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Mt. Holz Science Fiction Society
Club Notice - 08/06/93 -- Vol. 12, No. 6

MEETINGS UPCOMING:

Unless otherwise stated, all meetings are in Holmdel 4N-509
Wednesdays at noon.

 D A T E T O P I C

- 08/25 CONSIDER PHLEBAS by Iain Banks
 (Space Opera with a Knife Twist)
- 09/15 WORLD AT THE END OF TIME by Frederik Pohl
 (Modern Stapledonian Fiction)
- 10/06 SARAH CANARY by Karen Joy Fowler (Nebula Winner)
- 10/27 THE MOON IS A HARSH MISTRESS by Robert A. Heinlein (Classic SF)
- 11/17 BRIAR ROSE by Jane Yolen (Nebula Nominee)
- 12/08 STAND ON ZANZIBAR by John Brunner (Classic SF)
- 01/05 A MILLION OPEN DOORS by John Barnes (Nebula Nominee)

Outside events:
The Science Fiction Association of Bergen County meets on the second Saturday of every month in Upper Saddle River; call 201-933-2724 for details. The New Jersey Science Fiction Society meets on the third Saturday of every month in Belleville; call 201-432-5965 for details.

HO Chair: John Jetzt HO 1E-525 908-834-1563 holly!jetzt
LZ Chair: Rob Mitchell HO 1C-523 908-834-1267 holly!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 quartet!lfl
MT Librarian: Mark Leeper MT 3D-441 908-957-5619 mtgzfs3!leeper
Factotum: Evelyn Leeper MT 1F-329 908-957-2070 mtgpfs1!ecl
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1. I could find some deep metaphysical relationship between the two films we will be showing on August 12, but it probably would not be true--at least not the real reason we are showing this double feature. The truth is that these are just two science fiction

films that have been requested. The Leeperhouse film fest has always been amenable to requests. I can vouch that the first film is rare and good. The second film is a new one on me. On August 12 at 7 PM, the Leeperhouse film fest will be showing:

THE MT VOID

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Science Fiction Double Feature
WHO? (1974) dir. by Jack Gold
LIFEPOD (1993) dir. by Ron Silver

People are always asking why we don't see more films based on novels by genuine science fiction writers. Well, somebody actually based a film fairly accurately on one of the better novels of a leading science fiction writer. The film is W_h_o?, based on the novel of the same name by Algis Budrys. Not a major special effects film, of course--this would have been a minor though well-respected science fiction, but But something went wrong in the film processing. The colors were washed out. So the film never got a major release. It went almost straight to late-night television. That is a real pity because it is such a good puzzle film.

During the height of the Cold War, physicist Lucas Martino (played by Joe Bova) may have the key to a scientific discovery that could have supreme defense implications. Then he is in a bad car crash right near the Berlin Wall and is rescued by East German authorities. He is in East Berlin for long months before he can be returned. When he is returned he has so much prosthetic material that he is more metal than human. Now FBI agent Sean Rogers (played by Elliot Gould) has to decide if what has been returned can be trusted. Is it Martino at all? Is it a machine with parts of Martino's body? Is it an imposter? More important, where do his loyalties now lie? If he is false, it might be possible to prove it. But if he is authentic, how could it be proved? Trevor Howard also stars as the head of East German intelligence.

I cannot say much about L_i_f_e_p_o_d. I have never seen the film, but it looks like a stylish science fiction remake of Alfred Hitchcock's L_i_f_e_b_o_a_t. The film stars Robert Loggia and Ron Silver (of E_n_e_m_i_e_s: _A _L_o_v_e_S_t_o_r_y). Silver also directs.

2. Alan and Joan Gopin are the proud parents of a new baby boy Michael Ross, born August 3 at 8 pounds, 3 ounces, and 21 inches long. (And Stephen Eric and Josephine Ellen are the proud siblings, I suppose.) (Alan is one of the earliest members of the SF Club.) [-ecl]

3. Note that we have modified the upcoming schedule to add some older science fiction among the new. Also, A_M_i_l_l_i_o_n_O_p_e_n_D_o_o_r_s by John Barnes is scheduled to appear in paperback in November, so scheduling it for January should give people time to find and read it before the meeting. [-ecl]

4. The horror book being discussed at Border's in East Brunswick NJ on August 23 is S_t_r_a_n_g_e_r_s by Dean R. Koontz. [-ecl]

5. We are switching to a new format this week in an attempt to make the notice more electronically friendly, while still maintaining a paper-friendly format as well. Feedback would be appreciated. [-ecl]

6. THE DESTINY MAKERS by George Turner (AvoNova, ISBN 0-688-12187-X, 1993, \$20) (a book review by Evelyn C. Leeper):

This story, like many other by Turner, is set in a future, pre-holocaust Australia. There's been no bang, but the world seems to be going through one long drawn-out whimper. Politicians spend time trying to figure out how to stretch Earth's resources over an ever-growing population. There are technical advances, but on the

whole Turner paints an Australia of not-quite-enough for everyone--except of course the upper class. Shortages and substitutes are the order of the day. Only the veneer of equality, of "we're all in this together" spirit keeps the lid on.

But in Australia the government has even more problems--or at least the prime minister does. Having illegally rejuvenated his father (in a world bursting at the seams, extending lifetimes is not considered a good idea), he then discovers that his daughter is illegally pregnant. (Everything, it seems, is controlled. But everything has to be to keep the world together.) Harry Ostrow, a policeman of the lower-middle class, finds himself called upon not only to protect these high-level politicians, but to extricate them--and perhaps the world-- from the mess they've gotten into.

The background of T_h_e_D_e_s_t_i_n_y_M_a_k_e_r_s is well thought-out and developed, but the story itself is somewhat weak, and the resolution for some of the plot threads contrived and rushed. The main idea of the end might have made a good novel in itself, but here it's wasted as almost a throwaway. It could be that Turner will take this idea and expand it in a future novel (as he expanded "In the Nursery" to B_r_a_i_n_C_h_i_l_d.) But as it is, I can recommend T_h_e_D_e_s_t_i_n_y_M_a_k_e_r_s only for its description of a seedy, run-down future facing the abyss.

(It is unlikely that a sequel will appear soon, since it is reported that George Turner has been hospitalized following a stroke.)

7. ORLANDO (a film review by Mark R. Leeper):

Capsule review: This is a critically acclaimed adaptation of the novel by Virginia Woolf, but while it is visually beautiful, the story is empty. This is a story about someone who has lived for ten times my age through fascinating periods of history--lived for some period as a man and some as a woman--yet

who seems to have learned nothing beyond the superficial and has none but the blandest insights to share. Rating: 0 (-4 to +4).

It has been said that youth is wasted on the wrong people. In O_r_l_a_n_d_o we see eternal youth wasted on absolutely the wrong person. We are led to believe that Orlando is immortal due to a promise he made to Queen Elizabeth that he would remain forever young, and his later conversion to a female is due to some unknown mystical process (perhaps similar to the process Gregor Samsa encountered). Actually, this film supports the interpretation that Orlando is so slightly invested in living at all that s/he never uses up the life he was born with. Orlando is barely alive at all, much less male or female, so shifting from one to the other seems hardly surprising. Tilda Swinton manages this feat of seeming barely alive with a face that is drained of color and nearly impassive. Her reactions are entirely performed by widening or narrowing her eyes while leaving the rest of her face deadpan--the same acting technique that Bud Cort used in much of H_a_r_o_l_d_a_n_d_M_a_u_d_e. In fact, it can be an effective technique that leaves the audience to read their own interpretation into the expression.

The story is, of course, that the handsome Orlando is a favorite of a near-death Elizabeth I. The aging queen is played by Quentin Crisp in what is apparently a casting pun. In short episodes Orlando has an ill-fated love affair with a visiting Russian noblewoman and an ambassadorship to someplace in Central Asia. He then falls into a coma and wakes up a woman. "Same person; no difference at all, just a different sex," she tells the audience after having almost no reaction to her gender flip-flop. It does, however, raise her consciousness on women's issues. I will not ruin the story and tell how it ends except to say it is not really a story, nor does it have an end. It does, however, take Orlando to a time in the 1990s--or certainly in the last quarter of this century--must require some license in adapting Virginia Woolf's 1928 novel.

O_r_l_a_n_d_o is a novel adaptation for the 1990s. The visual imagery far outstrips the plot. The film has superb camerawork and terrific costume designs. Tilda Swinton is often upstaged by her own clothing, which is as over-stated as her performance is under-

stated. The film is really not a lot more than a series of historical tableaux. It is like walking through a museum of British dress of the last four centuries.

This film has been very popular with critics, and perhaps I was looking for another film, but the absurdity of the story bothered me. Not the fantasy premise of the deathless person moving through the ages or even the changing of sex, but for the idea that Orlando could have lived so long and apparently remained so vapid and lacking in insight. This is apparently a person who takes a long, long, long time to learn anything. Twice she is in love relationships. They are very parallel relationships, or even the same relationship, that she goes through once as a man and once as a woman. Yet there is no sign that she recognizes the situation and she says nothing insightful about it at all.

O_r_l_a_n_d_o is a short ninety-three minutes. Some scenes seem to go on too long and when it is over one feels that not much has happened. When it was over I had the distinct feeling that neither I nor Orlando had learned much from the extraordinary experience. I rate this one a 0 on the -4 to +4 scale.

8. RISING SUN (a film review by Mark R. Leeper):

Capsule review: Culture clash and high-tech manipulation of reality are the themes that combine with a mediocre murder mystery in this adaptation of Michael Crichton's novel R_i_s_i_n_g_S_u_n. Much of the anti-Japanese and anti-Western-decline diatribe from the book are toned down for the film. Rating: high 0 (-4 to +4).

A party slogan from Orwell's 1_9_8_4 said "who controls the past controls the future and who controls the present controls the past." R_i_s_i_n_g_S_u_n is a high-gloss technological murder mystery that, as everybody already knows, is about xenophobia, xenophilia, and Japanese-American relations, but what is getting less attention is that it is also about how electronic and computing technology is changing what we think of as reality. As portrayed in the film, the Japanese are masters at the electronic manipulation of reality--an art that gives them an immoral advantage over their American counterparts. This, by the way, is an interesting reversal of the 17th Century Japanese policy to suppress the Western technological advance of the gun which gave its wielder what was considered by the Japanese an immoral advantage over a swordsman. Times have changed and tables have turned.

In Los Angeles Web Smith, a liaison officer with the police department (played by Wesley Snipes), is investigating a murder in

a Japanese corporation's skyscraper. Assisting him as a guide is John Connor (played by Sean Connery), a mysterious expert on Japanese culture. An American woman who was deeply into drugs and kinky sex is found dead, presumably murdered, on a conference room table. The police should have a big jump on solving the case with four observation cameras trained on the room, but that is electronic data in the hands of people who are masters of the manipulation of data. Also complicating the investigation is the amoral, financially-motivated, chauvinistic presence of the Japanese business executives. This aspect is toned down from the novel, but it is still very present in the film. But also toned down is the aspect of the novel being arguably as critical--or more so--of the cultural decline of the West as it is of the Japanese. Michael Crichton's book was intended as a wake-up call to the American people. Not surprisingly, that message has been completely obliterated in the transition to film, along with a large proportion of what was negative about the Japanese.

What we have left here is an okay murder mystery revolving in large part around technological elements. It is then given Hollywood gloss with high production values and a notable cast. Sean Connery is, of course, Sean Connery. His performance is exactly what you would expect it to be. In this film he also has the title "executive producer." Wesley Snipes is a good actor who balances the cast racially but unless I am mistaken, it is very unlikely that the LAPD would have a black in the diplomatic position of liaison officer to the Japanese, who have a very low regard for blacks. Also present is Harvey Keitel, certainly one of America's most highly regarded character actors. Japanese playboy Eddie Sakamura is played by Cary-Hiroyuki Tagawa, somewhat familiar for having played an alien lifeform in the crew of the short-lived television series S_p_a_c_e_R_a_n_g_e_r_s. But for all the gloss and high-tech hardware, the mystery just fails to be intriguing. This is not a puzzle mystery where the clues are all in front of the audience. It is more a "follow the police and all will be revealed" sort of mystery. I would have to give it a high 0 on the -4 to +4 scale.

Mark Leeper

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Patriotism is the virtue of the vicious.
-- Oscar Wilde