

Lincroft-Holmdel Science Fiction Club
Club Notice - 6/12/85 -- Vol. 3, No. 48

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>
06/26	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)
09/04	HO: ?
09/11	MT: Organizational Meeting (tentative)
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. We are going to try something a little different this time for the Leeperhouse film fest. Instead of seeing films, we are going to see two horror plays originally done on Broadway and recreated for the cable. On Thursday, June 20, at 7:30pm the special film program will be

Broadway Macabre
FRANKENSTEIN (1981) (Showtime 1984) dir. by James Ormerod
SWEENEY TODD (1982) dir. by Terry Hughes

Sporting a very strong cast including Robert Powell, John Gielgud, David Warner, and Carrie Fisher, this play, only a little more than an hour long, closed on the first night on Broadway, bankrupted by its huge special effects budget. It is, to be frank, a mediocre retelling of the story mostly because it is not a story that translates well to the confines of the stage. Powell, however, always gives a very charismatic performance and he makes an engaging Victor Frankenstein.

The main event was a spectacular success on Broadway and, by virtue of the fact that you can see the actors' facial expressions in this form, I think it is better on tape. SWEENEY TODD: THE DEMON BARBER

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

OF FLEET STREET is a fascinating musical (music and lyrics by Stephen Sondheim) about revenge, madness, and murder. The story of Sweeney Todd has been popular in Britain since the days of the penny dreadfuls and this adaptation evokes much of the penny dreadful feel. Len Cariou stars in the title role and Angela Lansbury plays Mrs. Lovitt. Good stuff.

2. As you can tell, we are planning on having a Middletown branch of the Club. The first meeting date is tentative (depending on how much schedules slip, etc.), but the meetings will be on the Wednesdays not used by the HO and LZ groups.

3. The following is by request of Chris Ward:

Recently a Science Fiction artist by the name of Tom Kidd had an exhibition at Columbia University. Thirteen paintings were stolen from the exhibit. Many were book covers and should be identifiable. Here is a list of titles of the paintings. In most cases they are they are the same as the book, and I am listing the authors of the books. If you see any of the original paintings please drop me a line (ihnp4!mtfmt!ccw) or better yet the artist at:

Tom Kidd
19 Broadway Terrace 42D
NY, NY 10040
Phone (212)569-1421

- 1) Oath of the Renunciate (Marion Zimmer Bradley)
- 2) Mallworld (Somtow Sucharitkul)
- 3) Silent Invaders (Robert Silverberg)
- 4) Lord of the Skies (AMAZING)
- 5) Shadows out of Hell (Andrew Offutt)
- 6) One Step From Earth (Harry Harrison)
- 7) The Years Best SF (1984?) (Gardner Dozois)
- 8) Trojan Orbit (Mack Renyolds--Joshua's Tomb)
- 9) The Imperiator Plot (Steven Spruill--Sleepwalker's World)
- 10) Dialogue with Darkness (Poul Anderson)
- 11) Firewatch (Connie Willis)
- 12) The Frozen Wave (Robert Vardeman)
- 13) Meanwhile (?)

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

GOONIES

A film review by Mark R. Leeper

When George Lucas made Star Wars, he claimed what he was going to do was to make a Disney-like film for summer audiences. He made a film better, in my and most other people's estimations, than anything Disney had ever done. Since then, Lucas and Spielberg have been making films that, among other things, fill that Disney niche of wholesome films for young adults. For the most part they have been doing better filmmaking than Disney could for the same money. Till now. I sat in Goonies thinking wistfully about how much better a film Disney could have made with the same budget. Another Dragonslayer or Something Wicked This Way Comes would have brightened this summer considerably. Goonies, on the other hand, is a pretty sad statement about where mega-pictures are going.

The base story of Goonies is pure Disney. A bunch of neighborhood kids go searching for a fabled pirate treasure. (The kids call themselves "the Goonies," probably because it conjures up images of Gremlins-like success in collecting capital to make the film.) On the way, they run afoul of a family of bumbling criminals. This is the sort of story that Disney Studios might have made in their "Apple Dumpling" period. It would not have been a very good film, but in the deft hands of a Steven Spielberg, it is out-and-out lousy.

To begin with, this film has only two elements that seem aimed at a post-adolescent. One is the Spielberg name over the title, and the other is semi-raunchy humor...a whole lot of semi-raunchy humor. The Disney approach to the story to the story would have had neither and right there it would have been a better film. The Disney film also wouldn't have rubbed our nose in name brands like a certain brand of cola or ice cream. The latter appears forced in a place that makes very little sense at all in the plot, except that it means more money for production.

Spielberg is now rich and powerful enough that he doesn't have to listen to anyone telling him that something is a dumb idea. Pity--he needs it desperately. He continually undercuts the credibility of his story by throwing in absurdities. In one scene, he has somebody shaking a waterpipe somehow create a geyser to blow somebody off a toilet. The gag brought giggles from a few of the eight-year-olds in the audience and for the rest of us it looked pretty stupid. One of the kids is a walking bag of the children's equivalent of James Bond gizmos. That's stupid right there. Yet if you figure the total volume necessary for all that the kid is supposedly wearing, there is no room in the clothing for the kid. The gizmos are used with a Road-runner level of believability, too.

The little adventure and fun this film provides falls far short of out-weighting the flaws. Give this one -1 on the -4 to +4 scale.

CYCLE OF THE WEREWOLF by Stephen King
(Illustrations by Berni Wrightson)
Signet, 1985 (copyright 1983), \$8.95.
A book review by Mark R. Leeper

The current trend in science fiction seems to be to take popular novelettes, illustrate them, and then publish them--puffed up with lots of blank space--as books unto themselves, with price tags between \$7 and \$10. Steven King's horror novelette "Cycle of the Werewolf" was originally published as a hard-back with illustrations by comic-book artist Berni Wrightson for some absurd price. Now Signet has reprinted it as a paperback, with the Wrightson illustrations, at the comparatively cheap price of \$8.95, so you can imagine what the full price was. For that price, you get about fifty short pages of text, the Wrightson illustrations, and a lot of white space.

The story is about the year-long campaign of a werewolf. It is broken into twelve chapters, one for each month. Each takes place on the night of the full moon in that month (it happens in a rather idealized year in which there is precisely one full moon each calendar month). Most of the chapters just chronicle one werewolf attack. With all that attacking, there is very little time for any real plot development. In fact, there is very little in the way of characters continuing from chapter to chapter. That makes the plot violent but very minimal.

Wrightson's illustrations are like very good comic-book art. His vision of a werewolf is much like the title character in Frank Frazetta's painting "The Werewolf" or like the lycanthropes in the film The Howling. If it's borrowed, at least it is borrowed from the best. If there is any werewolf that would scare me to run into, it is certainly the sort of werewolf shown in The Howling. It is sort of a grizzly bear with a wolf's head. That's worse than anything Lon Chaney, Jr. ever turned into. So the illustrations are all right, but expect to pay a real premium for them. There is hardly enough story to rate here, but overall the package get -1 on a scale of -4 to +4.

NIGHT SHIFT by Stephen King
Signet, 1979, \$2.95.
BUCKETS OF BLOOD by Clive Barker
Sphere, 1984, \$1.50 (\$3.25).
Two book reviews by Mark R. Leeper

On a recommendation for horror stories by a British newcomer, Clive Barker, I read his third collection, Books of Blood: Volume Three. Then to put him in a perspective, I read what is probably the best-selling horror collection of all time, Night Shift by Stephen King. That makes sense because King is to horror writers what McDonald's is to restaurants. His is a sort of decent, never great, all-pervasive standard.

So what are my conclusions? I'd say the two writers were quite different but roughly on a par as writers. I read a horror story for three things: an interesting horror idea, interesting characters, and an engaging plot.

King's ideas are all right but a little unimaginative and even timeworn. I often say when I read one of his novels that it would have made a really good short story. Many of his short stories would have made good cartoons by a macabre cartoonist like Gahan Wilson. Stories like "The Boogeyman" and "Gray Matter," in fact, seemed very much like story-length versions of particular Gahan Wilson cartoons that pre-dated them. At least two other stories ("The Mangler" and "Trucks") are just variations on Sturgeon's classic SF-horror story "Killdozer," written in the late Forties. "Battleground," in which a child's toy soldier set attacks humans is just a pale shadow of the Richard Matheson story "Prey" in which a really vicious native doll comes to life and terrorizes the woman who purchased it. (Actually, a lot of King seems heavily derived from Matheson, who I think was an even better horror story writer before he was seduced by the Hollywood side of the Force.) Other so-called stories are really just a scene each plus a fair amount of set-up time. These stories are "The Ledge," "The Man Who Loved Flowers," and "One for the Road." The stories that stand out for original ideas are "I Am the Doorway" and "Quitters, Inc."

Of the five stories in the Barker anthology, at least three struck me as really new concepts. When you start out a Barker story, you are never sure where he is going to take it. When the idea does come along it is really out of left field and attacks with a real element of surprise. His best story drones for a little while about a vaguely interesting character out in his field trying to dig up a large object that he's found. Then the object comes up by itself and the story shifts gears into a really gruesome story about, of all things...a giant. I suppose at one time there were blood-curdling stories about giants, but that was a long time ago. These days they are confined to mild children's stories, at least in horror. This is not a mild

children's story. The idea of doing a gruesome giant story is more creative than just about anything that King has ever done. I was certainly more surprised by it than by any of King's stories.

Premise was the first criterion I had for measuring stories. The second was characters. King goes for interesting people, Barker for real people. What is the difference? Well, to exaggerate it, would you rather watch a videotape of an hour out of the life of your next-door neighbor or Mickey Mouse? One would be very realistic as a slice-of-life, but not as entertaining as the other. The other would be someone you could feel for, but it would not be quite as realistic as the first.

Barker writes about male prostitutes, film projectionists, pornographers. And they are believable portraits. You don't really care for the characters, but you believe them and you learn something about their lifestyles. When King writes about a college student, you end up identifying with the character, but you get no insights into how a college student sees life differently than, say, how a trucker does. King leaves a lot of room in his characters for the reader to identify with the characters, to get into and walk through the horror story with them. Barker's characters are too real and specific to have much identification value. That may be a point against Barker in a horror story, but his stories are better as literature.

But that is actually getting into the third criterion, plot. Barker's characters have depth and motivation, where all too often Kings just limns out an outline for the reader to paint him/herself into. Occasionally King uses this for an emotional effect. He has real-life things haunting the character and this is perhaps King's finest hour. His most satisfying stories are "Sometimes They Come Back" (drawn no doubt on his experiences teaching in a time when it really is outright dangerous to be a teacher in some schools) and "Last Rung on the Ladder." which is a non-fantasy story with some suspense which also has something to say. (While I'm on the subject of this story, I have some mathematical complaints. The character first says it happened some time when "Ike" was in office, as if he doesn't remember exactly when. Yet he knows he was ten years old at the time. Most people have a pretty precise idea of what summer they were ten years old. At another point, he jumps from a hayloft 70 feet high. That's like being on the seventh floor of an office building--assuming six twelve-foot stories beneath him. If this guy is jumping from that into a haystack, he should be a stuntman!)

Two different writers, two different styles. The difference is a matter of taste. Obviously, King is more commercial; Barker is more original. Either is worth the read.

Recent Nuclear War Films
by Dale Skran

For many years post-holocaust literature and film has been one of my genre interests. The last year or two has spawned a slew of a new style of nuclear war film that deserves special notice. For the first time film makers been given the freedom to more-or-less graphically depict the sheer awfulness of nuclear war. Happy endings of the most stupid sort ala Panic in the Year Zero are no longer mandatory. Put on your lead suits as we embark on our journey into Hollywood hell!

The Day After

It seems appropriate to start with The Day After, the mainspring of the current crop of films. The director was highly aware of the serious nature of nuclear war, so he larded the first half of the three-hour program with soap-opera nonsense. We are treated to sisters fighting over diaphragms and other suchlike excitement. The war itself (much belated), apparently begins with an accidental firing of a missile that results in massive Russian retaliation.

The next one and a half hours give the impression of having been extracted from a much longer film that made more sense. Rumor has it that the program was originally intended to run for two nights, but network execs feared no one would tune in the second night. Although a quantum leap forward in technical accuracy, The Day contains major cause for complaint. On the plus side, we see widespread damage, massive EMP effects, and a more or less realistic portrayal of radiation sickness. On the minus side, human behavior varies between the inane and the implausible. At one point hundreds of badly injured people besiege a hospital, but no violence erupts as the staff turns them away. Post-attack crime consists of some looting and the murder of a rancher by refugees. Most people wander about in a fog more characteristic of valium addicts than people about to die. Some, even a majority, I can believe, but at least a few oddballs would act as though they were awake.

The Day perpetuates the "American Basement" mythos of nuclear war survival -- all you need to do is go downstairs and stay in the root cellar for a couple of days, and all will be A-OK. This rank nonsense ignores the required air filters, bottled water, and sanitary facilities. Most such troglodytes would be doomed in the absence of special preparations never described in the movie, such as sealing all cracks with tape. The Day leaves the impression that most of the characters will survive for a while, albeit in a grim world. The nuclear winter is never mentioned. People have healthy horses, the presence of which is never explained. My favorite ludicrous scene occurs when the rancher's daughter comes up for a breath of air to discover the farm covered every few feet with dead horses, pigs, sheep, and so on. Where did they come from other than the director's need for a dramatic if implausible scene?

The Day After stands as just another over-hyped docu-drama, neither the commie propaganda claimed by some nor the realistic warning of doom as put forward by others.

Testament

Following soon after The Day came Testament. This film was originally intended to be shown on PBS, but seemed strong enough that the producers decided on a general release. Testament wastes more acting talent than most films have. Focused tightly on a grim woman who "keeps a stiff upper lip" while her kids die slowly and in BBC style graphic detail, Testament completely fails to deal realistically with nuclear war. The movie is obviously about some other disaster, a plague, perhaps. It centers on a miraculously undamaged town in northern California. No refugees ever come to this town, and we never see anyone suffering from a severe external physical injury. The single criminal act in the film consists of a fat bully stealing a bicycle.

Technical inaccuracy is only half of the problem with Testament. I consider it a moral atrocity. If the heroine were portrayed as mentally retarded or otherwise incapable of making rational judgement, I would claim Testament to be a moving drama of human courage. Alas, she is not. She could learn about radiation and attempt to deal with the situation. She has a chance to leave with her neighbors. She stubbornly refuses to admit the probable death of her husband. If not for herself, she should struggle to protect her children, or lacking the means to do so, kill them painlessly. If the movie portrayed her trying to do all these things, and failing horribly out of ignorance or her human foibles, it could have been an excellent tragedy.

The only possible explanation lies in the need of the directors and actors to make a political statement against nuclear weapons. This statement might have been more effective if a) it was not so obviously manipulative, b) the characters struggled to survive, however ineffectively, and c) the film was about nuclear war.

Threads

Threads, the BBC version of The Day, as usual, bests it utterly in every way. The only disappointment in Threads is its failure to deal with with a severe nuclear winter. However, the film is technically accurate given the scenario of a limited, European-only use of "tactical" nuclear weapons and the fact that as an island, England would be warmer than inland locations. The title derives from the film's effort to follow about ten characters to their destinies. For once, the percentage of survivors is realistic - less than one in ten. We see both the lucky (who get to starve in deep shelters) and the unlucky (caught in a fire storm). Threads holds back some, but on the whole is far more graphic than either Testament or The Day.

Threads is more of a documentary than a drama, with frequent narration, maps, and so on. This results in a first class docu-drama, but a less than great movie with incompletely developed characters. Overall, we are treated to the one of the best, most accurate, and grimly horrible views of a possible nuclear war available on film, rivaled only by the BBC production The War Game.

Defcon4

After three heavy films, Defcon4 comes as a low-budget relief. Defcon4 starts with three astronauts on a secret orbital weapons station. They view the final war via computer screens from their Eagle's nest, avoiding the use of the traditional US Government stock footage. Although pretty good for a low-budget film (they have the gravity in the correct direction), the plot is chock full of amazing coincidences.

Once the action moves to the Oregon coast and fighting between various bands of survivalists and ex-army types, the action becomes more ho-hum. There are a few witty scenes that come as bright surprises in an otherwise leaden and contrived script. Watch out for the door to the basement!

Defcon4 (the name is never explained) paints a fairly realistic portrait of a crazed, ruthless man dominating a small group by sheer force of personality. The technical background is more on a par with the budget. We are told by the handsome, youthful "leader" that his camp is surrounded by the Contaminated (who seem to be flesh eating refugees from a zombie flick), and they must move to a "clear zone" within two months to avoid a similar fate. If you buy this...!

In its odd notions of how radiation works Defcon4 harkens back to Fifties movies featuring mutants, but its violence and broken down society puts it more in tune with the modern view of likely post-nuclear conditions. Some may view Defcon4 as a confused Road Warrior imitation, but it stands by itself as an interesting, if low-quality, post-nuclear war film with strong SF content.

The Ratings

On the Leeper scale, (-4) to (+4): Threads (+2), Testament (+1), The Day After (0), and Defcon4 (-1).

TRAVESTY BLAISE
A film review by Mark R. Leeper

I while back I reveiwed the book Modesty Blaise by Peter O'Donnell. I am sitting here watching the film adaptation, directed by no less respected a talent than Joseph Losey, the powerful director of The Prowler, The Servant, and Accident. I haven't seen those respected films, but I can tell he is a powerful director by the mayhem he is able to commit on this story.

To begin with, there is Modesty herself, in the book razor-sharp, practical, independent, cat-like. Take what Emma Peel had and multiply it by two. That's Modesty. Now take Losey's Modesty. Monica Vitti is just the opposite sort of woman: clumsy as a horse in high heels, wearing all sorts of stupid-looking fashions and far too much make-up. She talks like she has the intellect of a hamster when she isn't giggling, which she does incessantly. She seems a complete bubble-headed incompetent. The script's contriving that she knows a few facts at the right instant--seemingly quite out of character--is the only concession to the original character's intellect that Losey makes. The fight scenes are hilarious. She has absolutely no physical control, yet villains walk into her knives. In the book, Modesty has a completely platonic relation with her cohort, Willie Garvin. It is the under-current of sexual tension they cover up that gives their relationship character. Losey comes right out and makes them lovers, and in the heat of battle they sing love songs to each other!

Gabriel--a master criminal in the book--is effete and fatuous in the film. His real ambition, other than eating dainty foods is to disprove his mother's view that he is a mamma's boy. He flits around with a pink parasol and scolds the hired help.

I do not know what Losey was trying to do with this film. If his casting so totally against type, his infantile humor (an extreme form of camp), and his self-indulgence were meant to be saying something, they didn't. Somehow, I think he thought they would make this an art film. It isn't. This is easily as bad a film adaptation as any of the Dean Martin "Matt Helm" films. It is considerably worse as an adaptation than Dune. Rate this trash -3 on the -4 to +4 scale. It has been a good long time since I last saw a film this bad.