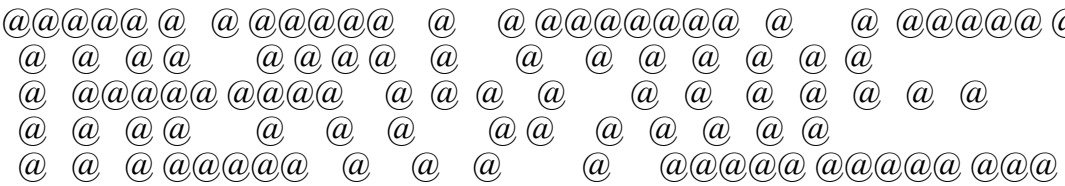

Mt. Holz Science Fiction Society
Club Notice - 11/20/92 -- Vol. 11, No. 21

MEETINGS UPCOMING:

Unless otherwise stated, all meetings are on Wednesdays at noon.

_D_A_T_E _T_O_P_I_C

12/09 HO: A FIRE ON THE DEEP by Vernor Vinge (HO 4N-509)
12/30 Location TBA: The Best of 1992 (room TBA)

_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.
11/21 NJSFS: New Jersey Science Fiction Society: TBA
(phone 201-432-5965 for details) (Saturday)
12/12 SFABC: Science Fiction Association of Bergen County: TBA
(phone 201-933-2724 for details) (Saturday)

HO Chair: John Jetzt HO 1E-525 908-834-1563 hocpb!jetzt
LZ Chair: Rob Mitchell HO 1D-505A 908-834-1267 hocpb!jrrt
MT Chair: Mark Leeper MT 3D-441 908-957-5619 mtgzfs3!leeper
HO Librarian: Nick Sauer HO 4F-427 908-949-7076 homxc!11366ns
LZ Librarian: Lance Larsen LZ 3L-312 908-576-3346 mtfme!lfl
MT Librarian: Mark Leeper MT 3D-441 908-957-5619 mtgzfs3!leeper
Factotum: Evelyn Leeper MT 1F-329 908-957-2070 mtgzy!ecl

1. Well, the election is finally over. I am sorry to see it end. In how many countries do you get to see politicians calling each other names like "Bozo" and "Ozone"? It really gives them a human side that I am not sure people in other countries see in their own leaders, at least not since the days of Idi Amin. M. Richard Leeper did not win, as a few of you will probably already be aware. I have it on good authority that he got at least one write-in. And that wasn't easy, since the pencil in my booth had a broken point. George Bush, whom at one point I thought was the only threat to M. Richard Leeper, seems to have run as if somebody had found a voodoo doll shaped like a campaign. Bill Clinton had claimed that George Bush was out of touch with the common people of this

country. Mr. Bush obviously wants to overcome that image and within two days of his loss gets us into a trade war over an issue with which we are all deeply concerned: French wine. As a man of the people he is trying to keep the price of French wines up to where us common people cannot afford them. Mr. Bush has obviously

had during his campaign a chance to see the poor of this country and now is afraid of what will happen if the price of French wine is too cheap. They should make do with domestic Cabernet Sauvignon; instead, riffraff have been drinking sauterne like St. Emilion-Pomerol. And it is wasted on them. Better to keep the price up to where only people who can appreciate the wine can get it. Hey, he might as well go for it. He only has to worry about the trade war for a couple of months.

Mark Leeper
MT 3D-441 908-957-5619
...mtgzfs3!leeper

Those who profess to favor freedom, and yet depreciate agitation, are men who want rain without thunder and lightning. They want the ocean without the roar of its many waters.

-- Frederick Douglass

CROSSTIME TRAFFIC by Lawrence Watt-Evans
Del Rey, 1992, ISBN 0-345-37395-2, $3.99.
A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper

Although the blurb says, "When travelers from alternate realities collide, an infinite number of possibilities arise," this description applies to only ten of the nineteen stories in this collection, and even that is probably stretching it. All this proves, of course, is that Watt-Evans isn't as limited as the blurb might imply. It is true that more than half of the stories are about alternate realities, but from reading the introduction it does seem that the intent was to include in this collection all the stories Watt-Evans wrote in this category. The net result is a somewhat skewed sample of Watt-Evans's writing, I suspect. But on to the stories.

There are at least four first-rate stories. "Why I Left Harry's All-Night Hamburgers" has won a Hugo and been nominated for a Nebula, but in case you're unfamiliar with it, let me just say

that this captures the sense of wonder of science fiction, and of other things, in a story of a visitor from parallel worlds. Alas, the sequel, "A Flying Saucer with Minnesota Plates," is not up to it in quality, but it was a tough act to follow.

Another excellent story is "Truth, Justice, and the American Way," which I reviewed when it first appeared in Resnick's _A_l_t_e_r_n_a_t_e _P_r_e_s_i_d_e_n_t_s. Here Watt-Evans postulates a victory by Hoover rather than Roosevelt in 1932. This results in a cascade of changes involving Japan, Germany, the Soviet Union, and Jews all over the world. This story is one that has stayed with me; it takes the old "what if World War II never happened?" question and gives it an unusual and perhaps surprising answer.

In "Storm Trooper," the barriers between the alternate realties are developing holes, and pieces of other universes are falling into ours. Reality storms, they're called, and so to deal with them .... It seems a slim idea, but Watt-Evans develops it well. "Real Time" may be the ultimate Time Patrol story--after you've read it, you'll never look at the genre quite the same way again.

Some of the other stories have their charms as well. "Monster Kidnaps Girl at Mad Scientist's Command!" is a fun send-up of old (and new) monster movies. If you like Bradbury, you'll appreciate "Windwagon Smith and the Martians." There's emotion in "An Infinity of Karen," Arabian Nights fantasy in "The Palace of al-Tir al-Abtan," pirates in "The Final Folly of Captain Dancy," ... in short, something for everyone.

I suppose my one complaint is more directed at the editor than Watt-Evans. The book is poorly laid out. The stories behind the stories, which would normally be set as paragraphs before the appropriate stories, are run together in a sixteen-page introduction that is somewhat daunting. Then, instead of leading off with the strongest story, the book starts with Watt-Evans's first story--a clever enough piece, but not the strong start one expects. As a result, the reader might give up prematurely, thinking, "If this is the _b_e_s_t story, ..." That would be a pity, so I will specifically warn against such thinking. This collection is worth reading, and I

recommend it.

BRAM STOKER'S DRACULA
A film review by Mark R. Leeper

Capsule review: Fairly faithful retelling with some very impressive surreal images. When it works, it works well; when it fails, it is at least interesting. Perhaps this works better as an art film than as a genuine piece of horror. Rating: +2 (-4 to +4).

In 1922 F. W. Murnau made the first film version of _D_r_a_c_u_l_a: _N_o_s_f_e_r_a_t_u. While the film really was a thinly veiled plagiarism of Bram Stoker's novel, originally calling the vampire Count Orlock, the source of the material was obvious. What was unusual about Murnau's version was the expressionist, almost surreal, world in which Dracula/Orlock lives. Using the crude special effects of the day, Murnau drops the viewer into a sinister world of strange visual images. Subsequent versions, with the possible exception of Werner Herzog's 1979 _N_o_s_f_e_r_a_t_u, tended to show the story in a more natural world. There were good reasons for that, mainly dealing with budget, but also with audience acceptance. Bela Lugosi, John Carradine, up through Christopher Lee, all play Dracula as a human-like creature with a few special powers, while there was little question that Max Schreck's Count Orlock had transformed into something really quite different from a human. Francis Ford Coppola has directed a new _D_r_a_c_u_l_a for a new generation and has intentionally way out-done Murnau and Stoker. Coppola has claimed this would be the dramatic version closest to Stoker's novel and nearly succeeded, at least for accuracy of plot. (The the one-hour premiere of Orson Welles's "Mercury Theater" radio program and three-hour BBC _C_o_u_n_t _D_r_a_c_u_l_a were both versions more faithful than Coppola's even if they lacked his flair for the imagination.) Stylistically, Coppola has turned up the visual horror elements in a way to make the novel almost prosaic by contrast.

Presumably most people reading this review will already have a good idea what the story is about. First there is the historic Vlad Dracula (literally "Son of the Dragon") who was also known as Vlad Tepes ("Vlad the Impaler"). He got his first nickname because his father was Vlad Drakul ("Vlad the Dragon"). Don't believe the film's introduction that said Dracula got the name for being in the Order of the Dragon; he was not. It was Vlad Drakul, Dracula's father, who was in the Order of the Dragon as his name indicated. Two more things not to believe: the Vlads were Hungarian, not Romanian as the introduction says (the borders were different then from what they are now). And the impalements were depicted wrong. People were not impaled the short way, through the trunk of the body. Unfortunately, instead they were set upright on the stake

using holes nature had already provided, which is a slower and much more agonizing death. This alone would have made Vlad Dracula feared. So Coppola has his history mostly right but not completely.

Here is where fiction separates from reality. Stoker's novel claims the feared Dracula became a vampire who still terrorized Transylvania four centuries later. For reasons that Stoker left to speculation, the vampire Dracula has decided to migrate to England and to spread his infectious vampirism to a new country. The symptoms of an outbreak of vampirism eventually come to the attention of a Professor Van Helsing who recognizes what is happening and, with a small group of friends, checkmates and eventually destroys the vampire. This all is the story that both Stoker and Coppola tell.

In spite of his professed fidelity to the novel, Coppola's version, with a screenplay by James V. Hart, makes some basic revisions to the story. Borrowing an idea that goes back at least to the 1933 Boris Karloff film _T_h_e _M_u_m_m_y. Dracula, it seems, became undead because of his love for a woman back when he was simply alive. Centuries later Dracula is still around and finds a reincarnation of this lost love. Now he wants her for his lover again. Coppola's Dracula becomes a tragic hero trying to regain lost love.

Other revisions to the story include a complete transformation of the character of Van Helsing. In the book it seems to me he was cautious and reserved, holding his tongue as long as possible and revealing all know knows only once he thinks that he might be believed. The film makes him a sort of mad professor who does not care about the impact of his statements and likely to misbehave in strange and unpredictable ways. Actually, much of the conversation we hear is probably a good deal franker and more sexual than would be likely in Victorian drawing rooms, though this would be very difficult to verify. The same goes for the public cinematograph showing nude women. I have no doubt the pictures dated from then, but probably would have been reserved for a less public venue. Two more places where a bit more research might have been done: Mina mentions Madame Curie as if her name was a household word in 1897. It was not until several years later that Curie would become famous

outside a small scientific community. Also Van Helsing said that the "story of syphilis is the story of civilization" as if it had been around as long as civilization. Actually the first known case was in 1493. The disease is suspected of having originated in the New World mostly due to chronology. No other European disease is even suspected of having originated with native Americans, incidentally. And even in this case, it is known only that it came with Spanish mariners from some other port.

As for the acting in this version, it is fairly spotty. Keanu Reeves seems out of place and uncomfortable as Jonathan Harker. He

is the best I have ever seen him, but that says very little. As I said Anthony Hopkins is a bit too weird as Van Helsing. Normally, I would call that the fault of the script, but various interviews have indicated that the eccentricity was Hopkins's idea and Coppola was amused and went along with it. Winona Ryder really was not too bad as Mina. Her British accent seemed acceptable to me, though likely a Briton might have a different idea. Of course, she did squint her eyes in a scene in which she was supposedly dead, but generally she turns in a competent, if lackluster performance. Then there is Gary Oldman as Dracula. Lon Chaney, Sr., was a very plain-looking man who, contrary to expectation, was the best character actor of his generation. That same description applies to the man who played Joe Orton, Sid Vicious, Lee Harvey Oswald, and Dracula. This understated actor's range is incredible.

But what sets this version apart from all other versions is the look. One image after another is startling. Time and again the camera plays with us. You find yourself wanting to view scenes a second time. Your eye will catch something funny in a scene. Dracula's shadow may be just an instant in timing slower than Dracula himself. Is it imagined? Is it intentional? Is it a mistake? And Transylvania is painted in bright primary colors. Oddly enough they only serve to make the place look more dismal and dreadful. Out of a red sky you will make out two huge Draculine eyes watching a character. It could be a touch of German Expressionism. The battle scenes in the historic sequence borrows from Akira Kurosawa. Throughout the entire film there is a dream-like quality, perhaps a surrealism. Coppola has chosen to avoid

computer effects such as morphing. While these effects might be effective for a science fiction film, there is something about them that does not work in a pure horror film. It did not occur to me at the time, but that might be one reason that _ F_ r_ i_ g_ h_ t _ N_ i_ g_ h_ t was not as effective for me as it could have been. Coppola's effects are all versions of special effects that were around in 1897.

The one problem with this version is the lack of actor empathy. _ B_ r_ a_ m _ S_ t_ o_ k_ e_ r'_ s _ D_ r_ a_ c_ u_ l_ a is for me more an artistic success than a good horror film. It tells the story often with images more vital than Stoker used in his novel. As with Murnau's seminal version, scenes are very good, but the net effect perhaps is less than the sum of the parts without the characters to back up the images. Still my rating is a +2 on the -4 to +4 scale.

A RIVER RUNS THROUGH IT
A film review by Mark R. Leeper

Capsule review: Norman Maclean's autobiographical novella is brought to the screen by the sure hand of director Robert Redford. I found the characters hard to care much about and the scenery of more interest. Others' mileage may vary. Rating: 0 (-4 to +4).

As an actor Robert Redford is just not my cup of tea. He generally plays someone handsome and callow and perhaps less than a

deep thinker. When a film calls for someone to be handsome and callow and less than a great thinker, he can be good in a role. I certainly cannot fault him for his contributions to films such as _ T_ h_ e _ C_ a_ n_ d_ i_ d_ a_ t_ e and _ T_ h_ e _ N_ a_ t_ u_ r_ a_ l. But Robert Redford the director is another animal entirely. His _ O_ r_ d_ i_ n_ a_ r_ y _ P_ e_ o_ p_ l_ e was neither ordinary nor empty, but a quiet and powerful study of a family that was no longer functioning as a family. _ T_ h_ e _ M_ i_ l_ a_ g_ r_ o _ B_ e_ a_ n_ f_ i_ e_ l_ d _ W_ a_ r was another film of keenly observed personalities. But this time he had a whimsical feel and a spell of magical realism. In his third film the craftsmanship is greater than ever but the people are much more reserved and the film lacks impact. It is hard to feel much for a family that believes so strongly that the best thing in life is fly fishing.

In Missoula, Montana, of the 1920s the Reverend Maclean is a dry, stern Presbyterian minister of Scottish descent. He leaves it to be assumed that behind his formal crustiness he may even have strong feelings for his children. He expresses emotion for only dry fly fishing and believes there is no clean line between religion and fly fishing. His two sons grow up loving each other and in subtle competition. The older, Norman (played by Joseph Gordon-Levitt and later Craig Sheffer), is bookish and tentative, while the younger, Paul (played by Van Gravage and later Brad Pitt). is handsome, self-assured, and adventuresome. As they grow older, Norman is reserved and religious, while Paul is more inclined to walking on the wild side. Most of the story is set in one summer when Norman returns to Montana after graduating college. The story is generally episodic, relating the relationship of the boys over that summer.

Redford's direction and Philippe Rousselot's camera capture the beauty of Montana but then fails to make the people upstage the scenery. At least this is the all-too-familiar story of the righteous son and the son tempted by women and strong drink. The message is too much like what is real and good and true in life is getting out into nature and killing fish. When it was all over, the characters I was rooting for all had gills. In spite of the polish, I give this film only a 0 on the -4 to +4 scale, but that may be only that I did not connect with the characters.