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Mt. Holz Science Fiction Society
Club Notice - 06/08/90 -- Vol. 8, No. 49

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

- 06/20 LZ: PRENTICE ALVIN by Orson Scott Card (Hugo Nominee)
- 07/11 LZ: HYPERION by Dan Simmons (Hugo Nominee)
- 08/01 LZ: A FIRE IN THE SUN by George Alec Effinger (Hugo Nominee)
- 08/22 LZ: RENDEZVOUS WITH RAMA by Arthur C. Clarke
- 09/12 LZ: STAR MAKER by Olaf Stapledon (Formative Influences)

 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.

- 06/09 SFABC: Science Fiction Association of Bergen County: picnic
(phone 201-933-2724 for details) (Saturday)
- 06/16 NJSFS: New Jersey Science Fiction Society: Social/Dance
(phone 201-432-5965 for details) (Saturday)
- 07/13 Hugo Ballot Deadline

HO Chair: John Jetzt HO 1E-525 834-1563 hocpa!jetzt
 LZ Chair: Rob Mitchell LZ 1B-306 576-6106 mtuxo!jrrt
 MT Chair: Mark Leeper MT 3D-441 957-5619 mtgzx!leeper
 HO Librarian: Tim Schroeder HO 3D-225A 949-5866 hotle!tps
 LZ Librarian: Lance Larsen LZ 3L-312 576-3346 mtunq!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. We have been talking in the last few notices about my experiences with sports--the ones that left me with something valuable that has lasted me a lifetime: my hatred of sports. I figure if I tell you about my sports experiences, maybe one of you will be able to write back and tell me when I'm cured.

I should tell you my most amazing moment in sports. It happened many years after my other stories. I was working for Burroughs in Detroit. Now Burroughs was not the brightest company in the world. If they were, why would they have their World Headquarters in a place like inner-city Detroit? Sometime I have to tell you about

THE MT VOID

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Burroughs.

Anyway, somebody at Burroughs got it into his head(s) that sports would be good for morale. "Build team spirit that would carry over into the job." Right. Now the old World Headquarters had no place to put a gym. It had an office or two big enough for a tiddly-winks match or a nerf-basketball hoop. But Detroiters know these aren't Real Sports. Detroiters know Real Sports; that's about all you find in the newspapers.

So the company that had put a White Owl cigar vending machine in the cafeteria decided to worry about the health of its employees. These guys, the big ones, would smoke stogies over their breakfast coffee and greasy doughnuts, smelling up the whole cafeteria, and they decided the employees weren't healthy enough. And there was no place in the building to build a gymnasium and even if there were the space, they wouldn't spend the money. Now across the alley from the headquarters they had an old warehouse. One of the execs decided the game would be _v_o_l_l_e_y_b_a_l_l!

Now there was a fair-sized lawn behind the warehouse and you would think that would be where they would put up the net. You would think that because you do not live in Detroit. First of all, there is little fresh air in Detroit and if you think people are going to get healthy playing volleyball out-of-doors unprotected in the middle of urban Detroit, your definition of healthy differs from mine.

No, they put up the volleyball net inside the dusty warehouse with the concrete floors. Inside the warehouse the brightest it ever got was pretty dim, just like the executives. Volleyball is a different game played in the dusty dim. You did not go down on your knees to hit the ball ... ever. The concrete of those rough floors ate knees.

Now I just once dared to play volleyball in this warehouse that would have been Home Sweet Home for Freddy Krueger. And here I was playing volleyball and every ball that came over the net was headed directly for my head. Then one of the guys on my team said it! It was the first time I had ever heard this idea expressed in any team sport I had played. He said to the other team, "Nothing like pickling the weak man!" And by golly, the ball started going to other people.

Now, this was a new concept for me in sports. In all my years of sports I had always been the weak man. I admit it. But I had always thought that the point of the sport w_a_s pickling the weak man. I was always the weak man and I always got pickled. That actually wasn't a bad game for the rest of it. We lost, of course. My team usually does, but for once it was because of mistakes other people on my team made. That game was kind of fun.

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It was only that once that I played volleyball. And it wasn't that I did not like the game. But when I play I guess I do my best and I expect the other team will also and that includes "pickling the weak man." The reason I don't play sports is not that I don't like them. In fact, I think I might enjoy sports. It's people I can't stand.

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

He who will not reason, is a bigot; he who cannot is a fool; and he who dares not is a slave.

-- William Drummond of Hawthorne

LONGTIME COMPANION
A film review by Mark R. Leeper
Copyright 1990 Mark R. Leeper

Capsule review: The tragic effect of AIDS on the gay community is movingly brought to the screen. This American Playhouse production may be the most adult and substantial film released this summer, albeit one of the

least expensive. Rating: high +1.

Some of the best films being shown in theaters are actually made for television. They are productions for PBS's "American Playhouse" that get their initial release in movie theaters before getting shown on public television. It is a positive-sum strategy since a theatrical release will help pay for the film. Since the film is already made for another venue the investment to get it into the theaters is relatively meager. And it is nice to see a film a little more substantial than B_a_c_k_t_o_t_h_e_F_u_t_u_r_e_I_I_I or F_i_r_e_B_i_r_d_s playing on the wide screen.

Norman Rene directed Craig Lucas's screenplay. The subject is a group of gay friends living on Fire Island and in Manhattan and how AIDS changed their lives. They go from an apparently carefree existence in the early Eighties through somber and often frightening changes as the disease claims victims from among their numbers. The behaviors we see are very much universal to epidemics and plagues. Initially the diseases are taken with concern but also with an occasional flippant optimism. We see weird explanations of what the epidemic "really is." Paranoia poisons the former carefree friendships. All the while the disease is taking its toll in the decreasing circle of friends.

L_o_n_g_t_i_m_e_C_o_m_p_a_n_i_o_n has too many major characters to keep them all straight (no pun intended), particularly because they all look like wholesome, male WASPs, but the center of the group is David, played by Bruce Davison. Davison's acting goes unnoticed until his character is placed under a severe emotional strain. Then Davison does some excellent acting that must be about the best he has ever done. Also notable is Mary-Louise Parker as a close (heterosexual) friend.

A couple of touches in the script are worth mentioning. There is a reference in the 1982 sequence to William Hurt playing a gay character. I believe they are alluding to Hurt's performance in the 1985 K_i_s_s_o_f_t_h_e_S_p_i_d_e_r_W_o_m_a_n. Also, there are about ten dated sequences and all but the last four take place on Fridays. That seems too many for coincidence, yet none of the last four is a Friday. (I am probably the only one who notices these things.)

L_o_n_g_t_i_m_e_C_o_m_p_a_n_i_o_n is not great. I would give it a high +1 on the -4 to +4 scale. But at a reported \$1.5 million in production cost and with a timely subject, this film is probably a very good choice for a theatrical release.

TOTAL RECALL

A film review by Mark R. Leeper

Copyright 1990 Mark R. Leeper

Capsule review: Violence, chases, thoughtful plotting, special effects, gore, Arnold Schwarzenegger, a few intelligent ideas. They don't all seem as if they could be in one film. Nobody will be totally happy with T_o_t_a_l_R_e_c_a_l_l, but there is a surprising degree of good science fiction in what could be Arnold Schwarzenegger's most intelligent fantasy film to date. Rating: +2.

I have to say that I usually am not very impressed by action or violence in films. How much variation is there in chase scenes from one film to the next? To my mind there is almost none other than the background scenery changing. The same goes for violence. There are about as many ways to tear apart a human as there are to carve a turkey. It is a special effect that has been done so many times in film that it no longer is of any interest to me to see it. I am well aware that there are people who can enjoy chases and violence in film after film and enjoy them every time, just as there are people who listen to the "Top 40" radio stations and can enjoy hearing the same songs over and over. Chase scenes and violence to me seem like unimaginative filler. In addition and amazingly, I find I have this weird psychic ability to know at the beginning of a fight scene who is going to win the fight. If there are four armed thugs taking on an unarmed Arnold Schwarzenegger, psychic vibrations tell me at the beginning of the fight who is going to win. The vibrations work for chase scenes also and there, too, they remove much of the suspense.

There have been a number of films that have tried to marry action to a science fiction plot. They have been films such as T_h_e_T_e_r_m_i_n_a_t_o_r, P_r_e_d_a_t_o_r, T_h_e_y_L_i_v_e, and R_o_b_o_c_o_p. I consistently like them less than the general public does and it is more than likely because the action and violence scenes have so little value for me. What I think I am really rating is the science fiction film that frames the action and violence--often making for a much shorter film. Take the action and violence from the four films I mentioned and none is a particularly good science fiction film. Only T_h_e_y_L_i_v_e has a particularly engaging premise. That may be because T_h_e_y_L_i_v_e is an adaptation of a pre-existing, published science fiction story so to some extent the story has stood on its own. T_o_t_a_l_R_e_c_a_l_l is a new action film also based on an existing science fiction story and starring Arnold Schwarzenegger.

An Arnold Schwarzenegger action film based on a story by Philip K. Dick sounds almost like a contradiction in terms. Dick writes cerebral--not to say neurotic--science fiction about people who generally seem to live inside their heads. You could not fit Schwarzenegger into a Dick story with a crowbar. The main character of

Dick's "We Can Remember It for You Wholesale" is a mousy, hen-pecked government clerk. Changes were inevitable if the story was to be made into an action vehicle and vast changes were indeed made. Yet the screenplay has retained much of the plot and most of the engaging ideas of the story before going off in its own direction. Even when it does diverge, some of the concepts it adds are thoughtful and intelligent. Of course, some unfortunately are not. I know of nobody who actually liked the last ten minutes or so of the film. Like many films, T_o_t_a_l R_e_c_a_l_l was damaged by somebody's idea of a big finish.

This is a story with a lot of twists, particularly early on when it is still being faithful to the original story. This means that I cannot be very informative about the plot, but I can say that it starts out being about a sort of an average 21st century man with big muscles and an unusual problem. He keeps dreaming about Mars. There is nothing in life Doug Quaid wants more than to go to Mars. (In the story his name was Doug Quail, but it was changed, possibly because it sounded too much like Dan Quayle.) Unfortunately, only relatively few people can go to the mining colonies on Mars and Quaid is not one. Well, the next best thing to being there is having b_e_e_n there. The difference between having been there and not is having the memories. In this future world a company called R_e_k_a_l_l can put artificial memories into your head more vivid and believable than real memories. So Quaid agrees to buy an artificial memory of Mars--just a minor adjustment to his reality. But any Philip K. Dick fan can tell you things go awry when you start adjusting reality. They certainly do for Quaid. The script is a remarkable piece of work that allows the viewer to look at the altering of reality to be a minor plot complication in an action film or it could be what the film is all about. My wife came up with reasonable internal evidence that the surface interpretation of what happens in the film is wrong and another interpretation of the reality is correct. Clearly the script is richer than one usually expects from a Schwarzenegger action chase film.

Visually there are some very unconvincing effects and some very nice ones. Some of the model work is below average for Industrial Light & Magic and Dream Quest, but there are some very impressive sights also. Audiences seem to enjoy the subway security station as an effect different from what ILM and DQ have done in the past. the special effects have been described as "eye-popping," a pun that will be

appreciated in the first five minutes of the film but also an accurate one. That brings us to the gore. This film is directed by Dutchman Paul Verhoeven. He is generally good but uses a very great deal of gore and violence, particularly in his later films. This is a very violent film and viewers should go expecting that. Also go expecting to see a lot of familiar brand names that helped to finance the film. (Of course, Dick mentions a typewriter company by name in the original story, so there are precedents.)

In summary, T_o_t_a_l_R_e_c_a_l_l is a lot of different films. It should please pretty much anyone who likes science fiction films. It should

Total Recall

June 3, 1990

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have a broad range of appeal on many levels. I rate it a +2 on the -4 to +4 scale.

[The novelette "We Can Remember It for You Wholesale" can be found in the following magazines, collections, and anthologies:

- M_a_g_a_z_i_n_e_o_f_F_a_n_t_a_s_y&_S_c_i_e_n_c_e_F_i_c_t_i_o_n, April 1966
- M_a_g_a_z_i_n_e_o_f_F_a_n_t_a_s_y&_S_c_i_e_n_c_e_F_i_c_t_i_o_n, 30th Anniversary Issue
- T_h_e_P_r_e_s_e_r_v_i_n_g_M_a_c_h_i_n_e by Philip K. Dick
- A_l_p_h_a_5 edited by Robert Silverberg
- T_h_e_B_e_s_t_f_r_o_m_F_a_n_t_a_s_y&_S_c_i_e_n_c_e_F_i_c_t_i_o_n_1_6 edited by Edward L. Ferman
- E_a_r_t_h_i_n_T_r_a_n_s_i_t edited by Sheila Schwartz
- N_e_b_u_l_a_A_w_a_r_d_S_t_o_r_i_e_s_2 edited by Brian W. Aldiss and Harry Harrison
- T_h_e_R_o_a_d_t_o_S_c_i_e_n_c_e_F_i_c_t_i_o_n, edited by James E. Gunn
- T_w_e_n_t_y_Y_e_a_r_s_o_f_F_a_n_t_a_s_y&_S_c_i_e_n_c_e_F_i_c_t_i_o_n edited by Edward L. Ferman and Robert P. Mills
- W_o_r_l_d's_B_e_s_t_S_c_i_e_n_c_e_F_i_c_t_i_o_n: 1_9_6_7 edited by Donald A. Wollheim and Terry Carr]

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THE FANTASTIC WORLD WAR II: The War That Wasn't
edited by Frank McSherry, Jr.
Baen, 1990, ISBN 0-671-69881-8, \$3.50.
A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper
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Though this book is credited as being edited solely by Frank McSherry, the copyright is listed in the names of Frank McSherry, Martin Greenberg, and Charles Waugh, so those of you who thought that somehow an anthology got released that Greenberg _ h _ a _ d _ n' _ t worked on were fooled. In addition to those three, and of course the authors of the stories themselves, There is also S. M. Stirling, who wrote the introductions to the stories. It seems that everyone got into the act somehow.

The title and description of this book might lead one to think it was a collection of alternate history stories about World War II. Well, it led me to think that, anyway. This is only partially true. There are some alternate history stories, yes, but there are also fantasy stories and straight science fiction stories as well.

The lead story is Charles Beaumont's "The Howling Man" (1959), probably the best-known of all the stories due to its translation into an episode of the old "Twilight Zone" television series. This is a horror story which provides an alternate explanation for World War II (or perhaps it's just another layer deeper explanation).

Next are three fantasy pieces. "Take My Drum to England" (1941) by Nelson S. Bond, set during the evacuation of Dunkerque, is reminiscent of Kim Stanley Robinson's "Black Air" (or is it that "Black Air" is reminiscent of "Take My Drum to England"?). Malcolm Jameson's "Vengeance in Her Bones" (1942) is about a ship with a personality--and a grudge. And "Red Moon on the Flores Sea" (1942) by H. Bedford-Jones is a ghost story set in Malaya (now called Malaysia).

Manley Wade Wellman delivers another horror story with "The Devil Is Not Mocked" (1943), albeit distressingly predictable. The contemporary stories are rounded out by A. E. Van Vogt's "Secret Unattainable" (1942), a typically Van-Vogtian idea of a machine that is affected by the thoughts and attitudes of those who are running it, and "My Name Is Legion" by Lester Del Rey, a well-done time travel story with a twist. Well, I suppose that is redundant--part of what makes a time travel story _ i _ s the twist. But in this case, I found myself surprised by the denouement while at the same time saying that of course it was perfectly obvious.

Edward Wellen's "Barbarossa" (1973) is set in a Nazi submarine twenty years after V-E Day; setting up a parallel to the legend of the 12th Century German hero Barbarossa (a.k.a. Frederick I) is not enough to sustain the story.

The last two stories are alternate histories. "Two Dooms" (1958) by C. M. Kornbluth is a classic in the field. Its depiction of the world years after the Axis has won World War II is suitably chilling, and seems to have inspired any number of lesser imitators (only Sarban's

SoundofHisHorn comes to mind as its equal--and no, I have not forgotten Philip K. Dick's ManintheHighCastle). And once again, we

find Harry Turtledove's "The Last Article" (1988), which is an acceptable story, but runs a real risk of being over-anthologized. (As far as alternate histories go, the definitive anthology in this area may already have been done: Gregory Benford and Martin H. Greenberg's HitlerVictorious (Garland, 1986), eleven "what if Germany had won the war?" stories. The Kornbluth story, not surprisingly, was included in that anthology as well.)

On the whole, I was disappointed by this anthology. Maybe I was just expecting something different. None of the stories was actively bad (well, maybe the Van Vogt), but I got the impression that the book was put together more because someone thought this would be a sellable theme than because someone had a lot of good stories to anthologize.

