

Lincroft-Holmdel Science Fiction Club
Club Notice - 11/28/84 -- Vol. 3, No. 20

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

- 12/05 HO: STARTIDE RISING by David Brin (at 11AM)
- 01/09 LZ: THE CIRCUS OF DR. LAO by Charles G. Finney
- 01/09 HO: Book Swap
- 01/29 LZ: Video meeting: THE FLY (part 1)
- 01/30 LZ: Video meeting: THE FLY (part 2)
- 01/30 HO: COURTSHIP RITE by Donald Kingsbury
- 02/20 LZ: SLAN by A. E. Van Vogt
- 03/13 HO: DOWNBELOW STATION by C. J. Cherryh

LZ Chair is Mark Leeper, LZ 3E-215 (576-2571). HO Chair is John Jetzt, FJ 1F-108 (577-5316). LZ Librarian is Lance Larsen, LZ 3C-219 (576-2668). HO Librarian is Tim Schroeder, HO 2G-432 (949-5866). Jill-of-all-trades is Evelyn Leeper, HO 1B-437A (834-4723).

1. Well, what can I say? Our last Lincroft meeting of this year has to be cancelled because I will be in Orlando. This means you can expect sunny and pleasant Indian Summer weather those days and Florida can expect a hurricane or something else unpleasant. That seems to be the pattern when I travel. I always miss the best weather at home for the worst weather wherever I am going. (Well, usually anyway.) I hate to disappoint all you active members at Lincroft, but you both can go to Holmdel if you want to discuss a book. They will be discussing the winner of last year's Hugo, STARTIDE RISING. (Note time change for this meeting only!) This is the novel that took readers by surprise last year when it suggested that dolphin spoke in Haiku. Japanese readers, used to unexpected ideas, took the concept totally in their stride and even produced a toy of a mechanical dolphin that spoke in Haiku thanks to a small electronic device included inside. Since the dolphin was a science fiction toy, however, it naturally had another requisite feature. If you pulled the head back, pulled the fins to the side, turned the flukes at a 90-degree angle, then turned it inside out at the mouth, it became a death-dealing robot. I don't know if you have noticed, but all Japanese toys these days seem to

turn into robots if you know the right combination of twists and turns.

If you don't know what I am talking about, you probably would be well-advised to hurry and get to your Christmas shopping. Our

- 2 -

toystores are flooded with Japanese folding robots. I wonder what the Japanese concept that everything has a death-dealing robot hidden inside says about their culture? I suppose we started it with the concept that any nerd you see on the street could be a superhero in disguise, but this is really a strange form of paranoid car. I mean they have things like Volkswagen Bugs that unfold into robots. I have seen wristwatches and cameras that are actually robots in disguise. They have toy pistols that unfold into robots. That is a weird one. Because the pistol is already made to scale, so the robot it folds out to become is also presumably full-sized. That means they have little robots six or seven inches high going around shooting people. That is pretty weird if you stop to think about it. I can just picture some villian saying "Stay out of my way or my army of robots will blow off your ankles. I can smuggle them in and you will just think they are guns." Maybe someone out there can explain to me this curious phenomemon of toys that become robots.

2. Channel 13 (WNET) will be running the Michael Palin film JABBERWOCKY this Sunday at 11:15PM. In honor of this event, we bring you Mark Leeper's original review of this film. [--Evelyn Leeper]

Mark Leeper
LZ 3E-215 x2571
...{houxn,hogpd,hocse}!lznv!mrl

Mercury Capsules - November 28, 1984

"Mercury Capsules": SF review column, edited by Paul S R Chisholm. Appears in the "Lincroft-Holmdel SF Club Notice".

A medium for quick reviews of anything of interest in the world of science fiction. I'll pass along anything (not slanderous or scatological) without nasty comments. I prefer to get reviews by electronic mail: send to wi!psc from the AT&T-IS ENS systems in Lincroft; hocse!lznv!psc, houxn!lznv!psc, or hogpd!lznv!psc from everywhere else. If that's impossible, I'm at LZ 1D-212, 576-2374.

o+ T_h_e_E_w_o_k_A_d_v_e_n_t_u_r_e: ABC TV special, 1984.

If you though the best thing about R_e_t_u_r_n_o_f_t_h_e_J_e_d_i was the cute Ewoks, have I got a show for you! Two kids and their parents crash on the moon of Endor. The parents get captured by a big-nasty; the kids run into some extremely mellow Hokas, I mean, Ewoks. By speaking slowly and clearly, they manage to communicate, and the Ewoks (and the kids) go off to rescue the parents.

Highly recommended for the under ten crowd. (I'm not under ten.)

Paul S. R. Chisholm

o+ M_o_t_e_l_H_e_l_l: film (on cable this month), directed by Kevin Connor.

Tarzan knew where the Elephant's Graveyard was. That was the place where old elephants go to die. Old actors go to horror films. Rory Calhoun, heartthrob of early Fifties westerns and later "The Texan" TV series, pops up in M_o_t_e_l_H_e_l_l as Farmer Vincent. He has his makes his money by running the Motel Hello and by making and distributing Farmer Vincent's Smoked Meats. His meats are so good not because he puts a little of himself in his work, but because he puts a lot of other people in it. In the grand tradition of Sweeney Todd, Farmer Vincent's secret ingredient is human flesh.

It seems the good farmer catches people, cuts their vocal cords, buries them in the ground, and force feeds them until they are ready to "become famous." It is a gruesome black comedy with a few really nice comic touches. Calhoun has a grand time of it, apparently playing his part as if he were dressing up in a sheet and going "boo!" If you don't concentrate too hard on the horror of the situation, this film is a lot of fun.

Mark R. Leeper

- 30 -

JABBERWOCKY

A film review by Mark R. Leeper

"The time has come," the Walrus said,

"To get a little talky.

I must tell you a thing or two

About the J_a_b_b_e_r_w_o_c_k_y.

The film is planned, I'd say off hand,

To be a great sensation
By chasing after H_o_l_y_G_r_a_i_l
In skillful imitation.

There's quite a lot of filth and rot;
The people never wash.
For the most part it looks like the art
Of Hieronymous Bosch.

Special effects are not complex--
Some matted-in spires,
A decent beast, that is at least
When you don't see the wires.

Set in the past, they have the cast
In realistic apparel.
Still with that touch, there's still not much
Left of the original Carroll.

There was some wit; I do admit
That some scenes made me laugh.
But still it's not so very hot;
Rate it 2 1/2." [on a 1 to 4 scale]

JOB: A COMEDY OF JUSTICE by Robert A. Heinlein
A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper
Ballantine, 1984, \$16.95.

This one starts out with more promise than other recent Heinlein novels (N_u_m_b_e_r_o_f_t_h_e_B_e_a_s_t and F_r_i_d_a_y, in particular), but about halfway through Heinlein once again reverts to his stock characters and the novel loses steam.

The premise is intriguing. Alex (that's Alexander Hergensheimer) is on a cruise in an alternate world to ours in which the Moral Majority would seem positively decadent. He walks through a fire in Poynesia (on a bet) and finds himself in an alternate world (to his) which is far more free. There he meets Margrethe, a stewardess on the cruise ship, who has been having an affair with Alex Graham, Alex's alter-ego in her world, and conveniently decides to fall in love with Alex. (If her name sounds like a literary allusion, it's no accident.) If this isn't confusing enough, some gangsters are after Alex Graham for the million dollars he has in his lock box on board, and in the confusion that follows, Alex and Margrethe end up in yet another world. This is just the beginning--they jump from world to world, usually with nothing more than the clothes on their back (sometimes less).

Now, I liked all the alternate world stuff, but that's my particular thing. I don't think Heinlein does it particularly well, but then he has an out--but that would spoil some of the plot. He's done this sort of thing before (in N_u_m_b_e_r_o_f_t_h_e_B_e_a_s_t), and it wasn't all that great there either. But the different life-views are interesting, even if all the consequences are perfectly worked out. Alex is a born-again Christian (of course--but would the phrase 'born-again' have arisen in h_i_s world?); Margrethe believes in Odin. Together they conclude that someone (some deity, actually--Loki? Satan?) has it in for them, and that's why their world keeps changing.

Unfortunately, somewhere around world #8 (give or take a couple of worlds), they meet a couple a lot like Robert and Virginia Heinlein (one presumes) who live in an amazing house (luckily we are spared precise descriptions of the plumbing, which up until this novel seem to have been a Heinlein mainstay) and have very liberal and radical ideas. There's a lot of talk about nudity and sex (another Heinlein staple--I wouldn't mind it so much if he did it well) and the usual philosophical speeches before Alex and Margrethe once again jump somewhere else. It's also about here that Alex and Margrethe start talking like stock Heinlein characters. A pity--they were interesting up to this point.

Then about three-quarters of the way through, Heinlein does an abrupt left turn and the novel becomes something else entirely. Unfortunately, what it becomes is not nearly as interesting as what it was. (Telling what would ruin the surprise, which is about all it's got going for it.) The novel just sort of trickles out, with a very unsatisfactory conclusion.

J_o_b is better than other recent Heinlein novels (everything since T_i_m_e_E_n_o_u_g_h_f_o_r_L_o_v_e), but it's not up to his earlier work by any means. It will probably be nominated by a Hugo (it seems that any novel by Asimov, Clarke, or Heinlein is), but it's a nostalgia nominee. (Strangely enough, it seems

remiscent of Silverberg's U_p_t_h_e_L_i_n_e, though I can't pin down why.)

THE FILM ENCYCLOPEDIA: SCIENCE FICTION by Phil Hardy

A book review by Mark R. Leeper

Less than a year ago I saw for the first time and reviewed a book called T_h_e_P_s_y_c_h_o_t_r_o_n_i_c_E_n_c_y_c_l_o_p_e_d_i_a_o_f_F_i_l_m by Michael Weldon. I considered this to be the best reference book on science fiction, fantasy, and horror film I had seen in well over a decade. I stand by that assessment. The heavyweight reference books in the field were Walt Lee's R_e_f_e_r_e_n_c_e_G_u_i_d_e_t_o_F_a_n_t_a_s_t_i_c_F_i_l_m_s and Donald C. Willis's H_o_r_r_o_r_a_n_d_S_c_i_e_n_c_e

F_i_c_t_i_o_n_F_i_l_m_s: A_C_h_e_c_k_l_i_s_t, both published in the early Seventies. These were the best works for finding out about that film that the local independent station was showing at 3 AM, Sunday morning. The early Seventies were a long time ago. There has been no updating of Lee and while Willis did write with a follow-up, H_o_r_r_o_r_a_n_d_S_c_i_e_n_c_e_F_i_c_t_i_o_n_F_i_l_m_s_I_I, it is a bit inconvenient to have to look up films in both books. Two general books on films M_o_v_i_e_s_o_n_T_V by Steven Scheuer and especially T_V_M_o_v_i_e_s by Leonard Maltin good books and are helpful, but neither is complete on genre films and Scheuer consistently underrates genre films.

So when P_s_y_c_h_o_t_r_o_n_i_c came out, it was certainly the most complete reference work on genre films to have been published for quite a long time. Now another good book has been published. The book is T_h_e_F_i_l_m_E_n_c_y_c_l_o_p_e_d_i_a: S_c_i_e_n_c_e_F_i_c_t_i_o_n by Phil Hardy. He does not cover the entire genre, he covers only films with some science fiction content. Hence, he does not list K_i_n_g_K_o_n_g, but does list K_i_n_g_K_o_n_g_v.s._G_o_d_z_i_l_l_a. He lists only films released theatrically in this country, not made-for-tv films. Within those bounds, Hardy is dependable and complete. I consider myself something of an expert on science fiction films and I had a really hard time finding science fiction films that do not have entries. Most unlisted films I have found are really fringe: D_r._X, T_h_e_A_p_e_m_a_n, T_h_e_H_a_p_p_i_n_e_s_s_C_a_g_e, M_a_n

M_a_d_e_M_o_n_s_t_e_r. They tend to be more horror than science fiction. Where Hardy really shines is in his coverage of foreign science fiction films. Minor Italian, Mexican, and Japanese films are included and I have yet to pick one that I have seen that Hardy does not cover.

For each film covered there is a review of at least a paragraph in

length, followed by credits and cast. The reviews are pretty reliable. Hardy knows the good films from the bad ones, generally, though on a few his opinions seem a bit off base. The listings are by year which means that it can be used as a reference on specific films or one can go through page-by-page to get a good overview of the history of the science fiction film, or, better yet, one can just browse the book. Overall, the book is a really pleasurable one to read and the work put into it justifies the apparently steep \$25 price tag. If you do not want to buy it for yourself, have your library buy it for their reference section.

Hugo Gernsback
An editorial by Evelyn C. Leeper

Every year the World Science Fiction Convention members give out the "Hugos," awards named after Hugo Gernsback. But what did Gernsback do to deserve this honor, and the respect that he is given in the science fiction community?

He didn't invent science fiction. Whether you want to claim that science fiction was invented by Jonathan Swift (or even earlier) or are one of those who dates (modern) science fiction from Shelley, Verne, and Wells, you have to admit that Gernsback did not invent it. He didn't even write much of it--his one surviving work is R_ a_ l_ p_ h_ 2_ 4_ C_ 4_ 1 and a pretty bad novel it is. He didn't seek out and promote the best authors--Wells and Stapledon were not regular contributors to A_ m_ a_ z_ i_ n_ g. What he did do was to give science fiction its own name--and its own ghetto. Far from performing a service for the genre, he acted in such a way that it has taken almost fifty years to even attempt to recover from the damage he did.

Before A_ m_ a_ z_ i_ n_ g_ S_ t_ o_ r_ i_ e_ s, science fiction was published in mainstream magazines. After A_ m_ a_ z_ i_ n_ g_ S_ t_ o_ r_ i_ e_ s, science fiction was published in science fiction magazines. Before A_ m_ a_ z_ i_ n_ g_ S_ t_ o_ r_ i_ e_ s, authors could expect a good novel to be reviewed by the press, sell well, and be read by a lot of people. After A_ m_ a_ z_ i_ n_ g_ S_ t_ o_ r_ i_ e_ s, authors could expect a good novel to

be

reviewed by the press, sell well, and be read by a lot of people--_ u_ n_ l_ e_ s_ s_ it was science fiction, in which case it wouldn't be reviewed (except in science fiction magazines), sell just about the same number of copies as any other science fiction novel, and be read by just about the same number of people as any other science fiction novel. The phenomenon of "it's not science fiction because it's good" got started here; science fiction books weren't reviewed by major reviewers.

At last we seem to be escaping from this trap. What prompted me to write this editorial was the increasing number of "cross-over" books that are being reviewed in both the science fiction markets and the mainstream markets. Authors like Isaac Asimov, Arthur Clarke, and Robert Heinlein you might expect to find on the bestseller lists and reviewed in the _ N_ e_ w_ Y_ o_ r_ k_ _ T_ i_ m_ e_ s_ R_ e_ v_ i_ e_ w_ o_ f_ B_ o_ o_ k_ s, but Anne McCaffrey and Philip Jose Farmer?

The "horror novel" was exempted from Gernsback's scope, and so (until a few years ago) horror novels were kept in the fiction section of the bookstore, not in a special section next to "science fiction" and "juveniles." With the Stephen King phenomenon, and what seems like every author coming out with a horror novel, some (but only some) stores have set up separate sections for horror novels, but even this seems to be going away. Not the science fiction section, though--Waldenbooks is even giving it its own club.

The result is that everyone loses. The authors whose books are classified as science fiction sell less (which is why so many "science fiction" authors have renounced the field). The readers who prefer science

- 2 -

fiction tend to do all their browsing in that section and miss the good novels filed in the fiction (which may or may not be science fiction anyway). Authors recently reviewed here that you might have missed by not checking the fiction section include Russell Hoban (_ P_ i_ l_ g_ e_ r_ m_ a_ n_ n), Virginia Woolf (_ O_ r_ l_ a_ n_ d_ o: _ A_ B_ i_ o_ g_ r_ a_ p_ h_ y), and Doris Lessing (_ S_ h_ i_ k_ a_ s_ t_ a). Other authors of the fantastic not to be found in the science fiction section include Jorge Luis Borges and Robertson Davies.

Given all the trouble that's he's caused, why _ d_ o people venerate Hugo

Gernsback?

THE DEAD ZONE
A film retrospective by Mark R. Leeper

I saw T_h_e_D_e_a_d_Z_o_n_e when it first came out, and at that time I did not like it very much. My main recollection of the film was that it was a cold emotionless, very episodic, that just did not capture my interest. I saw it as a bland film based on a bland book by Stephen King.

Some of you out there may know Terry Burke. Terry is a very remarkable woman who just incidentally seems to me to have very good taste in films and science fiction. It may be that her tastes are just well correlated to my own, but films that I like she seems to like and v_i_c_e-v_e_r_s_a. It was her who recommended to me the film H_i_g_h_R_o_a_d_t_o_C_h_i_n_a after all the reviewers panned

it. Almost anyone I know who has seen the film has really liked it, and I probably would have never bothered with it if Terry had not said she really liked it. One notable disagreement I have had with her was on the film T_h_e_D_e_a_d_Z_o_n_e. She had rented the tape and said that she and her husband really enjoyed the film. Based on her recommendation I gave the film a second viewing. What can I say, Terry? Maybe the film hit me in a bad mood last time. Seeing it now, I see a lot in the film that I must have missed the first time.

T_h_e_D_e_a_d_Z_o_n_e is a very well acted film that delves into the various aspects of what it means to have psychic powers. Christopher Walken wakes up from a five year coma with the power to see important scenes from a person's life -- past, present or future -- just by touching that person's hand. The film i_s episodic. It seems to move ahead as a series of short stories not very closely related. Walken tries not to use his powers, to lead a normal or even dismal life. But time and again chance visions force him to act on knowledge that he has rather than let people be hurt. Finally he has a vision so devastating that he must commit murder to literally save humanity. It is a cold film, but rather than emotionless, it really is an effective and moving film. The ending is ironically jubilant and sad at the same time. Somehow I think the film works better on the small video screen than it did in the theater. Television enhances the claustrophobic feel of the film in a way that the wide screen fought against. T_h_e_D_e_a_d_Z_o_n_e is one of the few films that should really be seen on TV. On the -4 to +4 scale, this one rates +2, up from a -1 on my last viewing. Thanks, Terry.

_ N _ O _ T _ E _ S _ F _ R _ O _ M _ T _ H _ E _ N _ E _ T

Subject: various reviews (catching up a bit)
Path: hocsl!houxm!ihnp4!nsc!chuqui
Date: Mon, 19-Nov-84 20:00:44 EST

It's amazing how much reading you can catch up while criss-crossing this wonderful country of ours-- airplanes and airports seem to have a purpose after all. Anyway, onward to things I should have read months ago:

Dying of the Light - George R. R. Martin
Pocket Books, \$1.95
Rating: ***

I've seen mixed reviews of this book, but I found myself entranced and involved in it. It isn't an easy or happy book-- this is a book for an active reader (similar but not as well done as Wolfe's books); definitely not a casual read. The story is set on Worlorn, a rogue planet on it's way out of a star system and into unending darkness. Worlorn was used as a festival planet by a federation of worlds, and now scientists are studying it as it dies. The book studies the scientists, their societies, and how they interact with each other. Very powerful on a gut level, especially the characters and their strengths, faults and foibles. It made me read long after I should have been asleep, and that is the best recommendation I can make.

Wings of Omen -- thieves world #6 - robert lynn asprin
Ace Fantasy, \$2.95
Rating: **

I was looking forward to this book after devouring 1-5, but this one left me flat. Perhaps the new characters just aren't as interesting as the older ones (noticably in the background in this book). Part of it may be that I just have trouble with the Beysibs (an amphibian invasionary force from book #5). Mostly I think it is just that I (and some of the authors) are running out of steam on the project-- I just don't think it will sustain itself much longer.

Robots of Dawn - Isaac Asimov
Ballantine #3.95
Rating: *

yawn a 398 page short story, padded to fill. No real challenges, no real suspense, Asimov at his most mechanical. Isaac Asimov writing about sex reminds me of reading Gray's Anatomy-- it's all there, in perfect detail, and I'm terribly bored. The whole book left me terribly flat, the only

reason this book seems to exist is to try to link (with understated references to psychohistory) the robots with Foundation. Not really worth

- 2 -

it, in retrospect.

hmm... only 30 books to go and I'm up to date. Time to go back east again, I guess... *grin*

chuq

Subject: Re: Enchanters' Endgame
Path: ihnp4!seismo!brl-tgr!jeffh
Date: Tue, 20-Nov-84 09:53:01 EST

"Enchanter's Endgame" the fifth and final book in David Eddings Belgariad just hit the stands. I recommend this whole series as one of the best to come out in the last ten years.

Jeremy Sanders

I, too, have been waiting for this to come out. I started it Sunday afternoon and finished it Sunday evening (with only one stop for food). As you might guess, i did enjoy it very much, but I do have some complaints. I feel rather let down by the ending of the book. I don't know why, maybe I was just expecting him to do something really original. After all, the concept was good, his writing has a quality and wit that is far too rare in this genre, the characters were well drawn and (mostly) believable. What more could I ask for?

[... Spoiler Alert ... Spoiler Alert ... Spoiler Alert ...]

Well, for starters, I wish that it didn't have such a @!##\$@*! Hollywood ending. Everybody (well, almost) gets married and is expected to "live happily ever after" (except Garion, his rather forced marriage has all the seeds for a really hen-pecked husband). I often felt that characters were thrown at each other and told to be "in love" without getting a chance to know each other and develop any sort of true understanding. The best example is probably Adara, the "true confession" scene wherein she expresses her love for Hettar as she lies (she thinks) dying rings totally false.

It's just too contrived to feel true. This applies to most of the romances. I'm not opposed to romance or happy endings, but I would have liked a little more originality and a little less reliance on old, worn-out formulae for a happy end.

In all, this book feels more rushed than the first four. It seems that the author lost control of some of his characters and relied on cliché to carry them rather than maintaining the expressive writing style that I was starting to expect from him. Perhaps he had too many people populating his book and tried to give them all equal access to center stage, but didn't have the time to craft each appearance for maximum effect.

Finally, the confrontation with Torak, though exciting, left me with no real impression other than "Oh well, another Ultimate-Evil-in-the-Universe-gets-

- 3 -

destroyed-novel." I'm tired of that sort of stuff, why can't more fantasy literature take a realistic approach to this subject, i.e. that evil resides in each of us, and that the true war between good and evil lies in the internal struggle rather than in destroying some great EVIL being. (sigh, I'll get off my soapbox, now) Whatever "technical and philosophical points" the author was trying to develop apparently got lost in the telling of one more good-destroys-evil fantasy story. And that is very disappointing, because he had the potential to do much better than that.

I still recommend the series highly. It's exciting, often humorous, and has some of the most enjoyable characters I've seen in a long time. It stands far above most fantasy literature in quality and concept. Read it.

Posted by: Jeff Hanes

Subject: Re: Gene Wolfe's Book of the New Sun
Path: ihnp4!zehntel!hplabs!hao!seismo!cmcl2!philabs!pwa-b!utah-gr!donna
Date: Fri, 23-Nov-84 08:27:52 EST

I've been out of town and just recently managed to get caught up with everything -- otherwise I would have attended to this earlier. (Perhaps not coincidentally, my trip was to recover my library from storage, including THE BOOK OF THE NEW SUN!) Beware: some spoilers may lurk in the following

discussion...

In the last chapter of THE CITADEL OF THE AUTARCH, Severian says:

Have I told you all I promised? I am aware that at various places in my narrative I have pledged that this or that should be made clear in the knitting up of the story. I remember them all, I am sure, but then I remember so much else. Before you assume that I have cheated you, read again, as I will write again.

Wolfe is something of a fan of detective fiction (as you might guess from his story 'The Rubber Bend'), and the last several chapters consist of the summation which the great detective always makes at the end of the story. Of course Wolfe doesn't want to spoil the fun of finding the answers, so he answers things obliquely, and you have to read carefully to guess at what particular puzzle is being explained.

I don't like to spoil the fun either, but I will mention some points to direct your re-reading that stem from things I've noticed or read elsewhere.

Easy one: Can you draw Severian's family tree? There are a number of red herrings which appear in the course of the books but the answer to this is fairly clear by the end of CITADEL.

What is the connection between the gold coin which Vodalus gave to Severian, and Dr. Talos? What relates it to the Sun and to the old

- 4 -

mausoleum in the necropolis of the Citadel? Bonus question, unrelated: What was the original function of the Citadel?

What generates the apparitions of Master Malrubius and the dog, Triskele? This should be easy to answer, perhaps more so because of the recent Asimov novel. (There does seem to be a curious parallel between Asimov's universe and Wolfe's...)

What really happened in the climactic event of THE CLAW OF THE CONCILIATOR? I don't believe this is stated directly but it is relatively straightforward to guess.

What is the basis of the Urthian religion? Analogies with at least two

of our religions come to mind.

Who is the Conciliator? What is Severian's connection to him, and to the New Sun? Who is responsible for this connection?

Finally, why is a rose's thorn as efficacious as the Claw? If you understand this, you understand the core of the books.

You have 30 minutes. Put your pencil down to indicate when you have finished. Start now.

There are lots of fun things to look for besides plot events, of course. One is tracing the origins of the stories and legends which the people of Urth tell. Another is catching references to Jorge Luis Borges' works; two places to look are the story of Domnina's encounter with Father Inire, and 'The Tale of the Student and His Son'. (There are others, too...) Another is looking for little clevernesses -- for example, what book in the set of four which Severian fetches for Thecla does he NOT describe? (I wouldn't have noticed this if Wolfe hadn't mentioned it in an article.) If you fancy this sort of thing, it helps to have a copy of THE CASTLE OF THE OTTER and to read 'The Books in THE BOOK OF THE NEW SUN' in PLAN[E]T ENGINEERING (which also has a map of the continent on which Nessus is located).

Wolfe started working on THE BOOK OF THE NEW SUN in 1975 and the last volume wasn't published until 1983. Think of all the effort that went into it -- it shouldn't be surprising that Wolfe wants the reader to do some work too.

If all else fails, you can see if the answers are in THE URTH OF THE NEW SUN when it comes out,

Donn Seeley University of Utah CS Dept donn@utah-cs.arpa

Subject: SO LONG AND THANKS FOR ALL THE FISH by Douglas Adams
Path: ihnp4!cbosgd!clyde!watmath!utzoo!linus!philabs!pwa-b!utah-gr!donn
Date: Wed, 21-Nov-84 20:54:24 EST

This book is billed as 'the fourth book in the HITCHHIKER'S trilogy', which

tells you at once just how serious it is... I won't attempt to describe the book for someone who hasn't learned how to fly, or to mix a Pan Galactic Gargle Blaster, or to enjoy THE HITCHHIKER'S GUIDE TO THE GALAXY and other books by Douglas Adams, but I will drop the following tidbits for aficionados: Arthur Dent is back on Earth, where curiously no one seems to remember that the planet was destroyed to make way for a hyperspatial bypass, and even more surprisingly, he manages to fall in love. FISH feels weaker than the other books in the series because its sole plot device is to tie together three fairly trivial loose ends from the earlier story, but it is more satisfactory in its treatment of characters -- we get to see more of Arthur Dent than his years of existence as the ashtray of history. The book is every bit as funny as its predecessors: Adams' talent for irony is superior to every other sf writer I know except possibly Robert Sheckley.

The obligatory quote:

THE HITCHHIKER'S GUIDE TO THE GALAXY, in a moment of reasoned lucidity which is almost unique among its current tally of five million, nine hundred and seventy-three thousand, five hundred and nine pages, says of the Sirius Cybernetics Corporation products that 'it is very easy to be blinded to the essential uselessness of them by the sense of achievement you get from getting them to work at all.

"In other words -- and this is the rock-solid principle on which the whole of the Corporation's Galaxywide success is founded -- their fundamental design flaws are completely hidden by their superficial design flaws."

Don't forget to forget the bit about hitting the ground,

Donn Seeley University of Utah CS Dept donn@utah-cs.arpa
PS -- Monty Python's THE MEANING OF LIFE is currently playing on cable; if you're an Adams trivia freak, watch the movie's title sequence very closely and you'll see something amusing.

Subject: "Oh God! You Devil!"
Path: ihnp4!ucla-cs!reihier
Date: Mon, 19-Nov-84 03:27:31 EST

Well, *I* didn't ask for another "Oh God" movie, but someone must have, because here it is, "Oh God, You Devil". What a clever idea, to have George Burns play both God and the Devil in this one. Isn't it amazing what wonderful ideas the folks in Hollywood can come up with when they put their acorn-sized minds to it? Perhaps someone murmured something during lunch at Spago's (goose liver sausage and goat cheese pizza, no doubt) about new improvements in double exposure technology, this was picked up by an eavesdropper, and one of Hollywood's great idea men said, "Why, we haven't done anything like this since Haley Mills! There may be a buck here!"

Given that George Burns is such a great comic performer, maybe there will be a buck here. Burns is the only reason to bother with "Oh God! You Devil?" (or some other punctuation, perhaps; I'm satisfied with just *spelling* titles correctly, myself). Burns takes lines that are barely even amusing and transforms them into moderately funny lines. But even alchemists have limits. They must have lead before they can turn it into gold - manure won't do. Most of Burns' lines are pretty bad, so the best he can do is make them sound respectable.

If there were more of Burns and less of Ted Wass, the film might still be worthwhile. Wass was really funny in "Curse of the Pink Panther", but this role is certain death for almost anyone. It makes you appreciate the low key charms of John Denver to see poor Wass struggling with this part. He plays an unsuccessful song writer who makes a deal with the Devil (George Burns). The deal results in his taking the place of a famous rock star Burns has just foreclosed on, giving Wass lots of the rewards of success, but separating him from his wife. Eventually inevitably, George Burns as God shows up to have it out with George Burns as the Devil over Wass' soul. Not very long ago Disney got iced at the box office with much the same plot ("The Devil and Max Devlin"), so no points for originality.

No points for much of anything else, either. "Oh, God? You Devil!" is very predictable. We all know what will happen, which is the peril of this kind of plot. The screenwriter must try and fit in little surprises to make up for predictability at the higher level, and the screenwriters here fail. Real ho-hum stuff fills out the borders. Paul Bogart is a hack director ("Skin Game" was his only good film, though some of his TV work is OK), and he puts in another hack job here. No mistakes, no inspiration. Ron Silver is good in a small role as a record producer, but we're not talking picture-saving, film-stealing good here.

The bottom line for "Oh, God, You? Devil??" is that your enjoyment of the film will depend entirely on how charming you find George Burns, and how much nonsense you're willing to sit through to get to him. I sort of like George Burns, so I almost enjoyed the film. "Oh! God You Devil" is a real good film to catch on cable TV when you have nothing better to do.

Peter Reiher

Subject: Brother From Another Planet

Path: ihnp4!seismo!cmcl2!nybcb!drennan

Date: Wed, 21-Nov-84 11:10:34 EST

John Sayles' new film "Brother From Another Planet" is a thoroughly remarkable movie. The basic premise is that the Brother, evidently a fugitive from another world, crashes on Ellis Island, and eventually makes his way to Harlem. Being black, he fits in pretty well, and some locals in a bar take him in as their own, not knowing what he is, of course. But

- 7 -

there's more. The Brother is being persued by two others from his world, who happen to be white and dress like Johnny Cash.

A remarkable thing about this movie is that the Brother never says a word, yet he conveys such a remarkable sense of wonderment toward what he encounters in New York, more convincingly than any tourist I've seen wandering around Times Square. I don't remember the actor who played the Brother, but it was one of the best examples of pure acting I've seen. I would recommend the movie on his performance alone.

But there are a lot of other reasons to see this movie. First, it is genuinely funny. The humor is a very real sort, the kind you come across in normal life, and very intelligently done. I will admit, though, that many of the jokes require some knowledge of New York, or maybe some other large city, to make any sense, but this is not something that should keep anyone away.

The story is also very touching and warm. The brother develops a very sympathetic character, and we really start to feel for him in his struggles his attempts to fit in, and as he makes friends with people here on earth.

The acting overall is very good. The group in Harlem that take him under their wing is a great collection of personalities that work very well together, yet still retain very individual characteristics. They're the sorts of characters that everyone will recognize somewhere in their lives. The pair of aliens following the Brother, one of which is played by John Sayles, are appropriately bizarre, and one of the funniest parts of the movies.

On the whole it is a very entertaining movie, and one that I would strongly recommend for everyone.

Jim Drennan

Subject: "Supergirl"

Path: ihnp4!ucla-cs!reiher

Date: Fri, 23-Nov-84 00:42:54 EST

The Salkinds seem intent on becoming the most seasonal of movie producers. They're bring us "Santa Claus" for the Christmas of 85, and they're offering us a turkey for this Thanksgiving. (It's an old joke, but I couldn't resist.) "Supergirl" isn't a very good movie. I think the Salkinds realized this, because they haven't spent much money on building it up. Maybe it will make its money back, but probably "Supergirl" signals the end of the Superman movies. If this film and "Superman III" are the best ideas anyone can come up with, it's just as well.

Supergirl (Helen Slater) lives in a city saved from the destruction of Krypton. The filmmakers don't bother explaining how this happened, and it's

- 8 -

been a long time since I read comics, so you'll have to go to net.comics to find out. (If you must, please do. I have absolutely no interest in finding out, myself.) At any rate, the city is kept going by a couple of power sources known as octahedrons. Due to carelessness, Kara (that's Supergirl's Kryptonian name) loses one. It lands on earth, in the hands of Faye Dunaway, a witch with dreams of world domination which the octahedron can fulfill. Kara goes to Earth to retrieve the octahedron, as the city cannot long survive without it.

For obscure reasons, she disguises herself as Linda Lee, a student at a girls' academy in the Midwest. The long arm of coincidence makes Lois Lane's cousin her roommate. The only point of this seems to be to introduce Jimmy Olsen as Lana Lane's boyfriend, but, since he has nothing to do other than represent the otherwise absent cast of the "Superman" movies, this point seems pointless. Rather than bustle about looking for the octahedron, Supergirl wastes her time attending classes. There's another worthless subplot involving Dunaway's and Slater's rivalry over Hart Bochner, a gardener who attracts their attention.

The screenplay of "Supergirl" is very arbitrary and makes little sense. Would two idiots really try to rape a woman in a Superman costume, particularly when she had already blown one of them through a wall and heated up the knife the other one pulls? Why does the octahedron make its container grow? Why does the voodoo wand Dunaway lays her hands on suddenly give her complete control over the octahedron's power? Why, when a love spell goes awry, doesn't Dunaway immediately break it? Again, don't bother sending me justifications, I really don't care. There's no point plugging holes in a Swiss cheese. David Odell deserves the blame for the screenplay. A few good lines do not make up for the overall dreadfulness of this script.

Some people protested when, earlier this year, I predicted that "Supergirl" would be a disaster due to the choice of Jeannot Szwarc as director. They said that my assessment of Szwarc as a hack was too harsh. Well, I was right and they were wrong. Szwarc, in fact, gives a bad name to hacks. He has absolutely no visible talent. The man just cannot direct. Since Alexander Salkind has chosen him to direct "Santa Claus", too, that film also is doomed to disaster. No great matter, it was a rotten idea anyway, and by keeping Szwarc busy on it, Salkind may have kept him from ruining a film with some potential. I am quite sure that Szwarc's main attraction for Salkind is that he works quickly and cheaply. Rapid shooting is OK, but not if it shows, and "Supergirl" displays telltale signs of shoddy, careless direction, probably due in part to cutting corners.

One of the few good things about "Supergirl" is the production design, which is superb. The sets are beautifully dressed and are quite original. The special effects are of variable quality and sometimes detract from the otherwise excellent surroundings. Many of the flying effects are unconvincing. To paraphrase the advertising slogan of the first "Superman" film, I do not believe that a girl can fly. There are also some overly obvious mattes and composite shots. On the other hand, some of the effects do work, particularly the carnage of an invisible monster sent to destroy

- 9 -

Supergirl.

The acting is also variable. Helen Slater starts out very badly, but eventually turns out all right. She is much better as Linda Lee than as Kara, and she is certainly not the find Christopher Reeve was. Hart Bochner has such a rotten part that it's hard to say whether he's unbearable through his own fault or not. Brenda Vaccaro, on leave from tampon commercials, is

pretty good as Dunaway's sidekick. Peter Cook is largely wasted as Dunaway's ex-mentor, though he does have a good moment teaching the girls of Linda Lee's academy, reminiscent of some of the great skits he used to do with Dudley Moore in reviews like "Good Evening", classics like "The Frog and Peach", "One Leg Too Few", and "Down the Mine". But I digress. Mia Farrow and Simon Ward share only one scene as Kara's parents.

Acting is a mystery to me, despite the fact that I have seen thousands of performances in films and have even done some acting on stage myself. Why is it that when Peter O'Toole, a very talented actor, lets out all the stops he is utterly delightful, whereas Faye Dunaway, also quite talented, is merely embarrassing when she uses the same tactic? Perhaps O'Toole would have been equally annoying if he had more scenes, but I don't think so. His eventual reappearance is one of the highlights of the film, even though his duties are just as silly as everyone else's. Faye Dunaway, on the other hand, overacts so outrageously that her perpetual presence is very hard to take. Some people may view her performance as high camp, and I suppose that that is what she was trying for, but I found her only intermittently amusing.

The careless nature of "Supergirl" makes it completely unengaging. Only the less discriminating fans of special effects extravaganzas and those with a taste for surfeits of camp will get much out of it. "Supergirl" isn't really much fun, and, for this kind of film, that is the ultimate indictment.

Peter Reiher

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT ALMOST BLANK

