

Lincroft-Holmdel Science Fiction Club
Club Notice - 7/18/84 -- Vol. 3, No. 3

MEETINGS UPCOMING:

Unless otherwise stated, all Lincroft meetings are on Wednesdays
in LZ 3A-206 (HO meetings temporarily suspended) at noon.

_D_A_T_E _T_O_P_I_C

- 07/31 Video meeting: AN ENGLISHMAN'S CASTLE, pt. 1
- 08/01 Video meeting: AN ENGLISHMAN'S CASTLE, pt. 2
- 08/02 Video meeting: AN ENGLISHMAN'S CASTLE, pt. 3
- 08/22 TEA WITH THE BLACK DRAGON by R. A. MacAvoy
- 10/03 CIRCUS WORLD by Barry Longyear
- 11/14 THE TOMBS OF ATUAN by Ursula K. LeGuin
- 01/02 THE CIRCUS OF DR. LAO by Charles G. Finney
- 02/13 SLAN by A. E. Van Vogt

LZ's library and librarian Lance Larsen (576-2668) are in LZ 3C-219.
Mark Leeper (576-2571, LZ 3E-215) and Evelyn Leeper (576-2378, LZ
1D-216) are co-chairpeople. HO's library and librarian Tim Schroeder
(949-5866) are in HO 2G-432. John Jetzt (577-5316) is HO-chairperson.

1. What can I tell you? This is another of those weeks. I can't
tell you about next week's Leeperhouse special. That's this week.
Next week is our week off. Nor can I tell you about next week's
lunchtime video program. There's one the week after next. A good
one. But what can I say? Next week there is no video program.
Nor are we discussing a book next week. We did that last week. So
here I am with egg all over my face. I am trying to think
something interesting to tell you. Gee. I hope you understand
this is kinda embarrassing. Ever just get up in front of a whole
room full of people and you just draw a blank? I mean ya feel like
two cents. Well. Ah. Well, this is sort of like getting up in
front of a room of people. There are 160 of you out there. Just
about. I guess that's like being up in front of a room full of
people. Sort of. I mean I know all of you are going to be out
there with your beady little eyes reading this. Expecting
something, I guess. I mean, if I don't find something interesting
to tell you, you're not going to want to read any more. Let me
think. Did I ever tell you about the dog I had when I was growing
up? No, I guess you wouldn't find that all that interesting. I
think Miracle Whip is really good on a tuna fish sandw... No,
that's no good either. You know it's pretty tough to get up here

each week and be a molder of minds. Why don't we each take a week off? Yeah, what the heck. It's summertime.

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

THE LAST STARFIGHTER

A film review by Mark R. Leeper

Alex Rogan is every space opera fan and every videogame addict who ever lived. He dreams of excitement and adventure in the farthest reaches of space. In fact, he wants to be just about anywhere but the Starlite Starbrite Trailer Park. But what choice does Alex have? He can either spend his days fixing TV antennas and stoves at his mother's trailer park...or he can go and fight an armada of evil alien ships somewhere out in the far reaches of space. It seems that Alex is so good at fighting aliens in the S_t_a_r_f_i_g_h_t_e_r videogame at the trailer park that Centauri, a fast-talking interstellar flim-flam man, wants to sell Alex's talents to an army of real starpilots.

If all this sounds like an eleven-year-old's fantasy, that is exactly right. This is just about a perfect film for an eleven-year-old mind. That does not mean that adults will not enjoy it. A film cannot be perfect for an eleven-year-old without some virtues an adult can appreciate.

The special effects are like the ultimate in Saturday morning cartoons. The special effects are almost all computer graphics produced on a CRAY. The film really does use state-of-the-art techniques to make objects in space look real and three-dimensional. The results are really impressive graphics that still, unfortunately, cannot match the believability of what Industrial Light and Magic has been doing with models for eight years now. One problem is that on the CRAY graphics are based on light studies on plastic models. This makes the images created all look like plastic and they all seem to have the same dark blue-gray colors that everything had in T_r_o_n. The computer graphics seem to have been the main and only concern of the technical effects departments. The makeup is occasionally decent--as in the case of Alex's lizard-like co-pilot--but another group of aliens have very unrealistic-looking plastic domes for heads. S_t_a_r_W_a_r_s had very

carefully created alien voices while the aliens' voices in T_h_e_L_a_s_t
S_t_a_r_f_i_g_h_t_e_r--which we hear only until Alex gets a voice-translator chip--
sound like human voices superficially processed electronically.

Besides newcomer Lance Guest playing Alex, the film has a number of unexpected faces. Robert Preston virtually recreates his "Music Man" role of Prof. Henry Hill in the role of Centauri. Equally surprising was the presence, if not the face, of Dan O'Herlihy. O'Herlihy was a well-known actor in the Fifties but apparently came out of retirement to make this film. H_i_l_l_S_t_r_e_e_t_B_l_u_e_s's Barbara Bosson has a small role as Alex's mother.

Because of the somewhat juvenile scripting and because the computer graphics were not the technical "endrun" that the producers were apparently hoping for, T_h_e_L_a_s_t_S_t_a_r_f_i_g_h_t_e_r is what someone has described as a "summer Kleenex film." You see it once and then you throw it away. But that once it is certainly worth seeing.

Mercury Capsules - July 18, 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_L_a_s_t_S_t_a_r_f_i_g_h_t_e_r: movie, special effects by Digital Productions, 1984.

Well, I expected it to be better than T_r_o_n, and it was. (Sherry Klus made an interesting observation: the effects in T_r_o_n were supposed to look like computer graphics, and did. The special effects in S_t_a_r_f_i_g_h_t_e_r were supposed to look like reality, and didn't, quite.) The state of the art of computer graphics is inferior to the state of the art of miniatures and stop- or go-motion photography. That may change. Most of the people I went with would have preferred computer-assisted animation. (My dream is movies

so cheap to make that someone could do Tolkien's L_o_r_d_o_f_t_h_e_R_i_n_g_s as six feature-length films.)

Oh, yes, the story. You probably already know that the hero, Alex, is trying to steer away from what could easily become a dead-end life. It's hard; he spends a lot of time phantasizing, and playing a video game called Starfighter. He breaks the record on the game, and soon afterwards, the games inventor (played by Robert Preston) if he'd like a shot at some r_e_a_l adventure.

There i_s a story, but not a lot - it moves slowly. +1 on [-4..+4]; recommended for the effects.

Paul S R Chisholm

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o+ "S_l_o_w_B_i_r_d_s": short story, Ian Watson.
**** Spoiler **** Spoiler **** Spoiler **** Spoiler ****

This is not a bad little story, if you don't think too much about the premise. In some future society, much like the U.S. in the first part of this century, people live in fear of metallic missiles that seem to come from nowhere and go nowhere. They creep slowly yards above the ground for some unpredictable length of time, then they just disappear. Of course, sometimes they just blowup, leaving the ground fused to glass for miles around. People are adapting to the problem, but only slowly. Glass-skating

becomes a popular sport and children write their initials on the slow moving missiles in flight. What are the slow birds? They are missiles for another universe taking a timewarp shortcut through our universe. So what I want to know is with a whole universe to choose from, why do they keep picking the surface of an inhabited planet to materialize? What's more the materialization points seem to follow the planet around its sun all by chance. Talk about Murphy's law!

Mark R Leeper

o+ Two comments on your review of Schenck's "Geometry of Narrative:"

1) Actually, it's not that hard to come up with something "truly new" to say about literature written by people currently dead (I make no judgments about their futures--religion isn't my thing). What is difficult is to say something new about the approximately 20 authors who invariably appear in different schools' curricula.

2) What your average literary scholar most especially wants to avoid is talking about living authors--productive or otherwise--because they are in the position to refute whatever scintillating points a budding scholar makes. The living writer can even sue for damages . . . & paying for a lawsuit out of an English professor's salary is no small trick. The dead, however, can be analyzed with impunity.

I realize that these two points are side issues in your wee review, but I didn't want you to be uninformed on this point. On a more serious note, what the story doesn't quite deal with is the very real problem of English literary criticism imitating the structure of scientific theories for its own theories. In my opinion, that's silly--trying to force that kind of objective structure onto a subjective discipline is wholly counter-productive. But objective studies get the grant money, so critiques of pseudo-scientific literary theories are greeted with all the warmth & open-mindedness that one would expect towards a coup d'wallet.

Carol E Jackson

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Gemini Capsules - July 18, 1984

"Gemini Capsules": SF review column, edited by Rob Mitchell. Appears in the "Lincroft-Holmdel SF Club Notice".

A medium for quick reviews of anything of interest in the worlds of science fiction/fantasy, although the gimmick will be to relate pairs of interesting anythings. Unlike other columns, I'll pass along even the slanderous and scatological comments I receive. You can reach out and touch me at 576-6106, at LZ 1B-306, or via hogpd!jrrt.

Two recent film releases

Last Sunday, I broke my firm rule against seeing movies during the first weekend they're out. Lines are generally long, and I'd rather let my friends go and warn me away from turkey films. Nonetheless, I sought some air-conditioned comfort and wound up seeing T_h_e_L_a_s_t_S_t_a_r_f_i_g_h_t_e_r and T_h_e_M_u_p_p_e_t_s_T_a_k_e_M_a_n_h_a_t_t_a_n.

S_t_a_r_f_i_g_h_t_e_r is classic space opera in the tradition of S_t_a_r_W_a_r_s. Note that I never said S_t_a_r_f_i_g_h_t_e_r was a rip-off of SW; that common accusation is unfair. There are indeed many stylistic similarities; alien races, a struggle against an evil alliance, even a Bad Guy who escapes from the final annihilation. Classic space opera is filled with those elements, though; S_t_a_r_f_i_g_h_t_e_r is merely true to its genre.

By now, everyone's heard about the Cray computer and the legions of programmers who developed much of the film's special effects. The effects are indeed splendid, but all the cliches about "Special effects do not a movie make" apply here. Combine the best of T_r_o_n with an uninspired S_t_a_r_W_a_r_s, and the result is S_t_a_r_f_i_g_h_t_e_r. Robert Preston is wonderful as an interstellar recruiter who talks a teenage video game whiz (Lance Guest) into saving the universe from Nasty Invaders. No other roles are particularly memorable, although Dan O'Herlihy as a scaly humanoid deserves Honorable Mention for making convincing facial expressions through a latex mask.

My gripe against this movie is that's true to the form of space opera, but not to the spirit. It's just not exciting enough. Our sympathies are directed to the protagonist in a few token scenes, but he never comes across as particularly heroic. The climactic space battle came and went between two sips of Coke--no time to even build up tension before the last loud-explosion-in-vacuum left the screen. In essence, then, S_t_a_r_f_i_g_h_t_e_r is basically good-hearted, innocent, and unapologetically corny, and deserves a look-see (if you go during the discount matinee).

Speaking of good-hearted, innocent, and unapologetically corny, T_h_e_M_u_p_p_e_t_s_T_a_k_e_M_a_n_h_a_t_t_a_n scores high in all three categories. The film starts with Kermit and crowd graduating from college, intent on taking their successful Senior Musical to Broadway. Naturally, all kinds of problems get

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in the way, and naturally, there is a Happy Ending.

Although perhaps not as innovative as the first Muppets film, TMTM does prove Jim Henson and Frank Oz haven't lost their imaginations or their puppeting skills. Memorable scenes include a bunch of rats helping out in a restaurant, Miss Piggy on roller skates chasing a purse-snatcher, Kermit et al as *babies*, and the highlight of the musical, when Kermit and Piggy get "married." (Is it just part of the show-within-the-show, or is it "official"? See the movie and find out).

TMTM says a lot of nice things about New York, and as usual lots of stars drop in for cameo appearances. If you have any affection for the Muppets, see this movie. And trust me -- you needn't wait for the matinee.

Rob Mitchell

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

Contributed by Rob Mitchell & Dale Skran

>From ihnp4!zehntel!hplabs!sdcrcdf!sdcsvax!akgua!mcnc!ncsu!ncrae
!usceast!ted Mon Jul 16 02:07:46 1984
Subject: Jack Chalker

<lunch time at the well of souls>

The subject of Jack Chalker recently came up, and I would like to make an observation and see if anyone agrees with me.

It seems to me that Chalker is perhaps the most callous writer I can think of with regards to his treatment of his characters. He never hesitates, and in fact seem to glee in putting them through the most radical of changes.

His characters are lobotomized, changed in sex (both wholly and in part), brainwashed, transformed into animals , put into other bodies, stripped of their intelligence bit by bit and have their arms ripped off. (I could go on).

I read Chalker's books (some of them anyway) because he has good ideas and executes them well, but sometimes I find myself cringing slightly at the thought of starting another one. Am I alone?

Ted Nolan ..usceast!ted

>From ihnp4!ut-sally!pooh Tue Jul 3 13:24:05 1984
Subject: Re: New Stephen Donaldson book(s)?

The new Stephen Donaldson book is called "Daughter of Regals and Other Tales." It is a wonderful demonstration of his versatility; he is able to handle different styles and subject matter very different from that in Thomas Covenant. He also includes a missing chapter from the Chronicles, which I found disappointing. However, the other stories are for the most part well-written and refreshing.

Wendy Nather

>From ihnp4!zehntel!hplabs!tektronix!tekchips!vice!keithl
Thu Jul 12 12:11:30 1984
Subject: The Sword of Allah - BAD

I know the rest of you are too smart to buy "disaster SF", but I know one of the authors so I bought:

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The Sword of Allah by "Richard Elliot"
(actually Portland, Oregon "SF Review" editor Richard Geis and Salem, Oregon author Elton Elliott)

Mini-Review: Something this awful has to be intentional.

Review: (Please Laugh - justify my typing this in)

The characters in this turkey are the Pedophilic Evil Scientist, the Heroic CIA Agent, the Evil Financiers, the Deluded Sister of Radical Survivalist, and the Woman Vice President. Pedophilic Evil Scientist (hereafter PES) builds Immensely Powerful Space Plasma Beam Weapon to help Fanatic Arab Dictator (backed by the EFs) rule world. PES secretly points IPSPBW at Sun, causing Sun to go crazy. H-CIA-A singlehandedly invades, gets captured, gets loose, destroys command center. But the laser causes Sun to emit one hour burst of intense microwaves, roasting the Eastern Hemisphere (and PES).

H-CIA-A returns to US to help WVP establish martial law and protect US from black market depredations of EFs.

Meanwhile, the DSRS (remember her?) stumbles on a Secret Underground Control Center (SUCC?) in the southern Oregon mountains. She nearly gets killed by the guards, but is hospitalized by the benevolent government and given money to stay quiet. Ungrateful DSRS leaves and goes to Radical Survivalist Brother, who leads capture of SUCC. WVP is now WP, who has drafted entire country, and taken over the economy, so that we can survive aftermath of Eastern Hemisphere Roasting, such as the high winds INTO the heated area (at all altitudes!). WP escapes Washington, and heads SUCC to continue controlling country. H-CIA-A single-handedly captures SUCC.

What Can We Learn From This Book?

- 1) Watch out for Pedophiles (They may be Evil Scientists!).
- 2) Watch out for Evil Financiers (who fund Pedophilic Evil Scientists).
- 3) The universe will go out of control at the drop of a technological hat.
- 4) CIA agents are Heroic and Good.
- 5) Microwaves penetrate thick metal, but take minutes to do so.
- 6) Air contracts when it heats.
- 7) People go crazy in disasters.
- 8) Totalitarian control is the only way to survive major disasters.

That's most of the jokes. The writing was average pot boiler. Worth speed reading if you're in a cynical mood and get the book free. Probably will be a major bestseller.

Keith Lofstrom

>From ihnp4!zehntel!hplabs!sri-unix!Woods.pa@XEROX.ARPA

Wed Jul 11 14:44:58 1984

Subject: Re: Jack Chalker review (still non-spoiler)

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I'm one of those people who don't really care for Chalker, and River of the Dancing Gods (RotDG) is a typical reason why. In my opinion, he tends to come up with extremely interesting settings upon which he stages extremely poor stories. The Well World series is another example -- the very idea of

the Well World is fascinating, and the setting should lend itself to all sorts of interesting stuff. But I found *Midnight at the Well of Souls* to be too shallow and choppy. (And I'm speaking as one who PREFERS relatively shallow stories; I find most of Gene Wolfe too deep.)

RotDG has only one thing going for it, and that's the "set of rules" that govern the magical world. After all, there are godzillions of stories about worlds where magic works, and a heckuvalot of them deal with people from our world going to such places. The set of rules, however, set the story up to be a satire of all those other stories, because the rules purport to be the basis of virtually all of the cliches we know and love. ("Weather and climate permitting, all beautiful young maidens shall be scantily clad.") Some of the rules quoted in the course of the novel even poke fun at fairly specific other novels, such as *Lord of the Rings*. But there's not enough of it to make RotDG satisfying as a satire (I'm not convinced that satire alone can possibly support an entire novel), and as a story it's mediocre at best. The characterisations, which should be extremely full since they should contrast the cliches against more normal aspects, range from absurd to absent. The plot itself is average, with only a few surprises, and some *deus ex machina* for good measure. And the surprises were typically where Chalker stepped away from the satire, whereas it would have fit better had he found ways to dust off old cliches and use them where we didn't expect them. That is, my reaction to his twists was usually "Well, that's different" and it should have been "Of course! I should have known!"

As the previous review (by Eric Smith) notes, the novel cries out for a sequel. (I don't want to create a spoiler by describing the ending.) Eric found this a plus. I thought it was a cheap trick and found the ending unsatisfying, but then I was bored by the whole novel and was certainly not interested in a sequel. Chalker seems to like producing series. Besides the mediocre Well World and mediocre *Dancing Gods* series, he's got another one (*Four Lords of the Diamond*) that I've been told is utterly worthless and have never bothered to read.

The one book by Chalker that I've actually enjoyed all the way through was "*And the Devil Will Drag You Under*". Though it'll never be a classic, it was at least a good read. And it has two features that set it apart from the other Chalker I've read or heard about: (1) It not only has an interesting idea as its basis, he spends some time taking advantage of the idea to generate interesting situations and resolutions. (2) To my knowledge it has never had a sequel.

-- Don.

>From ihnp4!zehntel!hplabs!sri-unix!VLSI@DEC-MARLBORO Mon Jul 9 17:17:00 1984

Subject: defense of "The Cold Equations"

Let me put in a word in favor of "The Cold Equations" by Tom Godwin. Most SF stories are relentlessly optimistic. Given enough smarts, SFers believe that they can get around any difficulty, solve any problem. The whole point of "The Cold Equations" is that some problems cannot be solved. There is no way that both the pilot and the stowaway can both land safely. There is no way that the stowaway can land the shuttle. Therefore she has to go out the airlock.

Jeff Duntemann calls this an "idiot plot", a plot that only works if everyone involved is an idiot. "Why not unbolt a chair and throw it out?", he suggests. Well, the shuttle already had to be stripped down to make it possible for it to land at all. The fifty extra kilos of a stowaway was outside of its safety margin. The idea was to set up a situation that even can-do engineers would admit was hopeless. The parameters of the situation could be changed to make it even worse. The point is that these situations exist, that sometimes there is nothing you can do. This is a true but unpleasant moral, which is why "The Cold Equations" is a good story.

John Redford

>From ihnp4!zehntel!hplabs!sri-unix!duntemann.wbst@XEROX.ARPA
Wed Jul 11 14:33:07 1984
Subject: Constructed Worlds

Lordy, it was such an awful book I had plum forgotten it...

Patra-Bannk was the hollow planet from THE WORLD IS ROUND by (I think; book's at home) Tony Rothman, who is the son of another Rothman who occasionally writes SF. (First name escapes me right now.)

THE WORLD IS ROUND was a sad example of a book containing a well-worked out technological concept and entirely too much filler. Patra-Bannk was a titanic shell surrounding a black hole, rotating very slowly as it revolved about its star. The combination of slow rotation and period of revolution made for some very bizarre seasons, alternately hideously cold and killingly hot. End of interesting stuff.

What remains is silliness overlaid upon silliness, loose ends galore, and an ending which left one most thoroughly disappointed. This might have been something as novel as Ringworld, had the author taken the time to concoct something clever to happen on or inside the planet. Instead there is a stupid war among stupid humanoids and no identifiable motivation for any of

it.

The best parts of this book were the cover painting, the essay on the seasonal dynamics of Patra-Bannk, and the name of one (minor) character: Paddleack. The rest, after a year or two, has simply faded into the mud.

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Skip it.

PS: Do remind me of any other Constructed World stories you are familiar with...

--Jeff Duntemann

>From ihnp4!zehntel!hplabs!sri-unix!dantonio%vlnvax.DEC@decwrl.ARPA
Thu Jul 12 17:44:45 1984
Subject: Neuromancer

I have read the reviews/spoilers on Neuromancer by William Gibson and they sounded suspiciously like a short story I had read so I did some research and turned up the following:

William Gibson wrote a short story called "Burning Chrome" in the July '82 issue of Omni Magazine (the one with the eye-ball and person doing a back flip on the cover). It too featured a somewhat less than honest person "jacking into cyberspace" for fun and profit (mostly the later!). There was also a place called Chiba City where many people went in hopes of becoming simstim (simulated stimulation) stars, but it was a minor aspect of the story.

It was enjoyable and I have reread it many times. If this is anything like Neuromancer, then I will look forward to getting a copy...

Beware the black ice!

DDA

>From ihnp4!decvax!ittvax!dcdwest!sdcsvox!sdcrcdf!trwrb!trwssp!urban
Wed Jul 11 15:02:31 1984
Subject: Man of Gold

M.A.R. Barker started thinking up his imaginary world of Tekumel, we are told, when he was 10 years old. Tekumel is extraordinarily rich in culture, geography, history, languages, and mythology and is probably the first such creation that can justifiably be compared to Tolkien's world with respect to the sheer volume of creative energy that has gone into it. Perhaps most appealing about it is that it is not yet another medieval European clone-world, but is more strongly influenced by a combination of Arabic, Hindu and (curiously) Central American Indian languages and cultures.

But where Tolkien used the conventional forms of literature as his public outlet for his mythology, Barker instead found his medium in 1975 in the then-infant medium of Fantasy Gaming, and published "Empire of the Petal Throne". Since then, the game has been completely revised and rewritten and

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is published under the name of "Swords and Glory".

This month, Barker's first novel of Tekumel, "Man of Gold", has been published by Daw books. As a first novel, it's not bad, but nothing special. The Young Hero is somewhat vapid (a common enough fault) but the people around him are pretty interesting folks and everyone has the unmistakably "alien" feel of a really different culture. The resolution of the plot has a couple of interesting twists to it, but I don't want to generate a spoiler.

The problem with the book is that Barker is rather more caught up with showing you his world and giving you something of a travelogue than he is interested in coming up with a really original or interesting story. He's not the first writer to have this problem (Lichtenberg's Sime/Gen novels come to mind), but I was hoping for more from such a creative fellow. On the other hand, I already knew a fair amount about Tekumel, and was glad to "visit" it again, so I enjoyed it anyway. To a reader new to his world, the reaction might be either intrigue or utter confusion; I'd be interested to hear.

>From ihnp4!zehntel!hplabs!sri-unix!VLSI@DEC-MARLBORO Fri Jul 13 20:07:00 1984
Subject: constructed worlds

Here are all the constructed worlds that I can think of, including the ones that have been mentioned already:

"Ringworld" and "The Ringworld Engineers" by Larry Niven - The classic example. There is some planet-shuffling in "The World Out of Time" as well, but no planet construction.

"Orbitsville" by Bob Shaw - Dyson sphere with Earth-like conditions inside (well, Earth-like except that the sun never sets). I think there's a sequel out now.

"The World is Round" by Tony Rothman - Jupiter-sized hollow planet whose main reason for existence seems to be to make it tough for the people on it to realize they are living on a sphere. They go ahead and prove it anyhow, using the same techniques we did.

"Wall Around a Star" by Jack Williamson and Fred Pohl - Extra-galactic star-size planet attacks the Milky Way. "The Farthest Star" also has the same premise.

"Strata" by Terry Pratchett - People find Earth-moving machinery left over from an alien civilization and start to roll their own.

"Cageworld" by Colin Kapp - Four volumes in this series are out now. Giant computer builds shells around the Sun to provide more living room. The old planets (the "cageworlds") sit in gaps in the shell like ball bearings in a

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race. Kind of glosses over where all the material comes from.

"Starmaker" by Olaf Stapledon - A history of intelligent life in the universe, with lots of macro-engineering towards the end, eg hollowing out crusts of dead stars.

"Titan", "Wizard", and "Demon" by John Varley - Creatures a hundred kilometers across with habitable conditions inside and eccentric masters.

"Maker of Universes" by Philip Jose Farmer - Humanoid aliens make pocket

universes as playgrounds. Earth is one of them. There are several books in this series, but this was the only title I could remember. "Riverworld" only counts as terraforming (not that digging a million mile long river is easy), not as real planet construction.

And finally let me mention "The New Cosmogony", a short story by Stanislaw Lem (collected in "A Perfect Vacuum"). The trouble with all this cosmic engineering is that we don't see it taking place. Surely if re-arranging stars were possible, some alien race would already be out there doing it. Lem's answer is that the early civilizations have gone beyond that; instead of manipulating crude matter they work with the stuff of physical law itself. Anomalies like quasars are past mistakes. Asymmetries like the spins of muon emission are problems that are not yet worked out. The theory would be proved if we saw these wrinkles being ironed out. And why aren't there any intermediate level civilizations? Because the big boys don't want anyone else to play. It's time to start shielding our TV broadcasts.

/jlr

>From ihnp4!decwrl!decvax!mcnc!akgua!psuvax1!williams Sat Jul 14 14:16:39 1984
Subject: Dune Sequels

I'm getting weary of hearing people call the Dune sequels "garbage". Anything pales against Dune, but I personally am glad that Herbert continues to write sequels. "God Emperor" is brilliant. What other author (with the possible exception of C. S. Lewis) has dared address the issues raised there? Techni mentality appreciates exposure to current issues in exotic setting. Emphasis on exotic setting. Herbert creates a universe with fewer strokes than most authors use to create a world. He allows us to glimpse a bit of the meta order, the big picture. How many people have seen how many suns rise on how many worlds for how long? Every single pain and pleasure a mirror of itself and all others across all of space and time. All of us are comfortable with rebellion. We identify with Maud'dib. It is easier to destroy than to build. Destruction is the pattern. Creating an order breaks the cycle. Reading "God Emperor" we are forced to ask what it is we should build. Contrast Leto's "Golden Path" with the conclusion of Lewis' "Out of the Silent Planet". To which philosophy do you subscribe?

Lance Williams

>From ihnp4!decwrl!dec-rhea!dec-akov68!boyajian Thu Jul 12 06:24:39 1984
Subject: TESTAMENT review

The other week, I rented a copy of the movie TESTAMENT, an American Playhouse production for PBS that was released to theaters sometime late last year. I managed to miss it when it was released, and as it presented a somewhat different view of nuclear armageddon than THE DAY AFTER, I wanted to take a look at it. BTW, Jane Alexander, who played the mother in this film, was one of the nominees for Best Actress this year for this role.

TESTAMENT is very different from THE DAY AFTER, though no less gloomy. THE DAY AFTER went for the big picture: tensions in Europe leading up to war, flashy (no pun intended) special effects of the nuclear holocaust, mega-deaths, and slow, ugly deaths for the survivors. It tried in its first half to present the normal everyday life of a large set of characters so that we got to know them well enough to empathize with their situations when all hell broke loose. And, that film succeeded to some degree in this (for me, at least).

TESTAMENT, on the other hand, succeeds much more admirably in this regard. Rather than a host of characters, this film concentrates its point of view on one family: a mother, a daughter, and two sons (the father is on his way home from work when the bombs hit and is never heard from again). This narrowing of focus allows for a much greater opportunity to get to know these characters, so that their plight is that much more saddening. TESTAMENT shies away from the reasons behind the war, as well as visual effects. The locale is a mythical suburb of San Francisco, and everything seems peaceful when all of a sudden the tv is interrupted by a news broadcast about nuclear warheads detonating in some major cities. Then comes a flash of light through the windows as SF is hit. The rest of the film concentrates on the problems along the way as this community struggles to survive in the aftermath. As in THE DAY AFTER, we are faced with the slow deaths of the residents of the town, though this time we are spared the gruesome make-up of the former movie.

If this film makes any point, it's how helpless the average community can be in the face of such a disaster. And yet, despite the outcome, there is also a gratifying sense of good people helping each other through the crisis, and how some people just don't give up.

I liked THE DAY AFTER quite a bit. Unlike many critics, I found it to be dramatic, believable (with the usual caveats that the truth will most likely be worse than the fiction), and effective. TESTAMENT is the same, only more so. As horrifying as TDA was in its scenes of mass destruction, TESTAMENT was equally horrifying in its relative quietness. And it was much more dramatic. It's certainly a depressing picture, but it's a well-made depressing picture.

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If TESTAMENT shows up on PBS (maybe it has already, when I wasn't looking), I recommend watching it. If any of you own a VCR, I recommend renting a tape copy. It's unfortunate that with all the ballyhoo that THE DAY AFTER generated, TESTAMENT kind of slipped by unnoticed (as did an NBC tv movie from last spring, SPECIAL BULLETIN).

--- jayembee (Jerry Boyajian, DEC, Maynard, MA)

>From ihnp4!zehntel!hplabs!sri-unix!reiher@UCLA-LOCUS.ARPA
Sat Jul 14 15:43:29 1984
Subject: movie review: "Eyes of Fire"

Another film from Filmex, "Eyes of Fire" is an unusual fantasy/horror film. It's set in 1750 on the American frontier. A preacher with somewhat loose moral standards for his own behavior barely avoids hanging and escapes to the wilderness with several of his loyal followers. They float downriver on a stolen raft, pursued by the husband of the woman the preacher has been fooling around with. Hostile Indians and Frenchmen force them to land and flee to a valley which the Indians have marked as taboo. As always in such films, there's a damn good reason the Indians won't touch it with a ten foot pole. Good thing that the settlers have unknowingly brought along their very own witch, a girl the minister saved when her mother was burned as a witch (they had a real difficult time with her; the fire kept going out...). Ever since saving her, the minister has been unusually lucky. For instance, the rope breaks when the villagers try to hang him.

"Eyes of Fire" is beautifully photographed, in a backwoods area of Missouri. The art direction is also quite good, as are the effects and makeup. The film cost only a little over a million to make, but looks much better than that. There are a lot of shocks and general grossness, but little blood and dismemberment. The first-time director, Avery Crounse, relies more on good, old-fashioned shock effects than "Friday the 13th" style butchery. His background as a still photographer shows up in some lovely shots.

It is only fair to mention that opinion on this film is divided. Many critics thought that Crounse had taken an interesting situation and then just dumped it in favor of standard horror film nonsense. Some people leaving the theater were saying how great it was, others thought it was a

piece of trash. I, myself, liked it a lot. It will probably be released in a few months.

Peter Reiher

>From ihnp4!zehntel!hplabs!sri-unix!reiher@UCLA-LOCUS.ARPA
Sat Jul 14 16:06:39 1984
Subject: movie revies: "A Science Fiction Omnibus"

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More news from Filmex. The programmers grouped together five science fiction and fantasy shorts made within the last couple years in Canada and the US, under the title "A Science Fiction Omnibus". The films are between 13 minutes and half an hour in length, and, as might be expected, are uneven in quality.

"The Plant" is a film from Canada about an unusually virulant houseplant taken in by a lonely fellow. Eventually, it takes over his house. The stop-motion effects are well done, and well integrated, and there's nothing wrong with the film, but it's a bit thin.

"Quest" is based on an original Ray Bradbury story, and is directed by Saul and Elaine Bass. Saul Bass is the fellow responsible for the credit sequences of the James Bond films, and many other films. The story concerns a world in which people live for only eight days, and a boy who is sent out to open a set of doors which will allow light to flow through and give the people longer lives. He must overcome many obstacles on the way. The imagery is truly dazzling in this little short, and it includes some first class model and matte work, as well as a good miniature effect. The story, unfortunately, is overly familiar. None the less, the splendid effects made this the audience's favorite, and mine as well.

"Renascence", on the other hand, drew hisses and boos. Half an hour of a nasty fellow killing off a young woman and reviving her so that she can do his household chores and serve as his victim again. The photography, in black and white, was good, and the actors played there parts as well as possible, but it's far too long and repetitive.

"Strange Tangents" combines some pretty good effects with what is truthfully the worst acting I've ever seen on a movie screen, and I've seen over 3000 films. The writing also stinks. The whole is obviously an attempt to showcase the special effects talents of the makers. The story concerns a sorceress' attempt to recover a crystal from a far dimension before her master croaks. There's a lot of good effects, setting aside some second rate and unnecessary stop motion photography of a salamander (apparently literally a Ray Harryhausen reject creature). There are four speaking parts, and all of the actors would be booed off the stage at a junior high school play.

"The Final Hour" concerns a convicted space commander on his way to his last appeal before he is executed fo murder. He must save the two person vessel he is travelling on from disaster, and also attempt to escape. A set of final twists is totally without impact. There are no special effects worth speaking of (other than lots of sparks and smoke), and the sets were either copied from Roger Corman's sf films or perhaps are even the same sets slightly disguised. Not really worth the trouble.

Overall, I highly recommend "Quest" (if you know someone who programs for conventions, tell him/her that it's a sure hit), would suggest seeing "The Plant" if you don't have to go out of your way to do so, and recommend "Strange Tangents" for those interested in special effects, even when

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they're all a film has going for it. No need to walk out of "The Final Hour" if you happen to find yourself watching it, but don't bother looking for it. Avoid "Renascence" at all costs.

Peter Reiher

>From ihnp4!ut-sally!ut-ngp!mcgill Fri Jul 6 12:35:05 1984
Subject: JOE BOB BRIGGS

Rhett Beavers got drunk and forgot to mail in Michael Jackson concert extortion money, and so yesterday he left town trying to drive cross country to New York City to give Don King 120 bucks in person and ask him if he could have seat in Texas Stadium for the big convention of Jehovah's Witnesses with trick knees and bad haircuts and then after that "Captain

Kangaroo" got canceled by the network, and between the two of 'em Rhett got all depressed and couldn't talk about anything except what was gonna happen to Dancing Bear.

Anyhow, none of that has anything to do with it, cause I had to take the Toronado down off the blocks anyway and haul buns out to Lubbock on this emergency rush job. They were showing a new art flick called "Human Animals" out there, and I could smell communist censorship before I even got halfway to Fort Worth.

Somebody called up and told me the radio stations were refusing to play the "Human Animals" commercials because they sounded like a gang rape. So I tooled out there to police the mothers.

I'm kinda disgusted to report it, but what's happened now is the guys in El Lay that own "Human Animals" have jerked it off the drive-in screens of America because of pressure from the national ugly people's lobby, because the ugly people believe the title includes them.

Chernenko 1, Joe Bob nada.

Before I tell you exactly what we're gonna do to put "Human Animals" back on the big outdoor screen where it belongs, let's take a quick look at the beast itself. I'm talking plot.

The big nuke boys just got finished. Nothing's on the planet except for three people: two guys and one bimbo. This is the movie that asked the question, "What would you do?"

They made this flick in Italy, so first thing you see is these three turkeys standing on the deserted beach in their tuxes and evening gowns and not saying anything and listening to the wind and watching the camera jump around and come up to two inches away from their faces. That's how you know it's Italian. In Italy, all the cameramen have bad eyesight so they make the actor's pimples about nine feet high.

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Here's the best part of the whole movie: no talking.

Then there's a killer crab attack, and the blonde porkchop has to rip off part of her pink dress to make a bandage on her toot. Now we're talking

trouble. Now we're talking attack of the male hormones.

As soon as this black-headed goonface with a Gene Shalit mustache finishes his crab sandwich he's on her cookies like ugly on Lou Ferrigno. It's OK, though, cause the crabmeat makes him do it.

Next thing, these people go to a lighthouse and meet a dog. The dog is the best actor in the picture. The dog leads 'em to water but he can't make 'em think. The dog takes 'em to a lagoon where they get nekkid and play Marco Polo and then go kill some jackrabbits and skin 'em for breakfast.

In other words, you can see what we got here. We got Stupid Family Robinson.

Next thing, they all start building huts and planting earth-food and the dog helps gather firewood, and then one day Lady Godiva decides to strip down to her tutu and take a raft ride. But both guys make like Johnny Weissmuller and go after her and end up piking at each other with a knife. Blackbeard wins. The dog watches.

Then one day she goes off in the woods with the dog, and when she gets back Blondie and the dog go in the hut together.

This is the place where a lot of guys switched on their ignitions and drove straight home, and we haven't even got to the winning combination yet.

We're talking 32 full breast exposures (the count is limited to two to a scene). Two dead bodies. Primitive kung fu. Two quarts blook. Killer crab attack. Three beasts. No talking to get in the way of dialogue. Excessive whining. The movie that gives a new meaning to the word "doggie-style."

A totally disgusting three stars.

