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Mt. Holz Science Fiction Society
Club Notice - 12/29/89 -- Vol. 8, No. 26

MEETINGS UPCOMING:

Unless otherwise stated, all meetings are on Wednesdays at noon.
LZ meetings are in LZ 2R-158. MT meetings are in the cafeteria.

 D A T E T O P I C

- 01/03 LZ: BUG JACK BARON by Norman Spinrad (What Price Immortality?)
- 01/24 LZ: "The Borribles" Trilogy by Michael de Larrabeiti (Urban Fantasy)
- 02/14 LZ: Science Fiction and Romance (see below)
- 03/07 LZ: THRICE UPON A TIME by James Hogan (Affecting the Past)

 D A T E E X T E R N A L M E E T I N G S / C O N V E N T I O N S / E T C.

- 01/13 Science Fiction Association of Bergen County: Victoria Poyser
(book cover artist)
(phone 201-933-2724 for details) (Saturday)
- 01/20 NJSFS New Jersey Science Fiction Society: James Morrow
(phone 201-432-5965 for details) (Saturday)

HO Chair: John Jetzt HO 1E-525 834-1563 hocpa!jetzt
LZ Chair: Rob Mitchell LZ 1B-306 576-6106 mtuxo!jrnt
MT Chair: Mark Leeper MT 3D-441 957-5619 mtgzx!leeper
HO Librarian: Tim Schroeder HO 3D-225A 949-5866 homxb!tps
LZ Librarian: Lance Larsen LZ 3L-312 576-3346 lzfme!lfl
MT Librarian: Evelyn Leeper MT 1F-329 957-2070 mtgzy!ecl
Factotum: Evelyn Leeper MT 1F-329 957-2070 mtgzy!ecl
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1. In regard to the next Lincroft discussion book, Lance Larsen has this to say:

BUG JACK BARRON, by Norman Spinrad, is set in a near-future United States. The main character, Jack Barron, is the host of a call-in television show whose premise (and advertising hook) is, "Bugged about something? Well, then, BUG JACK BARRON." The flap-copy says:

Jack Barron went from Berkeley radical to national TV celebrity in one long, easy step. Now when he talks on his BUG JACK BARRON show, 100 million people listen. And Barron has just discovered the catch in multi-billionaire Benedict

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Howards' "freeze now, live later" immortality plan -- Howards alone decides who lives and who dies. When billionaires play god, that bugs Jack Barron. And when Jack Barron gets bugged...ALL HELL BREAKS LOOSE!

This novel looks at different forms of power and the interrelationships between the people who wield them. Jack Barron has the clout (because of the audience he draws) to get access to the people in power who would never answer a call from an "ordinary" person. And he uses that power in his hour-long weekly television show to get people in power (business or political) to respond to the people who call in to BUG JACK BARRON. Completely at home in his medium, where he can create whatever image he wishes, he rips off the emperor's robes and then cries that he has no clothes. Jack Barron is no paragon of virtue, but he is frighteningly good at what he does. The plot draws Jack from his existence as a master of imagery into a deadly reality of power brokers and political games. (The reality that he turned his back on after his days as a Berkeley radical.) Spinrad includes a lot of observations about people, society, values, ethics, racism, sexism, love, and obsession, but the fundamental question in this novel is "What price immortality?" [-lfl]

2. The following is from Rob Mitchell, our illustrious LZ chairperson: The Lincroft chapter meets every third Wednesday. This year, our schedule calls for a get-together on Valentine's Day, so an obvious topic to discuss is Romance. Does anyone have any good recommendations for SF-related books on love, romance, courtship, etc.? A few come to mind, such as COURTSHIP RITE (which we did a few years back), but we'd be interested in hearing from you. Whichever book gets recommended enough will probably become the major focus of the meeting, and Your Name could be recorded in the annals of the Club as a Major Contributor! Feel free to contact me (data above) with any suggestions. Thanks! [-jrrt]

3. I have to tell you this one while it is still fresh in my mind and before I forget it. I told you at one point how really rare it is for Evelyn to admit that I am right and she is wrong. I started counting the times 37 months ago and here is the sum total list:

- Evelyn's contention: Canned kasha can be made palatable with the possible addition of the right condiment. I doubted it.

That's the list. For those who lost count there is one (1) item on the list.

Now you might think Evelyn is just very conservative in her assertions. You might think this is the only wild assertion she made over those 37 months. Let me assure you this is not the case. Let us take an assertion of hers as a case in point. [Warning: the following concerns matters of boudoir politics. If you feel

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you might be offended, you may want to skip the rest of this item.] When we go to bed at night, the covers are pretty well centered over the bed. Often when we wake up in the morning I find myself shivering with my portion of the covers covering Evelyn and Evelyn's covering the floor on her side. Now we each have an explanation for this phenomenon. You, gentle reader, can judge for yourself what makes the most sense. My contention I think is elegant and simple: Evelyn stole the covers. Evelyn, of course, sees the flaw in that argument right away. It puts the fault on her rather than where it obviously belongs--squarely on me. Talk about blaming the victim! I want you to think about and consider her explanation for a moment. She claims I was tossing and turning at night and I pushed the covers in her direction. Effectively I pushed the covers onto the floor on her side.

Now here is a scientific experiment you can perform at home to help you decide if that makes any sense. Take a one-foot piece of string. Call the two ends A and B. Pull the string into a straight line and place it on the floor. Now grasp end A and push it toward end B. What happens to end B when you start to push? If the string stays straight with end B moving away from you, Evelyn is right and you are the next Houdini. I suspect you will find B

stays put. I cannot imagine how I would perform the feat Evelyn says I do. Even if I was awake I couldn't do it. If Evelyn is right I must have physical and psychic powers I never dreamed of.

Mark Leeper
MT 3D-441 957-5619
...mtgzx!leeper

Your son at five is your master, at ten your slave,
at fifteen your double, and after that your friend
or your foe, depending on his bringing up.

-- Hasdai Ibn Shaprut (10th Century)

RASPUTIN'S REVENGE by John T. Lescroat
Donald I. Fine, 1987, ISBN 1-55611-011-1, \$17.95.
A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper
Copyright 1989 Evelyn C. Leeper

In 1986, Lescroat wrote S_o_n_o_f_H_o_l_m_e_s, about Auguste Lupa, the son of Sherlock Holmes and Irene Adler. Of that book I said, "The villain is completely obvious from halfway through the book. If this book is

any indication, the child is but a pale shadow of the father."
Unfortunately, I have to stand by that estimation with R_a_s_p_u_t_i_n'_s
R_e_v_e_n_g_e, in which both the villain and the motivation are completely
obvious early on. (And, no, I don't mean that it's obvious that
Rasputin is the villain.) In addition, the proofreading on this book
was so abominable that one must stagger through paragraphs such as:

"I told Lupa that he demanded more proof of my and then
went on to describe my lunch at Cubat, the fire, and so
on. Whis head and drank more beer, as thought I'd
confirmed something he'd alreter we heard the churchbells
throughout the city echoing the refrain. Ih. It was ten
o'clock."

and:

"'No,' he said at last, as if toimself. 'No, I can't
accept it.' He sat up straighter, finishing yet another
gr, and pushing it to the line at the edge of his desk.
Surprisingly, he 'Just because we have a possible second
motive does not necessarily elimmote, but in fact, given
Katrina's promiscuity, they are not at all reed another
beer, finishing the pitcher."

Admittedly, 99% of the book is reasonably well proofread (who would
ever have thought this was a positive statement?), but the characters
are so flat that not even the introduction of Holmes himself at the end
can save this novel. Holmes himself in revolutionary Russia could be
interesting, and Rasputin is certainly an intriguing and puzzling
historical character, but this book fails to take advantage of the
possibilities. (Allen Appel's T_i_m_e_A_f_t_e_r_T_i_m_e, a non-Holmes time travel
novel, is another recent example of using Rasputin as a character
without taking full advantage of him.)

Oh, well, ... maybe there's something still hidden in that dispatch
box.

The "Kirinyaga" Stories by Mike Resnick
Comments by Evelyn C. Leeper
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There have been (to the best of my knowledge) three "Kirinyaga" stories by Mike Resnick: "Kirinyaga" (F&S_F, November 1988), "For I Have Touched the Sky" (F&S_F, December 1989), and "Bwana" (A_s_i_m_o_v'_s, January 1990). While they are undeniably thought-provoking--not a characteristic to be dismissed lightly these days--the conclusions one draws from them are disturbing. Or, to be more accurate and perhaps more fair, the message that I see them sending is disturbing.

In "Kirinyaga," we are shown a Kikuyu society in a space station, isolated from the rest of humankind, and allowed to live according to its own laws, with the proviso that anyone who wants to must be permitted to leave. This seems reasonable to all concerned until a woman in Kirinyaga gives birth to twins. Under Kikuyu tradition, one twin is not human but a demon and so must be destroyed. This of course leads to a conflict, in which the Kikuyu mundumugu (witch doctor) defends the right of the Kikuyu to live according to their own ways. One could draw all sorts of parallels to the pro-choice movement (the Kikuyu claim that they are not murdering an infant because the twin is a demon, not a human). Whether the story takes a stand for or against cultural relativism is a matter of interpretation.

In "For I Have Touched the Sky" a young girl learns to read, in violation of Kikuyu tradition and law. Koriba, the mundumugu, tells many fables to show how it is wrong for people to go against their customs and bring in alien ways. She could leave, but Koriba has blocked any way for her to find out about the outside, so how is she to make an informed decision? Of course, while he is doing this he also uses a computer to call up Maintenance and ask for orbital adjustments to improve the climate of Kirinyaga. True, at the end, he says that a mundumugu must live with his decisions. But still, I find the message of isolationism and cultural integrity at any price verging on fanaticism.

In "Bwana" the message becomes overt: it is wrong to bring in outside culture or technology. A hunter brought in to kill some hyena also brings in new ideas and new technology and these have an extremely negative effect on the Kikuyu. Koriba tells his people that it is because they cannot expect to take just some of the outsider's culture--they will have to take all the bad effects as well as the good. So medicine must be refused because that would upset the balance of Kikuyu life, etc. Koriba says the problems in Kenya began when the Kikuyu took the European's technology. And here is the crux of my problem--the "Europeans" were not originally a homogeneous group. They started as many tribes, but an interchange of ideas, goods, and technology made them what they are today. Koriba (Resnick?) does not say how bad the

Picts were for taking anything from the Celts, or how the Romans should never have used Greek technology or Egyptian medicine, or how the Italians should have thrown Marco Polo out when he tried to bring back umbrellas and pasta. The history of civilization is the story of borrowing from other cultures. Sometimes it's good, sometimes it's bad, but it's inevitable. If the Japanese find a cure for AIDS, should Americans reject it because it wasn't part of our culture? For that matter, by Koriba's reasoning the whole melting-pot of America is a disaster. Some may believe that, but I do not, and to find a popular series that seems to be espousing this view is disappointing.

SHE-DEVIL
Comments by Mark R. Leeper
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Last Tuesday and Wednesday night I watched the television adaptation of Fay Weldon's novel T_h_e_L_i_f_e_a_n_d_L_o_v_e_s_o_f_a_S_h_e-D_e_v_i_l. Friday I saw Susan Seidelman's version of the same story for Orion Pictures. The television version took its title directly from the novel; the film version abbreviated the title to just S_h_e-D_e_v_i_l, perhaps causing some confusion with the 1950s science fiction movie of the same title. Having seen the two versions so close together and with the television version being about two and a half times as long, I will disqualify myself from actually reviewing S_h_e-D_e_v_i_l and just discuss the contrasts in the two versions. The film is a very pale, very weak, and almost entirely forgettable rendition of the same story. Even now, an hour after having seen the film, the television version is more immediately memorable. Let me say why.

First, the television play had drama, comedy, and horror story mixed together into whatever proportions seemed right as it went along. The film aimed at a market for comedy and always tried to keep the tone light and frothy. So right from the start the film was less ambitious than the movie.

The film had a dream cast for the story. It had a popular serious actress, Meryl Streep, to play Mary; a popular television comedienne,

Roseanne Barr, to play Ruth; and a number of other good actors. The television version had virtual unknowns in the major roles. So why was the casting so wrong for the film? Because everybody was cast exactly right in the television play for the play's approach. Streep could have played Mary Fisher in the television play and done a reasonable job of it. The film, however, had more physical comedy. Streep is hardly known for comic roles and she is just not very good with it. Julie T. Wallace who played Ruth in the television play did not always have to be appealing to the audience. She starts out with the personality of a red brick. She is large, ugly, heavy, sullen, and not outgoing at all. Roseanne Barr got popular because she has a bright personality. Her weight does not stand in the way of her being basically attractive and charismatic. Even at the beginning of the film it is hard to think of her as a loser.

Thematically Ruth is very much like Stephen King's Carrie White. She is a woman who has almost nothing. She does not have looks, she does not have talent, she does not have money. The only thing she has is her rage. And her rage is enough. From her rage she forges the power to destroy her tormentors. At least that is how it is in the television play. In the film she does not start nearly so low and she falls well short of destroying Bob and Mary. The ending for all three is reasonably happy in the film. That is how comedies work. The

She-Devil

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television play did not have to worry about box-office and could allow itself to be bleak.

If I had to rate the two versions on the -4 to +4 scale, I would give the television play a +2 and the movie a low 0. But I do not trust those ratings because each rating is probably too much affected by the other. Let me leave these ratings unofficial and say that the play (which runs periodically on the Arts and Entertainment Network) i s worth your time to see, probably much more than the film.

Cable in January
Film comment by Mark R. Leeper
Copyright 1989 Mark R. Leeper

_ M_a_c_k_e_n_n_a'_s_G_o_l_d (1988) (Cinemax)
 _ A_n_n_e_o_f_G_r_e_e_n_G_a_b_l_e_s (1985) (Disney)
 _ B_i_g_g_e_r_T_h_a_n_L_i_f_e (1956) (American Movie Classics)
 _ C_r_o_s_s_i_n_g_D_e_l_a_n_c_e_y (1988) (Cinemax)
 _ D_a_n_g_e_r_o_u_s_L_i_a_i_s_o_n_s (1988) (HBO)
 _ H_i_g_h_R_o_a_d_t_o_C_h_i_n_a (1983) (HBO)
 _ T_h_e_J_o_u_r_n_e_y_o_f_N_a_t_t_y_G_a_n_n (1985) (Disney)
 _ L_a_d_y_f_o_r_a_D_a_y (1933) (American Movie Classics)
 _ T_h_e_M_a_n_W_h_o_W_o_u_l_d_B_e_K_i_n_g (1975) (Cinemax)
 _ M_u_m_m_y (1933) (Showtime)
 _ T_h_e_N_a_r_r_o_w_M_a_r_g_i_n (1952) (American Movie Classics)
 _ T_h_e_N_a_t_u_r_a_l (1984) (Cinemax, Showtime)
 _ N_o_W_a_y_t_o_T_r_e_a_t_a_L_a_d_y (1968) (Cinemax)
 _ O_n_c_e_U_p_o_n_a_T_i_m_e_i_n_t_h_e_W_e_s_t (1969)
 (Cinemax)
 _ S_c_a_r_f_a_c_e (1932) (American Movie Classics)
 _ S_o_m_e_t_h_i_n_g_W_i_c_k_e_d_T_h_i_s_W_a_y
 _ C_o_m_e_s (1983) (Disney)

January looks a lot better than December for interesting cable choices. Cinemax is giving one more run January 1 to _ M_a_c_k_e_n_n_a'_s_G_o_l_d. Carl Foreman, who in 1961 did the great adventure film _ T_h_e_G_u_n_s_o_f_N_a_v_a_r_o_n_e, tried to outdo the adventure with this amazing white elephant of a Western. The story is pretty much solid action with the characters jumping from one death-defying scene to another without much chance to catch their breaths. There are a few clever plot twists and a lot of cliches. At the time, the critics found the pacing preposterous. Actually, by trying to make a film so solidly full of action, instead of making a concentrated _ G_u_n_s_o_f_N_a_v_a_r_o_n_e Foreman made a
 _ R_a_i_d_e_r_s_o_f_t_h_e
 _ L_o_s_t_A_r_k about 15 years before its time. The slam-bang finale is somewhat more spectacular and less believable than _ R_a_i_d_e_r_s's spirit attack. The photography is spectacular and the song "Old Turkey Buzzard" has to be heard to be believed. Not a good film, but a fun one. [Sorry I did not recommend the film sooner but I saw it for the first time December 27.]

Another curiosity you may not know is _ B_i_g_g_e_r_T_h_a_n_L_i_f_e, a true story somewhat exaggerated to the point that it is almost a horror story. James Mason plays a mousey grade-school teacher with a medical condition requiring him to take a new wonder drug: cortisone. Under its influence his personality changes until he becomes first tyrannical and then homicidal. The film is based on a case history reported by Berton Rouche, who writes true stories of medical detective work. The screenplay was by Cyril Hume and Richard Maibaum. The former wrote the screenplays for _ F_o_r_b_i_d_d_e_n_P_l_a_n_e_t and its semi-sequel _ T_h_e_I_n_v_i_s_i_b_l_e_B_o_y.
 Richard Maibaum wrote or co-authored all but three of United Artists' James Bond films and is the man most responsible for the James Bond screen persona.

I have never heard of a published critic who liked _ H_ i_ g_ h_ R_ o_ a_ d_ t_ o
_ C_ h_ i_ n_ a and I have never found anyone I know who did not like the film.

The critics keep comparing it to _ R_ a_ i_ d_ e_ r_ s_ o_ f_ t_ h_ e_ L_ o_ s_ t
_ A_ r_ k and I don't

think that is what it is trying to be at all. It just works to be a
good adventure film and most people I talk to seem to think it succeeds.

I think any film that features a 1920s' setting, bi-planes, and Asia is
hard not to like.

And speaking of adventures, one of the great ones is playing this
month: _ T_ h_ e_ M_ a_ n_ W_ h_ o_ W_ o_ u_ l_ d_ B_ e_ K_ i_ n_ g. This was
the film that bankrupted

Allied Artists--mostly because most people must have thought it was like
the gung-ho-and-stiff-upper-lip adventure films of the Thirties. In
fact it may well be the best film in either Michael Caine's or Sean
Connery's careers. Based on the Kipling story, it has two scoundrels
from the British Army setting off to make themselves kings of a region
of what is now Afghanistan. A great score, beautiful cinematography,
and the kind of film engrossing enough to seem much shorter than it is.

The Disney Channel has two very good films that were overlooked
when the Disney name was boxoffice poison. _ T_ h_ e_ J_ o_ u_ r_ n_ e_ y_ o_ f
_ N_ a_ t_ t_ y_ G_ a_ n_ n

got critical praise but was not seen by many people. It is just a
simple story, set in the Great Depression, of a young woman who has to
travel across country on her own. Good performances and a good story.

The performances are not quite as good in _ S_ o_ m_ e_ t_ h_ i_ n_ g_ W_ i_ c_ k_ e_ d
_ T_ h_ i_ s_ W_ a_ y

_ C_ o_ m_ e_ s, at least on the part of the two main characters, but it is a
haunting and poetic horror film. The two child leads are just okay, but
Jonathan Pryce as Dark is a terrific force of evil. He does not prey on
the kind of fears such as that somebody is going to jump out of the dark
and stab you, but on deeper fears such as aging.

Disney is also running an enjoyable adaptation of the Canadian
children's classic _ A_ n_ n_ e_ o_ f_ G_ r_ e_ e_ n_ G_ a_ b_ l_ e_ s. Anne is an orphan
who is sort

of a latter-day Don Quixote. Her mind is full of romantic literature
and it affects everything she does.

_ L_ a_ d_ y_ f_ o_ r_ a_ D_ a_ y came early from Frank Capra's career at Columbia and
is an enjoyable piece of "Capra-corn" that does not get seen very often.

He later remade it as P_o_c_k_e_t_f_u_l_o_f_M_i_r_a_c_l_e_s. Other films worth seeing include the 1933 T_h_e_M_u_m_m_y, a fairly suspenseful B-picture T_h_e_N_a_r_r_o_w_M_a_r_g_i_n, and the original S_c_a_r_f_a_c_e with Paul Muni and Boris Karloff.

More films worth watching if you haven't seen them include the comedy/mystery N_o_W_a_y_t_o_T_r_e_a_t_a_L_a_d_y, based on the William Goldman novel. Also there is Sergio Leone's massive farewell to the "Old West," O_n_c_e_U_p_o_n_a_T_i_m_e_i_n_t_h_e_W_e_s_t.

Cable runs of more recent recommendations include C_r_o_s_s_i_n_g_D_e_l_a_n_c_e_y, D_a_n_g_e_r_o_u_s_L_i_a_i_s_o_n_s, and T_h_e_N_a_t_u_r_a_l. Now why were there so many decent films this month and so few in December? Who knows--perhaps because they were running so much Christmas programming.

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