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Mt. Holz Science Fiction Society  
Club Notice - 8/24/90 -- Vol. 9, No. 8

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

- 09/12 LZ: STAR MAKER by Olaf Stapledon (Formative Influences)
- 10/03 LZ: MICROMEGAS by Voltaire (Philosophy)
- 10/24 LZ: THE WORM OUROBOROS by E. R. Eddison (Classic Horror)
- 11/07 MT: WANDERING STARS ed. by Jack Dann (Jewish Science Fiction)
- 11/14 LZ: WAR WITH THE NEWTS by Karel Capek (Foreign SF)

\_ M \_ E \_ E \_ T \_ I \_ N \_ G   \_ S / \_ C \_ O \_ N \_ V \_ E \_ N \_ T \_ I \_ O \_ N \_ S / \_ E \_ T \_ C .

- 09/08 NJSFS: New Jersey Science Fiction Society: TBA  
(phone 201-432-5965 for details) (Saturday)
- 09/15 SFABC: Science Fiction Association of Bergen County: TBA  
(phone 201-933-2724 for details) (Saturday)

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 3E-301 949-4488 hotld!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. Yes, friends, I want to talk to you today about what we have here in America that no other country can boast of--or would want to. I'm talking about American culture. American culture is like some strange fungus you find in the backyard that does not just grow and thrive, it keeps changing its form, growing weird nodules like nothing you have seen before. Well, those nodules are coming

faster and faster these days. We are living in what I call the Weirding of America. The faster things change, the more you are going to find people getting nostalgic for the quieter, simpler, more understandable times of the previous month.

THE MT VOID

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Well, let me tell you about the latest weirdness nodule. In times long gone by--like 1989--if you were caught with your paw in the till, you could not make money that way any more, so you told your story to a ghost writer, he beefed it up with sex and turned it into a book that would be bought by aspiring thieves who want to know step-by-step 1) how to find their paws, 2) how to find the till, 3) how to stick their paw into the till, and 4) how humans reproduce.

But that was back in good old 1989. Back then, a lot more people were willing to read and knew how. Because of the ever-increasing market of cretins from the planet Mars, you no longer need to know how to read in order to get sexy expose's. Yes, now Jessica Hahn

in her own words w\_r\_i\_t\_t\_e\_n\_e\_s\_p\_e\_c\_i\_a\_l\_l\_y\_f\_o\_r\_h\_e\_r tells of her affair

with the Wrong Reverend Jim Bakker. And you don't even have to read them! You can call Jessica Hahn's own 900 phone number. Just pay \$2 for the first minute and 50 cents for each additional minute. The first minute is only vaguely tawdry; the second minute is when it first starts being titillating. It doesn't really become salacious until the seventh minute and you have to hold on a full 15 minutes for it to become out-and-out slimey. But by then you've spent something like \$9. You could have bought two months'

of P\_e\_n\_t\_h\_o\_u\_s\_e for that. But then I guess P\_e\_n\_t\_h\_o\_u\_s\_e is aimed more at

the l\_i\_t\_e\_r\_a\_t\_i among us.

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

Without free speech no search for truth is possible ...  
no discovery of truth is useful .... Better a  
thousandfold abuse of free speech than denial of free  
speech. The abuse dies in a day, but the denial slays  
the life of the people, and entombs the hope of the  
race.

-- Charles Bradlaugh

"Nuke Em Till They Glow"  
Reviewed by Dale L. Skran Jr.  
Copyright 1990 Dale L. Skran Jr.

I seem unable to escape the pull of reviewing nuclear war films,  
even as they appear to be growing less and less relevant to reality with  
the coming of Glasnost. Hence, I return, once again, with a review of  
several films of nuclear disaster I have seen recently, including one  
\*classic,\* \_ F \_ i \_ v \_ e .

\_ S \_ u \_ r \_ v \_ i \_ v \_ o \_ r

I mention this simply for completeness. Imagine the most  
pretentious art film you've ever seen. Now imagine that its director  
has decided to make a film with a post-nuclear setting. The result is  
\_ S \_ u \_ r \_ v \_ i \_ v \_ o \_ r . I've never seen this film except in the TV cutting, so there  
may exist versions where it all makes more sense, but I doubt it. Many  
scenes are filmed in slow motion with the wind blowing, and an  
occasional mutter of portentous dialog like "We blew it all up."

\_ S\_ u\_ r\_ v\_ i\_ v\_ o\_ r appears to concern an astronaut who is launched as part of a SDI test, and returns to find the world turned into a desert, with ships becalmed in the sand, and people living underground fighting over water and other spoils. There are long, dull scenes of water dripping, the wind blowing, and his hand built wind-sailing rail-road car whizzing along. Nuff said. Leeper scale rating of (-2).

### \_ F\_ i\_ v\_ e

This film is apparently one of the earliest nuclear war films ever made, dating from 1951. It concerns a very small number (5, oddly enough) of people who have, by some miracle, survived a nuclear war. \_ F\_ i\_ v\_ e suffers from a confused and inaccurate understanding of how radiation kills. Two men survive by being locked in a bank vault. Another is at the top of a mountain. A woman survives in a photographic vault. The fifth finds refuge \*at the top\* of the Empire State building!

One of the survivors is unable to deal with the post-war reality, and dies peacefully on the beach, never having come to grips with the new situation. However, the remaining three men fall to fighting over survival tactics and the woman. The mountain climber wishes to live a life of ease off the mountains of stored food in the cities, while the others propose to eke out a living farming and hunting in the countryside. The mountain climber kills one of the men, and tricks the woman into coming into the city with him to look for her lost husband. She brings along her new-born child by the missing husband. In the city, they find the husband (dead), and the mountain climber (who previously had entertained the bizarre theory that they were immune to radiation) realizes he has radiation sickness and runs off. The woman leaves the city and is re-united with the single remaining man. They bury the child, who apparently has died of radiation sickness, but this

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is never very clear. The music swells and Biblical verses fill the screen. All is well.

Much of the early film is taken up with the woman wandering from empty building to empty building while portentous music plays. One of my major impressions of the film was a sense of nostalgia for the melodramatic music of '50s horror films.

It is hard to evaluate Five. Surely a historical curiosity, it is fairly dull, and not especially illuminating. The only interesting part is the conflict over the "life of ease" versus the "let's learn to farm" approach, which would surely be a real issue if the number of survivors were extremely small. Rating is (0) on the Leeper-scale.

### WhentheWindsBlow

This one torqued me off a fair amount. It is a professionally made, animated, British anti-weapons propaganda film. To soften the pill, it presents an extraordinarily dim-witted and loyal retired British couple who live in the English countryside. The woman's cow-like inability to comprehend even the simplest realities of modern life and nuclear war is at once pitiful and manipulative. The man's constant walk through memory lane back to World War II and the "good ol' days" brings home the point the World War III will be different with all the subtlety of a sledgehammer.

Having set this stage, the film presents the old couple trying to understand "Protect and Survive," a British government handbook that purports to explain nuclear war survival. The old couple do their best to follow its guidelines, but their efforts are so dim-witted as to be pointless. At times they almost make sense, and at others it appears that they have not the slightest understanding of radiation or nuclear war. The only sensible explanation I would even put on the film is that the man knows better, and realizes they are doomed, but plays out a charade to dupe his wife into believing all is well. She, in turn, plays along with his awesome naivete since she, as well, prefers the fantasy that all is well to the reality that they are doomed.

WhenWindsBlow reminded me of Testament in that it presents a lot of people who just stand around and die, and then says this is the horror of nuclear war. Nuclear war is plenty horrible enough without this kind of absurd exaggeration. It has all the interest of placing a blindfolded cow on railroad tracks and making a film of a train striking it in slow motion.

Leeper-scale rating (+1), but NOT recommended.

### ThisisNotaTest

In spite of bad acting and poor production values, this 1962 film is actually fairly interesting. An extremely low budget produces a

play-like atmosphere, with most of the action taking place near a road-block in the desert. A policeman stops a group of typical citizens, and eventually commands them to take shelter in a truck. The diverse set of characters allows for the usual range of response to nuclear war, from a sudden embrace of hedonism to despair to a determination to survive at any cost.

Many of the actors are quite poor, but in an odd way, this only makes them seem more genuine. Another plus for this film is the absence of the radiation-induced mutants that became so popular in the late '50s. Although we see the stupidity of taking shelter in what is obviously a flimsy truck (the truck and most of the characters get evaporated in the final scene), some people survive by striking off on their own and hiding a deep mine. This avoids the "survival is impossible and silly" theme some later films take.

Leeper-scale rating (-1), but interesting to nuke-war fans.

\_ B \_ y \_ D \_ a \_ w \_ n ' \_ s \_ E \_ a \_ r \_ l \_ y \_ L \_ i \_ g \_ h \_ t

This made-for-HBO film is the only post-Glasnost nuclear war film I've ever seen, and one of the better nuclear war films. Unlike T\_h\_e\_D\_a\_y\_A\_f\_t\_e\_r, it focuses on the relatively small dimensions of various command bunkers and airplanes, following the American President and a bomber crew as they struggle to either avert or fight Armageddon.

It all begins with Turkey launching a missile at the USSR, and the USSR responding with a limited counterforce strike against the US, that will only kill "a few millions." The Soviet Premier then asserts that dissident elements in his own forces have contrived to have the missile launched by terrorists in Turkey to bring about a full-scale nuclear war, and begs the American President not to escalate. The President has at most a few minutes to decide. One of the missiles is heading for Washington, D.C.

This is just the beginning, and the story spirals outward as the two war machines move closer and closer to unrestrained conflict. It ends with a dramatic do-or-die struggle between the American President and elements of the American armed forces that want to allow the US submarines to launch their pre-programmed total response to Soviet aggression. The film shows the sheer desperation of ultimate stakes poker, a game where a few million lives can get snuffed at the flick of a switch, a game where your own side may be working against you.

There is also some interesting air combat between a B-52 and some MIG-29s (clever idea, using an A-Bomb that way!). One thing that bothered me about the script was the use of the female B-52 co-pilot as an advocate of not following the orders to bomb the Soviet Union. This

merely perpetuates the stereotype of women as being unable to follow difficult orders. The audience knows the orders are coming from a deranged American General and a far-right Secretary of Interior, but the

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bomber crew doesn't. Another possible problem is the idea of an "automatic total response" by the U.S. submarine fleet. I have discussed this with someone who was a missile fire control officer on a "boomer," and although he would not describe their actual orders, he assured me that the orders and procedures used in the film \*DO NOT\* correspond to those actually used.

Overall, however, B\_y\_t\_h\_e\_D\_a\_w\_n'\_s\_E\_a\_r\_l\_y\_L\_i\_g\_h\_t is a technically accurate and well-made tale of a possible nuclear war that may yet lie in our future. Recommended to all those who think the threat of nuclear war has ended.

Leeper-sale rating (low +2) -- recommended.

