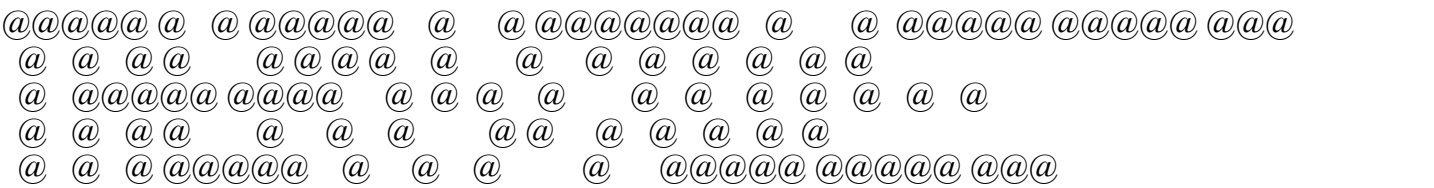

Mt. Holz Science Fiction Society
Club Notice - 11/22/91 -- Vol. 10, No. 21

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
12/11/91	LZ: MIRKHEIM by Poul Anderson (Novels with Names of Scandinavian Mythological Places in Them)
01/08/92	LZ: EXPECTING SOMEONE TALLER by Tom Holt (Operatic SF)
01/29/92	LZ: A CLOCKWORK ORANGE by Anthony Burgess (Dystopias)

_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.
12/14/91	SFABC: Science Fiction Association of Bergen County: Denise Little of Barnes & Noble and B. Dalton (phone 201-933-2724 for details) (Saturday)
12/21/91	NJSFS: New Jersey Science Fiction Society: TBA (phone 201-432-5965 for details) (Saturday)

HO Chair: John Jetzt HO 1E-525 908-834-1563 hocpb!jetzt
LZ Chair: Rob Mitchell LZ 1B-306 908-576-6106 mtuxo!jrrt
MT Chair: Mark Leeper MT 3D-441 908-957-5619 mtgzy!leeper
HO Librarian: Rebecca Schoenfeld HO 2K-430 908-949-6122 homxb!btfsd
LZ Librarian: Lance Larsen LZ 3L-312 908-576-3346 mtfme!lfl
MT Librarian: Mark Leeper MT 3D-441 908-957-5619 mtgzy!leeper
Factotum: Evelyn Leeper MT 1F-329 908-957-2070 mtgzy!ecl

1. Like most red-blooded Americans I don't watch real television any more. Some of you may remember real television. You would watch a show like _T_h_e _D_e_f_e_n_d_e_r_s where E. G. Marshall would defend some poor jerk against the cruel and heartless system. Sometime E. G. would win; sometimes the system would. And then the ads would be like Alka-Seltzer's classic "No Matter What Shape Your Stomach Is In."

These days that sort of television is mostly gone. The networks show mostly situation comedies of people screaming at each other or teenagers trying to mate with each other. Then there are the ads. There is one where the woman comes on and says in great mock reluctance that unfortunately today everybody needs a can of Mace

(tm). And there are other ads. There are ads for things that I never knew existed when I was growing up. I only heard about them when I heard guys joking about them in my high school men's room. Now those same things have big Technicolor ads on prime time television Jeez!

And those are the daytime ads. At night all the ads go something like this: There is an attractive woman who cannot read her lines standing there saying, "I know how it is. Sometimes you just have to discuss those intimate private details of your life with a tall blonde who has big breasts. You can call me twenty-four hours a day. I am always on the phone. My number is 1-900-AIR-HEAD." Then a little voice says eight dollars for each minute. I was trying to watch a movie on the local ABC affiliate and they would have a five-minute commercial break and four minutes were taken up with eight ads all pretty much like this one.

So I don't watch the real stuff any more. Not fresh, anyway. I watch canned television. I catch it fresh, but then I store it on the shelf until I want to watch it. Why am I telling you this? Well, yes, there is a point but you have to tune in to my next piece to get it.

2. People have requested summaries of the discussions. Well, the following is not so much a summary as comments from Charlie Harris as a "virtual attendee" (rather than a physical attendee), but you may find it interesting anyway. (For those who don't attend, I should explain the "thumb vote": we initially gave books thumbs-up or thumbs down, but this gradually evolved into a full range from 12:00 to 6:00.) And now, here's Charlie:

Wouldn't you know it: The first time (as far as I recall) that I've ever finished reading a Club selection a week early, and now I won't even be able to attend the Club meeting.

So here's my thumb vote: 1:00.

I am surprised and puzzled by my vote. I had read _T_h_e _P_u_p_p_e_t _M_a_s_t_e_r_s long ago, during the Golden Age of SF, and it was for a few years my favorite sf book--one of the very few books I ever finished in a single day. Typically, my Golden Age favorites turn out to be disappointing when I reread them.

_T_h_e _P_u_p_p_e_t _M_a_s_t_e_r_s wasn't. I thoroughly enjoyed rereading it.

But I'm at a loss to say why. It seems to violate most of my criteria for good sf: It has no novel ideas or insights. It doesn't transport me to some bizarre but believable world, time, or mind. It isn't humorous or (most of the time) suspenseful. It presents no puzzle or mental challenge, no unforeseen or delightful denouement. The writing isn't good--in fact, the tough-guy/gal

wisecracks were annoying, the reiterations of how inexpressibly revolting the aliens' appearance is was annoying, and the repeated misuse of "hagridden" was _v_e_r_y annoying. The characters weren't especially interesting, and the basic plot is standard.

That sounds like I'm panning the book, right? But I really _d_i_d enjoy it enough to rate it real high. I can point to only a few things that the book had going for it:

1. To me, it was almost completely believable. I believed that the alien invasion might happen that way, and I believed that people might react that way.
2. There was only one sf element--the aliens--or maybe two: the physical aspects of how they possessed their human hosts, and the mental. No additional inventions or elaborate future-world detailing to show off how clever the author is. (Well, maybe just a few, such as the flying craft and the colony on Venus, but nothing much was made of them.)
   --SPOILER WARNING!! Quit now if you haven't read the book!--
3. I was taken by surprise by how _e_a_r_l_y in the book the protagonist got captured. And then I was taken by surprise again later. Sure, that's one standard plot variant, but it

was effective here.

4. The portrayal of the mental processes of a captured human was so unexpectedly low key. I found that particularly impressive amidst all the surrounding hyperbole.
5. I was none too sure who would win out in the end (even having read the book before). That's no big trick for an author to pull off, but this time it did keep me involved.

Okay, that's all I can think of to say. Wish I could be there to hear whatever everyone else thinks.

3. Due to the poor turnout at the November Middletown meeting, and due to a new scheduling conflict, the December meeting scheduled for Middletown has been canceled. If anyone in Middletown is interested in having discussions, please suggest a topic (and offer to lead it!). [-ecl]

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

... that knowledge may not be as a courtesan, for pleasure and vanity only, or as a bondswoman, to acquire and gain to her master's use, but as a spouse, for generation, fruit, and comfort.
-- Francis Bacon

THE TRINITY PARADOX by Kevin J. Anderson and Doug Beason
Bantam Spectra, 1991, ISBN 0-553-29246-3, $4.99.
A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper

Elizabeth Devane is an anti-war, anti-nuke activist who sneaks into Los Alamos one night to destroy the government's latest project. (Anderson and Beason seem to think breaking into a secure

government installation is easy.) But whatever the device is--we never really find out--breaking it up sends her back to 1942. Stuck there, she passes herself off as a mathematician sent to work at Los Alamos. (A facility that screens all out-going mail would take someone with no identification and no paperwork to work on such a sensitive project?) She finds herself caught up in the project and her small attempts at intentional sabotage do less than her carelessness (through an extremely unlikely plot device).

The problem is, I think, that no one behaves realistically. Devane wouldn't be allowed in to do classified work. And I think she would also be more knowledgeable about the history of nuclear warfare--an anti-nuke activist who doesn't even know what dates the bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki wouldn't be high enough in the organization to be assigned to break into a facility like Los Alamos. Scientists wouldn't be smuggling letters to the enemy, even out of such noble motives as sharing knowledge. Americans wouldn't have reacted to events as Anderson and Beason show them. Germans wouldn't be as careless as they are portrayed. In general, everyone seems to act as the plot requires, rather than as human nature and history indicate they would. While reading a time travel/alternate history set at Los Alamos has its enjoyable moments, _T_h_e _T_r_i_n_i_t_y _P_a_r_a_d_o_x does not bear close scrutiny.

WHAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN, VOLUME 2: ALTERNATE WARS
edited by Gregory Benford & Martin H. Greenberg
Bantam Spectra, 1991, ISBN 0-553-29008, $4.99.
A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper

Well, after a long wait--over a year since Volumes 1 and 2 came out within a few months of each other--Volume 3 of Benford and Greenberg's series of alternate history anthologies is finally out. Whether this series is the cause or the effect is not known (at least not to me, though see my comments below), but we seem to be living in the Golden Age of Alternate Histories, with at least a dozen appearing in major magazines and who knows how many elsewhere just this year. Heck, even _S_p_o_r_t_s _I_l_l_u_s_t_r_a_t_e_d carried one ("Bubbles and the Babe," Fall 1991 special issue): not a very good one, true, but an alternate history nonetheless.

I say I don't know whether this series is the cause or the effect, but I suspect it is at least partly the cause. Why? Well, while it's possible that eleven authors independently decided to write alternate histories this year--and that they all got published and then collected by Benford and Greenberg--it is less likely that they would all fit in the category of "alternate wars." So I would assume that these were commissioned for the anthology but, finances being what they are, arrangements were made to allow them to be published first in the magazines.

I say "eleven authors," and the cover says, "Tales of Alternate History by Eleven Premier Voices in Science Fiction," but there are actually twelve stories and authors. While there is some evidence that the Resnick story may have been a last-minute addition, I think it more likely that one they considered the twelfth author is the one not usually considered a "premier voice in science fiction," though he did win a Nobel Prize for Literature. In 1930, when his career in politics appeared finished, the Right Honourable Winston S. Churchill, M. P., was commissioned by J. C. Squire to write a piece for _I_f _I_t _H_a_d _H_a_p_p_e_n_e_d _O_t_h_e_r_w_i_s_e: _L_a_p_s_e_s _i_n_t_o _I_m_a_g_i_n_a_r_y _H_i_s_t_o_r_y. That anthology is now almost unobtainable, but Churchill's piece, "If Lee Had Not Won the Battle of Gettysburg," is at last reprinted here. The title is not a typo; Churchill writes as though in a world in which Lee won, and his descriptions of what would have happened had Lee lost are mostly of the sort "We wouldn't have X" and "Y never would have happened," though he also "predicts" carpetbaggers et al. But clearly the alternate history aspect is in his descriptions of the world in which Lee won. (One might ask why someone who could predict all sorts of alternate events arising from Lee's victory could fail to see even two year's into his own world's future, but just as hindsight is easier than foresight, so is sidesight.)

The remaining stories are all from sixty years later (1991) so I will treat them chronologically by internal date. James Morrow's "Arms and the Woman" (_A_m_a_z_i_n_g, July 1991), set during the Trojan War, takes a look at what might have happened if Helen had taken a somewhat more active role. Done in Morrow's typically irreverent style, it's not completely credible as a piece of realism, but as part of a mythos it does work, and works well.

"The Number of the Sand" by George Zebrowski looks at the infinite possible branchings of history, in this case those centering around Hannibal. Unfortunately, Zebrowski can do little but catalog the various variations--there is no time to develop any of them to a reasonable extent.

The time setting is initially vague for "The Tomb" by Jack McDevitt, so I will place it here. (Yes, you eventually find out when it takes place, but that would be telling.) It's a powerful story, marred only afterward by nagging doubts that the change would have caused such a drastic result. (In stories in which the change point is not given early on, I will try to speak in generalities to avoid spoiling the surprise.) Even with these doubts, though, I still find "The Tomb" a haunting story that I'm sure I'll remember for a long time.

"And Wild for To Hold" by Nancy Kress (_ I_ s_ a_ a_ c _ A_ s_ i_ m_ o_ v'_ s _ S_ c_ i_ e_ n_ c_ e _ F_ i_ c_ t_ i_ o_ n _ M_ a_ g_ a_ z_ i_ n_ e, July 1991) postulates an institute that pulls critical people out of the past in order to tailor history. The story centers on Anne Boleyn, though other historical personages figure as well. My objections to this story are two-fold. First, the "alternate war" element is minimal and the story seems out of place in this anthology. Second, and more seriously, the extraction of some of the characters from history would seem to preclude the existence of others who appear.

Contrary to the blurb in _ I_ s_ a_ a_ c _ A_ s_ i_ m_ o_ v'_ s _ S_ c_ i_ e_ n_ c_ e _ F_ i_ c_ t_ i_ o_ n _ M_ a_ g_ a_ z_ i_ n_ e (where it first appeared in October 1991), Gregory Benford's "Manassas, Again" is _ n_ o_ t set in the future. It's an

alternate Civil War--a very alternate Civil War, and certainly one of the more original of that sub-genre. Interestingly enough, though, the same key incident was recently used independently by another author to go off in another direction entirely. Benford's story is the more concise (the other was a novel) and explores the idea with a thrifty compactness.

Poul Anderson has the Americans fighting the French empire in "When Free Men Shall Stand." It appears superficially that the change point was the Battle of Trafalgar, but that was in 1805 and the change obviously occurred before the Louisiana Purchase in 1803. No, it was the decision by Napoleon not to invade Egypt but to consolidate his-European holdings that led to this face-off of the United States and a still French Louisiana Territory. (I mention

this only because the reviewer in _ L_ o_ c_ u_ s seems to tag Trafalgar as the cause.) Anderson has done his homework, though I still think "In the House of Sorrows" is his best alternate history. (It appeared in _ W_ h_ a_ t _ M_ i_ g_ h_ t _ H_ a_ v_ e _ B_ e_ e_ n _ 1: _ A_ l_ t_ e_ r_ n_ a_ t_ e _ E_ m_ p_ i_ r_ e_ s.) But the self-contained nature of "When Free Men Shall Stand" makes it more satisfying than any of his long series of Time Patrol stories, showing an originality and freshness and "edge" that they are missing. (Readers may want to compare this to T. R. Fehrenbach's "Remember the Alamo,"recently reprinted in Isaac Asimov and Martin Greenberg's _ G_ r_ e_ a_ t _ S_ c_ i_ e_ n_ c_ e _ F_ i_ c_ t_ i_ o_ n _ S_ t_ o_ r_ i_ e_ s: _ 2_ 3 (_ 1_ 9_ 6_ 1). Anderson's is better, and more believable.)

"Over There" is one of Mike Resnick's "Alternate Teddy" stories (Roosevelt, that is). It first appeared in _ I_ s_ a_ a_ c _ A_ s_ i_ m_ o_ v'_ s _ S_ c_ i_ e_ n_ c_ e _ F_ i_ c_ t_ i_ o_ n _ M_ a_ g_ a_ z_ i_ n_ e in April 1991 and assumes that Theodore Roosevelt decided to take his Rough Riders to Europe to fight in World War I. More a character study of Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson than an "alternate war" story in spite of its whole raison d'etre being to comment on the changing face of war, this tale draws on Resnick's African knowledge as well.

Alternate World War IIs are always popular (they and alternate Civil Wars are neck-in-neck for the lead), and Benford and Greenberg provide three. "Tundra Moss" by F. M. Busby deals more with telegraphy on an Arctic island base than with the alternate history situation, which is basically an aside in half a dozen short paragraphs at the beginning and another half-dozen at the end. With this, as with many alternate histories that merely mention the alternate history aspect without doing anything with it, I am reminded of the marble hand found by the archaeologists in James A. Michener's _ T_ h_ e _ S_ o_ u_ r_ c_ e. They believe it to have been broken off a complete statue, but it wasn't--the artist intended it to _ i_ m_ p_ l_ y the rest of the figure. Perhaps it might work in a sculpture, but in an alternate history story, anyone can say, "In this world, X happens" (or doesn't happen, depending)--the point is to develop that idea, not to leave it as an exercise for the reader. As fiction, "Tundra Moss" is okay, but it fails as alternate history.

"Godard's People" by Allen Steele (_ I_ s_ a_ a_ c _ A_ s_ i_ m_ o_ v'_ s _ S_ c_ i_ e_ n_ c_ e _ F_ i_ c_ t_ i_ o_ n _ M_ a_ g_ a_ z_ i_ n_ e, July 1991) is a straightforward "history" of the Allies' big push toward rockets (rather than atomic bombs) during World War II. (There is purportedly a previous story, "John Harper Wilson," which is set in the same timeline and appeared in the June 1989 issue of _ I_ s_ a_ a_ c _ A_ s_ i_ m_ o_ v'_ s _ S_ c_ i_ e_ n_ c_ e _ F_ i_ c_ t_ i_ o_ n _ M_ a_ g_ a_ z_ i_ n_ e.) Unlike many of the stories, which are character studies with a veneer of alternate history, this is almost pure alternate history speculation. (The purest such was, of course, Robert Sobel's _ F_ o_ r _ W_ a_ n_ t _ o_ f _ a _ N_ a_ i_ l., and this sub-genre has its special devotees.)

Barry N. Malzberg's "Turpentine" is set in an alternate 1968 where everyone is like they were in 1968, only more so. Given the

tenor of 1968, for most people this means angrier and the results are perhaps predictable when some protesters seize a reactor at the University of Chicago. Other Malzberg alternate history stories center around the 1960s and angry protests. Benford describes this as "fevered remembrance," but I find the obvious passion with which Malzberg writes overpowering and too strident for my tastes. I had mixed feelings during 1968--I thought the Vietnam War was a mistake,

but I also had a father over there, so I was not ready to condemn everyone who went either. My reaction Malzberg's story may reflect this and, as always, your mileage may vary.

Last is Harry Turtledove's "Ready for the Fatherland." The premise here is that Hitler was assassinated in 1943, before he could manage to get Germany so stuck on the Eastern Front that they could never accomplish anything. Flash forward a few decades. Two agents are trying to smuggle arms for the uprising in Croatia, difficult because the government has a cordon around the port city of Rijeva. The Serbs are attacking the Croats every chance they get, and vice versa. Roadblocks and multiple armies make the going rough. And now, gentle reader, a question for you: are the last three sentences describing Turtledove's story or CNN's latest news bulletin?

If you answered, "Both," you are correct. If Churchill can be taken to task for failing to predict two years into his future, Turtledove is in the unenviable position of having history belie his story even on its publication. His premise--that Hitler's demise would have led to the survival of a fascist Croatia and continued internal strife between Serbs and Croats--may be true. Unfortunately, when the opposite event (Hitler's survival) is shown to lead just as inevitably to this war, it looks too much like predicting the sun will rise. True, in our world the Serbs have the upper hand (last time I checked) and in "Ready for the Fatherland" the Croats do, but ironically, the results are almost indistinguishable--a country full of troops in a state of civil war.

This may sound like a criticism of Turtledove. It isn't. It's more a commentary on the Balkans--_ a_ n_ y history will result in war. (All roads lead to Rome, and all timelines lead to Balkan wars.) Turtledove postulated a slightly different war. Had he projected a glorious peace, _ t_ h_ e_ n I would be skeptical. I don't know whether Turtledove intended it this way, or whether it's merely serendipitous (a la _ M_ a_ r_ o_ o_ n_ e_ d and _ T_ h_ e _ C_ h_ i_ n_ a _ S_ y_ n_ d_ r_ o_ m_ e), but "Ready for the Fatherland" is a strong argument for the inevitability of some historical trends, a vindication of the "Stream of History" over the "Great Man" theory. To paraphrase: The Moving Finger has already future writ, / And has moved on: nor all your Piety nor Wit / Can ever make it change a single line / Nor all your Tears alter a Word of it.

_ W_ h_ a_ t _ M_ i_ g_ h_ t _ H_ a_ v_ e _ B_ e_ e_ n _ 3: _ A_ l_ t_ e_ r_ n_ a_ t_ e _ W_ a_ r_ s is a worthy successor to _ W_ h_ a_ t _ M_ i_ g_ h_ t _ H_ a_ v_ e _ B_ e_ e_ n _ 1: _ A_ l_ t_ e_ r_ n_ a_ t_ e _ E_ m_ p_ i_ r_ e_ s and _ W_ h_ a_ t _ M_ i_ g_ h_ t _ H_ a_ v_ e _ B_ e_ e_ n _ 2: _ A_ l_ t_ e_ r_ n_ a_ t_ e _ H_ e_ r_ o_ e_ s. Though there are a few disappointing stories, there are enough good ones to more than compensate, in particular the McDevitt, the Morrow, the Anderson, and the Turtledove. Add to this the inclusion of the Churchill and the book becomes irresistible to alternate history fans and a good choice even for those who are just looking for good, thought-provoking reading.

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ALIEN TONGUE by Stephen Leigh
Bantam Spectra, 1991, ISBN 0-553-28875-X, $4.99.
A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper

This second entry in Bantam Spectra's "Next Wave" series is not up to the first (_ R_ e_ d _ G_ e_ n_ e_ s_ i_ s by S. C. Sykes). Perhaps it's that the aliens are unconvincing--as several people have pointed out, the odds seem against a race which cannot lie ever achieving a high level of technology or sophistication. It isn't helped by Asimov's opening essay, in which he claims that of course an alien race that discovered Earth would make contact and explore, because we always had. 1) We didn't always--the Chinese at one point decided to pull back, burn their navy, and give up exploring. 2) They're _ a_ l_ i_ e_ n_ s. The whole point of the book is that aliens are different from us, they have different thought processes, they have different priorities. (This of course also means my first complaint may not be completely valid, but all I can say is that Leigh doesn't convince _ m_ e.) Rudy Rucker seems to grasp Leigh's concept of alien in his afterword better, at any rate. But in addition to the unconvincing aliens, the love story lathered on top was totally unnecessary and seemed like mere padding.

But _ A_ l_ i_ e_ n _ T_ o_ n_ g_ u_ e does continue "The Next Wave"'s mission of science fiction with ideas, having as its plot interstellar travel and first contact. And Leigh, on the whole, handles the psychology

of an avian race well. Because of this, I would say that _ A_ l_ i_ e_ n _ T_ o_ n_ g_ u_ e was an acceptable read--not great, but reasonable for a plane flight or the beach.

BY BIZARRE HANDS by Joe R. Lansdale
Avon, 1991 (c1989), ISBN 0-380-71205-9, $3.99.
A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper

I don't normally read horror, but I made an exception in this case. First, there were reportedly two alternate history stories in this book, and I'm an aficionado of alternate history stories. And second, Joe Lansdale has a reputation for writing unusual stories. (I think of him, rightly or wrongly, as the Howard Waldrop of horror.)

Of the sixteen stories, I will comment specifically only on two--the alternate history ones, of course. "Trains Not Taken" is a fairly straightforward alternate history: the Japanese settled North America from the west as the Europeans settled it from the east, leaving no frontier or "Wild West." So the great heroes of that era ended up as politicians instead. This is fairly mundane and the historical underpinnings don't bear close scrutiny (what happened to the Spanish if the Japanese had the West Coast sewed up?). "Trains Not Taken" is an interesting character sketch but not much else.

"Letters from the South, Two Moons West of Nacogdoches," on the other hand, is a gem. Like "Trains Not Taken," it's set in a world in which the Japanese got involved in North America, but there the similarity ends. And to tell any more would be unfair--suffice it to say I didn't think an author could put that many twists in a five-page story.

The other fourteen stories are closer to my definition of

horror and range from merely well-written to memorable. There are no clunkers, and I don't hesitate to recommend this book to you even if you don't read that "horror stuff."

CAPE FEAR
A film review by Mark R. Leeper

Capsule review: How can you go wrong with a crime thriller directed by Martin Scorsese, photographed by Freddie Francis, with credits by Saul Bass and a score (virtually) by Bernard Herrmann? You do it by trying too hard to make the ultimate thriller and taking things just too far. Had this film been tied up twenty minutes earlier, it would have been rated better than a low +2 (-4 to +4).

There seem to be a lot of different groups who were involved with making _ C_ a_ p_ e _ F_ e_ a_ r. There was Steven Spielberg's Amblin Entertainment, there was Cappa Films, and there was Tribeca Productions. Martin Scorsese directed. But somehow at the heart of this film is Steven Spielberg. Though his name appears no place in

the credits, what is good about this film and what is bad about it has Spielberg's name written all over it. Spielberg seems intent on going from one genre to another making the ultimate film of that genre and then overpowering it with excess. What _ 1_ 9_ 4_ 1 was to wartime comedies, what _ R_ a_ i_ d_ e_ r_ s _ o_ f _ t_ h_ e _ L_ o_ s_ t _ A_ r_ k was to action adventures, what _ P_ o_ l_ t_ e_ r_ g_ e_ i_ s_ t was to the ghost story, that is what _ C_ a_ p_ e _ F_ e_ a_ r is to the crime-suspense film. This was supposed to be a tense suspense film in the tradition of _ N_ i_ g_ h_ t _ o_ f _ t_ h_ e _ H_ u_ n_ t_ e_ r and the original _ C_ a_ p_ e _ F_ e_ a_ r. And it succeeds beautifully. Robert DeNiro's Max Cady is a brilliant and implacable stalker. For maybe eighty or ninety minutes, this is one of the great suspense films. Then some place--I'd say it is a trick Cady is able to pull off with a belt-- _ C_ a_ p_ e _ F_ e_ a_ r crosses the line from tense but realistic film into monster movie. And if a monster movie has tension at all, it is a different kind of tension. From that point on, the identification value is gone and the viewer just watches two opposing forces chew away at each other. This is one film where less would have certainly been more.

Fourteen years ago public defender Sam Bowden (played by Nick Nolte) intentionally hid evidence that could have freed his illiterate client Max Cady. He had known his client was guilty of rape and did not want to see Cady go free. Sent to prison for fourteen years, Cady taught himself to read, then educated himself to understand the law. He also built his body into a tower of strength. And once he learned of his lawyer's betrayal, he dedicated himself to making Bowden pay for hiding evidence. In fourteen years, Cady has made himself a supreme strategist preparing for the war with Bowden that Cady knew was coming. Cady's attacks will tear apart Bowden's family life and will destroy Bowden's career. While Sam Bowden flounders to find the best way to defend

himself, Cady will make one brilliantly considered move after another.

Robert DeNiro's Max Cady is an excellent screen villain. Behind the hair slicked back with black grease and the big obnoxious cigar is the agile mind of a chess master. He can be vicious like a

force of nature or he can be seductive like a snake. In the longest scene of the film he turns his seductive power on fifteen-year-old Danielle Bowden. This is a particularly powerful and disturbing scene. It is the centerpiece of the film and it shows how Cady manages to turn every human frailty to his advantage.

Another example of the excesses of this film, incidentally, are Cady's religious tattoos. A nice touch from _ N_ i_ g_ h_ t _ o_ f _ t_ h_ e _ H_ u_ n_ t_ e_ r (and perhaps from the original _ C_ a_ p_ e _ F_ e_ a_ r--I do not remember) is that Robert Mitchum covers his psychotic behavior with a veneer of fundamentalist religious piety. We are never really sure whether or not he really believes his viciousness is fulfilling God's will. However, he takes the piety to the point that he has tattooed himself with religious messages. In this film, DeNiro's Cady has the same religious fervor and has become a veritable illustrated man, with more than a dozen religious tattoos.

This is a film that spared little expense to create its effects. On top of a good cast--Robert DeNiro, Nick Nolte, Jessica Lange, and Joe Don Baker--the film throws in cameos of three actors from the original film--Robert Mitchum, Gregory Peck, and Martin Balsam.

Technical credits are equally well cast. Title sequences are done by Saul Bass. For those unaware, Bass really pioneered the idea of making the titles into films that stand on their own and comment on the rest of the film. Many of the classic films that had striking credit sequences show his work. These include _ A_ r_ o_ u_ n_ d _ t_ h_ e _ W_ o_ r_ l_ d _ i_ n _ E_ i_ g_ h_ t_ y _ D_ a_ y_ s, _ V_ e_ r_ t_ i_ g_ o, _ T_ h_ e _ B_ i_ g _ C_ o_ u_ n_ t_ r_ y, _ A_ n_ a_ t_ o_ m_ y _ o_ f _ a _ M_ u_ r_ d_ e_ r, _ N_ o_ r_ t_ h _ b_ y _ N_ o_ r_ t_ h_ w_ e_ s_ t, and _ N_ i_ n_ e _ H_ o_ u_ r_ s _ t_ o _ R_ a_ m_ a. The tension and the bizarre visual effects start in the opening credits, which are superbly crafted by Bass.

From there the visuals are carried by Freddie Francis--also one of the greats in his field, moody photography. Francis's work includes _ T_ h_ e _ I_ n_ n_ o_ c_ e_ n_ t_ s, _ T_ h_ e _ F_ r_ e_ n_ c_ h _ L_ i_ e_ u_ t_ e_ n_ a_ n_ t'_ s _ W_ o_ m_ a_ n, _ T_ h_ e _ E_ l_ e_ p_ h_ a_ n_ t _ M_ a_ n, and _ D_ u_ n_ e. This year he did _ T_ h_ e _ M_ a_ n _ i_ n _ t_ h_ e _ M_ o_ o_ n. To have both Bass and Francis on the same film seems to indicate someone went out with a very large wallet and a determination to buy the best. The one visual out of place is the use of super-dramatic storm-cloud skies, uncharacteristic of Francis, but almost a trademark of Spielberg.

The original _ C_ a_ p_ e _ F_ e_ a_ r and many of the best of Alfred Hitchcock's thrillers had scores by the late Bernard Herrmann.

Herrmann, of course, could not do this score, so Elmer Bernstein was hired to rework Herrmann's original themes from the first _ C_ a_ p_ e _ F_ e_ a_ r and in general to write in Herrmann's style. So one more expensive but tasteful decision was made. The new _ C_ a_ p_ e _ F_ e_ a_ r essentially has a Bernard Herrmann score, full of the master's dramatic dissonances, even if Herrmann was not around to write it.

Of all the choices of who would work on the film, the only one that was really questionable is Martin Scorsese to direct. And it may have been the biggest mistake. Scorsese's forte is realistic crime. His one foray into horror fantasy, _ A_ f_ t_ e_ r _ H_ o_ u_ r_ s, works mostly because it needed exactly what Scorsese could give it: a feel of realism. Here that same feeling of realism stands him in good stead as long as it can, but when Cady crosses the line into monster and super-villain, Scorsese has mothing more to contribute. The film goes into auto-pilot and Scorsese just films his scenes. The film shows Freddie Francis's art but loses any Scorsese feel. One more reason that the last part of the film was ill-considered.

_ C_ a_ p_ e _ F_ e_ a_ r is a very good thriller that saves almost all of its mistakes for the last part of the film. I would give it a low +2 on the -4 to +4 scale.

THE MAN IN THE MOON
A film review by Mark R. Leeper

Capsule review: This is the story of a salt-of-the-earth sort of family in Louisiana in the 1950s, and especially Dani, a 14-year-old with a crush on the 17-year-old boy next door. Two good performances and good photography are sold short by melodramatic plot twists. Rating: low +1 (-4 to +4).

It is 1957 in rural Louisiana. Fourteen-year-old Dani Trant (played by Reese Witherspoon) is just at the awkward age when she is approaching womanhood and thinks she has neither looks nor intelligence. She envies her older sister Maureen (played by Emily Warfield), who is attractive and gets good grades. Then her father's old girlfriend, now a widow, moves in next door, bringing her own family including a seventeen-year-old son, Court Foster (played by Jason London). Court and Dani become good friends. Their friendship begins platonically, but Dani gets a crush on Court and is anxious to push things just a bit further. All by itself this relationship causes problems between Dani and her father Matthew (played by Sam Waterston). However, more family strains start to show when Court discovers Maureen, a Trant daughter his own age.

Robert Mulligan directs this story with all the sensitivity he

can muster. And sensitivity is certainly what the plot needs, since it is perilously close to being a trashy Southern passions sort of melodrama. In different hands this story could have been another _ G_ o_ d'_ s _ L_ i_ t_ t_ l_ e _ A_ c_ r_ e. However, this is avoided, thanks to good acting on the parts of Reese Witherspoon and especially Sam Waterston. As Matthew, Waterston seems uneasy with the responsibility of fatherhood. By turns he is authoritarian or compassionate, but neither with real conviction.

The most unfortunate aspect of the film is a melodramatic turn toward the end of the film. the two sisters are headed for conflict in one way when the all too obvious hand of the scriptwriter distorts things. It leaves the conflict but warps it into a different one, and one that may be more quickly resolved. The last twenty minutes of the film are the least satisfying.

Photography is by the excellent Freddie Francis, whose credits as cinematographer include _ T_ h_ e _ I_ n_ n_ o_ c_ e_ n_ t_ s, _ T_ h_ e _ F_ r_ e_ n_ c_ h _ L_ i_ e_ u_ t_ e_ n_ a_ n_ t'_ s _ W_ o_ m_ a_ n, and _ G_ l_ o_ r_ y. Overall the good moments of the film do not quite overcome its weaknesses. I give it a low +1 on the -4 to +4 scale.