

Lincroft-Holmdel Science Fiction Club
Club Notice - 12/31/86 -- Vol. 5, No. 25

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

01/7/87 LZ: NEUROMANCER by William Gibson (Consciousness)

01/21 MT: Movie: (to be announced)

01/28 LZ: Book: (to be announced)

02/04 MT: CONTACT by Carl Sagan (First Contact)

HO Chair: John Jetzt HO 1E-525 834-1563
LZ Chair: Rob Mitchell LZ 1B-306 576-6106
MT Chair: Mark Leeper MT 3E-433 957-5619
HO Librarian: Tim Schroeder HO 3M-420 949-5866
LZ Librarian: Lance Larsen LZ 1C-117 576-2068
MT Librarian: Bruce Szablak MT 4C-418 957-5868
Jill-of-all-trades: Evelyn Leeper MT 1F-329 957-2070
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1. This is the age of the innocent bystander in foreign intrigue. Our newspapers are full of hundreds of people involved with selling arms to Iran being done by Israelis as fronts for Canadians to get Americans out of the clutches of Syria for the profit of Canadians which is being diverted to Nicaraguan contras. (They would never believe it if it happened in a film. Believe it? They would never even follow it!) And everyone involved is an innocent bystander. So at the January 8 film festival at the Leeper house we will show:

Innocent Bystanders
ADVENTURES OF CAPTAIN MARVEL ch. 2
THE 39 STEPS (1978) dir. by Don Sharp
NORTH BY NORTHWEST (1959) dir. by Alfred Hitchcock

In THE 39 STEPS, faithful to the John Buchan novel rather than the earlier Alfred Hitchcock and rarely seen, Robert Powell plays Richard Hanney who quite innocently gets embroiled in a dastardly plot by a foreign power. Believe it or not, I think this is better than Hitchcock's version. The plot is more complex and even a bit more fun.

What can I tell you about NORTH BY NORTHWEST? The late Cary Grant runs all over American landmarks trying to defend himself when foreign spies mistake him for an American agent. James Mason, Eva Marie Saint, and a weasel-faced Martin Landau star.

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2. It's worth noting that our first film festival of 1987 corresponds (sort of) to the first two films the Cinema Club is showing. They are showing NORTH BY NORTHWEST on January 16 and THE 39 STEPS on January 21. However, they are showing the Hitchcock version of THE 39 STEPS. (Further details on the Cinema Club's 1987 season will appear here as soon as they send it to me.)

3. The Holmdel branch of the Science Fiction Club library has moved. The new address is shown above.

4. If a certain Lincroft person sends me a blurb for NEUROMANCER in time, you won't see this. If you do see this, I think you should know that it isn't Rob who's late this time; it's (shhh!) <jo paltin>. In any case, since the book won the Hugo, the Nebula, and the Philip K. Dick Award in 1985, it comes highly recommended by *someone*. And since it has spawned an entire sub-genre known variously as "neuromantic," "cyber-punk," or "post-modern," it should be on your must-read list.

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

Diary of a Film Addict
by Mark R. Leeper

December 24, 1986 (12:37 PM): Well, this is it. Christmas vacation--well, sort of--is here. This is the longest contiguous slice of time we get off from work at a single shot. It's four and a half days. Not enough time to really go anyplace, particularly over a Christmas weekend when so many things are closed. So what I am going to do is set up for myself a film festival. I have no idea what all I will be seeing, but I will comment on each film after I see it. Not the most exciting weekend I can think of, but about the best I can do with what I have to work with. I have been saving classic films off of cable most of this month so that I can review them here. We also rented four films. Well, now it's 12:50 PM.

THE GUNS OF NAVARONE (1961)

Directed by J. Lee Thompson. I think most people would agree that

this is one of the great adventure films. This was, by about a decade, the first film based on the novels of Alistair MacLean; there were many imitators to follow. The pacing is just about right for an action film. It isn't a hyper-active R_a_i_d_e_r_s_o_f_t_h_e_L_o_s_t_A_r_k, but it is much more believable. And still you are never very far from an action scene. The casting is very good, the only really false note being James Darren, who is a little out of place as an island-born resistance fighter. There is one plot problem I can see. The army is not sending in six men to save 2000 men as we are supposed to believe. They are sending in six men to save having to find one kamikaze pilot. Where 2000 lives are at stake, it is hard to believe that they couldn't find someone who hated the Germans enough or who was idealistic enough. Still, once the film gets moving it is a fine piece of story-telling. One of the questions that gives this film unexpected relevance is the belief of one of the characters that "the only way to win a war is to be just as nasty as the enemy." I think the film concludes it is generally true, but you have to take advantage of every exception or you end up worse than the enemy. That's just a side note. Rate this film a +3. (All films will be rated on the -4 to +4 scale.)

WHITE NIGHTS (1985)

(7:00 PM) Directed by Taylor Hackford. Mikhail Baryshnikov plays a Russian and Gregory Hines plays an American but they have a lot in common. Each is a dancer. Each was unhappy with life in his native country so each defected to the other's country. And one more thing in common: due to an emergency landing of Baryshnikov's plane, both are in

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the Soviet Union--and both want to leave. This film took some knocks because it was one of a number of anti-Soviet films which came out about the same time. But in films like R_o_c_k_y_I_V Stallone is just fighting an identical enemy to ones he has fought in the past; they are just labeled "Russian." The Soviets in W_h_i_t_e_N_i_g_h_t_s, and particularly intelligence agent Jerzy Skolimowski, have a ring of truth about them. Not a bad film, I must say, and the opening dance sequence is most impressive (and I usually am not a fan of dance). The dance sequences are created by Twyla Tharp, one of the best-known names in American dance. One thing struck me as an error: Baryshnikov refers to where his plane is crashing

as "Russia." I believe his plane was flying from New York to Japan. This might take him near parts of the Soviet Union, but no place that a native Russian would call "Russia." Give this film a +1.

December 25, 1986 (5:28 AM): Well, I am afraid that Evelyn is already two films up on me. Yesterday after T_h_e_G_u_n_s_o_f_N_a_v_a_r_o_n_e I did some reading and some putting books away while she watched T_h_e_A_d_v_e_n_t_u_r_e_s_o_f_S_h_e_r_l_o_c_k_H_o_l_m_e_s (1939). She is a big Holmes fan and is in the process of collecting many of the films. This one is the second film in which Rathbone and Bruce played together, the last time they would do it for Twentieth Century Fox, and the last time they would do a story set in the Victorian age. Universal would bring the two together for many films, but would set them all in World War II. I had seen the film before and had liked it, I think, but wasn't really interested.

The other film was Godard's H_a_i_l_M_a_r_y. Unfortunately, it put me to sleep (not even it--there was a short before it called "The Book of Mary"). The film was slow, and subtitled, and I hadn't slept much the previous night so I muffed it. Evelyn called it a -2 so I don't have too much inducement to go back and see it. However, now I am picking up on a film that Evelyn was neutral on seeing.

COUNT YORGA, VAMPIRE (1961)

(6:11 AM) Directed by Bob Kelljan. This film came to bat with two strikes against it. It is a vampire film in a modern setting. That usually does not work. Without the proper setting, a vampire seems just like a ludicrous anachronism. F_r_i_g_h_t_N_i_g_h_t glosses over the problem by putting tongue in cheek; most other films don't even do that much. Further, the film was produced by American International, whose filmmaking standards were often less than the best.

In spite of that, this may well be the most effectively frightening vampire film I know of. Part of the reason is that, in most vampire films, the vampires are slow and hypnotic. That breed of vampire is in Yorga also, but there is a second breed, presumably newer vampires, who are fast and bestial and hunt silently in packs. As a victim you don't see or hear them and suddenly eight are on you, biting pieces out of you. Kelljan has a good feel for how to make things happen suddenly.

The translation to cassette, unfortunately, has its problems. In one scene much more effective on the screen we see a quick cut to a scene in which a newly-created vampire is eating something (I won't say what). On the wide screen you could see what she was eating; you can't tell on TV. You are told later what it was, but it is much less effective. C_o_u_n_t_Y_o_r_g_a,_V_a_m_p_i_r_e is a film with a lot of rough edges, but it is still a solid and effective horror film. It must have been one of the first films for a familiar actor, Michael Murphy. Give it a +2. Uh, I am not sure exactly what Bulgarians look like, but I suspect it is not much like Robert Quarry, who has the title role.

THE KENNEL MURDER CASE (1933)

(10:37 AM) Directed by Michael Curtiz. There are a whole series of films about Philo Vance produced by several different studios. This is considered the best and certainly the one with the most complex plot. It is the only Philo Vance film I can remember seeing so I don't know if he was always associated with a dog, but in this film Powell's relationship with his dog is very similar to the one he would have with Asta when he made *he Thin Man* the following year. This is secondarily a whodunit but the primary mystery is about what was done and how it was done. It is, among other things, a locked-room mystery. One complaint I might have with this film is that too many of the characters looked too much alike. Almost all of the men in the film have moustaches and the same general sort of look. It was a little tough to tell them apart. Still, a good mystery. Rate it a +1.

LADY JANE (1985)

(1:00 PM) Directed by Trevor Nunn. When filmmakers make historical films about their our country's past, there are certain periods of history they tend to zero in on. For American filmmakers it is, of course, the American West. In Japan the most romantic period seems to have been the fall of the Ashikaga shogunate and the subsequent rise of the Tokugawa shogunate. In England the period is from the reign of Henry VIII to the accession of Elizabeth I. Films like Y_o_u_n_g_B_e_s_s,_A_n_n_e_o_f_t_h_e_T_h_o_u_s_a_n_d_D_a_y_s,_A_M_a_n_f_o_r_A_l_l_S_e_a_s_o_n_s,_T_h_e_P_r_i_v_a_t_e_L_i_f_e_o_f_H_e_n_r_y_V_I_I, etc., all attempt with varying degrees of success to recreate this period. The latest to join the ranks is L_a_d_y_J_a_n_e, about Lady Jane Grey, who was used as a pawn and puppet. Against her will, she was forced at the age of fifteen first to marry a cousin she had never met, then to take the throne of England. As the film would have it, on the throne she rebelled against political expediency and ruled instead with naive idealism. Whether that was truly the cause of not, after a nine-day reign things were in such a mess that she was deposed.

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This is not candied MGM-style British history like Y_o_u_n_g_B_e_s_s. The film is an impressive and moving period piece, as was A_n_n_e_o_f_t_h_e_T_h_o_u_s_a_n_d_D_a_y_s. And like A_n_n_e_o_f_t_h_e_T_h_o_u_s_a_n_d_D_a_y_s it seems unfairly destined to be quickly forgotten. That's a pity. The film really should be seen and enjoyed. It is a good story and a quality production. I rate it a +2.

THE CAINE MUTINY (1954)

Directed by Edward Dmytryk. I've liked this film a lot when I've seen it in the past. But that was quite a while ago. In the interim I have heard a radio version of the stage play "The Caine Mutiny Court Martial." That turned out to be better than I expected. I didn't think that the whole story could be reduced to a play. There was just too much story there that required too much visual. That was before I heard the play. It tells you everything you need to know about what has gone on before and a good deal more. The defense attorney (the part played in the film by Jose Ferrer) is a much more interesting character in the play and his ambivalence toward defending the mutineers makes a lot more sense.

Watching the film now, my primary impression is one of frustration I keep wanting to tell the film to get on with it. The real story has nothing to do with night club singers and pretty scenes of Yosemite. It is my suspicion that the film inherits the weakness from the book (which I haven't read) of not wanting to be misinterpreted as being anti-military. In the days of black-listing and McCarthyism that may well have been a justifiable concern. So we have a gung-ho pro-Navy story tied to the story of the mutiny and the defense attorney's ambivalence. Then we have the real meat of the story toned down. This viewing is a real disappointment. Rate this one a +1. Still a good film but it could have been a lot better.

HOLIDAY (1938)

(4:32 PM) Directed by George Cukor. This is a film adaptation of a play by Philip Barry written, no doubt, before the Depression because it had already been adapted into a film in 1930. However, the play must have taken on new meaning for Depression audiences. Cary Grant is a happy-go-lucky slob who discovers that the fun girl he met on vacation is really the daughter of one of America's wealthiest families. He wants to enjoy life; his fiancée wants him to join the family business and make lots of money. Wouldn't you know it--his sister-to-law-to-be is something of a free spirit herself and believes in people's right to be poor and happy. She is played by Katherine Hepburn, who never embodied my impression of beauty, but in this film she was at least attractive. This sort of social comedy is not really my cup of tea and

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someone else would undoubtedly rate it higher, but I didn't enjoy it enough to rate it higher than a 0.

AMADEUS (1985)

Directed by Milos Forman. Generally I prefer seeing the film adaptation of a play to seeing the play itself. Well, that's not exactly true--it is more fun to go to a play--but I think a lot more can be done with a film. The film of F i d d l e r o n t h e R o o f really made the shtetl life come alive in a way the play never could. I guess in a way "The Caine Mutiny Court Martial" is an exception, although the film and the play were really just based on the same book. A real exception, however, is A m a d e u s. The effect of the play was powerful, to say the least.

(7:00 PM) The story was somehow diluted for the film by putting in more about Mozart and less about Salieri. Salieri's machinations are even a bit toned down for the film. However, we have been watching a series of Mozart operas on television so we are anxious to go back and re-watch the film. That will be in a few moments now.

December 26, 1986 (11:25 AM): Well, there is not much more to say about the film on re-seeing it. I think Tom Hulce overplays his part. F. Murray Abraham is, as always, a very charismatic actor.

THE BRIDGE ON THE RIVER KWAI (1957)

Directed by David Lean. Early in his career Lean made well-filmed but relatively low-budget productions. Late in his career he made only spectacular films like L_a_w_r_e_n_c_e_o_f_A_r_a_b_i_a,_D_r._Z_h_i_v_a_g_o, and A_P_a_s_s_a_g_e_t_o_I_n_d_i_a. This is really his bridge film (no pun intended). It has much of the war-film feel of British films in the 1940's, including Lean's own I_n_W_h_i_c_h_W_e_S_e_r_v_e. But this is, I think, his first color film. It certainly is more expansive and expensive than any film he had done to that date. Alec Guinness is, of course, the best thing about this film and (I suspect) is much of the reason that T_h_e_B_r_i_d_g_e_o_n_t_h_e_R_i_v_e_r_K_w_a_i is so well-remembered. The adventure of the film is just fine but the story is certainly one of Lean's least intellectually stimulating films. It is mostly just empty excitement and tribute to British courage. I like this film more than I respect it. Give it a +1.

THE FANTASY FILM WORLDS OF GEORGE PAL

Probably no single person has contributed as much to the science fiction film as did George Pal. In the late 1940's the world had seen

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the biggest war of all time end in an unexpected flash of science. People wanted to know what else science could do. The United States was ripe for a science fiction boom. The man who actually brought about that boom was Pal. Pal had laid the groundwork necessary for special effects with puppets. With the publicity given to the production of D_e_s_t_i_n_a_t_i_o_n_M_o_o_n, other filmmakers realized that the public wanted science fiction. As a personal note, the first film I ever remember seeing in a theater was W_a_r_o_f_t_h_e_W_o_r_l_d_s. I hated it. But then, I wasn't even three years old yet. By age six it headed my must-see list. I didn't see it again until I was 12, but it was worth the wait. At a time when there were few films to use as an inspiration and few special effects to borrow Pal made the most visually spectacular science fiction

films that were made.

Just for the film clips this documentary would be worth seeing.

The interviews make it doubly so. One curious thing is that the film leaves off Pal's films T_h_e_P_o_w_e_r_a_n_d_D_o_c_S_a_v_a_g_e but has clips of R_e_t_u_r_n_o_f_t_h_e_J_e_d_i and E.T. (though only at the very beginning). I conclude from this that the documentary was made between 1964 and 1968 and then was recently re-dressed to be re-broadcast.

SANTA CLAUS CONQUERS THE MARTIANS (1964)

Directed by Nicholas Webster. I had never seen it and thought it might be amusing. It's no C_r_e_e_p_i_n_g_T_e_r_r_o_r and G_l_e_n_o_r_G_l_e_n_d a. It does get a -4.

THE WAR GAME (1966)

December 27, 1986 (6:00 AM): Directed by Peter Watkins. In 1965 or so, the BBC gave Peter Watkins the assignment of doing a documentary on what would actually happen if a nuclear war came to Britain. Watkins did what he was told. When he screened the film for the BBC he was told there was no way that this film would be shown on the BBC. Instead it was released to theaters and won an Academy Award for Best Short Documentary. And well it should have. With facts twenty years out of date in a very fast-changing area, this remains the film that least soft-pedals the horrors of nuclear war. T_h_r_e_a_d_s came close but fell well short because in too much of T_h_r_e_a_d_s you are not sure what you are seeing. T_h_e_W_a_r_G_a_m_e has a dispassionate narrator always there to tell you that the firestorm you are seeing is happening over a two-square-mile area, or what the horrible physics of a firestorm is, or that rioting and breakdown in social order occurred at Dresden during World War II and would certainly occur in Britain.

With the exceptions of T_h_e_W_a_r_G_a_m_e and the less effective T_h_r_e_a_d_s, every other film about nuclear war shows you what is happening where the

action isn't and the vast majority of those are either wildly inaccurate or don't take all of the facts into account. T_e_s_t_a_m_e_n_t, for example, is a very moving film, but in order to be at all accurate the town would have to be very, very atypically protected from fallout (as maybe one or two places--all on the West Coast--would be). Even then the most serious social disorder is a boy stealing a bicycle. If this film is the basis of any of your opinions about nuclear war, forget it. See T_h_e_W_a_r_G_a_m_e, You cannot get a better education anywhere about what it is like to be in a nuclear war--even with facts twenty years out of date. Rate it a +4. (To judge what a +4 means, I can think of less than ten films that I currently give that rating to.)

The reason I watched T_h_e_W_a_r_G_a_m_e is that we had company. A film buff, one Richard Ekstedt, had never seen T_h_e_W_a_r_G_a_m_e. I don't have his exact quote but he liked it better than I did, believe it or not. As a film to see with it he brought O_n_e_N_i_g_h_t_S_t_a_n_d.

ONE NIGHT STAND (1984)

Directed by John Duigan. No offense intended to Mr. Ekstedt, but this is a peculiarly bad example of nuclear war film. It is New Year's Eve. A few hours ago the nuclear war started, but so far there have only been two or three strikes on Australia. Two attractive Australian girls get together with an AWOL United States sailor and a janitor in an auditorium and talk about their sex lives and play strip poker. Talk about films that show you where the action isn't. What the people in this film do is so agonizingly stupid that it is nearly impossible to work up any sort of sympathy for them. These people do nothing to try to be better prepared. They drink and check their horoscopes and flirt and reminisce and have sex. For people like this getting nuked might be a blessing. Rate this one a -2. An intelligent and moving film

compared to, say, S_a_n_t_a_C_l_a_u_s_C_o_n_q_u_e_r_s_t_h_e_M_a_r_t_i_a_n_s.

THE DAY THE UNIVERSE CHANGED: "Worlds without End"

This is the final episode of the TV series where James Burke ties together everything he was saying in this history of science. More than any other episode, on this one I would like to argue with him. My interpretation of his interpretation of what the series was about is that there are many world-views, each logically consistent and each really equally valid. When major discoveries came along, the universe really does change for those people who allow their world-views to change. Throughout the series he has shown scientific world-views in conflict with established world-views (established often by religious authorities). Even the scientific community has an entrenched world-view that it fights to defend from new ideas. He shows us an Eastern

religion which he claims has not changed the way it sees the world in

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2000 years.

Where I disagree is in his very democratic contention that all world-views are consistent and equally good. I would contend that some world-views are more useful than others. I would not have a lot of faith in any world-view that doesn't have two features: 1) extensibility to cover new phenomena and 2) retractability through falsification. In fact, these are the processes he has shown through the whole series. Far from having a universal change, world-views changed very little in each step he showed and each was an extension to fit new phenomena or a retraction. Actually there were also fundamental changes in world-view, but they tended to be less important than the extensions and retractions. I could be a solipsist: I could believe that the whole world around me is an illusion. This would be a fundamentally different world-view. I would still want a description of the illusions I can expect to have. In the end it doesn't matter if the phenomena are illusions.

The world-view I would really distrust is the one that has not changed in 2000 years. Either they got that one perfect 2000 years ago or there is something wrong with its extensibility and its ability to be falsified.

MODERN TIMES (1936)

(11:24 AM) Directed by Charles Chaplin. Buster Keaton comedies I find hilarious. Some Harold Lloyd is great. I roar at silent Laurel and Hardy's. Very little Chaplin ever really strikes me as being all that funny. As funny as I ever find him he is in certain scenes of M_o_d_e_r_n_T_i_m_e_s, partially because it is machinery humor of the same sort Keaton does so well. Chaplin himself seemed to be afraid of technology as evidenced by the fact that he was still doing an essentially silent film almost a decade years into the sound era. He probably had reason to fear since it is hard to imagine his "Little Tramp" talking. Of course, had I never seen a sound Laurel and Hardy I wouldn't know how well their comedy would make a transition to sound.

M_o_d_e_r_n_T_i_m_e_ s is a very simple straightforward sort of story--so much so that done today we would not think it was a very good idea. It is mostly a set of comic scenes tied together into a plot. Some of those comic scenes are very funny, as in the feeding machine sequence, but the story is not really good enough to hold the film together. I would give it a +2 because it was an early film, but a similar film coming out today would rate a flat zero.

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KING KONG LIVES (1986)

(6:00 PM) Directed by John Guillerman. As we left Di Laurentiis's Kong ten years ago, he had just fallen to his death from the World Trade Center. We actually heard his heart stop on the soundtrack. Well, surprise! He didn't die. For a decade his humungous, hirsute, comatose body has lain at the Atlanta Institute of Technology. Now with the implantation of a gigundo Jarvix Seven and a transfusion from another of his species (yup, in classic Toho tradition they found another one!), science is ready to bring him back to life join a female Kong and become the first giant monsters to ever threaten Georgia.

John Guillerman directs. He has directed films like W_a_s_M_o_n_t_y'_s
D_o_u_b_l_e,_T_h_e_D_a_y_T_h_e_y_R_o_b_b_e_d_t_h_e
B_a_n_k_o_f_E_n_g_l_a_n_d, some of the best
"Tarzan" films, T_h_e_T_o_w_e_r_i_n_g_I_n_f_e_r_n_o,
D_e_a_t_h_o_n_t_h_e_N_i_l_e, and the first
Di Laurentiis K_i_n_g_K_o_n_g. More recently he is doing fun films like
S_h_e_e_n_a (which would have made a decent Tarzan film with Jock Mahoney
instead of Tanya Roberts) and now K_i_n_g_K_o_n_g_L_i_v_e_s. Coming from
Toho,
this would have been a pretty good entry for young audiences, the kind I
enjoyed growing up. As a major film, however, it falls a good deal
short of what might be expected from a major film. Give it a -1.

WAR OF THE WORLDS (1953)

Directed by Byron Haskin. Well, not expecting to see this film this weekend I made some comments about it earlier. There is not much more to say but that this is one of the great xenophobic science fiction movies of all time. There aren't many films in which the aliens are so destructive and so implacable. Most people consider this film to be one of the great science fiction films. Rate it a +3.

COMEDY OF TERRORS (1963)

Directed by Jacques Tourneur. Superb cast of Vincent Price, Peter Lorre, Boris Karloff, and Basil Rathbone. Tourneur is a great director and there is a script by a great horror writer, Richard Matheson. Something surely went wrong someplace. There is not one chuckle in the whole comedy script. I like Matheson but I have to assign primary blame for this white elephant to him. It needed much better material. It evokes more pity for good actors than entertainment. Give it a -3.

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HORROR HOTEL (1960)

Directed by John Moxie. The title is totally misleading. This early film from Amicus of Britain involves a small village of satanists still under the spell of a witch who was burned at the stake three centuries before. The material is familiar but several of the scenes are quite effective. Someone discovered an atmospheric effect of having night scenes lit mostly by light reflected off of fog if outdoors or by flickering fires if indoors. This effect is over-used, unfortunately. This one gets a +1.

SPIES LIKE US (1985)

December 28, 1986 (7:30 AM): Directed by John Landis. This is inspired comedy! I think it was inspired by somebody wanting to have a comedy in the theaters for Christmas 1985. Throw in a couple of

_ S_ a_ t_ u_ r_ d_ a_ y_ N_ i_ g_ h_ t_ L_ i_ v_ e graduates so people know it is a funny comedy. Get

John Landis to direct. It's all decided but the minor details like what is the film going to be about. I won't rate this one because that would mean I'd have to go back and watch more than the first 40 minutes I have seen of incompetent, lumbering attempts at comedy, 80% of which have been done much better elsewhere.

The assumption of this film is that everybody is an idiot. In one sequence Ackroyd and Chase are taken by a group of doctors to be a pair of surgeons. The spies attempt to fake it through an appendectomy. They don't even know where to find an appendix and have to get clues from the watching doctors. The other doctors still never guess that these two are not great surgeons.

THE GENERAL (1926)

(7:30 PM) You don't have to be in engineering to enjoy Buster Keaton comedies, but it does help you to appreciate the humor. There never was a comedian who so effectively built his humor around machinery and the laws of physics.

_ T_ h_ e_ G_ e_ n_ e_ r_ a_ l is an action, an adventure and a comedy. Johnny Gray (Keaton) is a Southern train engineer during the Civil War. When Northern saboteurs come south to destroy the rails Gray sets off after them to stop their dastardly deeds. Keaton's train becomes a character all its own, playing jokes on Keaton and the audience. Keaton's deadpan

delivery is perfect and the gags are really funny and occasionally astonishing. Rating this a +3 is really redundant. It is an acknowledged classic.

IDOMENEO, KING OF CRETE

(8:42 PM) By Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. The Glyndebourne Festival's production ends the weekend with an opera based on Greek mythology. As those who saw _ A _ m _ a _ d _ e _ u _ s may remember, Mozart was not fond of classical themes and this early opera on a mythological theme is atypical of his later work. The music does not seem to have the same fullness that his later operas would have. Of course, Mozart was only 24 at the first performance in 1781. It is rarely done these days and is possibly one of Mozart's less interesting operas.

Well, that covers a broad spectrum of films for the weekend. They had a surprising spread on quality. I think I gave out every rating between -4 and +4. There were 20 films and two non-film items. That is as many as I would see at a major film festival, close to my limit on how many I could stand to see. Fifteen years ago to set up a festival like this would have been impossible. Now a lot of people seem to do it.

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