

Lincroft-Holmdel Science Fiction Club  
Club Notice - 6/5/85 -- Vol. 3, No. 47

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>
06/12	HO: GREAT SF 1 (1939) edited by Isaac Asimov and Martin Greenberg
06/26	LZ: TACTICS OF MISTAKE by Gordon R. Dickson (War & the Military)
07/03	HO: JOB: A COMEDY OF JUSTICE by Robert Heinlein
07/17	LZ: THIS IMMORTAL by Roger Zelazny (Immortality)
07/24	HO: DAMIANO by R. A. MacAvoy
08/07	LZ: A CASE OF CONSCIENCE by James Blish (Religion)
08/14	HO: THE INTEGRAL TREES by Larry Niven
08/28	LZ: DINOSAUR BEACH by Keith Laumer (Time Travel)
09/18	LZ: THE MARTIAN CHRONICLES by Ray Bradbury (Near Future History)
10/09	LZ: THE SHEEP LOOK UP by John Brunner (Catastrophes)

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. Friends -- and you are my friends -- do you feel that life is passing you by? Do you see great things happening in the world and you are not a part of them? Have you resigned yourself to living out the rest of your life in the same dull, wretched way you have lived this first part? Would you like to be touched by

GREATNESS?

Well, this is your big chance! Why not let a little GREATNESS into your life? Our next discussion at Holmdel will be (a little fanfare please, maybe a few trumpets and drums) THE GREAT SF STORIES, NUMBER ONE. These are the finest, GREATEST, and most beautiful science fiction stories published in the year 1939 as selected by the honorable doctor Isaac Asimov and his ever-faithful friend Martin G. Greenberg (actually I suspect that Greenberg did the work and Asimov lent his name in large letters to the cover, but let me not be petty). Included in this volume are "Black Destroyer" by A. E. Van Vogt, "Lifeline," Robert A. Heinlein's first published story, Lester Del Rey's "Day is Done" (read this one if you read nothing else, it is the best of the volume). Read John Campbell's "Cloak of Aesir" (the other extreme for the volume) and "I, Robot" by Eando Binder. Yes, people, there still is room for greatness in your lives. Let these stories enrich your otherwise pitiful existence. Admit it, you need to read this book and discuss it. This may be your last chance.

\*\*\*\*\*Presorted\*\*\*\*\*  
\* Leeper, Evelyn C. \*  
\* 114A HO 1B-500A \*  
\*\*\*\*\*

Mark Leeper  
HO 1E-412 834-2657  
...mtgzz!leeper

---

EL NORTE  
A film review by Mark R. Leeper

El Norte is a full-length film (in fact over two hours long) made predominantly for showing on PBS's American Playhouse, but also released to theaters, a course similar to that of Testament. It is the story of a brother and sister who must flee Guatemala and, lured by the enticing images in Better Homes and Gardens and by stories of how rich life must be in the U.S., head north. The story is in three parts. The first shows how Enrique and Rosa lose their parents because their father protests the rich landowners stealing their land. In the second part they travel through Mexico to reach El Norte. The final and longest part shows their experiences in the U.S.

I think that I was pre-conditioned by reviews of this film to expect it to be predominantly about how bad it is in the U.S. for illegal immigrants. That theme is certainly present in the film. Enrique and Rosa have a very hard time in the U.S., but if the film is saying anything, it is that U.S. law should allow more immigrants in legally. Life in the U.S. is not the bed of roses that Enrique and Rosa expected, but there is little doubt that they made the best decision by coming to the U.S. The worst parts of their experience in this country were results of the immigration laws, not from any callousness or cruelty by U.S. citizens. In fact, when Enrique and Rosa are happiest in the film, it is because they are succeeding in the U.S. For the serious problems they do have we see that help is given to them, either free or at a price they can afford. The film is, in short, surprisingly pro-U.S.

One other thought comes to mind while watching El Norte: if this story was supposed to be typical in some way of the experiences of people trying to get into this country, it is unconvincing. The typical people with the background shown probably would have failed to get to their destination (and probably did), but certainly would not have gotten in. Then there would have been much less of a story. Enrique and Rosa had the unlikely luck to be able to find just the right person in Mexico who owed a favor to someone they knew in Guatemala. This seems less than likely.

El Norte, which was nominated for and lost one Oscar--Best Screenplay--is better than at least two of the films nominated for Best Picture last year. And it comes free on television. If you missed it and it is on again, watch for it.



THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA  
Gaston Leroux  
A book review by Timothy P. Schroeder

After having seen the silent movie of the same name several times (most recently at the House of Leeper), I finally read the book. I'm not sure what class to put this book in. The copy I read was part of the Dennis Wheatley Library of the Occult, and was billed as horror. That label certainly doesn't fit this book. The book is Leroux's investigations of the tales of the Opera Ghost; it is written in a type of "investigative reporter" style.

Leroux follows through the curious happenings attributable to the ghost. Each section is based only on what he has discovered up to that time; consequently the reader knows only part of what is happening. Most of the "crimes" attributed to the opera ghost seem to be magical at the time, but as the narrative progresses, natural explanations are found. The story takes odd twists from time to time, as the characters grope about, often under incorrect assumptions about what is going on. There is little explanation in the first part of the book. The main character, Raoul Chagny, is just a bystander in the antics of the opera ghost. Things happen to the opera; things happen to his friend Christine Daae; he understands nothing. For the second part of the book, Leroux found out who to talk to to uncover the ghost's secrets. The mysterious Persian takes over as the main character, and several chapters are devoted entirely to his memoirs on the ghost. The Persian seems to understand everything that has happened, although occasionally he refuses to discuss them because of violating someone's confidence. (Who is the man in the felt hat?)

As an epilogue, Leroux interviews the Persian, and ties up the last few remaining loose ends. We are finally given background information on the ghost, the Persian, and their story. To really spoil the book, you could read this part first.

I imagine that the world beneath the Paris Opera House could inspire terror in almost anyone. Whole groups of people live there, in addition to the ghost. There is a lake, armies of rats, torture chambers from the French Commune and prisons used during the Franco-Prussian war, plus the workings for the opera house and all the old sets from previous operas. Add in trap doors, no reliable light, and the constant fear of strangulation, and you have a great setting for a horror story. That is not what Leroux chose to write, however. Not being a horror fan, I'm glad. I found it difficult to read "The Phantom of the Opera" for long stretches at a time, due to its somewhat dry style. However, I always hurried back to it. This is a book to be read for its content, not its style, but certainly worth reading.

A MORTAL GLAMOUR by Chelsea Quinn Yarbro  
Bantam, 1985, \$3.50.

A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper

While not strictly a horror story, A Mortal Glamour does have its horrific elements. Set in a convent in France in 1387, the story deals with the repressed sexuality of the nuns there--many of whom were deposited there by their families when they (the nuns) would not agree to the marriages arranged for by their families, or when their families could not arrange marriages for them at all. One nun, Seur Aungelique, escapes to a nearby villa where the Comtesse Orienne lives. Here she sees "how the other half lives" as she is a guest at one of the Comtesse's debauched parties. Upon returning to the convent, she is beset by "demons" who ravage her nightly. Her torments seem to be contagious, as gradually most of the convent is taken over by these persecutions. The priest sent to cure them is no better, but his excesses are channeled in more "accepted" paths. Along with all this, we are given the Flagellants and the Plague as minor(!) characters.

While the topic is of some psychological interest, one can't help but feel that Yarbro is concentrating more on the sensational aspects and less on what drives these women to madness. A cover blurb that talks about "ecstatic moans of pleasure" and "a netherworld of debauchery and defilement" does not serve to re-enforce the seriousness of this book. But it's probably as good (or better) than the usual best-seller. Of interest to Yarbro fans (and yes, she's still into elaborate descriptions of clothing!).

ALICE THROUGH THE NEEDLE'S EYE by Gilbert Adair  
Dutton, 1985, \$11.95.  
A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper

There was only one Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, but that didn't stop others from writing passable Sherlock Holmes pastiches. There was only one Lewis Carroll, but now someone else has attempted an Alice pastiche--and done an acceptable job. While it's obvious that it's not Carroll, this is a reasonable imitation. Parts of it are Carrollesque, and it's only when taken as a whole that you realize that it doesn't fit together quite as neatly, or contain quite as many puns, as Carroll's work did.

Unfortunately, it's difficult to tell the plot without ruining the book (at least partially), so I'll just say, if you liked Carroll's "Alice" books, try this one. (The illustrations are nice too.)



LADYBUG, LADYBUG  
A film review by Mark R. Leeper

Actually, I am a little surprised that this 1963 film has been so totally forgotten, even if it isn't the best anti-nuclear war film ever made. The story is of a school that gets a Conelrad alarm telling it that the U.S. is about to be attacked by nuclear weapons. The story follows the children's reactions to the news that a nuclear war is coming. While--as we are told in the credits--the story is based on an actual incident (so much for suspense as to whether the alarm is real or not), the children clearly are meant to be in an allegorical sense everybody living under the threat of the Bomb. The children clearly mouth adult lines rather than talk about nuclear war the way children would.

The film does rather effectively show how people looked at nuclear war in the Sixties. Various groups of children react differently. Some panic, some protectively take care of loved ones, some become ruthless survivalists. The problem with the story is that too much of the film is spent showing the principal of the school (Williams Daniels) deciding to send the children to their homes and then showing a school teacher marching the students to their homes. These scenes are dull on the literal level and do not advance the allegorical meanings of the film. Lord of the Flies, made that same year, does a much better job of integrating its literal and allegorical meanings. All too often the film tries to make overly sentimental statements by having characters wallow in self-pity. Threads effectively demonstrates that nuclear war is bad without ever appearing self-indulgent, as Ladybug, Ladybug often does.

Ladybug, Ladybug probably went unnoticed in 1963 because it did not have the star-power that On the Beach had, and it is not seen now because most of its points have been made better elsewhere. Still, placed in an historical perspective, it deserves to be seen just to illustrate public sentiment toward the Bomb in the Sixties. It might make an interesting double feature with Atomic Cafe.

The Gore Trilogy of Herschel Gordon Lewis  
Film comment by Mark R. Leeper

One of the advantages of videotape as a medium is that it is relatively inexpensive to produce a commercial videotape given that you have a film you want to put on tape. This means that obscure or relatively minor films become available for viewing that one would have otherwise had to search for years to find. It is difficult to believe that there is a giant market out there for the films of Herschel Gordon Lewis, but his first three films are available.

Who is Herschel Gordon Lewis? He is an exploitation filmmaker who realized that he had to put something in his films you could not get in the mainstream. He hit upon the idea of putting gore in. Since he did, gore is moving into the mainstream, but all the Friday the 13ths and even the Wild Bunches owe something to Lewis.

I should explain that I am somewhat indifferent to gory scenes in film. I cringe at the French documentary Night and Fog because I know what I am seeing is real. If I know what I am seeing is not real, it becomes one more special effect. My rating of a Lewis film is not much different than my rating would be if the same film were done without gore. When a friend rented these films one at a time, I was interested to see them because they were influential, not because I was interested (or disinterested) in them because of the blood content.

The three films, which apparently played as a triple feature at drive-ins for a long time, are Blood Feast, 2000 Maniacs, and Color Me Blood Red.

Blood Feast (1963) is a humorously inept piece about an Egyptian caterer who is setting up an "Egyptian Feast" for the graduation party of a client's daughter. Unbeknownst to the client, the feast is going to feature body parts from a number of local women. The film was produced on a miniscule budget by people with more money than talent. A Playboy Playmate, Ashlyn Martin, plays the graduating senior. Nobody behaves like anyone you know. Rate it -3 on the -4 to +4 scale.

By far the best of the trilogy is 2000 Maniacs (1964). Unlike its predecessor, it does not look like it was made in somebody's garage. The story concerns a town, population 2000, that was massacred in the Civil War and, like Brigadoon, comes back once a century, though in this case to avenge itself on Yankees. The script has some (intentional) wit and at times actually attains fun. The music is provided by the Pleasant Valley Boys, a professional group whose most memorable contribution to the film is the song "Eeee-HA! The South's gonna rise again!" As a film, it nearly makes it. Rate it 0. This one has Playboy Playmate Connie Mason.

In 1965, Lewis proved that the watchability of 2000 Maniacs was a fluke. Color Me Blood Red is not as imaginative as its predecessor, and a good deal less entertaining. It concerns an artists who discovers that the perfect color for his paintings is human blood. Of course he goes out looking for nubile young lovelies to supply the commodity. This one doesn't have enough story to cover even its short screen time, so scenes are drawn out much too long. No Playboy Playmates grace this film and the script and acting are a step down. Rate it a high -2.

This all adds up to saying that, in spite of being the ones that started the splatter craze, Lewis's films are nothing to scream about.



The Road Not Taken:  
Alternate History in the Visual Media  
An article by Evelyn C. Leeper

The idea of an alternate history is not rare in science fiction--a recent article the The Proper Boskonian cited a bibliography over over a thousand stories! Why then, when it comes to visual science fiction, is it so rare? An examination of the few examples one can find may help answer that question.

Strangely enough, there seems to be only one film (as distinguished from television shows or other visual media) that deals with alternate history that has achieved any popularity in this country, and that film is Quest for Love. Based on John Wyndham's "Random Quest," this British film begins with a physicist transferred to an alternate reality as a result of a laboratory accident. In this alternate world, he is not a physicist, but a playwright--or rather, his counterpart is. (The details of the transfer are a little vague.)

Now, admittedly, if one examines most science fiction premises too closely, they tend to fall apart. But this one falls apart faster than most. In this alternate world, World War II never happened (more on this later). This would explain the profession change--it was to a great extent the atomic bomb that inspired the then current generation of scientists (the film was made in 1971). And the main character appears to have been born before the alteration (to borrow Kingsley Amis's term), so the question of "would his parents have met, etc.?" does not really arise. But the background doesn't make sense.

Problem #1 is the base premise--that the alternate branched off from ours in 1938. By 1938, Hitler had been in power for five years and Japan had occupied Manchuria for two, so that the prevention of World War II at that time was highly unlikely. In fact, the general consensus seems to be that the seeds of World War II were sown by the Treaty of Versailles, so this film is about twenty years late in its placement. One might call this problem the ignorance of causes.

Problem #2 is trickier. One of the little touches that gives the main character a hint of what's going on is a headline indicating that John Kennedy has become the new head of the League of Nations. Since the internal time of the film is post-1963, our protagonist finds this a bit odd, to say the least (never mind the League of Nations bit). But it's even odder than he thinks--one of the factors that got Kennedy into the public eye was his war record. Another was his good showing against Nixon's poor one in the debates. Nixon, in turn, was running because he served as Vice-President under Eisenhower, who certainly was elected on the basis of his war record. One might claim that Kennedy would have gone into a political career anyway, but I think that his age (or rather, lack of it--he would have been only 51 years old when the film

takes place) would have delayed his career considerably. This sort of problem might be called the ignorance of effects.

At this point, the difficulty becomes clear--to do a good alternate history, one must understand history not merely as a set of dates and events, but as a chain of causes and effects. This is more depth than film producers usually have to deal with.

American TV hasn't done much better. There exist a few stories dealing with this topic. Twilight Zone's "The Parallel" has Astronaut Robert Gaines go up into orbit and black out, only to find himself back on earth (having somehow soft-landed the capsule!). But it's not quite the earth he remembers: he's now a colonel, not a major, Kennedy isn't the President, his house has acquired a picket fence, etc. The story never really deals with any implications of these changes--the man who built the Panama Canal in the alternate world is not the same as in this one (Gaines is checking items in an encyclopedia), but future history after that seems remarkably similar to our own. Star Trek's "The City on the Edge of Forever" deals with alternate history as a sub-species of time paradox story. If Kirk saves Edith Keeler in 1930's New York, her pacifist activities will keep the United States out of World War II until it's too late, and the Axis will win (why the Japanese don't bomb Pearl Harbor, or why their bombing doesn't cause our entry into World War II, is never made clear). Outer Limits touched upon the idea in "The Man Who Was Never Born." And I can't help but feel that One Step Beyond must have done something similar. But the one-hour (or half-hour) format seems to be too limiting for this theme.

The best visual alternate history piece I have seen is a BBC television play, An Englishman's Castle. Made as three 50-minute episodes, it has time to develop the ideas that the concept (the Germans invaded Britain in 1940 and won the war) imply. In addition, its setting--that of the production of a television series set in Britain in the late Thirties and early Forties--gives the author a chance to do some explaining to his audience without appearing to lecture.

It's the small touches that make An Englishman's Castle work. For example, it has been pointed out that the drab clothing can be attributed to the lack of the "Mod revolution" that swept our Britain in the Sixties. And the cars parked in the background of the outdoor scenes are Volkswagens and such. There is some discussion of how the United States stayed out of the war (again, this ignores the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, which wouldn't seem to be connected to Germany's success or failure in invading England), but the concentration is much more on the present, and how the characters cope with the ever-present totalitarian government. There is a semblance of the old structure, but it is firmly under the control of the Third Reich. With the passing of time, the Reich has changed somewhat (the old timers are gone, and a new generation of leaders has replaced them), but the reminders of the beginnings remain: the "inferior races" have been exterminated or sent to labor camps, the racial purity laws are still in effect, etc. There



is, of course, an Underground (no, not the subway!). They want to use the television show An Englishman's Castle as a means of passing messages--after all, everyone watches it. The government wants to use it also--to convince everyone that everything has turned out for the best. Yes, the British were brave during the war, etc., but when the time came, they saw what was right, laid down their arms, and joined forces with the Germans to bring law and order back to Britain. The main character, Peter Ingram (played by Kenneth More), is the author of the television show An Englishman's Castle, and needless to say, he has problems keeping everyone happy, or at least not ready to kill him.

As an alternate history, it is well thought out, and succeeds in large part because it doesn't spend a lot of time trying to dazzle the viewer with all the changes. It sneaks up on you, the same way the truth snuck up on the main character in Quest for Love. Little comments that the characters make seem "off", and then you finally realize what is going on. (I read the entire novel The Dragon Waiting feeling that things were a bit "off", but it wasn't until the afterword that I realized that it was an alternate history. This is a little more obvious than that.)

So why are there so few good alternate history stories in the visual media? Simply put, it takes more thought than most producers are willing to give it. Even if a writer turns in a good script, he ends up having to explain it to a producer, who really wants something he can sign Tom Selleck and a bunch of teen-age girls in wet T-shirts for.



BASKET CASE  
A film review by Mark R. Leeper

Internationally there seems to be a big market now for horror films on videotape. (I was just reading that horror videotape rentals have surpassed pornography videotape rentals in Canada. The same may have happened in the U.S.--the article didn't say.) With all this demand, the number of horror titles on the rental shelves is increasing. A general rule of thumb is, if you haven't seen it playing in theaters, it is not worth seeing. That is not an infallible rule, however, and a friend's recommendation that I see Basket Case turned out to lead to an enjoyable evening.

No, Basket Case is not about a war amputee. It is about Duane, a young man born a Siamese twin. Duane looked relatively normal, but his brother Belial growing out of his side looked like a cross between Phiz-gig from The Dark Crystal and a fleshy deformation from Altered States. Three doctors separated the boys and left Belial for dead. Ah, but Belial's deformity gives him great strength and telepathic control over his brother. Duane carries Belial around in a basket. We see him drop hamburgers into the basket in the early parts of the film and the buns tossed back out. Belial is using Duane to get revenge on the doctors who left him for dead. At times he is played by a man in a suit in some scenes and by less-than-convincing stop-motion photography in others. The script has a natural wit and more than a little good-natured fun. While it never takes itself too seriously, it never turns hammy or silly. There are several well-drawn characters which we would only see in passing in most horror films made for this budget. This isn't immortal material but if it shows up at your videostore, give it a try. Rate it +1 on the -4 to +4 scale.