

Lincroft-Holmdel Science Fiction Club  
Club Notice - 7/3/85 -- Vol. 4, No. 1

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>
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: ? (11AM)
08/28	LZ: DINOSAUR BEACH by Keith Laumer (Time Travel)
09/04	HO: ? (11AM)
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. Back in the 50's and 60's the most imaginative fantasy films were done by Columbia Pictures with stop-motion special effects by Ray Harryhausen. Films like SEVENTH VOYAGE OF SINBAD and JASON AND THE ARGONAUTS set standards that weren't matched for years to come. In the last decade, computer controlled effects have taken over, but stop-motion films were still around and doing interesting things. Our next Leeperhouse film festival, July 11, 7:30pm, will take a look at two more recent stop-motion films.

Latterday Stop-Motion  
GOLDEN VOYAGE OF SINBAD (1974) dir. by Gordon Hessler  
DRAGONSLAYER (1981) dir. by Matthew Robbins

Seventeen years after SEVENTH VOYAGE OF SINBAD, Ray Harryhausen made the second of his three Sinbad films. This is a dark fantasy with a strange menagerie of mythical beasties including homunculi, centaurs, and the many-armed goddess Shiva done in stop-motion. John Philip Law plays Sinbad and Tom Baker plays an evil sorcerer who ages as he uses his magic. There is a lush musical score by Miklos Rosza.

Now this is my choice for the best pure fantasy film (as opposed to science fiction or horror) of the past decade. DRAGONSLAYER has a literate script, great special effects, and the most impressive

\*\*\*\*\*Presorted\*\*\*\*\*  
\* Leeper, Evelyn C. \*  
\* 114A HO 1B-500A \*  
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dragon I have ever seen on the screen. Vermithrax Pejorative is to my mind the one of the most beautiful monsters ever put on the screen. This is a dragon that actually looks like it could fly. The script is fine and literate with a number of rather unexpected plot twists.

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

Lifeforce: The Movie  
Directed by Tobe Hooper  
Screenplay by Dan O'Bannon & Don Jakoby  
Space Vampires: The Book  
By Colin Wilson

It is my intention to review these two items together and focus on some of the problems involved in transforming a dry, intellectual novel to the screen. I have just read the novel, and agree with the screenwriters that some major changes were required to transform the novel to the screen. Space Vampires (SV) suffers from a dull beginning and a standard SF paste-on ending of the form: "I am UBBER SLOBBBTOH THE KARGAUTH and I have been hunting the Space Vampires for millennia." Its strengths include wide ranging intellectual speculation, moody atmosphere, and enough sizzling sex to attract a wide audience.

Correctly, the screenwriters transformed both the time of the novel and the placid opening in an imaginative way. In SV an asteroid exploration craft discovers the alien space ship hundreds of years in our future. Alas, Wilson, the occult speculator, has sketched an unbelievable future featuring technology likely to exist in the next 50 years and the computers of the 70s. Lifeforce (LF) solves this problem by placing the story in an alternate universe in 1986. The major characteristic of this alternate universe seems to be that Europe is much stronger and more united than in our world. Hence, Halley's Comet is met by a European Space Agency shuttle specially modified by the addition of a NERVA engine (nuclear), and large solar panels. The initial encounter with the alien ship in the comet's coma breaks new ground in the visualization of the unknown in SF film. Although marred by a later scene in which the American shuttle Columbia docks with the ESA vessel, and they appear to be the same size although interior shots of the ESA vessel indicate something about 5X the size of space shuttle, I give LF considerable credit for the entire opening sequence.

Now the action moves to Earth and follows the book fairly closely, up to the point where the alien with the girl's body walks off into the fog. Although the screenwriters threw in more action with the Space Girl (as she is named in the credits) using TK [telekinesis] to knock around some guards, this sequence has two strengths. One, thanks to more liberal film standards, we are spared the silliness of getting clothes on the woman. She walks as though clothes meant nothing to her, an attitude totally consistent with that that an alien might hold. Note that these scenes in the movie are taken right out of the book, and should not be regarded as someone's attempt to insert flesh into the film to titillate the audience. Two, modern special effects permit a spectacular visualization of her draining the lifeforce out of an unfortunate spear carrier.



At this point LF diverges in a major way from the novel. In the novel, which is more of a psychological detective story than a thriller, we are introduced to the notion that we are all vampires to a greater or lesser degree. An eerie trip is taken to visit an old scientist who lives with three female assistants, and has discovered how to make what he calls "positive vampirism" work for him, extending his lifespan as his assistants each give him a little bit of their life force everyday. This scientist has been scorned as a nut, but in the context of an invasion by space vampires, people suddenly begin to take him very seriously. It is at this point that Carlsen, the original discoverer of the aliens, finds that they still live and are using him to leech life force out of everyone he meets. He nearly kills one of the scientist's assistants while making love, but holds himself back before she is sucked dry.

I am confused as to why the screenwriters threw out the premise of the novel. Surely the sexual content did not give them pause. Perhaps the message that we are all vampires was considered too unsettling for the audience, or too intellectual. Perhaps the novel's association of vampirism with S&M, indeed, as the ultimate sadistic act, the total absorption another human, the analogy of the vampire/prey relationship with the sadist/masochist relationship, and the emphasis on the necessity of the consent of the prey to the vampire was considered too complex to understand. Whatever the reason, it is unfortunate since excising these ideas make many of the later scenes in the movie incomprehensible.

Instead, the screenwriters decided they were making a zombie movie. Everyone the vampires drain rises after two hours, and go off hunting for others to drain. This allows them to show lots of people drying up and falling into dust until we are bored with the special effects. Then space captain Carlsen shows up (he appears to die early in the movie) with an amazing tale of how the space vampires killed his crew and he escaped in a small pod. They decide to hypnotize him to find out more about his persistent nightmares. At this point the movie rejoins the novel, with the difference that the hypnotic scene takes place in a research center rather than at the home of the scientist studying positive vampirism.

Without revealing the details, they use the link between Carlsen and one of the vampires to trace its location, and the hunt is on. The trail leads to an asylum for the criminally insane. In the movie this seems to be just another piece of cliched atmosphere. In the novel, it dovetails nicely with the theory of vampirism developed. What better place to find strong masochists and strong sadists, as well as bodies with so little mind as to offer no resistance to occupation by a vampire?

Although both novel & movie are close together here, we are quite lost in the movie. The idea of Carlsen being a vampire himself has never been mentioned. The concept that you must consent to the vampire

has not been fully developed. The further extrapolations that some enjoy being in the thrall of a vampire (masochists), and that the only way to resist a vampire is to emphasize your natural sadistic inclinations have never been laid out. Thus, when we see Carlsen torturing a nurse in the movie, we take it as an exorcism. In the novel, the nurse (a sexually repressed woman with strong masochistic drives) is in thrall to the vampire, and is being used by the vampire, who is in another body, a mindless body, to drain others. When Carlsen tears off her clothes, we see her back is covered with scratches. Why is he tearing off her clothes? Why does she have all these scratches? What is going on? The movie never answers these questions. He appears to be demanding that she tell where the vampire is via crude tactics, but the scene in which Carlsen drains her life force until she tells him which patient the vampire is hiding in has been removed. In the novel, it is clear that the nurse wants to be destroyed, and will only give up the information if Carlsen takes over where the vampire left off.

After this confusion, both novel and movie proceed in step until the alien vampire is finally imprisoned in a body via the use of drugs. In the novel, the alien then gives a long and unconvincing explanation of what is going on, which the screenwriters have properly excised. Instead, they take off for London and we rejoin the zombie movie. Both the novel and the movie take us make to London to meet the Prime Minister, but in the novel this is the final confrontation, and the world is saved by UBBBOO... you get the idea. In the movie, the PM is now a zombie, not possessed by one of the vampires. Our surviving heroes, Carlsen, the astronaut, and Caine, a military type, escape narrowly from the zombies. Once outside London, they find the city has been quarantined, and will be nuked in a couple of hours. At the point, the screenwriters borrow the end of Five Million Years to Earth and introduce the following ideas heretofore unmentioned, and certainly not taken from the novel:

1. The aliens are collecting souls and sending them up to the ship via the "Space Girl."
2. The aliens can be killed by lead sheathed iron swords with a thrust through an "energy center."
3. The aliens have been doing this for a long time, accounting for the association of comets with evil spirits and bad times (this is actually an OK idea, and fits in better than the explanation given in the book).

At this point, we have some extended action sequences as Carlsen and Caine separately enter London and take on a city full of zombies and the remaining two space vampires (one having been killed earlier with a sword). The ending, with Carlsen simultaneously killing himself and the Space Girl while being transported to the alien ship defies explanation.

On its own terms, I fault LF for overuse of effects and scenes (How many times do we need to see Carlsen pull down the oxygen lever in the ship? How many dried up zombies? How many laser light effects?), and a less than clear script. Lifeforce can be aptly described as Alien meets Zombie Island meets Five Million Years to Earth. To its credit, Lifeforce brings to the screen some impressive effects and beautiful visualizations of the unknown.

In comparison to the novel, I fault LF for either using it too much or too little. The middle part of the movie, which is taken mainly from the novel, also held my interest the best, suggesting that more novel, and a more courageous treatment of the themes of the novel, would have improved the film. However, this middle part ill fits a Zombie Island/Five Million Years to Earth plot. If the director wanted to make a straight action picture about zombies, he should have gone to the Spielberg/Lucas school of film editing first. We can always hope that someday BBC will do a version of Space Vampires that focuses more directly on the intellectual content of the novel and less on zombie bashing.

And so, in conclusion, I would like to expand on a comment made by someone I saw Lifeforce with. This person claimed that the violent, jarring film fit the name "Space Vampires" much better than "Lifeforce." To this I add that the novel should never have been called "Space Vampires," rather "Lifeforce." Ironically, one suspects that both titles were chosen in an attempt to reach a wider audience.



## LIFEFORCE

A film review by Mark R. Leeper

Everybody is saying that the big science fiction film of the summer is Cocoon. I have heard very little negative comment on Cocoon and very little positive comment on Lifeforce. Based on this I get a strong impression that Lifeforce is not a film I should recommend. Let me say then as a minority opinion that for me Lifeforce is the big film of the summer and that it is the kind of film that I wish more people were making.

The filmmakers have remembered that what makes a science fiction film is ideas and showing the viewer visually the effects of these ideas. You will see sights that could only occur in science fiction films. Unlike in Terminator, you won't see car chases that could be from a "Dirty Harry" film. You won't see Don Ameche break-dancing either. You will see a science fiction/horror/fantasy film with science fiction or horror or fantasy in virtually every frame of the film. There is too much story here to fiddle around with cute characters or standard human drama.

This is not to say that the film is totally original--far from it. There are elements of Five Million Years to Earth, Alien, Dawn of the Dead, Ghost Busters, a number of 1950's British science fiction films, even Dracula, but there is also a great deal of metaphysical speculation that belongs to this film alone.

Lifeforce is a film that has more right with it than wrong, and it has more wrong with it than a film like Cocoon has right or wrong. This is a film densely packed with ideas and visual effects. The story begins with an expedition to Halley's Comet discovering a 150-mile-long spacecraft filled with dead aliens. Yes, in some senses it is not all that different from Alien. And it stays like Alien for a good five or ten minutes. But while you are watching the film, don't think you have it pegged as a particular kind of film; it won't stay that way for long.

John Dykstra, who was pivotal in the special effects of Star Wars, created the effects for Lifeforce and they stand as a showcase of just about every special effects' technique seen in modern fantasy films. The story calls for blue screen effects, for laser light effects, for some effects I don't even know the names for. There are also make-up/model/prosthetic effects and those play an important role in the film.

Along with Dykstra there is an odd collection of familiar names associated with this film. It was directed by Tobe Hooper, who directed such diverse films as Texas Chainsaw Massacre, 'Salem's Lot, and Poltergeist. It was produced by Golan and Globus, two Israelis who usually do films of the Chuck Norris ilk with pricetags a good deal

beneath this film's \$23 million budget. The screenplay was co-authored by Dan O'Bannon, known for Dark Star, Alien, Blue Thunder, and Star Chamber. The source material was the novel The Space Vampires by Colin Wilson, a philosopher who is a sometimes science fiction writer. The surprisingly riveting score is by Henry Mancini (of all people), who used to score such horror films as Tarantula but is better known for soft music such as "Moon River" or "Days of Wine and Roses." The film stars Steve Railsback (Manson in Helter Skelter, and The Stunt Man), Peter Firth (the disturbed boy from Equus), and Frank Finlay (who played Van Helsing in the PBS/BBC version of Count Dracula). Lifeforce was released by Tri-Star, the film-making arm of Home Boxoffice.

The reason that Lifeforce runs into problems is that there is simply too much story for a 101-minute film. Often the plot line becomes cryptic. The viewer often sees something that is clearly spectacular, but also is a little hard to interpret. Some scenes of destruction become a little repetitive, but are required to convey the scope of the events of the film. In general the plot runs quickly and in several unexpected directions.

Lifeforce will not do well at the boxoffice and most who see it will not care for it. Still, it is a remarkable and an unusual film. I gave it a +3 on the -4 to +4 scale on leaving the theater, but on some reflection I might drop that to a +2. But I had a whale of a good time and a lot more pleasure out of Lifeforce than I got out of E. T., Starman, and Cocoon combined. This is a film for a narrow audience, but I found it straight on target.



BACK TO THE FUTURE  
A film review by Mark R. Leeper

The last film that came out with Stephen Spielberg's name on it was Goonies. After seeing that I decided that these Spielberg-produced films were on a downward spiral. I told myself that I would avoid them in the future. Then a local theater had a sneak preview of Back to the Future and hope sprang eternal. For the first ten minutes of the film I was asking myself why I didn't listen to my advice to myself and stay away. After all, why do I need a film about a cute kid on a skateboard and a horribly over-acted mad scientist? The remaining 106 minutes answered that question rather nicely.

In fact, Back to the Future has few or none of the script problems that I saw in Goonies. Instead, we have a tightly written science fiction story with likable characters, a fair amount of wit that really is funny, and a great collection of time paradoxes presented in a witty fashion. Nobody who has read the basics of science fiction or seen much of science fiction cinema will find much in the way of real ideas, but the old ideas are tied together in a way as entertaining as they have ever been in the past.

The story deals with Marty McFly, whose father is a life-long nerd and whose life is in a shambles. Marty has somehow acquired the friendship of a really weird scientist (Christopher Lloyd), who one night reveals that he has made a few special modifications to a DeLorean car. When it is powered with plutonium and is moving at precisely 88mph, it becomes a time machine. It isn't too long before our hero finds himself trapped in 1955 and madly trying to repair changes he has made in history.

The script (by director Robert Zemeckis and producer Bob Gale), after a shaky start, is remarkable for clever lines and for attention to technical detail. In spite of a few bizarre touches, this film works as a piece of science fiction.

The cast is made up almost exclusively of unknowns. The minor exceptions are Lloyd, whose face is familiar from One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest--he played a belligerent inmate--and from To Be or Not To Be. Also familiar-looking is James Tolkan as the vice-principal of the local high school.

This is a +2 film (on the -4 to +4 scale) and I consider it to be the best thing with Spielberg's name on it since E. T.

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