

Lincroft-Holmdel Science Fiction Club
Club Notice - 10/17/84 -- Vol. 3, No. 14

MEETINGS UPCOMING:

Unless otherwise stated, all LZ meetings are on Wednesdays in
LZ 3A-206 at noon; all HO meetings are in HO 2N-523 at noon.

_D_A_T_E _T_O_P_I_C

- 10/23 Video meeting: THEM! (part 1)
- 10/24 Video meeting: THEM! (part 2)
- 10/24 TEA WITH THE BLACK DRAGON by R. A. MacAvoy (HO 2N-523)
- 11/15 THE TOMBS OF ATUAN by Ursula K. LeGuin
- 12/04 Video meeting: THE FLY (part 1)
- 12/05 Video meeting: THE FLY (part 2)
- 01/02 THE CIRCUS OF DR. LAO by Charles G. Finney
- 02/13 SLAN by A. E. Van Vogt

LZ's library and librarian Lance Larsen (576-2668) are in LZ 3C-219.
Mark Leeper (576-2571, LZ 3E-215) and Evelyn Leeper (834-4723, HO
1B-437A) are co-chairpeople. HO's library and librarian Tim Schroeder
(949-5866) are in HO 2G-432. John Jetzt (577-5316) is HO-chairperson.

1. Our next Lincroft meetings, on October 23 and 24 (Tuesday and
Wednesday of next week) we will be showing THEM! Many of you out
there probably already know the film. It was the first and by far
the best of its sub-genre of the science fiction film. For those
of you who don't know the film I will not mention the sub-genre.
Suffice it to say that it is a hard-bitten and tense thriller that
in 1954 was considered to be a real stunner. The film was done
almost in the documentary style of crime films of the period and
that made it even more credible to its audiences as it segues to
more fantastic themes. The film stars James Whitmore, Edmund
Gwenn, James Arness, and in a small role Leonard Nimoy. Walt
Disney saw the film and especially liked the bit actor who played
the bewildered Texan. Shortly thereafter, when he was casting Davy
Crockett, he asked for that same actor, Fess Parker.

2. As it happens in this world, if you look pitiful enough and
plead and wheedle long enough, somebody takes pity on you
eventually. As it happens, in this case, it is Holmdel that for a
long time has looked with big sad dewy eyes to Lincroft envying all
the science fiction activity over there. Well, we in the
Lincroft-based club have taken pity on all you jerks in Holmdel and

are lending you a bit of class. My own wife has been loaned to your worthless building to run a chapter over there. On Wednesday, the 24th, Evelyn will have her first meeting in Holdmel. The topic for discussion is TEA WITH THE BLACK DRAGON by R. A. MacAvoy. (The meeting will be in HO 2N-523.) You asked for it, you wheedled

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for it, you pleaded for it, now you got it. Show up to the Wednesday meeting or Evelyn will come right back to Lincroft. Now I'm not going to tell you twice. (By the way, please note Evelyn's new phone number. This should be her permanent number from now on.)

3. Speaking of worldly philosophy, it always seemed to me that the world is made of the beautiful people and the not-so-beautiful. All too often the beautiful people can coast on their looks, those who are not develop their minds. This is why there are so few of the truly beautiful people of the world who are also connected with science fiction. Well, SF CHRONICLE ran a survey of what notable people in science fiction are the best-looking. The best-looking male author picked was Harlan Ellison and the best looking female was Tanith Lee. It is rare that I find one of my theories so conclusively confirmed.

4. A correction to the previous announcement of Concoction: L. Sprague De Camp will NOT be the Guest of Honor, due to a conflicting engagement.

Mark Leeper
LZ 3E-215 x2571
...{houxn,hogpd,hocse}!lznv!mrl

BOOK REVIEWS by Nigel

You were all silent after last week, so I shall stop believing in you, then you will all cease to exist and then you'll be sorry.

JOB - A COMEDY OF JUSTICE
by Robert Heinlein

I was lent a copy of this by someone who liked it. I will buy a copy for myself when they get around to publishing it in paperback. That way I pay about what I think the book is worth.

The beginning is fine up to around the 65% mark, then, as usual, the story takes an abrupt change into silly country. This is typical of Heinlein so we cannot complain about it. The killer is the final chapter which is a typical happy ending but apparently at the cost of what little IQ the hero ever had.

I fail to see what justice is involved, although it depends on whose

definitions you use. I did see some character development; the hero is an almost brainless idiot at the beginning of the book and has that little brain removed between the penultimate and the ultimate chapters. One of the worst parts of the book is the explanation of what was going on in the first 65%, given in the silly section of the book. It is only valid at first glance.

It is clear that Heinlein does not like organized religion in any shape or form but knows enough of the Bible to be able to point at some of the obvious sillinesses. I expect to see the book pushed by sundry anti-Bible groups because of this. It might even sell a few Bibles.

Look up the meaning of 'comedy' in a good dictionary. Look for 'justice' while you have the book open.

CITY OF SORCERY
by Marion Zimmer Bradley

This is probably her worst ever Darkover story and quite possibly her worst ever book to be published. The whole cast is female. There are references to males but only remotely. The length of the history of Darkover has always been obscure, and this book further confuses the issue.

We have always had the Cristoforo Monastery at Nevarsin with its school for boys of families that could afford it. We are now asked to believe in a secret nunnery, further back into the Hellens, that is just as old. The nunnery is a complete secret except for widespread rumours and disciples.

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The nunnery specializes in the same class of activities as the towers but has never been detected by them. At the time of the story there are two other female groups living in the same area as the nunnery, all aware of each other but not detected or detectable by the existing towers.

I will believe in lots of impossible things for the sake of a good story. This book has too many inconsistencies with previous Darkover stories and isn't even a good story.

It is the story of a mystical quest, with trials and glimpses of the object

of the quest. Self analysis of the questors. Pain and suffering, romance (remember that everyone is defined to be a woman), jealousy--it all happens and on the other hand nothing happens.

Admittedly a few people get killed but there is no character development, there is no historical development, there is no satisfying happy ending.

Maybe my problem is that I could not relate to any of the characters in the book and that I cannot accept this section of Darkover.

Do not look at this book unless compelled to, and make sure you understand the compulsion.

THE PIMPERNEL PLOT
by Simon Hawke

The third in the Timekeeper series. I reviewed the first two a while ago. This is light entertainment based on the story of the Scarlet Pimpernel.

This adventure has our heroes used to mend a split in the timestream and so gets even more confusing than usual. I avoided reading I_v_a_n_h_o_e, I have read T_h_e_T_h_r_e_e_M_u_s_k_e_t_e_e_r_s a number of times but the chaos of this story may just persuade me to read about the legendary Scarlet Pimpernel.

World Fantasycon
A con review by Evelyn C. Leeper

The Tenth World Fantasycon was held in Ottawa, Ontario, from October 12, 1984, to October 14, 1984 (more or less--details later). Since it was so close, and since it is a s_e_r_i_o_u_s convention (their phrase, not mine) devoted to fantasy in the written and artistic media (translation--minimal film programming), we decided to go.

The first thing we learned was that in spite of the fact that Ottawa is the capital of Canada, it is almost impossible to get to. The only direct flights from New York (JFK) are via Pilgrim Air. If you want to fly a real airline, you have to fly to Montreal and then take Air Canada the rest of the way. This costs more and takes longer (in theory). However, since our flight, aboard an F-27 prop plane, was diverted to Montreal anyway because of fog, it took us 6 hours to get to Ottawa the "fast" way. (The airline bussed us from Montreal to Ottawa--a two hour trip.)

We spent Friday morning sight-seeing--the Parliament buildings and the National Gallery. Then at noon we registered (very quick, but then the Con was limited to only 750 people--one tenth the size of the World SF Con--so how much of a line could there be?). The programming was a single track of panels, a track of readings, and a few other events (mentioned later). The panels were all serious panels; I will describe the ones I attended.

"John Buchan: Statesman, Adventurer & Fantasist"

John Bell, Donald M. Grant, Sterling E. Lanier, Galad Elflandsson

I only caught the tail end of this, at which point they were discussing why there are no comparable United States "Renaissance men."

"David Cronenberg & the Canadian Grisley"

Dennis Etchison, Doug Winter, William F. Nolan, Geoff Pevere

This was an exception, in that it dealt with film rather than the written word, but since Cronenberg is a leading Canadian director, it fit very well in this Con. (There was also an O_z presentation by Craig Miller, but that is also distinctly fantasy-related.) There were two threads of discussion here: Cronenberg's continuing theme of mind against body, and the question of graphic violence in the cinema. (Note: T_h_e_D_e_a_d_Z_o_n_e, while directed by Cronenberg, is basically a Stephen King film, so many of the continuing themes discussed do not appear in it.)

Regarding the former, it is clear that all of Cronenberg's films deal with this dicotomy. M_a_n_t_h_i_n_k_s he is a rational being and denies the primal instincts he really has. If one looks at S_h_i_v_e_r_s (for example), one sees the classic Jekyll and Hyde theme: what happens if man's inner nature is released, if his inhibitions are removed? R_a_b_i_d, T_h_e_B_r_o_o_d, S_c_a_n_n_e_r_s, and V_i_d_e_o_d_r_o_m_e all continue this theme. This Apollonian/Dionysian conflict is

ancient, but Cronenberg is one of the few directors who has pushed the limits of film to graphically depict it.

The fact that he h_a_s pushed the limits of acceptability (some might even say exceeded them) in his films was the other thread of discussion. Nolan was picked for the panel not based on his knowledge of Cronenberg's films, but on the fact that, other than the aforementioned D_e_a_d_Z_o_n_e, he has seen none of them. His refusal to see them is based in part on what he has heard about them and in part on the trailers and coming attraction he has seen, particularly for S_c_a_n_n_e_r_s. (At the start, when listing Cronenberg's films, Nolan said he had seen none of them, not even R_a_b_i_d, though he said he had seen all of Marilyn Chambers's other films.) His objection was mainly that Cronenberg depicted what should only be suggested--that the bulging of the door in T_h_e_H_a_u_n_t_i_n_g was more menacing than showing you what was behind the door would have been. The problem with horror films today, he said, was that they could now explicitly what formerly was merely implied. However, he had no answer to the question of why he was willing to watch a film like B_e_h_i_n_d_t_h_e_G_r_e_e_n_D_o_o_r, which was also explicit, showing rather than suggesting. The question still remains: if it is valid to be explicit in some themes (in particular, sex), then why is explicit horror invalid as an artistic method? Granted that T_h_e_H_a_u_n_t_i_n_g has its own form of horror, and that films such as N_i_g_h_t_o_f_t_h_e_D_e_m_o_n (a.k.a. Curse of the Demon) are better without the five seconds or so of explicit monster footage, is it still not true that Cronenberg's films have as much validity for what they are trying to do as B_e_h_i_n_d_t_h_e_G_r_e_e_n_D_o_o_r? No one says that the director of B_e_h_i_n_d_t_h_e_G_r_e_e_n_D_o_o_r should have made that film more like a 1930's film where sex was merely suggested, but they feel free to say that Cronenberg should make his films more like Robert Wise did in the 1950's. Nothing was resolved on this issue, though a lot of good comment was generated.

It was unfortunate that this panel was scheduled before the showings of the Cronenberg films (reviews elsewhere in this Notice).

"Archaeology in a Fantastic Vein"
Robert Hadji, Sterling E. Lanier, Alberto Manguel,
Lloyd W. Currey, Terri Windling, Mark Alan Arnold

No one was really sure what the committee meant by the title of this panel. The result was that a variety of topics were discussed. These included Latin American fantasy, on which topic Manguel spoke at great

length, listing many of the leading authors of this genre in Latin America. Some are well-known in this country (such as Jorge Luis Borges, who was awarded a Lifetime Achievement Award by the World Fantasycon in 1979); others are not so well known. It was unfortunate that he did not provide a written (mimeographed?) list, because even those of us who understand Spanish had some difficulty in guessing at the spellings of the names he mentioned. It does seem, though, that Latin America is where fantasy is happening now. While there is a lot of fantasy being published in the U. S. and England, it all seems to fall into two or three well-defined sub-categories (high fantasy, horror, and so forth). In Latin America, the fantasy tends more toward the surreal, with more variation in styles and

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themes. (Yes, there is some of this in English also. Russell Hoban writes fantasy, but not fantasy like anyone else. And John Collier's stories are in a class by themselves also. But in general English language fantasy shows more similarities than differences.) Currey then spoke on the finding of "lost" fantasy stories, such as two M. R. James stories recently re-discovered because of their mention in some obscure biography of James. The other panel members elaborated on these topics, as well as mentioned a few other ideas that they thought were related to the name of the panel. Manguel's discussion was very valuable, but the panel as a whole lacked coherence.

"Art of Collecting Books...From Them What Sells 'Em"

Roy A. Squires, Lloyd W. Currey, Grant Thiessen, Robert Weinberg

I left this panel very early when one member said, "If you want to know whether you are a collector or an accumulator, ask your wife." Obviously, they weren't talking to me. (Besides, this panel seems to be one of the standard con panels, like "Women in SF" or "World-Building.")

"New Mythologies"

Jane Yolen, Patricia C. Wrede, Janny Wurts, Charles R. Saunders,
Greg Frost, Charles De Lint, Nancy Kress, Susan Dexter

Yolen had sent several questions to the panelists beforehand, but they were so confused that no one could answer them. For example, "In your mythology, are you a god or a worshipper?" What this apparently was supposed to me was, did you assume your reader would pick up your mythology from context, or did you explain the mythology to your reader (much as the early

SF novels explained the science to their readers)? Other questions included, "Whom would you most want to be in your mythology (world)?" and "Whom would you least want to be?" In answer to "What is the first thing you would do if you found yourself in your created world?" Saunders (_ I _ m _ a _ r _ o) said the first thing he would do was look for a exit. Frost talked about the necessity to research existing mythologies well if you intend to use them. For example, he said, he sent the beginning of his latest novel to an expert on ancient Celtic society who completely demolished both what he had written and the entire premise of the story. (According to a friend of mine, he should have done the same with his last novel.) Some interesting ideas were brought out, but Yolen seemed unable to lead this panel as well as some one like Saunders or even Frost.

"Horror: The Next Decade"

Stephen King, Peter Straub, David Morrell, Whitley Strieber,
Charles L. Grant, George R. R. Martin, Les Daniels

This was the heavyweight panel of the con. It's amazing, but with all the talent and supposed acumen present on the stage, I can't remember much of what they said. There was some discussion of cycles in publishing: the science fiction boom in the early seventies, then the lull, then the revival spurred by _ S _ t _ a _ r _ W _ a _ r _ s. Horror fiction may also slack off, particularly given the current plethora of lookalike books. As Grant pointed out, everyone

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seems to be publishing a horror novel with a black cover and a couple of red drops of blood on it for contrast. Soon people stop buying them. (Though the lookalike covers of romance novels don't seem to hurt their sales any.) Mostly, the authors used this as an excuse to hype their next novel. The implication that the next novels of these authors are what's happening in horror in the next decade is egotistical, to say the least. They're not bad authors. They are in fact very good authors. But they're not the only authors.

"World Fantasycon Retrospective"

David Hartwell, Bob Booth, Norm Hood, Robert Weinberg, Charles L. Grant

Hartwell wasn't quite sure where to begin this panel, so he suggested throwing it open to questions immediately. One question that was asked was why there was a need for a fantasy convention at all. SF conventions have horror panels, it was noted, but they are usually held at midnight and 80%

of the panelists are sloshed. Grant talked about this for quite a while. SF conventions, he said, started the horror panel as an attempt to compete (on some level) with the Fantasycon. But horror (or dark fantasy, as many prefer to call it) has never achieved a legitimacy at SF conventions. So serious readers of dark fantasy have organized their own convention, where they don't feel they have to hide their preferences in fiction. Also, he observed, it has become a badge of honor among SF con goers to not attend any panels. The result is that when an author speaks on a panel at the Fantasycon (with one-tenth the registration of a World SF Con), he is speaking to a full room instead of an empty one. Authors attending their first Fantasycon are amazed by this. They are further amazed when they discover that members of the audience have actually read what they're written. (As Robert Bloch said at L.A.con II, "There used to be fifty authors and a thousand readers. Now there are a thousand authors and fifty readers.")

There was some discussion of the mechanism used for choosing the awards, as well as how sites are chosen. The award process consists of polling the members of the previous two World Fantasycons for nominations in the various categories. The judges may also add nominees to the list. Then the judges make the final selection. This system has been attacked as favoring the judges' choices. Hartwell claimed that 75% of the winners are in fact nominated by the members rather than the judges, and spoke at some length about the honesty and dedication of the various judges, but I'm still not convinced that this system will always be fair.

"Canadian Fantasy"
John Bell, Robert Hadji, Robert Sawyer

This was a split panel--there was one member talking about French-Canadian fantasy (his name wasn't listed on the program and I can't remember it), and a couple of other people talking about English-language Canadian fantasy. The speaker on French-Canadian fantasy talked about the style--baroque and surreal--while those speaking on English-language fantasy contented themselves mostly with a list of names.

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What made this panel noteworthy was this was the only panel that talked about French-Canadian literature. Throughout the convention, one got the impression that Canadian fantasy was English-language and that was that. Given that Quebec was less than a mile away from the hotel, this attitude

seems somewhat narrow. (For that matter, many people referred to "here" or "this country" when they obviously meant the United States. Provincialism runs deep, it seems.) Even Latin American fantasy got more mention. (And there is a fair amount of French-Canadian fantasy, so this cannot be attributed to a dearth of material.)

The members of the panel seemed determined to mention lesser-known authors--a salutary goal, but a panel on Canadian fantasy (and SF) that doesn't even mention Spider Robinson (the Toastmaster of the convention no less!), A. E. Van Vogt, or Gordon R. Dickson until prompted by the audience only helps support the mistaken belief that there are no important Canadian authors in the field.

"SF and Fantasy: Walking the Tightrope"

Judy Merrill, Spider Robinson, Jack Chalker, Fritz Leiber

(Before this panel got started, someone got the bright idea of posing all the famous authors in the room for a photograph. The result was about a dozen well-known and lesser-known authors standing in the front of the room while everyone with a camera helped boost the price of Kodak stock.)

Merrill started this out by saying that, while it wasn't exactly on the topic, she really disliked the type of fantasy that she called "false medievalism," which someone else described as a medieval world in which there are no bathtubs but everyone is clean. There was general agreement with this opinion and this led to a discussion of rustic fantasy versus technological science fiction. The panelists agreed that such a division was simplistic, and that the dividing line was much harder to pin down. Kingsbury presented the idea that fantasy is to science fiction as mathematics is to physics--mathematicians start with axioms which are not necessarily connected to the real world and draw logical conclusions from them, while physicists attempt to take real-world phenomenon and explain them. Fantasy (at least good fantasy) takes axioms which may have no relation to the real world (e.g. there are leprechauns) and extends these axioms out to their logical results. Science fiction ties itself very much to the real world, to the possible. No one dealt with the scientific "impossibilities" that are commonly accepted in science fiction: faster-than-light travel, time travel, matter transmission. But if you give some thought to these, you can see that while they are impossible according to current science, science fiction stories utilizing them attempt to give some rational reason for extending our current view of the real world to include them. There was also a suggestion that fantasy deals with an unchanging world, while science fiction deals with a changing world and in particular how its characters react to such change. Merrill saw fantasy as dealing with internalization of feelings, while science fiction dealt with how characters interact with their environment.

This panel was the last of the con, and ran for an hour and a half rather than an hour (since no one was following it in the room). In the end, nothing was really decided, but a lot of ideas were thrown around and a lot of good discussion about those ideas was generated.

Other Functions

The film program consisted of four Cronenberg films: S t e r e o, C r i m e s o f t h e F u t u r e, S h i v e r s, and R a b i d. These are reviewed elsewhere in this

Notice, so I will content myself with observing that Cronenberg delights in creating interesting scientific fields of study and the institutes to study them. One that sticks out in my mind is "oceanic podiatry" (from C r i m e s o f t h e F u t u r e). Another is "psychocybernetics" (and its related field "psychoeroticism"). It's amazing how he is able to make total gobbledygook sound almost plausible.

The Dealers' Room was unusual (as SF cons go)--it had mostly books. There were only three dealers selling something other than books, two art dealers and a T-shirt dealer (and even the T-shirt were art). But the books were mostly antiquarian books (as opposed to used books), with a couple of new book dealers as well. Books by attending authors were in demand. King and Straub's new book (T h e T a l i s m a n) sold well, as did Spider Robinson's new collection (M e l a n c h o l y E l e p h a n t s), the latter partially because it will not be available in the U. S. until the middle of next year. The new Ace Science Fiction Special also sold out quickly, though it is straight SF, not fantasy. There was a large used book store near the hotel which was not mentioned in any of the convention materials, but which did have a big SF section, and an equally big horror section, at about two-thirds cover price.

The art show was small, and there was a fair amount of SF art (despite the convention's emphasis on fantasy). And even here, it seems, one cannot avoid the Indiana Jones pencil sketches. Some good artists, but most of the work was "NFS" (not for sale). This may have been due to the difficulties everyone was having getting their books and/or artwork through customs. (A couple of books which were to have been distributed to convention-goers ended up tied up in customs, and several other authors had to sign statements that they would not sell the books they were taking in.) Only about half the art was hung by Friday afternoon, and since there were no Sunday art show hours, I suspect many people missed the items that were hung on Saturday.

The Saturday night autograph session was very well attended. It's true there was nothing else to do then (convention-wise anyway), but there was an

unusually high percentage of authors there. Where at a World SF Con Meet-the-Authors party there will be 3000 fans and 100 authors, here there seemed to be 500 fans and 100 authors. Needless to say, it was much easier to get autographs or discussions with your favorite author--unless he was Stephen King. The line for King's autograph was about an hour long. No one else was more than 10 minutes. Even very popular authors like Guest of Honor Tanith Lee and Toastmaster Spider Robinson had time to stop and chat with people who wanted to talk to them.

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World Fantasy Awards

Novel--John Ford, T_h_e_D_r_a_g_o_n_W_a_i_t_i_n_g

Novella--Kim Stanley Robinson, "Black Air" (March 1984 F&S_F)

Short Story--Tanith Lee, "Elle est trois (La mort)" (W_h_i_s_p_e_r_s_I_V)

Anthology/Collection--Roberson Davies, H_i_g_h_S_p_i_r_i_t_s

Artist--Steve Gervais

Special professional award--Ian Ballantine (Joy Chant, T_h_e_H_i_g_h_K_i_n_g_s)

Special non-professional award--Stephen Jones & David Sutton

Lifetime Achievement Awards:

L. Sprague DeCamp

Richard Matheson

E. Hoffman Price

Jack Vance

Donald Wandrei

British Fantasy Awards

Novel--Peter Straub, F_l_o_a_t_i_n_g_D_r_a_g_o_n

Short Story--Karl Edward Wagner, "Man for [?]"

(Didn't catch the title)

Film--V_i_d_e_o_d_r_o_m_e

Artist--Rowena Morrill

Small Press--W_h_i_s_p_e_r_s

When we got to the airport for our return flight, we discovered we would be sharing a plane with Donald and Elsie Wollheim, Peter Straub, Whitley Strieber, F. Paul Wilson, Joan Vinge, Jim Frenkel, Chris Claremont, Chris Steinbrunner, and other well-known people in the publishing world. Not bad for a plane that only holds about 40. Just as I was saying that if this plane went down, there would be a major dent in the SF/horror publishing world, Pilgrim Airlines announced that due to mechanical

difficulties the flight had been cancelled! After a lot of confusion ("What do we do now?" "I don't know." "What is the loudspeaker saying?" "I can't hear it!"), we got ourselves straightened out. Most of us opted for re-booking on the next day's noon flight (the clerk said that the 7AM would be cancelled due to fog). Some went through the problem of booking flights through Montreal, either because they were sick of Pilgrim Airlines, or because they needed to get back to New York earlier. The rest of us cruised back to Ottawa and hung out at the hotel (we stayed with friends who were staying through until Monday anyway), then returned to the Ottawa Airport Monday for a remarkably uneventful flight back.

As we were finally driving home on the Belt Parkway, we were listening to the end of T h e R i g h t S t u f f (the final launch and the end credits) on the cassette player and watching a Concorde take off from JFK. Fantasy is good, but nothing beats real technology for a thrill.

I enjoyed the Con. It's on a par with a small regional convention (not Boskone, but perhaps Ann Arbor's Confusion). I wouldn't travel a great distance for it, but when it comes to Providence, RI, in 1986, I think I'll go.

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STEREO and CRIMES OF THE FUTURE
Film reviews by Mark R. Leeper

It must be something like eight or nine years since I went to a drive-in in Michigan and saw a horror film called _ T_ h_ e_ y_ C_ a_ m_ e_ f_ r_ o_ m

W_i_t_h_i_n. My impression at the time was that it was a mixed bag of graphic horror, absurd ideas, and fun satire. That film, better known as S_h_i_v_e_r_s, was the first major film by Canadian filmmaker David Cronenberg. Without really trying I have seen all the films he has made since then: R_a_b_i_d, T_h_e_B_r_o_o_d, S_c_a_n_n_e_r_s, V_i_d_e_o_d_r_o_m_e, and T_h_e_D_e_a_d_Z_o_n_e. Based on these films Cronenberg has become, I am told, the second highest Canadian filmmaker. Cronenberg's films are now known for their angry social commentary, their cold, uninvolved style, and their graphic but creative images.

Recently it came as a surprise to me that I'd seen all of Cronenberg's films but his first two, S_t_e_r_e_o and C_r_i_m_e_s_o_f_t_h_e_F_u_t_u_r_e. Well, now I have seen them all. The first thing that becomes obvious is that these are not feature films. These are amateur films, each about an hour in length. Each is silent but narrated. Each takes the form of a pseudo-documentary about a supposed scientific experiment. There will be a little narration which will be incredibly incoherent followed by two or three randomly chosen minutes of footage that sometimes seems to have something to do with the monotone narration but which is more intended to present disturbing visual images. Words that came to my mind while watching were "plotless," "pretentious," "dull," "over-long" (almost no plot at all, much less enough to fill an hour each), and "slow-moving." These are experimental films and the experiments of the films, like the experiments in the minimal plot, are failures. To include these films in a Cronenberg filmography is probably a disservice to the filmmaker. I do not know if Cronenberg wants these films included with his others, but it makes as much sense as including Hemingway's worst grade school essays in his bibliography. If it were not for a few ideas in S_t_e_r_e_o that show up again in S_c_a_n_n_e_r_s, this would have been a totally wasted two hours, as well as being the longest two hours in my recent memory.

SHIVERS (THEY CAME FROM WITHIN; THE PARASITE MURDERS)

A film review by Mark R. Leeper

As I said in a previous review, it has been at least eight years since I saw the puzzling T_h_e_y_C_a_m_e_f_r_o_m_W_i_t_h_i_n at the old Fort George Drive-in in Southgate, Michigan. As I remember, my comment at the time was, "If this film was intended as a satire, it is a good film. If the guy who made it was just a flash-in-the-pan filmmaker and the parallels to other films were coincidence, it was a lucky and okay film. If the filmmaker was intentionally parodying other films and knew what he was doing, this was a pretty good film." I guess I reserved judgement to see how other people regarded the new filmmaker David Cronenberg.

Well, the verdict is in, folks. Cronenberg did not have just a lucky shot on his first commercial film. He is now a popular and successful filmmaker. I still think this early effort is one of his best and certainly the wittiest film he has made. Seeing it again, I am reminded of scenes that strongly influenced later filmmakers. This is just one more film that had its most powerful images imitated by A_l_i_e_n. In fact, much of A_l_i_e_n was borrowed but the scenes that stick out in people's minds (including the parasite eating its way out of the body), was borrowed from S_h_i_v_e_r_s.

Starliner is an upscale apartment complex on a small island within commute distance to Montreal. It is a society unto itself offering all the benefits of a small city. It does, however, have a rather large health problem: it is being ravaged by an attack of parasites spread by kissing and sexual contact. These parasites turn their hosts into ravaging sex fiends. Your typical mad scientist has bio-engineered these little beasts in order to destroy nasty human inhibitions and tried them on an inhibited young lady without stopping to think that removing her inhibitions would effectively spread the parasite before it has been perfected. This premise gave Cronenberg plenty of opportunity to pack a film with sex and gore--proven boxoffice attractions.

The scientific underpinnings of this film are less than convincing. A venereal parasite roughly four inches long and at least three-quarters of an inch wide stretches more than our suspension of disbelief. But in an odd way, the absurdity simply reinforces the wit of the film, which is plentiful. The film has oddly twisted echoes of T_h_e_N_i_g_h_t_o_f_t_h_e_L_i_v_i_n_g_D_e_a_d and The Last Man on Earth. In the former film, zombies come in hordes to kill the living and make them part of their numbers. The sex zombies

have the same goal but they do it with sex. In the latter, the hordes come around at night calling "Come out." In S_h_i_v_e_r_s the call becomes "Come out. We're having a party."

This has proven to be an influential film and, with the exception of S_c_a_n_n_e_r_s, it is Cronenberg's most watchable. Where later films show Cronenberg's rage at society, this one shows instead good-natured swipes. It is the beginning and the end of his fun films. If the subject matter doesn't turn you off, this one has some rough edges but is a pleasure to see.

_ N _ O _ T _ E _ S _ F _ R _ O _ M _ T _ H _ E _ N _ E _ T

Subject: Pig Latin in P1

Path: ihnp4!zehntel!dual!qantel!intelca!hplabs!sri-unix!RAOUL@JPL-VLSI.ARPA

Date: Mon, 8-Oct-84 17:35:00 EDT

Pig Latin was a very common coding algorithm in my grade school days. One take the first consonant of each word, suffix it with "ay" and suffix the result at the end of the word. There was no reference to it in the P1 book. Robert Heinlein uses/refers to it in a couple of his books.

But since we are on the subject of explanations, has anyone read "The Hieros Gamos of Sam and Ann Smith" by Josephine Saxon (I think). It was published a while back (15+ years) and there has been no new printings. The book had received quite good reviews. I would appreciate any comments or even a logical explanation of the storyline jump. To refresh the memories of those of you that have read it :

***** SPOILER WARNING *****

The story opens with Sam, a young boy, being the only human on earth. During the course of the story, he finds a woman giving birth to a baby girl. The woman dies shortly after childbirth and Sam is left to take care of the girl (Ann). After Ann matures, she becomes Sam's wife. Up to now, Sam and Ann are the only humans on earth. Then the story takes a drastic jump and we find Sam and Ann are middle class people with a house in the suburbs and Sam with a 9-5 job.

Subject: The Hieros Gamos of Sam and An Smith
Path: ihnp4!zehntel!hplabs!sri-unix!J.Dalton%edxa@ucl-cs.arpa
Date: Wed, 10-Oct-84 17:48:18 EDT

A few years ago, I read a something by Josephine Saxon and, wanting more, obtained "The Hieros Gamos of Sam and An Smith" through interlibrary loan from my local library (this was in the US), an excellent method for finding even books as obscure as this one.

It's not for everyone, but I was very impressed.

I too was puzzled by the ending. It would help, or at least I hope it would, to know what "hieros gamos" means, or even to find some reason for the name "An" instead of "Ann", but I'm not sure a logical explanation of the storyline jump is possible. Still, if we all throw in a few bits, perhaps something will emerge.

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>>> If you have not read the book, you may want to stop here. <<<

First, it's not quite true that Sam is the only human on earth. Apart from the woman who dies, I think I recall (this means I'm not sure I trust the memory) that the boy had met some other people and was reluctant to meet more. This is why he didn't like to loop back to anywhere he'd already been -- he might meet someone who was following. Then there was the old woman (I'm more sure of this) in the Department store who selected a pile of books for him to read. (If I'm correct here, does anyone remember which books?) Still, Sam and An never actually meet anyone else, so for most of the story they are effectively the only ones.

I also recall that a lot of things-in-need-of-explanation happen on the way to the story discontinuity. I believe that for most of the book, the boy and girl have no names, or at least that something involving names happens near the end. I wish I could remember how old they were and what they did just before the discontinuity as well. Their life changes considerably once they reach the sea (at the amusement park): she becomes his wife, but other things happen as well, and the girl is the leader in at least some of this.

(I seem to recall her suggesting that it was "time".)

Well, you can see that my memory is hazy (at best) on all points, but if I had to make a guess at what it was all about, I'd say that it involved the transformation of children into adults (the transformation in general -- because otherwise I wouldn't be saying much, but also because Sam and An are sort of generic names). I would look for metaphors and associations rather than something like: someone tried an experiment along the lines of Wigner's Friend and this is what happened before someone looked in to make the quantum choice determinate, or: disease (war?) killed most people on earth, but actually the world split at that point and somehow the boy and girl were able to reunite the alternates.

Actually, I'm more inclined not to interpret it at all and just see what else, if anything, connects.

Jeff Dalton, University of Edinburgh

Subject: Defending the literary fort...
Path: ihnp4!zehntel!hplabs!sri-unix!finnegan@uci-icsc
Date: Wed, 17-Oct-84 00:32:44 EDT

After reading various negative comments about some of the authors (Herbert, Anthony, Niven) and their works (Dune, Adept series, Ringworld, etc.) that I have enjoyed greatly, I felt I should argue in favor of the aforementioned. But I didn't feel that I should answer in rebuttal to each argument posted, until I was inspired by a foreword by Isaac Asimov that appeared in an old anthology. This should sum up why I feel some opinions of these books is unfair (everyone is entitled to their own opinion - even if they are wrong...).

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Science fiction (this include fantasy in my mind) is the only printed arena where authors can get away with such far (and not so far) reaching ideas as they do (unless you want to count some of the off the wall works of Gore Vidal -- Duluth, and such). Since the author is not usually dealing with such well known facts that objects fall when you drop them, dogs bark, and fire trucks are red (in my town), he must spend much of his time describing the background - social, political, biological, etc. aspects. This leaves

very little room to expand upon characterization and minute plot details that writers of 'normal' fiction delve into. Sure the characters in Dune are shallow and sometimes boring, but the political web that is woven by Herbert is immense. And sure, Niven's Integral Trees is just a shoot-em-up travelogue, but he gave us a novel (no pun...) setting that is unparalleled in any of the reading I have done lately (read LATELY! - and I will accept suggestions).

This may sound rude, but if you want thoughtful characterizations and intricate plots all of the time - read a few of the classics recommended by the national library association. I admit that there are sf novels out there that meet these requirements, but that doesn't mean that the others can't be enjoyed for what they are.

-- Greg

Subject: Re: "The Gods Must Be Crazy" (non-spoiler)
Path: hocsl!hogpc!houti!ariel!vax135!cornell!uw-beaver!ssc-vax!fluke!dbb
Date: Tue, 9-Oct-84 12:07:20 EDT

I saw "The Gods Must Be Crazy" in Vancouver BC on Labor Day weekend, after it having been recommended by friends who had seen it there. I also recall it being touted in net.movies some time before that. The distribution has been rather spotty (maybe because it's South African?), but it has at last reached Seattle. It's a wonderful movie, one of the most unpretentious films I've seen in a long time, a bit reminiscent of Jacques Tati or Buster Keaton films along with charming dialogue.

It begins like a documentary on the Bushmen in the Kalahari, then begins weaving three (or so) stories together around an epic journey by one of the Bushmen into civilization. I'll restrain myself from telling more, and just give it four (or five, if the scale allows) stars.

Dave Bartley

Subject: The Brother From Another Planet (non-sp)
Path: hocsl!hogpc!houxm!ihnp4!ucbvax!citrin
Date: Thu, 11-Oct-84 03:34:17 EDT

Before reviewing The Bro, I just want to say that I saw Buckaroo Banzai last

week and enjoyed it. I found a great deal of wit and freshness, plus a fine performance by John Lithgow. It certainly looked like everyone concerned had a good time. This was an Indiana Jones film not loaded with pretention; that showed that you can make an adventure film without ranging any further afield than New Jersey. The ending promised a sequel, but I hope that that was just part of the comic book atmosphere that they were trying to invoke; a sequel would be a letdown and I don't think the concept could carry one without the jokes getting tired. Unfortunately the economics of movies dictates a sequel. Rating: *** (of ****).

Now to "The Brother From Another Planet." Unlike Buckaroo Banzai, which was ultimately forgettable (as lightweight fluff usually is), "The Brother..." gets better each time I think about it. The Brother is a black extraterrestrial trying to escape slavery on his world and pursued by two white extraterrestrial bounty hunters. He makes his way to Harlem and the story takes off from there. The Bro is mute, although he understands all languages, and naturally becomes the sounding board for everyone's life story. It seems to me that this is what science fiction should be when it is at its best: a way of learning about ourselves from outside. The human interest is there, and there is a comic subplot concerning the bounty hunters, one of whom is played by director John Sayles. They are the ultimate honkeys in a Harlem bar and the original title of the film, "Assholes From Outer Space," gives you an idea of their characters. Joe Morton, as the Brother, gives an excellent performance without a single line. The other performances are uniformly good, there is a satisfying twist at the end (the full implications of which had to be explained to me later in a newspaper review), and the production gives the viewer no idea that the film cost only \$350,000 to make. I never got around to seeing Sayles' other films, including "Return of the Secaucus Seven," "Lianna," and "Baby It's You," but I plan to seek them out now when they come back to the Berkeley art houses. I give this film ***1/2*.

Now, a request: Has anyone seen "Last Night at the Alamo" or "Le Crabe Tambour" and is willing to post a review?

Wayne Citrin

Subject: Buckaroo Banzai....SPOILER!!!!
Path: ihnp4!zehntel!hplabs!sri-unix!quint@RU-BLUE.ARPA
Date: Tue, 9-Oct-84 11:10:25 EDT

If you like bizarre movies, if absurd things casually thrown together make you giggle incessantly, if you **LOVE** comic books and wish they were on the big screen, GO SEE THIS MOVIE!!!!

*****SPOILER STARTS HERE*****

Buckaroo Banzai seems to me like a true comic book in the 50's tradition filmed exactly as written. Buckaroo Banzai is a brain surgeon. However, he

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got bored, and decided to pursue particle physics and rock music. He travels with "those hard-rocking scientists, the Hong Kong Cavaliers". He is the son of a Japanese father and an American mother, and so started life as he was destined to live it...going in many directions at once. He is fighting evil aliens from Planet Ten at the command of Good Aliens from Planet Ten (if he doesn't catch the bad guy, they are going to bomb Russia and make it look like we did it). There is the obligatory Scientist Friend of His Deceased Parents, the Smart Blonde Who Acts Dumb, the New Member of The Group, and other marvelous types. The Evil Ringleader talks with an accent that is apparently deliberately a cross between Italian and Jamaican. The Good Aliens look like Rastafarians to almost everyone. The space ships look like seashells. There is a watermelon in a hydraulic press. There is one Evil Alien who sucks on a 6volt battery like a soda. The War of the Worlds radio hoax was no hoax: Hundreds of people from Grovers Mill applied for Social Security on November 1, 1938 for a company called Yoyodyne Propulsion Systems.....the hotbed of the Evil Aliens and the current contractor for America's new bomber. There is so much and so little going on at once that after 2 showings I am still confused, and still giggling. This movie has no reason for existence. But then, neither does Rocky Horror. It is fun. I want the soundtrack.

/amqueue

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