



Mt. Holz Science Fiction Society
Club Notice - 7/24/87 -- Vol. 6, No. 4

MEETINGS UPCOMING:

Unless otherwise stated, all meetings are on Wednesdays at noon.
LZ meetings are in LZ 3A-206; MT meetings are in MT 4A-235.

_D_A_T_E _T_O_P_I_C

- 07/15 LZ: TITAN by John Varley (Megalomania) (in 1B-205)
- 07/29 MT: "Down in Flames" by Larry Niven (in the cafeteria)
- 08/05 LZ: The BERSERKER books by Fred Saberhagen (A/I)
- 08/26 LZ: COUNT ZERO by William Gibson (Hugo Nominees)
- 09/16 LZ: THE UPLIFT WAR by David Brin (Future Histories)

HO Chair: John Jetzt HO 1E-525 834-1563 mtuxo!jetzt
LZ Chair: Rob Mitchell LZ 1B-306 576-6106 mtuxo!jrjt
MT Chair: Mark Leeper MT 3E-433 957-5619 mtgzz!leeper
HO Librarian: Tim Schroeder HO 3M-420 949-5866 homxb!tps
LZ Librarian: Lance Larsen LZ 3L-312 576-6142 lzfme!lfl
MT Librarian: Bruce Szablak MT 4C-418 957-5868 mtgzz!bds
Factotum: Evelyn Leeper MT 1F-329 957-2070 mtgzy!ecl
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1. Our next Middletown meeting is going to be a little different.
(Well, same doesn't seem to be doing us much good!) Till now we
have been meeting in conference rooms with most of the attendees
bringing their lunch. The problem was that brought lunches are
limited to what you can bring on a paper tray from the cafeteria or
what you can bring in a paper bag. We of the science fiction club
know that the proper use of paper is to print science fiction on,
not to wrap food in. So next meeting we will eat in the Middletown
cafeteria itself. Look for us near the windows toward the center.
In any case it should be easy enough to find us. Usually when
Evelyn eats, it attracts some attention from the nearby tables. I
am used to seeing Evelyn eat so it doesn't seem all that strange to
me, but we often get people at other tables staring when they
forget to be polite and this close to the window we may also get a
dog or two coming to watch Evelyn eat and to howl. Our topic for

discussion will be DOWN IN FLAMES by Larry Niven, available on request from Evelyn (preferably electronically). This is an unofficial plot outline that Larry Niven wrote for a Known-Space story that ends all Known-Space stories. Niven supposedly destroys he wrote in other Known-Space stories. Comments I have gotten from

THE MT VOID

Page 2

people seem to indicate that the ideas in it are funny and bizarre. I have not yet read the story myself -- and probably not enough of Niven to appreciate it -- but I will keep up my end of the discussion and watch Evelyn eat.

If this meeting works out, our next may be held at the Middletown Swing. In fact, it could probably hold the attendance of some of our recent meetings. We ought to use the swing while it is still available and in its original state. Apparently there was some question about the professionalism of having a swing on Middletown property. A certain off-site VP wanted the swing removed as a distraction from work. At the very least he wanted it moved to the Middletown's new Library Mark II. Since the shelves are half empty we could do with half as many shelves and that would leave room for the swing. Local management prevailed, saying that it would only attract attention to the library and there are hardly enough books to go around for the people who use the library now. A compromise was reached and the swing will stay where it is, but will be fitted with conferencing mikes and cellular phones. Users will be expected to have their calls forwarded to the swing. These will be the same cellular phones that last year they tried to affix to all Middletown joggers until it was discovered that the sweat corroded the copper wiring. Well, not the same phones, after many attempts to deodorize those phones, they were buried in a specially designated land fill near Trenton.

Sorry, I guess I digressed a little. In any case, meet us in the cafeteria next meeting.

Mark Leeper
MT 3E-433 957-5619
...mtgzz!leeper

ROBOCOP

A film review by Mark R. Leeper
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Capsule review: Featherweight and violent superhero comic book on film about a cyborg policeman protecting the streets of Detroit. Paul Verhoeven is one of the last directors I would expect to make this fun but unoriginal action film.

The place is Detroit. the time is some undefinable date in the future. Law enforcement is no longer done by government and is instead contracted out to the giant corporation, Omni Consumer Products. Two models of mechanized policemen have been developed by OCP. One is the ED-209, a kind of walking tank combined with the artificial intelligence to take over standard cop-on-the-beat responsibilities. The other model is "Robocop," a cyborg incorporating human and mechanical parts but requiring a human brain to run the device. Just as the ED-209s are about to be mobilized, the model proves to have difficulties and instead, a recently murdered policeman, Murphy (played by Peter

"Buckeroo Banzai" Weller), is robocized and resurrected as Robocop. Three guesses what crime Robocop wants to solve.

In fact, rarely does anyone need more than one guess about anything in R_o_b_o_c_o_p. The plot is supremely cliched. The resurrected-hero idea has been used many times before, from the "Six-Million-Dollar Man" to Remo Williams to the Lone Ranger. The "honest police under corrupt leadership" plot is done two or three times a year, it seems. Scenes of hoods shooting at Robocop to no effect are virtual dramatizations of scenes in "Superman" comics half a century old. The only place the script becomes at all creative is in extrapolations of society some (inconsistent) number of years into the future. By the look of cars and clothing styles, this film could be taking place tomorrow. As far as the technology and changes to society (like contracted police protection), the film still could be thirty or forty years into the future.

And some things might not make much sense whenever they take place. The ED-209 is nearly useless as a surrogate policeman. It is too big and bulky to do anything but travel on flat terrain and blast away. Robocop has only a little more finesse. If I lived in the Detroit of this film the one thing that would scare me more than crime would be the possibility that Robocop might come to my rescue. There is no better way to parlay a \$100 robbery into a \$100,000 damage-repair bill than to call on the "Flatfoot of Steel." And with what Robocop must cost OCP in police brutality suits, they could probably hire an army of old-fashioned humans.

Robocop

July 19, 1987

Page 2

But the biggest surprise about R_o_b_o_c_o_p is that it is directed by Paul Verhoeven. This film is an entirely new style for the director of S_o_l_d_i_e_r_o_f_O_r_a_n_g_e, S_p_e_t_t_e_r_s, F_l_e_s_h_a_n_d_B_l_o_o_d and T_h_e_F_o_u_r_t_h_m_a_n.

Although the latter two films were in spots quite as violent as R_o_b_o_c_o_p, all four of Verhoeven's previous films were aimed at a more mature audience. R_o_b_o_c_o_p is his first film aimed at the audiences who make floors sticky. Where films like T_h_e_F_o_u_r_t_h_M_a_n had occasional touches of Kurt Russell, R_o_b_o_c_o_p has more of a tendency to fade into K_e_n_t_u_c_k_y F_r_i_e_d_M_o_v_i_e.

One final comment: Basil Poledouris, who has a nasty habit of giving films better musical scores than they deserve (e.g., B_l_u_e_L_a_g_o_o_n, C_o_n_a_n_t_h_e_B_a_r_b_a_r_i_a_n, R_e_d_D_a_w_n, and A_m_e_r_i_k_a), has once again shown up his director by making his score the best thing in the film. Rate this one a +1 on the -4 to +4 scale.

THE LOST BOYS
A film review by Mark R. Leeper
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Capsule review: Moody photography and baroque sets constitute most of the value of this punk-vampire film about the undead on motorcycles and pre-teen Van Helsings. The story plays a little fast and loose with traditional vampire lore.

Back when Hammer Films was making its best vampire films--and they were some of the best ever made--they used vampirism as a sort of metaphor. The early Dracula films with Christopher Lee (K_i_s_s_o_f_t_h_e_V_a_m_p_i_r_e and especially B_r_i_d_e_s_o_f_D_r_a_c_u_l_a) likened vampirism to drug addiction. This added a little relevance to the films and it made things easier for the scriptwriter. How does a mother behave when she discovers her beloved son has become a vampire? Well, it's not so hard to find mothers whose sons have become drug addicts; just have them react the same way. In B_r_i_d_e_s_o_f_D_r_a_c_u_l_a one woman talks about how there is a so-called smart set who consider vampirism a sort of special privilege. Hammer's metaphor has been resurrected for Joel Schumacher's L_o_s_t_B_o_y_s.

The story concerns two boys Sam (about 12 years old) and Michael (about 18) who are the new family in town in Santa Carla, California. Michael quickly falls in with the wrong sort, punk bikers forever getting into trouble. Sam makes friends, too, with boys his own age. The bikers are not just punks; they are vampires, and Sam's friends are vampire hunters. From there the plot follows turns which, if not completely predictable, are hardly surprising either. In fact, the only real surprise comes from where the scriptwriter suddenly decides to vary from the standard rules of the powers of the vampires.

With not much of a script to work with, Schumacher manages a few pleasant moments of tongue-in-cheek but little more than that. This is, however, a cinematographer's film and while everyone else seemed to be putting in half-hearted efforts, the cinematographer was working overtime. The photography is moody and at times even eerie. The atmospheric camerawork extends even to the gratuitous rock concert scenes. If T_h_e_L_o_s_t_B_o_y_s is better than Schumacher's previous films, like T_h_e_I_n_c_r_e_d_i_b_l_e_S_h_r_i_n_k_i_n_g_W_o_m_a_n, it is mostly because of emotional effects orchestrated by the cinematographer. Rate the film a low +1 on the -4 to +4 scale.

THE KING EDWARD PLOT by Robert Lee Hall
Critic's Choice, 1987, ISBN 1-55547-158-7, \$3.50.
A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper
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Let me start out by saying that this book is somewhat deceptive. The "Editor's Note" at the beginning mentions the Diogenes Club and 221B Baker Street. The cover art shows a deerstalker, a pipe, and a magnifying glass. The manuscript is described as having been placed in a bank for safe-keeping. But, contrary to all expectations, this is n_o_t a Sherlock Holmes story.

Frederick Wigmore, late of the Baker Street Irregulars and currently an actor, has taken up residence in Holmes's old quarters. Stamford, who apparently missed his calling as a real estate agent, suggests to bank teller Herman Munns that he might want to share rooms with Wigmore. Munns's uncle, Simon Bliss, is a member of the Diogenes Club and Jack Merridew is the 12-year-old pageboy there. When a murder actually takes place at the Diogenes Club, the four of them become involved in figuring out, not so much who committed it, but why. And they have a deadline, or a dastardly--but still unfathomed--plot against King Edward will succeed and drag the Empire down to defeat under German domination.

The plot is not nearly as exciting as a summary of it, and the story could perhaps have been told better in shorter form, but as a mystery novel of Edwardian sensibilities, it is passable. I'm not sure I could actually go so far as to recommend this book, but I don't "dis-recommend" it either. Presumably you know whether a lightweight Holmes imitation is what you're looking for.

Robert Adams' BOOK OF ALTERNATE WORLDS
edited by Robert Adams, Martin H. Greenberg, & Pamela Crippen Adams
Signet, 1987, ISBN 0-451-14894-0, \$3.95.
A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper
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When I first looked at the table of contents of this book, I noticed that the stories were novelettes or even novellas rather than the usual assortment of short stories. And the editors have managed to avoid the usual over-anthologized stories for some less well-known ones. In his brief introduction, Adams says the two are connected: the better alternate-history stories run to longer lengths and hence are usually left out of anthologies, whose goal (it often seems) is to have the longest table of contents possible. The nine stories included here average fifty pages in length.

Murray Leinster's "The Other World" is the story of what might happen if the ancient Egyptian magicians had found a way to travel through portals to a parallel, uninhabited world and then sustain themselves there by looting our own world. It's old-fashioned science fiction, and written with such vibrant images that I couldn't help but think it would make a great movie.

Subtitled "The Role of the Air Force Four-Door Hardtop," George Alec Effinger's "Target: Berlin!" is typically bizarre Effinger,

applying what Darrell Schweitzer has called the "silly factor" in alternate histories. In this case, the silly factor seems to be that in this alternate world, the aircraft of World War II were all modified cars: the Americans flew Mustangs, the Germans flew Volkswagens, and the Japanese flew Toyotas. No, that not an anachronism; World War II was delayed by agreement of all concerned (maybe to give them time to develop cruise control?). This may be some people's cup of tea, but frankly it doesn't do it for me.

Fritz Leiber's "Adept's Gambit" seems mostly a excuse to put Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser into our own world. After a few pages, I decided I didn't care what world they were in, or what happened to them. H. Beam Piper's "Last Enemy" I had read before and found fairly mundane then, so did not re-read and cannot comment in detail on.

L. Sprague de Camp's "Aristotle and the Gun" is "Alternate History Plot #2A": man goes back in time and tries to change things for the better; things don't work out the way he planned. (For the curious, Plot #1 is "things just happen to turn out differently," and Plot #2B is that "man goes back in time and tries to change things for the better; things do work out the way he planned." Plot #2B makes for a fairly dull story and is not often used.) Since de Camp knows something about history--a requirement that many alternate history authors seem to overlook--the story has a very authentic feel to it and is one of the better ones in this anthology.

Larry Niven's "There's a Werewolf in My Time Machine" is one of the many stories in which Svetz goes back in time to get some historical animal and ends up picking up some fantastical parallel in a parallel world instead. His time machine, like Dr. Who's Tardis, seems to have some sort of permanent glitch.

Robert Silverberg's "Many Mansions" has so many parallel threads that it's almost impossible to keep track of them all. Silverberg even uses the old hackneyed Plot #2C: man goes back in time, kills grandfather (either his own or someone else's, it doesn't seem to matter), and things may or may not change. Silverberg, as usual, makes even this old plot new.

T. R. Fehrenbech's "Remember the Alamo!" is a combination of Plot #1 and Plot #2B. Normally, it would be a strong story, but it has too

much to compete with here. It does have the advantage of dealing with alternate American histories, while most authors in the genre still seem to prefer fooling around with European history.

Jerome Bixby's "One Way Street" is another common plot (okay, Plot #3, if you want a number): man has an accident and finds himself in a world similar to, but not exactly like, our own. Bixby is best known

for his story "It's a _ G _ o _ o _ d Life," adapted for _ T _ h _ e _ T _ w _ i _ l _ i _ g _ h _ t _ Z _ o _ n _ e. This

story will remind the reader of another _ T _ w _ i _ l _ i _ g _ h _ t _ Z _ o _ n _ e story, "The Parallel."

Though not all the stories are great, the assortment provides something for everyone and a good look at some of the better alternate history stories that you may have missed until now.

BIMBOS OF THE DEATH SUN by Sharyn McCrumb
Windwalker, 1987, ISBN 0-88038-455-7, \$2.95.

I'm not sure who Sharyn McCrumb is, but I'd bet you'd find her name on the membership lists of several science fiction conventions. B i m b o s o f t h e D e a t h S u n is a novel set in a real fantasy world--that of a science fiction convention. (Lately, it may seem more horror than fantasy, but that's another story. Appin Dungannon, the Guest of Honor of this particular convention, is the author of the incredibly successful series of Tratyn Runewind books. He is described as a "malignant midget," but McCrumb--in what must be a ploy to fend off a Harlan Ellison lawsuit--makes sure to mention that he is n o t Harlan Ellison. Dungannon apparently has all the bad characteristics of Ellison without any of the literary talent, since Tratyn Runewind does not seem to be a character on the level of, say, Hamlet. Therefore, it is not much of a surprise when Dungannon is found murdered in his hotel room. It's not even much of a loss so far as most of the people are concerned. But the police think it would be nice to find the killer.

But why B i m b o s o f t h e D e a t h S u n? Well, the protagonist of the story is Dr. James Owen Mega, a.k.a. Jay Omega, author of the recent not-best-selling science fiction novel... B i m b o s o f t h e D e a t h S u n. The book, he claims, is based on a new scientific theory he was working on; the title were dumped on him by the publisher. Mega is especially outraged at the cover, showing a "female bodybuilder in a fur bikini." Just as B i m b o s o f t h e D e a t h S u n is the title of both this book and the book-within-the-book, the cover of this book is very similar to the one described. In the true tradition of cover art, though, the cover of this book differs in several details from that described for the book-within-the-book. Perhaps this is a meta-statement on how cover art is often inaccurate, but I doubt it.

Anyway, McCrumb has the characters, and I do mean characters, that one meets at a science fiction convention down cold. The costume fans, the gaming fans, the outsiders who have discovered that science fiction fandom will ignore many things the mundane world places great importance on--height, weight, appearance, the ability to "fit in"--they're all here. McCrumb may seem at times cruel to those whom she is portraying, but it is more a question of accuracy than of hostility. One brief example: when it is finally announced to the convention members that Dungannon has been murdered, the audience at first doesn't know what to make of it. Then,

Suddenly a clarion voice rang out like a battle cry above the babble. "The hucksters' room! While we still can!"

... "The huckster's room?" she echoed. What does that

have to do with Appin Dungannon's being murdered?"

... "Not a thing," he replied. "But life goes on. And now autographed copies of Appin Dungannon's books are worth triple what they were five minutes ago."

While this is not a book from which a non-convention-goer could learn about conventions, it is a book that convention-goers will love. Highly recommended.

ONCE UPON A MURDER by Robert J. Randisi and Kevin D. Randle
Windwalker, 1987, ISBN 0-88038-450-6, \$2.95.
A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper
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Miles Paladon is a private eye in 1939 Chicago. Following a hot tip, he takes a hot slug in the chest and falls to the ground at the edge of a battlefield littered with armored corpses, the arrow protruding from his chest. Say what?! Well, that was his reaction also.

Miles has apparently been paired to his "twin," Prince Paladon of Palandrum. This pairing appears to consist of drawing Miles's consciousness into Prince Paladon's body to share it with Paladon, while Miles's own body lies comatose in his own world. Prince Paladon knows that the arrow which killed him was fired by one of his own household, but needs Miles's additional psychic strength to keep himself alive long enough to figure out who is was.

There are the usual fantasy elements: wizards, magic, and all that stuff. There is an attempt to have strong female characters; it's not a total success. As a mystery, it's pretty ho-hum. All in all, it's an interesting blend of fantasy and mystery, and what I call an "airport book": a pleasant enough way to spend a couple of hours, but not something you should go out of your way to find.

