

Lincroft-Holmdel Science Fiction Club
Club Notice - 4/10/85 -- Vol. 3, No. 40

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>
04/24	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-500A (834-4723).

1. Our next evening movie program features two films that I have a particular respect for. On Thursday night, April 18, 7:00 PM (note earlier time!) at my place we will be showing two films about people who are nearly killed and return from near death with special powers. Sounds stupid, doesn't it? Actually both are very involving dramas.

Many happy (?) returns:
DEAD ZONE (1983) dir. by David Cronenberg
RESURRECTION (1980) dir. by Daniel Petrie

One might expect that when David Cronenberg (THE BROOD, SCANNERS, VIDEODROME) does a Stephen King novel the result would be an all-out horror show. Actually DEAD ZONE is the somewhat subdued study of what clairvoyance is all about and how it affects the bearer of this power. Christopher Walken stars as a man who awakes from an auto accident with the curse of knowing more than he wants to about the people around him. The film is bitter and a little episodic, but well-made and nicely atmospheric.

A very dull Saturday afternoon and one positive review sent me to see a film I was reasonably sure I would not like. In RESURRECTION, Ellen Burstyn stars as a woman who has an out-of-body experience after she is in a car crash. After she wakes up she discovers that she has the power to heal those around her. "Just what I need, an Oral Roberts tract on film," I thought. Shortly after seeing it I started recommending the film to people. This film is a character study of someone caught up in bewildering experiences and how she copes. Whether or not you agree with the

*****Presorted*****
* Leeper, Evelyn C. *
* 114A HO 1B-437A *

premise it is one of the top 5% of fantasy films. (Then, how many people agree with the premise of DRACULA?) Even if you don't see it at the film festival, watch for it. It is hard to find, but it is very good. Sam Shepherd (Chuck Yeager from THE RIGHT STUFF) is the second lead, but only very second. Richard Farnsworth (THE GREY FOX) has a short but unforgettable role. Leonard Maltin give RESURRECTION 3-1/2 out of 4 stars.

This is one of our better double features. It might have been better to pair each with a weaker film so they do not detract from each other, but I couldn't think of any really good way of doing that.

2. From the HO Librarian:

Four new books have been donated to the Holmdel branch of the Science Fiction Library. They are (again with blurbs):

Conan the Warrior Howard & DeCamp
contains Red Nails, Jewels of Gwahlur, Beyond the Black River
Conan the Freebooter Howard & DeCamp
contains Hawks over Shem, Black Colossus, Shadows in the
Moonlight, Road of Eagles, A Witch Shall Be Born
Conan the Liberator DeCamp & Carter
Conan vs. Numedides, mad king of Aquilonia
Friday Heinlein
Triumphant national bestseller

3. As was hinted at last week, many of the HO members will be moving to Middletown late this summer--including our illustrious chairperson. Volunteers for HO Chairperson are being solicited. [-ECL]

4. Please note room change for Jill-of-all-trades.

5. In a letter on the UNIX net, I was commenting to someone about the STAR TREK films. For whatever interest the comments may have:

ST I: better than the public gave it credit for being but it still could have used a better idea to it. It is the most visually impressive film I ever remember seeing, particularly for the scale of V-ger. The film was emotionally a little unengaging.

ST II (I would call it ST IIa): Worst of the three. It is mostly a cops and robbers in space. It has action, but it has serious script flaws. The scenario called for Kirk to have come up with a clever way to get around the Kobayashi Maru test. When it actually came to putting it in the script, I think the writer couldn't come up with anything clever so says Kirk tampered with the computer. It is unlikely he could get at it, and even if he did it is cheating and he would have been punished when it was discovered. It is hardly the original thinking they claim. Unlike his actions as Captain, it doesn't solve the problem, it sidesteps it. He

should have been court-martialed for leaving his shields down when the manual said they should be up. People died as a result of that error. The script of this (or perhaps it should be the next) film ignores the Federation response to this offense. And what is this garbage about the Enterprise being able to take down another ship's shields? There was no preparation for that at all. It seems like the scriptwriter wrote himself into a corner so had to invent a new super-capability of the Enterprise. Then there is the Genesis Effect that seems to be able to attract stars to optimal distances from planets. Be real.

ST III (ST IIb): Best of the three, but it still involves the foolish concept of the Genesis Effect. Also why is Spock so surprised that Kirk did all this for him? Didn't he leave instructions that it be done imprinted in McCoy's brain. And if this was a ritual that hadn't been done for millenia, what did Spock intend to happen when his dead body was brought to Vulcan? There is a lot that goes unexplained.

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

NIGHT OF THE ZOMBIES
A film review by Mark R. Leeper

Ever since Dawn of the Dead turned out to be a boxoffice bonanza in Europe, the dead have not rested easily in Italy. Virtually anything seems to wake them up--industrial wastes, voodoo, mad scientific experiments, air pollution, And they always wake up with the munchies for those of us who are still alive. In Night of the Zombies the wakeup call comes from nuclear radiation. Some sort of weird experimental radiation is released from a reactor. And suddenly there are a bunch of dead people whose faces have turned black and who are walking around with a gait resembling the Frankenstein monster looking for human snacks.

Now if that premise sounds absurd, wait till you hear the next one. This all takes place in New Guinea, where an American SWAT team is vacationing together en masse--without families or friends outside the team--but with their uniforms and their guns. There they run into a glamorous TV reporter who enjoys running bare-breasted while communing with native tribesmen. Not that it has much to do with the plot; there isn't one. The film is just a string of attacks by black-faced zombies. At the conclusion, there is a minor surprise ending that makes no sense.

The film is directed by someone hiding behind the name Vincent Dawn. (Somebody ought to compile a cross-reference of Italian horror film directors and the Anglicized names they use.) In any case, this is not the Lucio Fulci Night of the Zombies, but the Vincent Dawn film of the same name. Not much entertainment value here. Rate it -2 on the -4 to +4 scale. No surprise there, I guess.

BIRDS OF PREY by David Drake
Baen, 1985, \$7.95.
A book review by Mark R. Leeper

I've reviewed a number of books published by Bluejay Books of late. This time I have switched to a competitor in publishing trade paperbacks, Baen Books. David Drake is known for good military science fiction, I am told (by a friend who liked his Hammer's Slammers). Birds of Prey is sort of a change of pace for him.

Instead of setting his story in the future, Drake sets it in the ancient past--"262 A.D.," the cover says, though I don't remember the date coming up in the story. The cover also says, "Roman courage against alien ferocity in a battle of the ages." Well, if you buy books for the blurbs, you deserve your \$7.95 back. While Birds of Prey is undeniably science fiction, that doesn't become really important to the plot until the last forty pages or so. For the most part, this is just a straight-forward historical novel. There is an encounter with an alien fairly early in the book, and another character is actually from the future, but these things don't affect the plot a whole lot in the first 80% of the book. The story just follows the adventures of Aulus Perennius, agent of Rome.

As an adventure tale, pure and simple, the story really is not too bad, though some of the "clever" escapes from enemies in the story are predictable. The extended scenes of naval battles are quite good and have the feel of being well-researched. The language, however, seems a little less convincing. Romans keep using phrases like "the mission was scrubbed" or "for shit's sake..." Of course, I don't think anyone remembers how Romans swore, or doubts that they did, but the phrases used to swear, in particular, seem several hundred years out of place.

As a science fiction novel, Birds of Prey is somewhat less satisfying. It is a 350-page novel with less science fiction content than you would find in an average Dr. Who story. The presence of the aliens is not well explained, and considering their technological superiority, they are much too easily defeated.

I can recommend Birds of Prey as a pleasant reading experience even if it is rather inadequate as a science fiction story.

SHERLOCK HOLMES AND THE TREASURE TRAIN by Frank Thomas
Pinnacle, 1985, \$2.95.
A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper

This is the third Frank Thomas "Holmes" book I've read, the other two being Sherlock Holmes and the Sacred Sword and Sherlock Holmes and the Golden Bird. The first two were really bad; this one is merely mediocre. The structure of the novel is very unlike any Holmes story that Doyle wrote and the result is something that just doesn't sound right. Thomas has not yet mastered the writing style required, though he is improving. The solution, when it comes, is also less than convincing.

The plot concerns a gold shipment stolen from a special express by use of an unused spur going to a disused mine, etc. (There seem to be a preponderance of unused spurs going to disused mines in mystery stories set in Britain.) There are the usual red herrings and strange characters involved, and Holmes and Watson are involved in more violence than one might expect. All in all, not a *bad* book, but not something to run right down to your local bookstore for either.

(According to the front of the book, Thomas has written a fourth book, Sherlock Holmes, Bridge Detective. If anyone can tell me whether this is a novel, or merely a collection of bridge puzzles with Sherlock Holmes as the framework--a la Raymond Smullyan's The Chess Mysteries of Sherlock Holmes--I would appreciate it.)

THE CASE OF THE REVOLUTIONIST'S DAUGHTER by Lewis S. Feuer
Prometheus Books, 1983, \$14.95(?).
A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper

If Prometheus Books is not a vanity publisher, I'll be very surprised--this novel is merely a means for the author to give the reader a lot of socialist and anti-socialist argument, while name-dropping well-known historical figures throughout (the subtitle is "Sherlock Holmes Meets Karl Marx"). (Additional support for the vanity press theory comes from the fact that no price is printed in the book--the \$14.95 is based on the Strand Bookstore's pencilled-in price.)

The case is no case at all: Marx's daughter is "missing," as Engels describes it when he comes to engage Holmes, but everyone (including the reader) knows from the very beginning where she is. Holmes spends a lot of time meeting Shaw and other Fabians, and discussing Ibsen's plays, but since he doesn't have anything to do in terms of investigation or deduction, the reader soon wonders what he's doing there at all.

I'd say avoid this one, but the only people who are likely to even run across this book are the completists (like myself) who will buy it no matter *how* bad it is.

An April Vacation's Reading
By Dale Skran

Over my Easter vacation, I read three new books. As I have found more and more of late, I enjoyed the two fantasy volumes more than the science fiction.

TO REIGN IN HELL
by Steven Brust

This book deserves the accolades bestowed on it by Rogar Zelazny in the forward--"engaging story with consummate grace and genuine artistry." The story follows the events in Heaven that led to the falling out between Satan and Yaweh. Although less than convincing as theology, as a tale of gods who are men, To Reign in Hell must be placed with Lord of Light as a masterwork. Brust's writing has much to offer: beautiful language, rich characters, a haunting ring of truth, and a larger significance. At the end, I lusted for Lilith, respected Satan, and pitied Yaweh. Their final battle and ultimate destiny is at once unexpected and plausible.

CROSS THE STARS
by David Drake

Drake continues the chronicles of "Hammer's Slammers," a mercenary outfit in the Pournelle tradition with this tale of a future Odysseus on an interstellar Odyssey as a retiring "Slammer," Don Slade, journeys homeward. Although episodic, the story rolls right along, keeping the reader interested in what might have been, in other hands, an unremarkable tale of a big strong man. The ideas in Cross the Stars may be less than innovative (although I believe the method of propulsion used by the Alayans is new), but Drake puts the bite on the reader as Slade gets into tough spots and tougher moral choices.,

THE WHITE ROSE
by Glen Cook

The White Rose shares with Cross the Stars the distinction of being a tale of a mercenary company forced into tough spots and tougher decisions. Cook's Black Company will linger long in the annals of F&SF warriors. The White Rose concludes what may (or may not) be a trilogy (The Black Company, The Shadows Linger, and The White Rose) chronicling how the Black Company came to serve the Lady in her war with the rebel, how the rebel was defeated, how the Dominator rose from the grave only to be put down by the Lady, and how to save Darling the Black Company turned against the Lady. I consider Cook's series to be many cuts above standard fantasy fare. Cook writes honestly about hard men facing tough choices, and doesn't gloss over the grim face of war or allow easy (Dorsai style) victories for the good guys. Best of all, he has created two of the strongest female characters in fantasy, Darling and the Lady.

The Lady is a fit successor to Weinbaum's Black Flame, an immortal sorceress, powerful beyond human ken, yet dogged by a spark of humanity. She finds her nemesis in Darling (The White Rose), a "magic null" who fuels her suburb generalship with driving hate. Told by the Black Company's doctor and annalist, Croaker, The White Rose, is by far the best of the series, and the others are good! Among these and other strong characters Cook builds a fantasy world that includes the Barrowland and the Plain of Fear, the wind whales and Toad Killer Dog, Soulcatcher and the Limper.

Perhaps a preference for fantasy comes with age, as I recently turned 27, but I recommend the entire Black Company series strongly to anyone who enjoyed the Slammers or John Christian Falkenberg, and also to anyone who hates cute unicorn fantasy and loves dark, mysterious, tortured women with a soft spot that leads them to a glorious destiny. I also recommend To Reign in Hell to anyone who enjoyed Lord of Light. Neither book is perfect--the characters in To Reign in Hell may be overly monothematic, and the ending of The White Rose may or may not be consistent with the magic used up to that point in the series, but I couldn't put either one down once I got started. Both of these books make Power's Anubis Gates seem pale. Power has action and ideas. Brust and Cook add character, passion, pain, and a shuddering glimpse of the final evil.