

1. This week's Lincroft meeting is a retrospective of Robert Anson Heinlein. Heinlein, who died earlier this year, was one of the "Big Three" of science fiction (the other two being Isaac Asimov and Arthur C. Clarke), recognized as such even by those who did not like his particular style of writing. Heinlein's first published

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story was in A_s_t_o_u_n_d_i_n_g in 1939--a landmark year which gave us the debuts of Isaac Asimov, Theodore Sturgeon, A. E. Van Vogt as well (all in A_s_t_o_u_n_d_i_n_g). (Of course, Hollywood produced G_o_n_e_w_i_t_h_t_h_e_W_i_n_d and T_h_e_W_i_z_a_r_d_o_f_O_z and Europe produced World War II, so perhaps t_h_i_s was the "Year of the Jackpot.")

Heinlein has been hailed as a master story-teller and denounced as a sexist pig. A generation of science fictions fans grew up on his "juvenile novels," to the extent that the phrase "Heinlein juvenile" has become almost a generic term. His early works often seemed to stress a particular political philosophy; his later works emphasized sex as well. Any discussion of his writing invariably becomes a discussion of how much of an author's personal philosophy should be inferred from his/her writing.

Though the specific book chosen for the discussion was his last, T_o_S_a_i_l_B_e_y_o_n_d_t_h_e_S_u_n_s_e_t, the entire Heinlein oeuvre will be under consideration, so feel free to attend even if you haven't read a Heinlein novel since T_h_e_R_o_l_l_i_n_g_S_t_o_n_e_s. [-ecl]

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

ALIEN NATION

A film review by Mark R. Leeper

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Capsule review: The biggest science fiction film of the year! (What a feeble year!) There is not a whole lot of science fiction in this retread of the mismatched-partners police film. There is not even much in the way of new twists from the science fiction premise. Lots of overly familiar mindless action to fill out the length to that of a feature film. Rating: -1.

These days Hollywood science fiction films really need a high budget. And they need imagination. Science fiction films need a budget because the cost of automobile parts has soared. Car chases are not exciting unless lots of cars get smashed up, lots of shattered

windshields get sprinkled over the street, and lots of great makeup effects of people smashed up in the cars. That costs money. Then filmmakers need imagination to design new kinds of guns that the audience has not seen before. Gunfights with the same old sorts of guns get boring. Hollywood has come to see that science fiction fans want to see new guns in science fiction film gunfights. _ A_ l_ i_ e_ n_ N_ a_ t_ i_ o_ n is a science fiction film that has the car crashes and the new guns that fans demand. And I hope they are happy with what they got. I suspect that they will be because _ A_ l_ i_ e_ n_ N_ a_ t_ i_ o_ n's basic story usually does very well whenever it shows up in a film, four or five times a year.

As the film starts, the "Newcomers" have been on Earth for three years. Newcomers are aliens who arrived on Earth and were accepted much like, and to the same degree as, many other ethnic groups. In fact, the film glosses almost totally over how much more different an alien species would be from us than a new and even unfamiliar human ethnic group would be. There are references to a very different physiology but they sure look a lot like humans over 95% of their bodies. In fact, the camera lingers longingly over the very human-like breasts of the women. Now, nobody really knows why human women have globular breasts that even our closest primate relatives do not. And compared to these Newcomers, even daffodils are close relatives, yet the Newcomers' female breasts are similar enough that our main character gets a thrill fondling them. Well, it is just that kind of film.

But I am digressing. The aliens live in very human-like ghettos and have very human-like sorts of problems. Towards the end of the film we learn a few more differences, but for most of the film you could easily substitute "Chinese" for "alien" and could tell the same story. And undoubtedly someone has since it is a story that has been done so frequently in the past. The story is the "mismatched police partners."

You have seen it before. It may not have been called _ 4_ 8_ H_ o_ u_ r_ s_ _ R_ e_ d_ _ H_ e_ a_ t_ ,_ o_ r_ _ L_ e_ t_ h_ a_ l_ W_ e_ a_ p_ o_ n. There are enough of them to turn listing

examples into a party game. Yes, there is initial friction between the partners; yes, they come to like each other. It is all there, complete with bugs gunfights and car chases.

James Caan does a reasonable job as Matthew Sykes, whose old

partner is killed by insidious aliens. Mandy Patinkin is enjoyable to watch as Sam Francisco--named that by an insensitive immigration official. But then it cannot be really hard for them to play parts that have been done so many times before. The film also features in cameo roles lots of products you can buy in your local grocery store. The alien makeup is all right if scientifically unlikely, and all other visual effects of the film have tires and fenders or bullets.

What was purported to be the year's biggest science fiction film is a huge disappointment. Rate it a -1 in the -4 to +4 scale.

