

Lincroft-Holmdel Science Fiction Club
Club Notice - 12/11/85 -- Vol. 4, No. 24

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>
01/08	LZ: PHOENIX WITHOUT ASHES by Edward Bryant (Generation Ships)
01/15	HO: "Hitchhiker's" Trilogy by Douglas Adams
01/22	MT: Book Swap (4A-402)
01/29	LZ: STAR SMASHERS OF THE GALAXY RANGERS by Harry Harrison (Humor)
02/05	HO: THE EYE IN THE PYRAMID by Shea and Wilson
02/12	MT: ?
02/19	LZ: WORLDS by Joe Haldeman (Politics)

HO Chair is John Jetzt, HO 4F-528A (834-1563). LZ Chair is Rob Mitchell, LZ 1B-306 (576-6106). MT Chair is Mark Leeper, MT 3G-434 (957-5619). HO Librarian is Tim Schroeder, HO 2G-427A (949-5866). LZ Librarian is Lance Larsen, LZ 3C-219 (576-2668). Jill-of-all-trades is Evelyn Leeper, MT 1F-329 (957-2070).

1. Yet another film fest will be shown on the Leeper's magic box on Thursday, December 19, at 7:30pm. This time we have a rather odd film, but a good one, to show you. The film is

KNIGHTRIDERS (1981) dir. by George Romero

and you haven't seen too much like it. Don't be turned off by the fact it was directed by Romero -- this film has no gore and no corpses walking around. Instead it is one of the best representation of a fannish subculture I have seen on film. The story concerns a struggle for power in a band who puts on a traveling Renaissance fair. The current "king" is Billy (Ed Harris of THE RIGHT STUFF) who wants the group to live of to King Arthur's ideals. His chief opponent (Tom Savini) is a hip dude who wants to take advantage of the fame the troupe is getting for their motorcycle jousts. This is a film with something to say and it says it in a very entertaining way. Frankly, nobody thought that George Romero had a film this good in him, and after it died at the box office (as many very good films seem to do) Romero went back to making gory horror films. (Leonard Maltin gives it three stars, Steven Scheuer gives it three-and-a-half -- both out of four stars possible).

2. A while back I reviewed the film THE WARRIORS about a gang trying to fight its way back to its home turf in New York City. I

*****Presorted*****
* Leeper, Evelyn C. *
* 127A MT 1A-121 *

half recalled that this was supposed to be based on a novel that was itself an updating of what I remembered to be a Greek play. I did not remember the play's name however. Betsy Hanes Perry and David Gelhar respectively suggested the Aeschylus play SEVEN AGAINST THEBES and the Xenophon history ANABASIS. The former seems not to be correct and is in the series about Oedipus. What description I can find of ANABASIS does seem to indicate that it is, in fact, the basis of the story, though it does not seem to be a play itself. Gelhar's description (borne out by a similar description in Durant's LIFE OF GREECE) is:

Xenophon was one of a bunch of Greek mercenaries that got mixed up in a rebellion in Persia led by a guy named Cyrus (who I assume is the model for the gang leader Cyrus). Anyway, Cyrus is killed, the rebellion fails, and the Greeks are left to march across N miles of hostile Persian territory before they can get home...

Even if the novel was based on a Greek play, it would have had to have been a play about this incident since the similarities are too striking to be coincidence.

3. The request for suggested activities in Middletown has resulted in two suggestions--movies and book swaps. It seems that Middletown is more interested in passivities than activities. If anyone wants to suggest any books for discussion, please send the suggestions to Mark or me. -Evelyn

4. Note that the publisher/Jill-of-all-trades has a new room number and phone number.

Mark Leeper
MT 3G-434 957-5619
...mtgzz!leeper

YOUNG SHERLOCK HOLMES
A film review by Mark R. Leeper

Capsule review: While Sherlock Holmes purists will find plenty not to like here, this is a pleasant and surprisingly substantial film. This may well turn out to be one of the few entertaining films of this holiday season.

I am afraid that I have not been reviewing too many films of late. The reason is that this particular holiday season is delivering a lot of films that simply don't interest me very much. After seeing Superman III and Supergirl, I have very little interest in seeing the same team's super-Santa film, Santa Claus--The Movie. That the Salkind name used to be associated with films of the quality of Three and Four Musketeers and that they are now making product-plugging pap is a tragedy. Rocky IV and Deathwish 3 continue to trade off of the popularity of two okay films that really didn't need sequels. These days Steven Spielberg's name is associated with films of varying degrees of quality. Some are weak, like Goonies and Explorers; some are strong, like Back to the Future. For the Christmas season a Spielberg film, Young Sherlock Holmes, has gotten me back into the theater.

Young Sherlock Holmes is one of Spielberg's more substantial films and it represents a quality close to that of Back to the Future. The film is an entertaining adventure aimed at a teenage level but with wide enough appeal from adults. With unusual integrity, the film admits at both its beginning and end that it is inconsistent with the mythos of Sherlock Holmes. Among other things, it has Holmes and Watson meeting at a far younger age than they do in Conan Doyle's Study in Scarlet. Further, the film is inconsistent with the style of a Sherlock Holmes story. In many ways it is more like a Sax Rohmer adventure, but how many people would understand a title like Young Nayland Smith?

The story concerns Holmes getting involved with and solving a mysterious set of murders while he is at school. To give the special effects wizards something to do, the story involves hallucinations, many of which are very creatively put on the screen. One touch that does not work: Industrial Light and Magic, who in Dragonslayer, made a dragon that looked like it could really fly, for this film made a flying machine that absolutely could not. Since human-powered flight has finally been achieved in our time, they could have at least put some of the principles into the design of the Victorian flying machine that might have made it look more believable.

Actually the main story does not function well as a Sherlock Holmes story. Holmes makes only one real Holmes-like deduction toward solving the murders. We see more of his deductive powers in finding a lost fencing trophy than in finding the murderer. The film does nicely use

the same fallacy that Conan Doyle exploited. Doyle's observation was that there are clues in crimes that only a trained observer would notice. Then in the most classic Holmes stories these clues are just the right clues and are sufficient clues to point to the solution. While invisible clues do exist, Doyle's artificial placement of these clues was the real reason Holmes seemed so clever. And this film is one more example that filmmakers have lost the talent of writing mysteries that have real surprises. The people I saw the film with and I all knew who the murderer was before Holmes did.

The young people in the cast (all unknowns) are well-chosen to give a Victorian feel in a way that someone like Michael J. Fox could not. Nicholas Rowe and Alan Cox are Holmes and Watson. The young woman who played the love interest for Holmes looked very much like Simon Ward in long hair, and was played, I discovered later, by Sophie Ward. I would not be at all surprised to discover Sophie is really Simon Ward's daughter. The film makes for an entertaining evening. Rate it a +1 on the -4 to +4 scale.

Deathwish III
A movie Review
by Dale Skran

Every once in a while I get tired of serious, important movies, put on my most non-descript clothes, and stalk into the night seeking a simple-minded, violent, and generally rousing movie. One recent Friday I happened onto Death Wish III. This recent emanation from Golan-Globus bears their distinctive mark in every frame. In their practiced hands the movie becomes an educational experience. The following vital facts and knowledge may be gleaned from DWIII:

1. The younger and more sexually attractive a woman is, the more easily she is overpowered. Only aged black women are capable of striking back effectively.
2. Women are little more than targets. Men who attach themselves to women are foolish indeed.
3. Self-defense on the street requires special weapons. For example, an M60 machine gun.
4. Street punks and teenagers in large cities are invariably vicious psychopaths.
5. Older people are invariably decent law-abiding citizens.
6. Jews are nice people who can cook well but are very ineffective at defending themselves.
7. When a gang leader is having trouble with decent God-fearing folk he can put in a quick call to gang central. Within minutes fifty or so heavily armed (automatic rifles, grenades, etc.) Hell's Angels show up to put down the revolt.
8. The best way to deal with burglars is the installation of a variety of deadly mantraps and pongee sticks throughout the house.
9. Police are ineffective wimps who spent most of their time ticketing parked cars and confiscating the guns decent citizens need to defend themselves against the zombie killers on the streets.
10. A very small number of "tough cops" exist who aren't wimps. They are almost as tough as Bronson. They long for the day when they can walk through the streets killing everything that moves.
11. Bronson is irresistibly sexy.
12. Bronson is lightning fast.

13. Bronson is unkillable.
14. It is best (whether on the side of good or evil) to always wear a bullet-proof vest.
15. It is best to always use an immense long-barreled pistol that fires armor piercing rounds to penetrate the bullet-proof vests of others.
16. If all else fails, anti-tank rounds make excellent anti-personnel weapons.
17. Many Americans enjoy watching Bronson blow away the punks. The audience communicated this by cheering loudly and frequently throughout.

All in all, very informative.

THE ART OF DECEPTION by Nicholas Capaldi
Prometheus Books
A book review by Mark R. Leeper

A while back I reviewed The Gentle Art of Verbal Self-Defense by Suzette Haden Elgin. This was a book that is almost--but not entirely--useless in the art of surviving the verbal conflicts we all face. For the sake of comparison I read the deceptively titled The Art of Deception. This is really much like Strunk's Elements of Style in its simplicity and it could better be called The Elements of How Arguments Are Won. That is not necessarily the same thing as how to win an argument. Some of the techniques occasionally backfire but often do not. Hence it really gives strategies in argument that have worked rather than fool-proof strategies. The book will suggest a technique. A few pages later it will say if this technique is used against you, here is how to counter it.

As the title suggest, Capaldi makes no distinction whatsoever about which techniques are clean and which are dirty. His concern is to teach the reader how to analyze a situation and have a number of techniques--clean and dirty--in his gadget bag for getting him out of the situation. In this sense the book is much like Gentle Art, but the effectiveness of

the gadget bag is different. Elgin's gadget bag will help out its user in about 5% of all arguments. Capaldi's will help in about 75% with it being really useful about 40% of the time. In a general book about argument, it is unlikely you will find much that is more effective than that. Obviously there are limits to the efficacy of an argument based on the actual content of the argument. To convince someone that two plus two is five, Capaldi's approaches are simply too weak. As an extreme example, if you could use O'Brien's techniques in Orwell's 1984 you could be more convincing, but obviously with techniques falling short of that there are strong constraints that content will place on how an argument must be presented and Capaldi ignores them.

The Art of Deception is broken into sections on:

1. presenting your case
2. attacking your opponent's argument
3. defending your case
4. political propaganda
5. cause and effect reasoning
6. formal analysis of arguments

The first three sections obviously are basic. Section 4 is interesting and short, but can be skipped on first reading. The last two sections are more on what Capaldi himself says is too easy to find in this society, material on formal logic. It is the sections on informal logic that are useful.

There are levels of basic books that everyone should have. First comes a good dictionary and thesaurus. The next level includes an encyclopedia and a Bible for reference (perhaps also a copy of Maltin's TV Movies, though that might be just my prejudice). On the next level with Strunk's Elements of Style comes Capaldi's Art of Deception--at least until a better book on informal argument comes along.

LEGS by William Kennedy
Penguin, 1983, \$5.95.
A book review by Mark R. Leeper

I rarely get around to reading a lot of what the mainstream considers to be "good fiction." I am not talking here about best sellers, though I don't read many of those either, but about the stuff that the prestigious magazines think is good fiction. However, on vacation at Club Med, a particularly sun-burned gentleman mentioned to me that he had just read and enjoyed the Pulitzer-Prize-winning Legs by William Kennedy. This was a novel about the gangster Legs Diamond. After I got home I noticed the book for sale and decided to give it a try. For one thing, I have never read a novel that won any prize more prestigious than a Hugo award. Also, it would give me an opportunity to research the actual character and put the novel in an historical context. Particularly good for this purpose are Bloodletters and Badmen by Jay Robert Nash and Encyclopedia of American Crime by Carl Sifakis. I tend to go to these books after seeing a film like The Cotton Club or even Gunfight at the OK Corral in order to find out more about characters.

The book seems to take some liberties with the facts though in general it is reasonably faithful to the facts about the character's late career. The character tells his wife that his real name is John Thomas Diamond. It is odd she would marry him without already knowing his real name, but odder still, she would know that his real name was John Thomas Noland. Apparently Kennedy did not even know Diamond's real name.

The novel itself is told from the point of view of Marcus Gorman, a young lawyer whom Diamond befriends and who allows himself to be pulled into an association with Diamond that he knows will destroy his career plans. Gorman is occasionally pulled into the plot but for much of the book he is just observing Diamond's relationship with other gangsters (especially Dutch Schultz), with the law, and with the two women in his life, his wife Alice Kenny and his mistress, a dancer named Kiki Roberts. This is not the kind of book that really comes to any conclusions about Jack Diamond. Diamond is neither hero nor villain. He is a selfish man who uses people from time to time and rewards them at other times. At the end of the novel we know a little more about Diamond, though we still have not come to any real understanding of the character. If this is a story with a beginning, a middle, and an end, it's almost all middle. There is almost no beginning and the end is flat, quick, and a letdown.

It is difficult for me to see much greatness in the book and I am unlikely to go on to read Kennedy's other two "Albany novels," Billy Phelan's Greatest Game and Ironweed, but the combined experience of reading the book and the background material in Nash and Sifakis was worthwhile.