

Lincroft-Holmdel Science Fiction Club
Club Notice - 10/2/85 -- Vol. 4, No. 14

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>
10/09	LZ: THE SHEEP LOOK UP by John Brunner (Catastrophes)
10/16	HO: THRICE UPON A TIME by James G. Hogan (11:00AM)

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. The Lincroft people will be discussing John Brunner's THE SHEEP LOOK UP and other catastrophes on October 9, noon. I rather suspect that Brunner doesn't think of his novel as being such a catastrophe, but the Lincroft discussion may be.

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

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

Georgio Moroder's METROPOLIS
A film review by Mark R. Leeper

Capsule review: The silent classic Metropolis with a rock score could have been a real misfire. Some scenes don't work, but some work remarkably well.

We see Roman marble statues as beautiful white forms. They have no color, nor do they need it. The shape is everything. We now know the Romans did not see them this way. In Roman times the statues were painted and looked, I imagine, like department store mannequins. We cannot see the statues the way the Romans did. Silent films were never intended to be silent. There was just no way of putting the sound with the film. Instead, each theater had an organist to create the mood for a film. A really good organist could add a lot to the enjoyment of a film. Classic silent films are, however, rarely seen with good musical accompaniment. They have to go it on their own as they are usually seen, without music, like the Roman statues without color.

When I heard that Metropolis was going to be re-released with a rock music, I was less than pleased. It seemed that rock music was all wrong for a 1920's film. I thought the attempt would turn it into a campy film and make it the object of derision. I avoided seeing it for a long time because I expected so little from the new version. Given the choice, I would have seen it silent rather than with rock music.

In fact, Georgio Moroder's rock music orchestration is better than I expected. At times the music is irritatingly inappropriate, but at other times it really enhances the action. Since the film is set in the future, the 1980's music seems far less inappropriate than it might with, say, The Birth of a Nation. The film is timeless and a futuristic score may fit it better than the music of its own era.

The music could easily overpower most silent films but Metropolis is probably the great culmination of the German Expressionist period. Expressionism exaggerates acting, and often sets, to create strange emotions. The film is intentionally over-acted for emotional impact. Some of the better known rock stars contribute music that really does seem inappropriate, but Moroder--who scored the recent Cat People--has a good feel for film mood and tone. If you get the opportunity, give the new version of Metropolis a chance.

The Return of the Anthology Series
by Mark R. Leeper

It used to be that there were several anthology series on TV. Then the powers on high decided that if you miss one week of an anthology series you haven't really missed anything. The way to grab viewers is to have continuing characters whom the audience can identify with. As television writing has generally gone downhill, this piece of wisdom has been called into question. Further, the popularity of Tales from the Darkside and HBO's The Hitchhiker has convinced networks to give anthologies a try again.

What is nice about anthologies is that the stories are short and self-contained. No continuing characters means that almost anything can happen to the characters in the stories. I really am pleased to see anthology series return. I think that there is much more room for creative story-telling in the short story on film. And based on the premieres of three new anthology series this season--for me the most anxiously awaited TV season in a decade--we can expect a spotty season with a few gems.

"Shatterday" and "A Little Peace and Quiet":
premiere episode of the new Twilight Zone series;
first aired Friday, the 27th of September, 1985.

Due to the magic of videotape I saw Amazing Stories and Alfred Hitchcock Presents before I saw Twilight Zone. This means that of the four stories I saw, each was better than its predecessor.

Twilight Zone led off with an adaptation of a Harlan Ellison story, "Shatterday." I have an irrational dislike for the stories by Ellison that I have read because I really dislike the man and usually also his writing style. I have never read an Ellison story that indicated he had nearly the talent of a Richard Matheson, a Charles Beaumont, or perhaps even a Robert Bloch. His stories strike me as rich in style but poor in content, and I consider content to be by far the more important. Of course, I cannot claim to have read a whole lot of Ellison and these opinions may be based on inadequate samples.

At any rate, "Shatterday" was a much better story than I expected out of Ellison. It was a story with an engaging premise and the premise was developed. In spite of myself I found myself enjoying the TV version of the story. I would fault the story only in that the ending was weak. It was a promising idea but it led to a dead end, a weak ending that just sort of peters out. The premise was good but its treatment was unimaginative.

The toughest thing for a redux of Twilight Zone to do is to recapture the feel of the original stories. That is where the film (Twilight Zone: The Movie) failed entirely. At no point did I feel watching the film that these were really Twilight Zone episodes. "A Little Peace and Quiet" was the big surprise of the week. Serling would have gone for this story in a big way. It combines themes that he used in the series with a nifty ending. This story could not only have been an episode of the original series, it would have been one of the better ones.

I don't know how long it will last, but the spirit of Twilight Zone lives.

"Ghost Train":

premiere episode of the new Amazing Stories series;
first aired Sunday, the 29th of September, 1985.

The real problem with the first episode of Amazing Stories is that it isn't one. It isn't even a surprising story. When a wise old man says X is going to happen and everybody says the old man is senile, the rest of the story is as unpredictable as the order that the days will be in next week.

The second problem with the first episode is that the first three ingredients on the label are sugar, corn sweeteners, and honey. The fifth ingredient is molasses. After watching for a half hour, my weight was up a half a pound and my teeth had three new cavities.

Spielberg has the budget. He directed the show himself. He has a score by John Williams. The logo for the show is nicely polished. There isn't a thing wrong with Amazing Stories that couldn't be fixed with a script by Rod Serling. What Spielberg used instead was a script by a relative unknown based on Spielberg's own story. If this is the best script Spielberg has, he and NBC are in real trouble.

"Revenge":

premiere episode of the new Alfred Hitchcock Presents series;
first aired Sunday, the 29th of September, 1985.

NBC rounds out the hour of Amazing Stories with Alfred Hitchcock Presents. Hitchcock himself is on hand via framing introductions taken from the original series and colorized by computer. The lead story was predictable, in part because one expects a little spin on the ball and the surprise ending was by far the most likely. But the story was slickly produced without the cuteness of the Amazing Stories premiere.

On what had to have been less than half the budget of the Amazing Stories premiere, the Alfred Hitchcock crew turned out a story with some genuine suspense and even what passes on TV for artistry. Amazing Stories is the series with a two-year guarantee from NBC, but Alfred Hitchcock Presents already looks like it might outlast it.

Mercury Capsules - October 1, 1985

"Mercury Capsules": SF review column, edited by Paul S. R. Chisholm. Appears in the "Lincroft-Holmdel SF Club Notice".

A medium for quick reviews of anything of interest in the world of science fiction. I'll pass along anything (not slanderous or scatological) without nasty comments. I prefer to get reviews by electronic mail: send to pa!psc from the AT&T-IS ENS systems in Lincroft, {pegasus,mtgzz,ihnp4}!lznv!psc from everywhere else. If that's impossible, I'm at 113A LZ 1D-212, 576-2374.

⊗ "Shatterday": premier episode of the new Twilight Zone series, based on a short story by Harlan Ellison; first aired Friday, the 27th of September, 1985.

At the cost of two days, Ellison's story completely filled a half-hour teleplay. There were only occasional, dramatic seconds of someone considering what's going on, as compared to minutes of "Ooh, lookit that!" And I ain't gonna tell you a *damn* thing about the story.

This is a reasonably faithful adaptation of the short story. One day where nothing happens is omitted, and the events of the last day (which made for a slightly stronger ending) aren't shown. I think if Ellison had done the script, he *might* have been able to wedge those in; it would only take another sixty seconds of air time. The problem is that there isn't sixty seconds to spare! Oh, that more television had such problems.

A quick comparison to two following screenplays: "Just a Little Peace and Quiet", the other half-hour teleplay of The Twilight Zone, might have had sixty seconds it could have given up. It's an idea story, a think piece; it didn't have the characterization of "Shatterday", but it did a good job of treating its subject. Amazing Stories' "Ghost Train" was E.T. with a different premise, done as a half-hour teleplay; it had about ten minutes of air time it could have spared. The amazing thing is that we'll be seeing this for two years.

Paul S. R. Chisholm

⊗ "Ghost Train": premier episode of the new Amazing Stories series; first aired Sunday, the 29th of September, 1985.

Is that it?

Jason Klus (age nine)

⊕ The Years of the City: novel, Frederik Pohl, 1984. Winner of the John W. Campbell Memorial Award for best novel of the year.

Recently, it seems I've talking about the good points of a book, then vaguely explaining why I don't like it. This time, I'm hard put to find particular elements that are outstanding, but I like the results.

The Years of the City looks like a collection of short stories. It's not. It's a novel that covers several hundred years, by considering five crises. (I'm not sure if they would stand alone as five individual stories.)

The city of the title is "the City", New York. The first episode, "When New York Hit the Fan", tells of a city very much like the one we know and love (well, some of us), on a day where the Mayor is less in charge than Murphy. The key to this story is that New York - and by imitation, the rest of the world - decides to really *solve* its problems. The next two parts, "The Greening of Bed-Stuy" and "The Blister", concern the forces of change and their fight with the powers that be, notably, organized crime. The final two sections, "Second-hand Sky" and "Gwenanda and the Supremes", take place in a New York that's a utopia, compared to our own. The problems are trivial, compared to the earlier stories, because New York has learned to deal with some of its worst weaknesses.

So, how does it measure up on my usual rulers? The characters don't leap out of the book at you, but they're fleshed out nicely, no more or no less than necessary for the stories to be about them. The prose is Pohl at his best: Gateway, say, or The Space Merchants. But what I really enjoyed about the book is the way Pohl kept it all together. Most of the changes the city (and society) goes through are based on ideas from the twentieth century (well, heck, Pohl had heard of them). One year's dream is the next year's project, and the following year's history. At the beginning, the new political and technological ideas are in conflict with each other, as well as the status quo; they blend together as time goes on. And by various tricks, Pohl manages to keep a minimal continuity of characters across the centuries.

Some books are good reads. The Years of the City is a good read. (And it's now out in paperback, or soon will be.)

Paul S. R. Chisholm

• Stars In My Pocket Like Grains of Sand: first half of a diptych, Samuel R. Delany, 1984; Bantam Spectra, 1985, 375 pages, \$3.95.

"We're planning to pluck all the best stars out of the sky and stuff them into our pockets," I said, "so that when we meet you once again and thrust our hands deep inside to hide our embarrassment, our fingertips will smart on them, as if they were desert grains, caught down in the seams, and we'll smile at you on your way to a glory that, for all our stellar thefts, we shall never be able to duplicate."
[p.132]

My Funk and Wagnalls Standard Dictionary (where else would I look it up in?) defines a diptych as "1, A double tablet; especially, two tablets of wood, metal, or ivory, hinged together and covered on the inside with wax, on which the ancient Greeks and Romans wrote with a stylus. 2, A cover for a book, resembling this. 3, A double picture or design on a pair of hinged tablets or panels." (They give an illustration of the last; have you ever seen a hinged pair of portraits of saints, or of photos of different people, perhaps at different ages? That's what it looks like.) Delany begins the book with, "Stars in My Pocket like Grains of Sand is the first novel in an SF diptych. The second novel in the diptych is The Splendor and Misery of Bodies, of Cities." I guess a diptych is a trilogy without the middle book. I'll probably get The Splendor and Misery of Bodies, of Cities, the second half of the diptych, when it comes out. I'm not entirely sure why; certainly not to finish the story I started reading here.

Stars in My Pocket like Grains of Sand is rich in description, culture, aliens, tradition; maybe everything but story, and possibly characterization. We see a lot of strange planets and people (not all of the latter human), and we get to know quite a bit about some of the planets. It's a galactic whirlwind, complete with dizziness. (One of the characters tells how much more you can learn about a world by taking a simulated tour, rather than actually visiting.) Delany never misses an opportunity to go off on an interesting tangent, exploring lush tributaries of a dry river bed.

The Prologue concerns itself with a world, and one of its natives (actually, a nth generation human colonist). If you have any doubt that Delany can tell a story, this should dispell it. (So should a *lot* of Delany's other writing.) Except in the Prologue, Stars also concerns the narrator; at least, it never leaves her side. She's as tempest tossed as the reader, and very few of her goals are of import to what goes on in the novel.

A word or two about pronouns: "'she' is the pronoun for all sentient individuals of whatever species who have achieved the legal status of 'woman.' The ancient, dimorphic form 'he,' once used exclusively for the general indication of males (cf. the archaic term man, pl. men), for more than a hundred-twenty years now, has been reserved for the general sexual object of "she," during the period of excitement, regardless of the gender of the woman speaking of the gender of the woman being referred to." [p. 78] Except in the Prologue.

In fact, the woman who is the main character is a male human, who (this is essential to the plot!), unlike most women who enjoy sex with women of either gender, is primarily turned on by large human males with acne and short fingernails. Twice in the novel, she (the narrator) remarks with surprise how, in some places, sado-masochism and "what's called beastiality" are (giggle) actually forbidden, even by law! I'm sure that all of this, including the short fingernails, is making some very subtle political statement. Maybe, "sex can be pleasurable without being pleasant"?

The pronouns I can accept as a reversal of the expected. Some other things - for instance, claiming one world just happened to have a compass rose with five directions (north, east, south, oest, and west) - don't seem to make a lot of sense. By and large, though, the bizzare bazaar of detail works at enriching the novel.

Delany wasn't writing a story; he was conducting an experiment. Realize that not all experiments "succeed" or "fail"; many simply yield data. There's a lot here, much of it good, but not enough of it working to stir the cauldron of Story; and as a *story*, as something to read rather than study, I think it fails. Maybe I'd enjoy it more the second time around? Maybe; but if so, the books requires, but doesn't encourage, you to reread it. I neither recommend that you read or don't read this book. (But if you read it, let me know what you got out of it!)

Paul S. R. Chisholm

The TARDIS and Safety Violations
Some commentary by Paul Kemp and others

[Commentary is signed by the email address of the commentator.
Introductory comments are by Paul Kemp.]

I've been watching Doctor Who for quite some time now and have come to the conclusion that the Time Lords have a complete disregard for personal safety!

Here is a list of some of safety violations I have found with the TARDIS:

- Only one exit (no alternate or emergency exit/escape pods)
ihnp4!hou2a!pjk

In "The Masque of Mandragora", the Doctor (Tom Baker) went back to the "original control room", and guided the TARDIS from there for at least two episodes (haven't seen any beyond "The Hand of Fear"). That was a room decorated in classical style, the TARDIS console was much smaller and made out of wood (!!!) and, yes, there was a door! Based on that, it would be easy to assume that *all* rooms have a door to the outside, even though you can *enter* the TARDIS through whatever control room happens to be in use.

ulysses!allegro!princeton!tilt!kyrimis

In "Invasion of Time", and maybe "Arc of Infinity" too, I believe it is mentioned that there are thousands of minor exits everywhere. I think one is even used in one of these two stories mentioned.

ihnp4!cmcl2!acf4!percus

Not true. Of course, to get to the alternate exit from the main control room, one has to find his/her/its way through the TARDIS to the auxiliary control room. You may notice that when exiting the main control room, one exits the left door (facing the call box exterior from outside), and when leaving the auxiliary control room (the one which looks like somebody did some housecleaning at the BBC warehouse) one exits via the right door.

ihnp4!laidbak!jeq

- Exit is not clearly marked
ihnp4!hou2a!pjk

Yes, but the first thing the Doctor does when he enters the TARDIS, is to close the door by pulling that lever with the big red knob (OK, it was a later addition, but still...).

If you first came to the TARDIS along with the Doctor, it should be very easy to pick it up (as that schoolteacher did, in "The Awakening"). If you first came in alone, then you probably found the door open, so you know how to get out. (Not to mention that you shouldn't be in there in the first place).

ulysses!allegra!princeton!tilt!kyrimis

- Exit door opens inward

ihnp4!hou2a!pjk

Yeah, but really -- again, this is only when it is a police box on the outside?

ihnp4!cmcl2!acf4!percus

The door(s) of the TARDIS would open inward no matter what it looked like on the outside, whether it was an Ionic column, a grandfather clock, or a Chesterfield sofa, as demonstrated by The Master's capsule. Also, outside lighting and marking would still be inadequate for these other disguises too! :-)

ihnp4!hou2a!pjk

Personally, I wouldn't want outward-opening hatches on any vessel expected to travel (spinning from a wire all the while) through the relative vacuum of space.

ihnp4!laidbak!jeq

If I recall correctly, the Doctor & Company are more likely to be in a hurry to get into the Tardis than to get out.

ihnp4!nicmad!agrigene!buchbind

- No windows (for emergency ventilation/escape)

ihnp4!hou2a!pjk

Are they really necessary when there are so many exits?

ihnp4!cmcl2!acf4!percus

- No smoke or fire detection

ihnp4!hou2a!pjk

- No sprinklers (or other fire suppression devices)

ihnp4!hou2a!pjk

- No fire/emergency alarm system [would the cloister(?) bell count?]

ihnp4!hou2a!pjk

I think it would count. In "Logopolis", I think The Doctor mentions that its use is as an emergency bell.

ihnp4!cmcl2!acf4!percus

- No fire extinguishers
ihnp4!hou2a!pjk
- No evacuation procedure or drills
ihnp4!hou2a!pjk
- No emergency lighting (?)
ihnp4!hou2a!pjk

See "Death to the Daleks", a Jon Pertwee episode. After a power failure, the emergency lighting came up, only to fail itself a few moments later.

ulysses!allegra!princeton!tilt!kyrimis

I THINK, mind you I'm not surre, but I THINK that you learn otherwise in "The Edge of Destruction" and many other stories.

ihnp4!cmcl2!acf4!percus

- No lifeboats (or their spaceship equivalent)
ulysses!allegra!princeton!tilt!kyrimis
- No spacesuits. People enter unknown environments/the vacuum of space with only their clothes on (and sometimes even without them - see "Death to the Daleks", where Sarah goes out to a freezing planet dressed for a day at the beach).
ulysses!allegra!princeton!tilt!kyrimis

Spacesuits were available in "Four to Doomsday", although Salamander was killed by having the door open during a TARDIS takeoff.

ihnp4!abnji!nyssa

In "Four to Doomsday" the Doctor pulls out some sort of headgear that allows humans/Alzarians/Trakenites to survive in atmospheres without oxygen. They also allow Time Lords to go into vacuum without exploding, apparently. So, since TARDISes are for the use of Time Lords, these would be the equivalent of space suits.

seismo!harvard!talcott!wjh12!gts

I seem to remember one episode with Tom Baker as the Doctor where he didn't need to where a spacesuit (or headgear) out in space. Actually, it wasn't in space, but rather inside a spaceship. The Doctor was hiding in the ship when it took off; the pilot of the ship had on a suit though. Maybe the suit was only needed for oxygen (since the Doctor put himself into a trance to reduce his need for oxygen). But, if a ship didn't have any air in it, wouldn't that be somewhat of a vaccuum? (then again, this is television :-))

The episode, by the way, was the one about Eden being holographically captured on some sort of crystal. Can't remember the name right off hand.

inus!faron!kbb

The episode was "Nightmare in Eden", and Baker does that kind of trick several times where he just "holds his breath", a trick he apparently picked up from the tibetan monks. I believe the first time that was done with Baker was in the hyperbaric chamber of "Terror of the Zygons", in which the atmosphere was rather depleted (perhaps close to vacuum?).

hnp4!uwmcsd1!jerry

- No life jackets

ihnp4!hou2a!pjk

- No seatbelts (or other restraint system)

ihnp4!hou2a!pjk

- No "emergency stop" provision [as on elevators (lifts) or railway cars]

ihnp4!hou2a!pjk

- Improper exterior marking/lighting (the flashing light on top is inadequate)

ihnp4!hou2a!pjk

Well, that depends on what it looks like on the outside. If it's a police box, what do you expect. However, in "Time-Flight" for instance, when the Master's TARDIS (yes, I do use this controversial term because of my linguistic theory) looks like a Boeing-747, I'm sure it has quite adequate lighting for night flying (If it is indeed an imitation of a 747 on the outside). Obviously, the Time Lords did not intend the Doctor's capsule to look like an old metropolitan box.

ihnp4!cmcl2!acf4!percus

- Unregistered vehicle/unlicensed operator (does The Doctor have a license to operate a time capsule?)

ihnp4!hou2a!pjk

No wonder The Doctor rarely visits the USA, an OSHA inspector would have a field day with the TARDIS! Maybe this is why they discontinued the type 20. I hope the Time Lords don't expect that the state of temporal grace that exists inside the TARDIS exempts them from safety regulations, as this "system" has been known to fail!

Paul Kemp

ihnp4!hou2a!pjk