

Lincroft-Holmdel Science Fiction Club
Club Notice - 3/20/87 -- Vol. 5, No. 36

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

04/01 LZ: Book Swap

04/08 MT: Would Shakespeare think PORTNOY'S COMPLAINT was science fiction? or, contemporary fiction as historical SF

04/22 LZ: MURMURS OF EARTH by Carl Sagan SF-related Non-Fiction

05/06 MT: THE HANDMAID'S TALE by Margaret Atwood Mainstream SF

05/13 LZ: TO YOUR SCATTERED BODIES GO by Phillip Jose Farmer Reincarnation

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. I got into a discussion recently about death. Gee, I wonder if that is a bad sign. In any case, as some of the more morbid of you out there might know (also a few who saw ALL THAT JAZZ), there is a Professor Kubla-Ross out there somewhere who writes about the psychology of dying. She is, in fact, the world's greatest expert on the subject. That wasn't very hard. When she came to the field, what was known on the subject could have fit into a booklet the size of the one you get with a coffee maker. Somehow all the psychologists are out there studying sex. (Indiana U. has a whole library devoted to sex, I found out when I spent a summer there. Unfortunately it wasn't open to the public and all I ended up with was barbed wire wounds on my hands and tongue.) I guess it makes sense. Which would you rather study? Besides, you ask for subjects for a sex study you get volunteers lining up around the block (particularly at Indiana U.). How many people do you think like of for Kubla-Ross's studies? Also sex studies make after-the-fact interviewing a lot easier, or at any rate more productive.

So in any case, Kubla-Ross found a field that nobody had wanted to study, so she had an easy monopoly. In any case, she divides death into five stages: disbelief, anger, bargaining, panic, and acceptance. (Aren't you glad there was a happy ending?) It

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occurred to me to wonder if all deaths went through the same five stages. The archetypal death to compare all others against is falling off the Empire State Building. That one comes up a lot in morbid philosophical discussions (usually it comes up at about 1:53 in the morning). It occurred to me to wonder if someone falling off the Empire State Building goes through the same stages. You know:

Floors 105 to 85: Disbelief: "I knew that railing was loose, but heck, it can't have given way. I mean there are laws about dangerous railings."

Floors 84 to 64: Anger: "How could they be so stupid as to leave a dangerous railing like that? I am going to sue the... Oh, shoot."

Floors 63 to 43: Bargaining: "I am going to flap my arms and think about Church. How's that. You can do it, God, just one little miracle. Try. Just a little glide."

Floors 42 to 22: Panic: "I can see the cracks in the sidewalk. This is it. This is the Big One. Aaarrrrrgggghhhh!!!!"

Floors 21 to -1/2: Acceptance: "What a pretty view."

Mark Leeper
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...mtgzz!leeper

MAN FACING SOUTHEAST (HOMBRE MIRANDO AL SUDESTE)

A film review by Mark R. Leeper

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Capsule review: A serious science fiction film from Argentina has a psychiatrist faced with a Christ-like patient who claims to be an alien. This is a film with a lot to say about psychiatry, hunger, charity, and religion. With that much to say it is, perhaps, over-ambitious. It does not do everything right but what is right is worth seeing.

Argentina is not one of the countries one generally expects to be making science fiction films. It has had a film industry for quite a long time--as anyone who has heard E_v_i_t_a knows--but their films seem rarely seem to get international play and do not seem to have much fantasy, in any case. Yet Argentina has a heritage of literary fantasy led until his recent death by Jorge Luis Borges. Borges's influence can be felt in a new fantasy science fiction film from Argentina, M_a_n_F_a_c_i_n_g S_o_u_t_h_e_a_s_t. The film combines elements of T_h_e_M_a_n_W_h_o_F_e_l_l_t_o_E_a_r_t_h and

O_n_e_F_l_e_w_o_v_e_r_t_h_e_C_u_c_k_o_o's_N_e_s_t.

The main character of M_a_n_F_a_c_i_n_g_S_o_u_t_h_e_a_s_t is a psychiatrist in an insane asylum. Dr. Denis is disturbed by his inability to really help his patients and by the asylum's callous and factory-like treatment of patients. One patient's fantasy, incidentally, is an uncredited enactment of the painting "The Lovers" by Magritte. But a new patient appears at the asylum one day, committing himself. It is Rantes's apparent delusion that he is an extra-terrestrial sent to Earth on a mission. He commits himself voluntarily because he knows society would only commit him more forcibly if he did not.

Rantes sees the suffering and pain around him and the selfishness of the comfortable. In a number of scenes he turns the tables. But Dr. Denis is the real center of the story. Facing pressure to drug Rantes out of what may or may not be an illusion (actually the audience knows which but the doctor does not), Denis sees himself as Pontius Pilate, being forced to crucify another Jesus. As more patients at the asylum become disciples of Rantes, the pressures increase on the bewildered psychiatrist to fulfill his role as the later-day Pilate.

M_a_n_F_a_c_i_n_g_S_o_u_t_h_e_a_s_t is an intelligent science fiction film that needs no special effects. It is at once a cry of social despair, a philosophical essay, and a science fiction story. If anything it tries to be too much and spreads itself too thin; often it gives way to cliché. Yet in many ways it is comparable to T_h_e_M_a_n_i_n_t_h_e_W_h_i_t_e_S_u_i_t and if the Argentine industry follows the same path the British did, we can hope to see a lot more good films from it in the future. Rate M_a_n_F_a_c_i_n_g_S_o_u_t_h_e_a_s_t a +2 on the -4 to +4 scale.

ANGEL HEART

A film review by Mark R. Leeper

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Capsule review: A hard-boiled detective story and something more. This is a complex film that has some interesting things to say about the nature of religion. There is a lot more to this film than the hot topic of

the ten seconds cut from the sex scene.

Harry Angel (played by Mickey Rourke) is a hard-boiled private eye in the Philip Marlowe tradition. He is a little crude, a little rude, and occasionally a little bit dense. His client is Louis Cyphre (played by Robert DeNiro), a recluse with a silver cane, pointed fingernails, and, like a cipher, is something of a mystery to be solved. Cyphre hires Angel to track down Johnny Favorite, a singer who disappeared twelve years earlier in 1943. Angel follows a trail that has been cold for twelve years through Harlem, Poughkeepsie, Coney Island, and soon to New Orleans. The trail will lead from drug addicts to evangelists to voodoo worshippers. Harry will trigger a series of murders of friends of Favorite and will become the prime suspect in some of these murders before he discovers the secret of the disappearance of Favorite.

A_n_g_e_l_H_e_a_r_t is an interesting variation on the detective stories of the '40s. It is as moody as Raymond Chandler would have written, probably nearly as suspenseful, but it also is a comment on religion. We see gospel evangelists squeezing money from their believers, we see baptisms for a religion whose primary symbol is, as one character describes, a man to a wooden cross, and we see voodoo rituals with slaughtered chickens. Each somehow looks equally ridiculous. I doubt that Raymond Chandler would have ever thought to put comparative religion into one of his stories.

To be perfectly frank, my first reaction was to say that this was just a fair detective story and a little bit more and hence would have given the film a +1 on the -4 to +4 scale. However, thinking back, the full solution of the mystery makes a lot of the film, even some of its settings, seem a lot more interesting. The film has a complexity and makes statements not immediately apparent on first viewing. On consideration, the film does deserve a +2.

Oh, and as for the film having to have ten seconds of Mickey Rourke shaking his buttocks edited out in order to go from an X to an R rating--who cares? That ten seconds has become a major topic of interest about the film. It has little to do with the main thrust of the film. There might not have even been an explicit sex scene if the rating system had not been around. Arguing what an R-rated film should be and what can only be in a X-rated film is like arguing how many angels can dance on the head of a pin. And I guess that brings us back to Angels.

MAUS by Art Spiegelman
Pantheon, 1986, \$9.95.
A book review by Mark R. Leeper
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When I was growing up most comic books were about criminals being chased by super-heroes, talking ducks, or mice being chased by cats. Serious literature was when Superman defended a black kid being picked on by a gang of white kids. The comic medium has changed quite a bit since then. I had not realized how much it had changed until I read M_a_u_s. This compact gray book, assembled into six chapters from pieces that had appeared in the underground comic book R_a_w, tells the story of a survivor of the German Holocaust. The true story was told by Vladek Spiegelman to his son Art. Art then rendered the story into comic form and published the stories.

As an odd concession to the comic convention, Jews are drawn to have mouse heads, Nazis have cat heads, and almost everyone else has pig heads, with an occasional dog thrown in. A Jew traveling incognito is a mouse with a pig mask. Why Spiegelman chooses to use the animal heads on his characters is not entirely clear. Various critics have suggested that it turns the story into a giant metaphor. My suspicion is that they were just easier to draw than human heads and somehow make the story a little less imposing and formidable, though in no other regard does the author pull his punches. The text itself never mentions the characters as being anything but human. In fact, in one scene involving rats, Vladek tries to convince his wife that the tiny creatures she sees are mice rather than rats. It seems incongruous since Anja is at least drawn as a mouse herself.

The six chapters of M_a_u_s cover fourteen years, from Vladek's origins to his internment at Auschwitz. (A sequel is promised.) The story is covered in roughly the same detail that a film would tell the story. In the framing story around Vladek's history we see Art's relationship with the elderly Vladek and Art's stepmother Mala. It adds some depth and drama to the story as well as making a commentary on how the Holocaust has changed Vladek and what he is like as an old man.

In spite of the animal metaphors, M_a_u_s is an effective reminder of the terror of the German Holocaust. Nobody who has studied the period will be surprised at the extent of the terror and how bad things were during it, but M_a_u_s is as effective as a good film about the period--say, as effective as the TV adaptation of John Hersey's T_h_e_W_a_l_l. And that is a good deal stronger than any "Superman" comic I have ever seen. It ranks with "Barefoot Gen," an autobiographical Japanese Manga comic about a survivor of the Hiroshima bombing.

TIN MEN

A film review by Mark R. Leeper

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Capsule review: Chronicle of two aluminum-siding salesmen's personal and self-destructive feud is often very funny, sometimes serious, but always engrossing. This is a well-made comedy-drama by the director of D_i_n_e_r and T_h_e_N_a_t_u_r_a_l.

Barry Levinson is quite a good director with films to his name like C_a_t_h_o_l_i_c_s, A_n_d_J_u_s_t_i_c_e_f_o_r_A_l_l, D_i_n_e_r, and T_h_e_N_a_t_u_r_a_l. His latest film, which he wrote and directed, is T_i_n_M_e_n, a new comedy from Touchstone Films, who seem to be able to turn out a film really worth seeing every month or so. They still have O_u_t_r_a_g_e_o_u_s_F_o_r_t_u_n_e playing in theaters, and they have followed it up with T_i_n_M_e_n, a much more serious comedy, perhaps even a comedy-drama. The film stars two members of the Touchstone repertory company, Richard Dreyfus and Danny DeVito.

T_i_n_M_e_n is a study in childishness, selfishness, and mania. BB (Dreyfus) and Tilley (DeVito) are both tin men. "Tin men" is slang for aluminum-siding salesman, and like the origin of the name "tin men," these men really have no heart. As director Levinson shows the business (and he should know--his father was a tin man) selling aluminum siding is sleazy enough to make professional wrestling seem honest and forthright by comparison. BB and Tilley have a car accident, damaging each of their Cadillacs, and before long they are totally consumed with the lust for revenge. At first the war is funny, sometimes very much so. But soon it is clear that neither man cares about who is hurt along the way any more than either man cares who is hurt by their business ethics. The government is investigating and closing down salesmen with disreputable business practices and the days of BB's and Tilley's flim-flamming customers are soon to come to an end. But their hatred of each other, because they are so similar, seems to be the only thing on each tin man's mind.

Levinson's ear for dialogue is superb. Conversations he throws in are often more interesting than the plot. He has carefully re-created

the Baltimore of 1962, just as he did for _ D_ i_ n_ e_ r_. With _ T_ i_ n_ M_ e_ n he has created two memorable if not likable characters and an entire world to put them in. Rate this a +2 on the -4 to +4 scale. Not up to _ D_ i_ n_ e_ r_ or _ T_ h_ e_ N_ a_ t_ u_ r_ a_ l_, but a quality film nonetheless.

EVIL DEAD II

A film review by Mark R. Leeper

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Capsule review: There's more budget than logic to this stringing together of off-beat and semi-humorous horror scenes. Creative visual concepts abound and the pace is frenetic and that makes up for a multitude of sins.

I guess in some sense _ T_ h_ e_ E_ v_ i_ l_ D_ e_ a_ d_ I_ I is the ultimate horror film...sort of...I guess. Well, what can I say? It does not have much of a plot. It has very little acting, no stars, little continuity, and no logic. But it has action, horror, and black humor in massive doses. Now, _ T_ h_ e_ E_ v_ i_ l_ D_ e_ a_ d_ I_ I did have some plot. It was not it's strong suit but it was there. What _ T_ h_ e_ E_ v_ i_ l_ D_ e_ a_ d boasted most was wit. An attacking corpse would be thrown into the fire. Then some living person would have a bout of remorse and pull it out of the fire. The corpse would look up and politely thank its benefactor for pulling it out of the fire, then continues to try and kill the living. I guess there is some wit in a scene like that and some willingness to experiment with the horror medium. The sequel is one strange semi-horror scene after another.

The plot is that some professor of some sort has translated the Necronomicon (of H. P. Lovecraft fame). He recorded an incantation on

tape and now whenever anyone plays the tape it's Anything-Can-Happen-Day. A young couple find the cabin and think it might be an ideal trysting place. Most of one of them is left the next night when the professor's daughter shows up with a friend and two rather strange locals. By that point we have already seen a beheaded corpse climb out of the ground and do a charming dance with its head. We've seen a lot more than that, but that would be telling. And we will see a whole lot more, but that, too, would be telling.

The actors of this piece were, I think, chosen for the terrorized looks they could get on their faces and for how ghoulish they could make themselves look. The script is incredibly contrived, including such touches as having a bridge that would have cost in the millions that leads to nowhere but a shack in the woods. I didn't think boondoggles got that big. For those who like gore and creative off-beat horror, this one's for you. As a fan of the latter, though not of the former particularly, I will give this a +1 on the -4 to +4 scale. If you like the bizarre, give it a try.

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