's name, he breaks glasses in his hand or babbles about how he is playing cat-and-mouse games. His whole manner screams "I am guilty of something and I am terrified I might get caught." Brandon is a little cooler, but in not very subtle ways he keeps leaving clues around for the sport of it. And in case anyone misses the clues, Philip can be counted on to stare at them and go white. Rather than coming off as the super-thinkers that Brandon has labeled them, they come off as just two bumbling killers.

Hitchcock works hard to maintain a sense that the film was a single shot, but the reel changes are still obvious. The camera for no reason pans to a characters back or some other single-colored part of the scene to cover the changing of the film reel. It is a technique that does not quite fool the viewer, and the changes are even more obvious when the tone of the actors' voices change suddenly.

Rope was Hitchcock's first Technicolor film and his first with James Stewart, and as such, it was a taste of what he was later to do. Like most films for the rest of Hitchcock's career, it is glossy but on close scrutiny flawed in unexpected ways. Still, after years of being tied up legally, it is worth watching to get a virtually new taste of Hitchcock's style.

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BLOOD SIMPLE  
A film review by Mark R. Leeper

Martin Gardner once wrote a book about what he calls the "Aha!-experience." That is the instant in problem solving when all the pieces of the puzzle fit together and everything makes sense. Mission Impossible was an entire TV series designed to create "Aha!" experiences. In each episode the main characters knew exactly what they were doing, but until the end the viewer was confused. Then at the end everything fit together. Blood Simple is sort of the dual of Mission Impossible. It is a film about the "Huh?" experience. Through most of the convoluted plot, it is the viewer who knows what is going on and the characters keep finding out that they only thought they knew what was happening. With the exception of the moments when the plot twists, it is really easy to keep track of what is happening. Yet, like Rashomon, each character has a different understanding of who is doing what to whom. The plot can just be described as slow chaos punctuated with moments of delicious confusion from the characters.

This is a film of very high production values which looks as if it was printed on cheap film stock. Somehow the film stock gives it a feel of authenticity that a slick production would lack. There are some incredible camera shots in this film and it is amazing that they do not feel contrived. It is like reading Victor Hugo: the first time you read a paragraph, you are amazed at how well-written it is, and only secondarily you realize that it really did advance the plot. Scenes in this film are amazing in the same way.

One scene toward the end of the film is particularly haunting. We are in a dark room and someone is shooting holes in the wall from a well-lit room. The effect is one of columns of light sprouting out of a dark wall. The scene fits naturally into the plot, but still is an unforgettable image.

In some way I still do not understand, the cameraman is unobtrusively able to make the viewer notice props that will be important later. A prop will become important in the plot and the viewer finds himself thinking, "Yes, I noticed that prop five minutes ago, but it was in a corner of the screen and I thought noticing it was my idea."

A cast of unknowns carry this story perfectly and the script is a lot of fun. Be warned that there is some necessary gore. Rate it a low +3 on the -4 to +4 scale.