

Lincroft-Holmdel Science Fiction Club
Club Notice - 4/23/86 -- Vol. 4, No. 40

MEETINGS UPCOMING:

Unless otherwise stated, all meetings are on Wednesdays at noon.

LZ meetings are in LZ 3A-206; HO meetings are in HO 2N-523.

 D A T E T O P I C

- 04/30 HO: Discussion of the films QUATERMASS AND THE PIT (a.k.a. FIVE MILLION YEARS TO EARTH) and THE QUATERMASS CONCLUSION
05/14 LZ: THE WEREWOLF PRINCIPLE by Clifford Simak (Biological Constructs)
05/21 HO: Is DR. WHO science fiction? (Specific discussion of THE CLAWS OF AXOS)
06/04 LZ: THIS PERFECT DAY by Ira Levin ("Utopias")
06/11 HO: ?
06/25 LZ: STAR GUARD by Andre Norton (Humans as underdogs)
07/16 LZ: SHADRACH IN THE FURNACE by Robert Silverberg (Ethics)
08/06 LZ: TUNNEL IN THE SKY by Robert Heinlein (Faster-Than-Light Travel)

HO Chair is John Jetzt, HO 4F-528A (834-1563). LZ Chair is Rob Mitchell, LZ 1B-306 (576-6106). MT Chair is Mark Leeper, MT 3G-434 (957-5619). HO Librarian is Tim Schroeder, HO 2G-427A (949-5866). LZ Librarian is Lance Larsen, LZ 3C-219 (576-2668). Jill-of-all-trades is Evelyn Leeper, MT 1F-329 (957-2070).

1. The next Holmdel discussion will be of the third and fourth QUATERMASS films: FIVE MILLION YEARS TO EARTH and QUATERMASS CONCLUSION. Fine films each. I expect that Evelyn and I will try to attend because these films are of particular interest to me and I am of particular interest to Evelyn.

2. You may have noticed that the last two notices sent out were both Volume 4, Number 38. It also may not have escaped your attention that this is Volume 4, Number 40. Why was there no Volume 4, Number 39? Well, it is like this, you just don't argue with success. Volume 4, Number 38 was so good, we decided not jinx things by changing the number for the next issue. The response has been fantastic. Since I released VOLUME 4, NUMBER 38 II: THE FOLLOWUP my telephone has been ringing off the hook (this is considered a System 75 hardware design problem and will be fixed in the next release). People have suggested that it should have come with the slogan "Just when you thought it was safe to go back to

reading your mail." In fact the sequel grossed three times what the original did. I was going to call this issue VOLUME 4, NUMBER 38 III: THE SAGA CONTINUES, but the market research department tells me that the VOLUME 4, NUMBER 40 dolls are already in the toy stores and we do not want to lag too far behind or it will hurt our

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sales figures. So we have jumped right over Volume 4, Number 39. Sorry, 39.

Mark Leeper
MT 3G-434 957-5619
...mtgzz!leeper

THE QUIET EARTH
A film review by Mark R. Leeper

Capsule review: Last survivors on Earth have to figure out what has happened to everyone else. Some intriguing ideas but the basic plot is old hat.

In 1951 Arch Oboler made the film F_i_v_e about a limited number of people who had survived a nuclear war. Every so often Hollywood makes another film about the last handful of people in a post-holocaust world. Notable was T_h_e_W_o_r_l_d,_t_h_e_F_l_e_s_h,_a_n_d_t_h_e_D_e_v_i_l, a 1958 film with Harry Belafonte and Mel Ferrer as the last people on Earth and of course in a love triangle. The same situation arose in T_h_e_L_a_s_t_W_o_m_a_n_o_n_E_a_r_t_h, a Roger Corman quickie made in 1960. In the '58 film an experimental super-bomb apparently dissolved everyone; in the '60 film something in the air did the same. In a TV movie called W_h_e_r_e_H_a_v_e_A_l_l_t_h_e_P_e_o_p_l_e_G_o_n_e? a solar flare does the honors.

Most recently it was New Zealand doing the three-survivor film.
T_h_e_Q_u_i_e_t_E_a_r_t_h_i_s_a_f_i_l_m_t_h_a_t_v_e_r_y_m_u_c_h_r_e_s_e_m_b_l_e_s_T_h_e

World, the Flesh,
 and the Devil. Once again we have white man/white woman/black man as the last people on Earth with the two men competing for the affections of the last woman. If this plot had to be done again, at least it was done with quality filmmaking and some style. The characters are better than the 50's stereotypes of the previous film versions.

What sets this film apart is the force that de-populated the world. Since the explanation is the most intriguing part of the film I will avoid spoiling it here. I came out of the film saying 1) the cause could not have happened, 2) given that it did happen there could not have been any survivors, 3) given that there were survivors what made the difference between who survived and who didn't is absurd, and 4) given that what decides who survives really decides it is an absurd coincidence that someone who could figure out what happened was also a survivor. Dale Skran (who some of you might know) defended the film on all four points. By my figuring he bested me on (1) and (2), tied on (3), and lost on (4). I still think the idea is impossible, but it does bear some thinking about.

Suffice it to say this may be a better film than it at first appears to be and deserves a modest +1 on the -4 to +4 scale.

I do have a philosophical complaint about the film. One of the characters feels terrible remorse for having worked on a scientific project whose results could have been used for evil. I guess this is a natural outgrowth of a pacifist sentiment growing in New Zealand. My question to the filmmaker would be just how much human progress could have ever taken place without anyone working science that could have been used for evil. Most of my career I worked on a data network that

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could have been used by a repressive government for keeping tabs on its citizens. The knowledge of how to immunize against smallpox makes it possible to infect your enemies at no risk to yourself. Find ways to increase food production and you find ways to control others with the surplus. No field of scientific research is entirely harmless; it is just that most are less risky than stagnation.

SURELY YOU'RE JOKING, MR. FEYNMAN by Richard P. Feynman
Bantam, 1986, \$4.50.
A book review by Mark R. Leeper

First let me say what this book is not. It is neither a biography nor an autobiography of Richard Feynman. It is more like a biography in which all the facts that would go into his eventual obituary have been removed. Reading this book you get very little idea of why Feynman is considered an important physicist. You get very little of his work. You even miss most of his personal life. The events are in chronological order and suddenly part way into the book you discover he is married. This comes as a surprise because up to that point there is little to indicate that the ungainly student would ever find someone to marry. Then shortly after that his wife is dying. In one scene he cries for her, then she is never mentioned again. At other points in the book he mentions two other wives without ever mentioning how he carried to marry them.

What this book is, then, is a collection of unrelated anecdotes, arranged very roughly in the order that they occurred. Most of them carry a subtext of what a great and versatile mind Feynman has. In fact this is the way Feynman really talks (the stories have been collected by Ralph Leighton, who shows up several times toward the end of the book), he is considerably more vain than I would have expected.

Nevertheless, if even a fraction of the stories are true Feynman has a considerable amount to be vain about. Memorable are the stories of how he became the safecracker of the Manhattan Project, his arguments with Talmudic scholars (memorable because he admits to having been bested by someone else), his art lessons, and his experiences rating textbooks. Many of the stories seem like just filler. The title comes from the first tea he attended at Princeton. He didn't know anything about tea so he asked for both lemon and milk. His hostess's exclamation provided him with a title for his book. The only thing amazing about the incident is that anyone bothered to remember it.

The stories in this book are of widely varying interest value, but a few good stories counterbalance a multitude of "Why are you telling me this?" tales, like how he got artists' models to pose nude for him. Overall not a bad read.

_N_O_T_E_S_F_R_O_M_T_H_E_N_E_T

Subject: Fiskadoro (review)

Path: mtuxo!drutx!ihnp4!mhuxn!mhuxr!ulysses!allegra!princeton!orsvax1!pyrnj!caip!daemon

Date: Sat, 12-Apr-86 22:55:33 EST

Fiskadoro, by Denis Johnson, Knopf, 1985 (hardcover)

Certain people will enjoy this book quite a lot. Others will certainly dislike it. Describing the books to which it is similar may be best -- if you liked those, consider trying this.

The first book is "A Canticle for Leibowitz". Like that book, "Fiskadoro" is a post-holocaust novel, although set only a generation after WWII. More importantly, it shares with "Canticle" the twist that the survivors are incapable of interpreting the details of the past. I have always remembered the "Canticle" monks patiently illuminating circuit diagrams. I think I will always remember the way that, in "Fiskadoro", the history and mythology of the Israelites and Rastafarians have merged. I find such touches useful in a book of this kind; they're a steady drumbeat, just at the surface, reminding me that things have changed.

Because the changes the war brought about are central to the book. Good science fiction sometimes reminds me of good anthropological description. It shows you a possible culture, with different customs and, most importantly, different ways of thinking. Typical science fiction assumes that all sentient life, and certainly all humans, think and react alike -- are twentieth-century, middle-class, well-educated rationalists like the author, most of his audience, me, and probably you. (Or, worse yet, are nothing more than an exaggeration of some human trait.) "Fiskadoro" does an excellent job of depicting a peasant fishing village (a somewhat foreign culture) and how it both ignores and digests the changes caused by the war.

But "Fiskadoro" is more concerned with individual characters. The war is long in the past -- the world has partly recovered -- but it is still a central part of life, is still changing the world, and still looms in the background, promising further changes. This concentration on the effects of great events on individuals is similar to "Radix" (although without that book's extravagance) and several novels of J.G. Ballard. The "mystical" tone of the book, the writing style, and the disoriented, shell-shocked characters are similar to much of Ballard (especially "The Crystal World" and related books). I am also reminded of Philip K. Dick's characters, who were often ordinary people coping with extraordinary situations.

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The book is clearly in the literary mainstream and doesn't owe much to science fiction's rich history. Plot is not particularly important, although there is a wonderful sub-story, the recollections of an old woman who escaped the fall of South Vietnam long, long ago. The ending is an "epiphany", a fashion (invented by James Joyce and nurtured throughout the years by the New Yorker) which I loathe.

Brian Marick

Subject: THE KIF STRIKE BACK by C. J. Cherryh (mild spoiler)
Path: whuxlm!akgua!gatech!seismo!hao!noao!terak!mot!anasazi!duane
Date: Mon, 14-Apr-86 10:22:17 EST

The jacket reads:

"Chanur's Revenge. Kif Power. Hani Pride... When the kif seized Hilfy and Tully, hani and human crew of "The Pride of Chanur", they issued a challenge Pyanfar, captain of "Pride", couldn't ignore, a challenge that was to take Pyanfar and her shipmates to Mkks station and into a deadly confrontation between kif, hani, mahendo'sat, and human. And what began as a simple rescue attempt soon blossomed into a dangerous game of interstellar politics, where today's ally could become tomorrow's executioner, and where methane breathers became volatile wild cards playing for stakes no oxy breather could even begin to understand..."

Sound confusing? It is, even if you've read CHANUR'S VENTURE, the book that precedes this one. It is sometimes the case that the middle book of a trilogy is weak, and this book is very weak.

The action takes place over the course of a handful of days, and during the entire time the crew is exhausted. Midway through the book the reader is exhausted too. The dialogue is very often in broken English; this is done to indicate that the speaker doesn't fluently speak the hearer's language (which isn't English anyway), but it grates on one's nerves after a while.

The story is very hard to follow. I had read the first book of the series and also THE PRIDE OF CHANUR, which deals with some of the same characters but is not directly involved with the trilogy, and I still had lots of problems trying to figure out the politics. There's no preface or afterword that summarizes what has happened up to this point, so if you haven't read CHANUR'S VENTURE, this book will thoroughly confuse you.

There are other problems with the story too. There's a lot of posturing and verbal confrontation, but very little real action until the end. And some of the conflicts, between Hilfy and Pyanfar, for instance, repeat themselves a number of times and are never resolved.

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I hate it when one of my favorite authors writes a dull book, but I can only give this book 2.0 stars (fair).

Duane Morse ...!noao!terak!anasazi!duane

Subject: "Speaker for the Dead" by Orson Scott Card
Path: mtuxo!drutx!ihnp4!mhuxn!mhuxr!ulysses!allegra!rayssd!jps
Date: Tue, 15-Apr-86 17:02:06 EST

This novel is the sequel to "Ender's Game", and picks up the story of Ender and the Hive Queen, unfortunately it doesn't end it. While I thought "Ender's Game" made a good short story, and only a fair novel, continuing on the tale leaves me cold.

The story starts with Ender being the oldest richest man in the inhabited galaxy do to his frequent use of FTL travel and compound interest. After years of exploration humanity finds another sentient although primitive race. While studying them in a way, so as not to "contaminate" them with human ideas, a xenologist is ritualisticly killed by the aliens (called "piggies" because of their porcine) appearance. Ender goes to the planet to speak for the fallen xenologist and possibly plant the Hive Queen. While there he solves the riddles of the planets ecology and the piggies culture, as well as catharsizing himself of the guilt for destroying the Hive Queens race.

The story is well written and technically plausible. Unfortunately, it only has one really good idea (the piggie culture/ecology riddle), and then a bunch of cliché's to carry it along. Cultural contamination, sentient computers, life extension via FTL, cyborgs and theological questions clutter the story. It's as if Mr. Card wanted to write about them all in this book. In addition, you're lost without having read the previous novel. "Speaker for the Dead" would have made another good short story unfortunately it makes only a fair novel. The story would have been better served if it had been written separate from the Ender trilogy (?).

Subject: Re: "Speaker for the Dead" by Orson Scott Card
Path: harvard!talcott!panda!genrad!decvax!gsg!kathy
Date: Wed, 16-Apr-86 10:24:09 EST

I feel compelled to disagree with the preceding review of "Speaker for the Dead." I have read all three works involved, the original short story version of "Ender's Game," the complete novel, and "Speaker for the Dead." I enjoyed the short story version of "Ender's Game," but the novel was vastly better. Card succeeds in letting us get inside Ender's head to a remarkable degree. The entire story he creates is internally consistent and believable. He manages to develop the characters so

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naturally and consistently that we forget they are children until he rubs our noses in it, reminding us that these "soldiers" are only ten years old. It is emotionally a very powerful book.

I didn't think "Speaker for the Dead" was quite as good as "Ender's Game," but it is still a fine book. I do not regret that I went out and bought the hardcover edition when it was first printed. (Something I very rarely do). I agree that it doesn't finish the story of the Hive Queen, but I disagree that that is a fault. He has created yet another consistent world for this book, and to try to carry on the Hive Queen's story in the same book would be trying to put far too much into a single volume. Her hatching and how humanity deals with it should be its own story, which I hope will be written someday.

These are, of course, strictly my own opinions, and it is distinctly

possible that no one else out there on the net will agree with them. However, the same hold for the author of the preceding review. Don't skip these books because he didn't like them. Read them for yourself. They are well worth the time involved. Personally, I think that "Ender's Game" will become one of the classics, and would not be at all surprised to see it pick up a Hugo at this year's Worldcon. I think it deserves it.

Kathryn Smith

Subject: Arthur C. Clarke, SONGS OF DISTANT EARTH
Path: mtuxo!houxm!whuxl!whuxlm!akgua!gatech!seismo!columbia!caip!daemon
Date: Fri, 18-Apr-86 10:26:26 EST

Some of you may recall the short movie outline Clarke did for SONGS OF DISTANT EARTH -- it was the only original text in his rip-off trade paperback of a few years back called THE SENTINEL. It was an incredible rehashing of old Clarke short stories and novels ("A Meeting with Medusa", "Songs of Distant Earth", THE FOUNTAINS OF PARADISE, "The Shining Ones", and so on), but it might have made an enjoyable, fairly literate SF movie. (Instead we got 2010 -- but that's another story.)

Unfortunately, SONGS OF DISTANT EARTH doesn't cut it as a novel. Clarke's later work seems to suffer from a general lack of plot -- rather telling a coherent story, he writes a series of rather disconnected vignettes. SONGS suffers from this even more than, say, FOUNTAINS OF PARADISE did.

Even so, Clarke can write well enough to make this enjoyable, if not spectacular. As for the story line -- comparing this novel with "Songs of Distant Earth" (collected in THE OTHER SIDE OF THE SKY) provides a really interesting view of how Clarke's attitudes, and the world's, have changed since the 50s. The plot, however, is pretty much the same. SONGS doesn't say much that "Songs" didn't say, but the novel is several

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times longer. Some would call that a problem.

By the way, someone was comparing the cover blurb with that for James P.

Hogan's VOYAGE FROM YESTERYEAR. Without rendering my opinion of Hogan's work, no, they don't have too much in common, although the two authors are developing a remarkably similar, equally obnoxious, and totally unbelievable view as to what the "ideal society" looks like. But Clarke can still blow Hogan right out of the water with straight narrative prose, his descriptions are light-years away from Hogan's, and his characters, well, neither one of them is going to pick up the Nobel in literature...

Mike Caplinger

Subject: Poll results

Path: seismo!lll-crg!lll-lcc!qantel!hplabs!hao!nbires!boulder!cisden!john

Date: Wed, 16-Apr-86 12:45:08 EST

Well, here's the summary of answers to my poll. I have reason to believe I lost some mail during a disk failure, so if your answers aren't included, I'm sorry.

1. Most overrated book. What's the worst SF book you've read that lots of other people thought was great? Even that won a Nebula/Hugo?

Not much consensus on this one. A couple of people took exception to my dislike for Childhood's End, but one supported me. The winners (?) are:

Childhood's End (Arthur C. Clarke) (2 votes)
Dune (Frank Herbert) (1 vote, 2 mentions)

Both people mentioning Dune said they thought it was a good book, but overrated.

2. Most underrated book. Ditto, but this time something you liked that nobody else seemed to care for much.

Even less consensus here (no book mentioned twice), but lots of leads to (maybe) good books.

The Bug War (Robert Asprin)
The Stars My Destination (Bester)
A Fall of Moondust (Arthur C. Clarke)
Triton (Samuel Delany)
The Black Cloud (Fred Hoyle)
"Dancers At The End of Time" trilogy (Michael Moorcock)
Inferno (Larry Niven and Jerry Pournelle)
The three Anthony Villiers adventures -- Masque World, The Thurb Revolution, and Star Well (Alexei Panshin)

Pavane (Keith Roberts)
_Dying_Inside_ (Robert Siverberg)
_The_Demon_Princes_ (Jack Vance) [actually 5 books]
"The Butterfly Kid" and "The Absolute at Large" (?)

Two books were mentioned that I thought had been generally considered good:

_Stranger_in_a_Strange_Land_ (Robert A. Heinlein)
_The_Dispossessed_ (Ursula K. LeGuin)

(I'd have to agree that _The_Dispossessed_ has gotten less attention in recent years than its quality really deserves.)

3. Worst writer that manages to stay fairly popular in the field. You know, that guy that has a great following but you can't choke him down?

The big winner, with 5.25 votes, is

John "Librarian Of Gor" Norman,

followed closely by

Frank Herbert (2.5 votes). Edgar Rice Burroughs (2.25 votes)
Others receiving votes were:

Isaac Asimov (1.5 votes) J. G. Ballard (.25 votes)
Gordon R. Dickson (.5 votes) George "Piglet" Effinger
(.25 votes) Robert L. Forward (1 vote) Robert A.
Heinlein (1.5 votes) Damon Knight (.25 votes) Barry
Malzberg (.25 votes) Andre Norton (.25 votes) Jules
Verne (.25 votes)

> 4. Book you're most ashamed to admit you like. (Answers anonymous of course.) [One respondent said he calls these "guilty pleasures".]

No fewer than 5 (!) people gave their nod to

The "Lensman" series (E. E. Smith).

(I guess I've got to try these.)

Others mentioned:

The "Scorpio" series (Alan Burt Akers)
_The_Sword_of_Shannarra_ (Terry Brooks) The Commander
Grimes stories (A. Bertram Chandler) _Fear_ (L. Ron Hubbard)
The "Elric" series (Michael Moorcock) (2 votes)
Footfall (Larry Niven and Jerry Pournelle) Most books
by A. E. Van Vogt _To_Die_In_Italbar_ (Roger Zelazny)

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The Thieves' World series.

Subject: FUGITIVE IN TRANSIT by Edward Llewellyn (mild spoiler)
Path: seismo!lll-crg!lll-lcc!qantel!hplabs!hao!noao!terak!edge!mot!anasazi!duane
Date: Sun, 6-Apr-86 10:48:46 EST

The jacket reads:

"When Peter Ward saw the lone woman standing in the ruins of an obscure temple on a remote Greek island and singing Sappho in the original Aeolic Greek, he may have thought her a goddess, but he would never even have imagined her true identity.

For Ruth Thalia Adams was a singular entity. Although she appeared as a beautiful athletic young woman, no one was even sure of her species. And "Alia" as she was called by the Galactic Transit Authorities had more mysteries than just her species. No one on Earth knew what it was she had done, but to the Auld Galactic Marshall, she was the most dangerous individual in the spiral arm and had to be caught. He had chased her through several hundred worlds to no avail, but now he had her cornered -- for Earth was the end of the line!"

An accurate description, but there's more of interest. For example, the location for the story is Earth in the near future. Aulds are beings from another planet who, to some extent, are in charge of supplying electrical power to the population of Earth. This doesn't win them much goodwill because they are reluctant to share their advanced technology, and they refuse to allow Terrans to travel in the galaxy.

The story follows a number of beings: Thalia and Peter, of course, the

Auld Marshall, and Dr. Bose, who first encountered the Auld. Another important player appears later in the book.

The relationship between Dr. Bose and the Marshall is interesting. Some of the doctor's human characteristics rub off on the Marshall, for instance.

Things move along fairly quickly; I never found myself bored, though the author has a funny habit of interrupting the story to give a 2-page thumbnail sketch of a character when he first appears. I enjoyed learning about the galactic culture, and all of the characters were appealing in their own ways. I couldn't predict what would happen from one moment to the next, and I didn't guess Thalia's identity. And the ending was a real surprise.

I enjoyed the book quite a lot and give it 3.0 stars (very good) out of 4.

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Duane Morse ...!noao!terak!anasazi!duane

Subject: Review: Coming of the Quantum Cats
Path: bellcore!ulysses!allegra!rayssd!gmp
Date: Fri, 18-Apr-86 17:54:56 EST

The Coming of the Quantum Cats
Frederic Pohl / Bantam Spectra / May 1986
ISBN 0-553-25786-2

If you're like me, you probably pick up books by Frederick Pohl because you've read one or two that you liked (e.g., "Gateway"). Maybe you've picked up a couple (e.g., "Man Plus," "Black Star Rising") that you didn't like too much at all. "The Coming of the Quantum Cats" falls into the second category (bad).

The book is about the beginnings of travel between parallel universes. Parallel universes are not new to science fiction, so the reader might expect to find some interesting and/or original ideas to supplement the

multiverse supposition, but alas, if there are any, I must have missed them. I found the most interesting part of the book to be the non-standard disclaimer found at the beginning. It warns that some characters are not quite fictional -- the frequent mention of contemporary political figures seemingly an attempt to substitute for interesting plot/dialogue/characters. A plot summary? What little plot there is isn't worth the trouble. What's worse, it all leads up to an ending worthy of nomination as one of the great trivial endings of all time. This book left me feeling as though I had wasted more time reading it than Pohl took to write it.

My recommendation: don't buy it, but if you do, read it only if you are bored. If you want to read interesting stories about parallel universes, I suggest you look elsewhere.

|| Greg Paris {allegra,linus,raybed2,ccice5,brunix}!rayssd!gmp ||