

Lincroft-Holmdel Science Fiction Club
Club Notice - 10/9/85 -- Vol. 4, No. 15

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>
10/16	HO: THRICE UPON A TIME by James G. Hogan (11:00AM)
10/23	MT: Audio Meeting: Mercury Theater DRACULA (MT 3K-502)
10/30	LZ: ? (To be announced)

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 Holmdel branch of the Science Fiction Club will meet to try to decide if life is still worthwhile now that the Leepers are in Middletown. Amidst the wailing, lamentation, and moaning (I guess in fairness I should admit that the mourning is justified by their loss), they will also discuss THRICE UNPON A TIME by James P. Hogan. This meeting will be in the usual room. The ending time will be the usual beginning time and the beginning time will be a full two hours before the usual ending time. The length of the meeting in minutes will be one less than the day of the month with the digits reversed. (Eat your heart out, Sam Lloyd).

2. For those who wrote on their re-registration form that they had already registered once, but grudgingly re-registered because their label had an unpleasant looking character on it, I will repeat. I apologize, but a new regulation came along saying we had to get your Social Security number or PAN. You who did not send me the information are no longer part of the group "you", you are now officially part of "them".

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

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

THE DOLL WHO ATE HIS MOTHER by Ramsey Campbell
Tor, 1985, \$3.50.

A book review by Mark R. Leeper

Ramsey Campbell is a popular British horror story writer and editor. He has become a very familiar name in horror circles for such a young man. He was born in 1946 and has been publishing stories for 23 years. As with most horror writers, I'd never read anything by him until recently.

The Doll Who Ate His Mother is every bit as grim a horror novel as the title indicates.

[*minor spoiler alert*]

The story (which rumor has it has been banned in Britain) concerns a pretty vicious young man who not only enjoys killing for fun in all sorts of creative ways, he also likes to eat his victims. There is just enough of a supernatural bent to the story to make it fantasy instead of simply a gruesome murder mystery, but not enough to make it really worthwhile as a supernatural horror story.

Some of Campbell's prose is crisp and sharp, yet other chapters I thought were really hard reading. When things really start happening the prose becomes so terse that I found I had to read some scenes two or three times before I could piece together exactly what was happening. Other places he has whole chapters that do very little to advance the story.

The Doll Who Ate His Mother is not a very creative horror story, but it is told in crisp tones of black and white, much like the cover of the Tor Books edition. The story is cold and grim. The characters are pretty flat and uninteresting. But it does tell a story of moderate suspense. On the scale of -4 to +4 it probably should get a non-committal +1.

METROPOLIS by Thea Von Harbou
A book review by Mark R. Leeper

How long have I been intending to read Von Harbou's novel on which the classic film was based? Well, I bought the book new in the Ace Books edition and paid the cover price of 40 cents for it. It's not that the novel itself is great. It is a relatively bland dystopia. The concept might well have been one that H. G. Wells would have approved of and one that would have fit into his future history of When the Sleeper Wakes, A Tale of Days to Come, and The Time Machine. As those who have seen the film will know, society has broken into a rich and powerful ruling class who live in the city above ground and the workers who live in the bowels of the city. The above city is an exaggerated view of the best of Manhattan extrapolated into the 21st Century. That is not surprising since the idea for the novel came from seeing the New York skyline. In the book, however, Joh Fredersen, the ruler of the city, gets New York stock exchange information from across an ocean so the city of Metropolis is probably intended to be European, though we are never told where. The city has three layers with the machinery that runs the city in the middle layer and the workers in the dismal, dark nether regions so deep below the city that when the main character goes down he speculates that it could not be much further down to reach the center of the earth.

This vision of the city is the only thing that really works in either the book or the film. Joh Fredersen's son Freder is aghast to learn how cruel the social system is. He is at the same time smitten with Maria, a sort of social reformer whose religious parables profoundly move the workers. There is just one more major character and the only one of any real interest in the book. Rotwang lives under the city in a mysterious old house. He is part evil wizard and part mad scientist (the film only hints at his wizardry and concentrates on the scientist). Enraged at the loss of the only woman he ever loved to Joh Fredersen, he has built a faceless soulless mechanical version of her. Joh Fredersen convinces Rotwang to use the robot to bring about the destruction of the city he runs.

That brings me to the real reason I wanted to read the book the film was based on. The film, being a silent film, is short on words. It never explains why the ruler of a city would want to see his own city destroyed. The book is nothing but words. Surely it gives a better explanation. Well, it does, but only slightly. Fredersen tries to destroy the city and kill thousands so his son can rebuild the city. End of explanation. One does not expect well-motivated characters in a religious parable. And time and again Von Harbou lays on religious symbolism so that the reader does not forget this is a parable. Far more than even in the film, virtually every aspect of the book seems aimed at making a religious point.

Metropolis as a reading experience is only fair. As a device to explain the basic illogic of the film it is all but a waste of time. One might almost believe it was based on the film instead of the reverse. By modern standards it is not much of a novel. It is instead just an interesting curio of the film.

FORBIDDEN ZONE

A film review by Mark R. Leeper

Capsule review: This is one of the strangest films I've ever seen. Clearly it was tailored for the midnight circuit. Very creative. Very disorienting. I like it, but then, I'm weird.

The midnight film circuit thrives on counter-culture films. The mere fact that these films are shown at a time when most people are not even awake to watch films underscores that midnight is the time for films that do funny things to your mind. Midnight films include El Topo, the class Rocky Horror Picture Show, Pink Flamingos, Eraserhead, Liquid Sky, and Repo Man. For midnight films, story-telling is secondary to creating strange and disorienting images. Clearly a film made for this circuit, and certainly one of the oddest films I have ever seen, is Forbidden Zone.

There is no way to do the plot of this film justice. The Hercules family of Venice, California (each of whom is a different nationality), have in their basement a portal to the sixth dimension where the midget king is building an army of zombies. Beautiful Frenchy Hercules slips on a roller-skate and falls into the sixth dimension. The midget king falls in love with Frenchy because she is French. This makes the 250-pound Queen jealous--wait, I must have left something out. This is making too much sense. Let's see--there's Squeezit, the human chicken who runs around in his underwear. Then there's the human chandelier and the man with the frog head.

The musical group Oinga Boinga have provided the music--oh, yes, I forgot to mention that this thing is a musical--with songs reprised from the Thirties. The style of the film is in some ways reminiscent of the best Betty Boop cartoons, in which just about anything could happen. The producers of Forbidden Zone have been marvelously creative in giving the film the feel of a bad dream, perhaps even that of a hallucinogenic experience. They have wasted no opportunity to give reality a weird twist. See this one at your own risk. For its creativity, I would give it a high +1 (on the -4 to +4 scale), but this is the toughest film to rate since Eraserhead. Most people will say it is just stupid. It isn't, but that is a lot easier than saying what exactly it is.

MISFITS OF SCIENCE: Abortion on TV
by Dale Skran

This fall has brought what may or may not be a superhero team show. Misfits of Science may also be a parody of superhero teams, but I vote for the notion that it is simply very inept in the fashion American Television has established worldwide. Describing the plot would be a waste of your time and mine--it scarcely exists. The credibility level starts at the A-Team and goes downhill from there. All this is a great shame since it will be used by a certain friend of mine as evidence that superheroes and superhero teams cannot be done well dramatically, and in any case are not worth doing in a movie or TV format. Certainly a survey of television attempts at superheroes supports this. Only the British series The Champions stands out as a serious, moderately effective story about what can only be described as three people with superhuman powers. Attempts to do Marvel characters have varied from the interesting Dr. Strange (canceled), the amazingly (!) popular Incredible Hulk, and the ludicrous live action Spider-Man. Perhaps the most nearly successful attempt was the Six Million Dollar Man, a series concerning Steve Austin, a cyborg endowed with superhuman strength and stamina. I consider the original two-hour pilot to be fairly good for TV. Unfortunately, the show soon ventured into plots that consisted mainly of technical impossibilities such as Austin holding up a car at arm's length.

Into this wasteland comes The Misfits of Science. Every super team has got to have someone who can throw lightning bolts. The Avengers have Thor, the X-men had Storm, the DNAGENTS Surge, the Outsiders Black Lightning, and the Legion of Superheroes Lightning Lad (and Lass). Johnny B. seems to be somewhat derived from Surge, and I liked his desert abode. Apparently, contact with water causes the electricity to drain from his body very painfully. As a result, he lives as far from water as possible. In addition, the charge he collects allows him to run at super speed, although more on the order of Quicksilver than the Flash. The first show uses him as the standout hero, as he variously takes on an army here and an army there, all A-team style, never hurting or burning anyone. A hail of machine gun bullets surround him and our other heroes, but no harm befalls anyone except in one scene near the end. The lightning bolt effects are BAD, although Johnny's glowing blue hands look OK. I admit it. I kinda liked the character. I especially liked the limitations built into his powers, and that fact the the script-writer noticed these limitations once in while. He can easily exhaust his supply of power, and in fact does so.

Supergroups also need someone with a major power to back up the big guy. Misfits offers us a girl with telekinetic powers that she has only moderate control over. The effects are WORSE THAN BAD. When she zaps people, the whole screen goes negative, except for the scenes where the director didn't want this to happen. She twirls two people in the air for a long time with nary a flash, yet when she blasts away at the army

(of course, without breaking a bone or so much as scraping a pinky) the screen is flashing again. This is unfortunate since the right way to do the effect is well within the powers of ILM. Actually, there are two right ways: either stuff should just happen, or she should be surrounded by a faintly visible energy field that gets extended to do things.

Finally, no supergroup is complete without a couple of fifth wheels. Here we have a tall black man who can shrink to Barbie doll size via the use of more bad special effects, and a human popsicle who can freeze things by touching them but dies if he melts, so he waddles about in an insulated suit.

Actually, the team isn't bad. Most comic writers could do something interesting with them. It's everything else in the movie, including the villains, the plot, the media people, and the guy who organizes the Misfits that are off-key. Most dreadful of all is the absolute unwavering refusal of the writer(s) and director(s) to allow any reality into the script. No one can be hurt more than superficially. No one is permitted to act in anything but the hammiest fashion. The villains deserve an award for worst imitations of villains in recent memory, especially the cigar-chewing general.

Will it fly? Who knows? The Hulk was something between bad and silly, and had almost nothing to do with the comic, and it did well. Dr. Strange almost made sense, and it bombed. All I know is that it taunted me with a faint and mistily seen vision of what could be done if someone wanted to do it right.

THE GENTLE ART OF VERBAL SELF-DEFENSE by Suzette Haden Elgin
A book review by Mark R. Leeper

The first thing I noticed about the book in the ads in Science News and World Press Review was that it was about a subject in which I had some interest: The Gentle Art of Verbal Self-Defense. Like many people, I suppose, I have gotten into a fair number of verbal disagreements that I have lost, not because I was wrong, but because the other person put forward a better rhetorical argument. I thought it would be useful to learn some of the rhetorical techniques that make winning arguments easier. My curiosity was also piqued by the fact that the author was Suzette Haden Elgin, a familiar science fiction author. I had never read any of her science fiction, but I considered her in some ways a kindred spirit.

The book itself is divided into some introductory chapters on "the Four Basic Principles," "the Five Satir Modes," and "the Verbal Violence Octagon." The latter is really a list of what Elgin considers the eight "most basic and most common" patterns of verbal violence. Following that is a chapter for each of these patterns and then a series of random chapters on aspects of verbal self-defense like body language and charisma.

The first chapter is a set of self-obvious principles: know when you are attacked, understand the attack, know what defense you should use, defend yourself.

The most meat in the book is in the second chapter. Borrowing from the writing of Virginia Satir, Elgin lists five tactics that people tend to take in arguments: placating, blaming, dispassionate logic, distracting, and leveling. The most dependable in an argument is dispassionate logic.

So far the book has been reasonably good. The third chapter is where the book runs into trouble. Elgin has picked out eight forms of unfair verbal attack and calls them the most basic. The simple fact is that the techniques she chooses are not all that common and nowhere near exhaustive. One could master counter-attacks for these eight attacks and still be at a complete loss in 95% of all arguments. To set these patronizing attacks apart and put them into "The Verbal Violence Octagon" is nothing but gimmickiness and is rather patronizing towards the reader. What are these eight attacks that Elgin considers the core of verbal attacks?

"If you really X, you wouldn't do Y."

"If you really X, you wouldn't want to do Y."

"Even you should X."

"Why don't you ever X?"

"Everyone understands why you X."

"A person who Xs should Y."

"Some Xs would Y."

"Don't you care that X?"

Suppose I said that this choice seems to indicate that Elgin has very little experience with her subject. That would be a verbal attack, but not one of Elgin's eight. It would be a very natural thing to say, but her own book would leave her unprepared to respond.

By taking these specific arguments, calling them basic, and showing how to counter them, Elgin may think she is preparing her reader for verbal combat, when in fact she has only scratched the surface on verbal attacks. She would do much better to list logical fallacies and at least tell the reader how to recognize them and point them out. There is very little generality in her approach to verbal self-defense if she prepares her reader for just these attacks.

Her next eight chapters are extremely repetitive. For each of the above attacks, she asks you to write down in another octagon eight times you have faced it. (There is a hidden implication that the attack is so basic that you must have faced it at least eight times.) She gives examples of what not to say when attacked this way and one snappy comeback. Once you have seen Elgin's comeback, you are given exercises in which the first line is given using the attack and the reader the rest of the conversation using an imitation of the snappy response. Then there are big empty spaces where the reader fills in what was said in a confrontation he or she faced and what the reader should have said. Finally, there are sample scripts as answers to the exercises.

The gimmick of using the octagon to list forms of attack and then again in each chapter to list eight experiences of the reader with the attack is obviously well-calculated to catch the prospective book-buyer's eye. But there seems to be nothing intrinsic about the number eight to verbal self-defense except that Elgin had eight snappy comebacks she wanted to turn into a book.

In many of the arguments cited by Elgin, my sympathies were clearly with the vicious attackers. In one case, the vicious patronizing attacker was a physician trying to convince a patient to give up smoking. In another it is a teacher trying to get a parent to take more interest in her child's education. With arguments like this, Elgin seems to be giving her reader instructions on how to win a battle and lose the war.

The random topic chapters include topics like charisma. For the most part Elgin tends to identify charisma with rhetorical techniques, but she does not seem to realize that the techniques that work well in a speech would come off as overly florid and over-ripe in common conversation. Kennedy's "Ask not what your country can do; ask what you can do for your country" worked great on an audience of thousands. If he gave out with that in a phone conversation, the person at the other end might have a real struggle fighting down nausea. (A great example

of a mis-user of rhetoric is the Louise Fletcher character in The Cheap Detective. As one of the other characters says in awe of her, "There goes a brave, beautiful, and extremely boring woman.")

Through much of the book I could not help feeling that there was a certain feminist bent to the example Elgin chose. In most of the cases the verbal abuser seemed to be male, the victim female. Toward the end of the book, Elgin lays it right on the line with her chapters "For Men" and "For Women." The "For Men" chapter is on how to recognize if you are a verbal abuser; the "For Women" chapter is on how to recognize if you are a victim of verbal abuse. In fairness, the latter chapter has a sentence at the beginning saying if you think you are a verbal abuser, you should also read the "For Men" chapter. Elgin, who sets herself up as an expert on verbal abuse, identifies abusers as being mostly male and all verbal abuse victims she assumes are female. Further, she tells women to read the chapter on recognizing if you are an abuser if you think you might be one. She tells men to read it whether they think they are or not.

Elgin, it seems, has carried a lot of psychological baggage and irrelevant anti-male bigotry into the writing of her book. She very handily took me as a reader who felt a kinship to her through an interest in science fiction and turned me into someone alienated from her. Recognizing her bigotry, I have considerably less interest in reading her other writings.

With the exception of the second chapter, in which Elgin describes someone else's work, the book has little of value and that is obviously offset by pieces of obviously bad advice. One wonders how much of the rest of the advice is similarly bad. I think that not everyone with enough clout to get a book published should be giving advice.

SHEENA, QUEEN OF THE JUNGLE
A film review by Mark R. Leeper

Capsule review: This was reputedly a VERY bad film. In fact, it isn't too much worse than some of the better Tarzan films. Tanya Roberts is much better than she was in A View to a Kill, but is out-acted by at least three of the plastic pelicans.

Tarzan films and Tarzan-inspired films have been a mainstay of cinema since the silent days. Back in the 40's, a Johnny Weismuller Tarzan film was a welcome entry for the bottom half of a double bill. These days double bills are rare, and Tarzan-esque films are even rarer. Jungle films really don't have the drawing power to make it on their own. A prime example is Sheena, Queen of the Jungle, last year's smash flop.

The story, based on an old comic book heroine, concerns a little blond girl whose parents are killed on a scientific expedition to Zamboolie territory. The Zamboolies raise the girl they rename Sheena to live among the African animals and to control them telepathically. She sleeps with a Teddy Boa, she has lions for friends, she jiggles on the back of a speeding zebra, she even somehow keeps the mosquitos from attacking her bountiful exposed flesh which also never seems to sunburn or even tan. She becomes Sheena, Queen of the Jungle. I take it that is an honorary title (like "Protector of Mexico"), since she spends her time either in sparse forest or on the veldt. (I guess "Queen of the Veldt" doesn't really hack it as a title.)

Sheena has its problems as a film. First there's Tanya Roberts in the title role. Roberts, let's face it, is no Laurence Olivier. Still they would be about equally convincing in the title role. There are definite script problems including too much comic relief from not enough drama. But Sheena could have been a lot worse. For one thing, if I had to choose a director for the film I probably would have picked just whom the producers did, John Guillerman. He has had a long and mixed career, including films like the 1976 King Kong and The Towering Inferno, but he also directed two of the best Tarzan films, Tarzan's Greatest Adventure (1959) (considered by Tarzan fans as second only to Greystoke as the best Tarzan film) and Tarzan Goes to India (1962). Guillerman's expertise nearly saves the film in the first half. In that half there is little wrong with the film that couldn't be cured by replacing Tanya Roberts with Gordon Scott and making him Tarzan instead. I guess that means it is a reasonable tale of African political intrigue on the level that you'd find in a good Tarzan film.

The problem is that even the best Tarzan film of the pre-Greystoke style is just not spectacular enough to make it at the box-office and would look silly today. Nobody is making films for the bottom half of double bills and few decent films are made for Saturday children's matinees. Even as a Tarzan film with a good Tarzan, this film wouldn't have made it. With Tanya Roberts, there's no chance. Give this one a low 0 on the -4 to +4 scale.