

Lincroft-Holmdel Science Fiction Club
Club Notice - 9/5/84 -- Vol. 3, No. 8

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

09/11 Video: DAY OF THE TRIFFIDS (BBC version) Pt.1 Tue.
09/12 Video: DAY OF THE TRIFFIDS (BBC version) Pt.2 Wed.
09/13 Video: DAY OF THE TRIFFIDS (BBC version) Pt.3 Thur.
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. Our next lunchtime movie is the recent BBC production of John
Wyndham's DAY OF THE TRIFFIDS. This is NOT the film you saw as a
kid with Howard Keel. (Gee, I never had neat friends like that
when I was a kid). No, this is a recent production for BBC
Television that prompted Dale Skran (the club's local fan of post-
holocaust film and literature, probably due to some inner sadistic
streak) to say it was the best dramatic presentation of a post-
holocaust society he had ever seen. As holocausts that end society
go, this one is pretty benign (English translation: it is buffered
and will not upset your stomach), but it is an interesting
holocaust and a very well made film. It is run periodically on the
Arts and Entertainment cable channel, whom we thank for
involuntarily providing it.

2. Here they are:

HUGO WINNERS FOR 1984

NOVEL -- S t a r t i d e R i s i n g by David Brin

NOVELLA -- "Cascade Point" by Timothy Zahn (ANALOG 12/83)

NOVELETTE -- "Blood Music" by Greg Bear (ANALOG 6/83)

SHORT STORY -- "Speech Sounds" by Octavia Butler (IASFM mid-Dec/83)

NONFICTION BOOK -- E n c y c l o p e d i a o f S c i e n c e F i c t i o n a n d
F a n t a s y,

_V_o_l._3 by Donald Tuck
DRAMATIC PRESENTATION -- _R_e_t_u_r_n_o_f_t_h_e_J_e_d_i
PROFESSIONAL EDITOR -- Shawna McCarthy
PRO ARTIST -- Michael Whelan
SEMIPROZINE -- _L_o_c_u_s
FANZINE -- _F_i_l_e_7_7_0

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FAN WRITER -- Mike Glycer
FAN ARTIST -- Alexis Gilliland
JOHN W. CAMPBELL AWARD -- R. A. MacAvoy

3. Thanks to Steve Houle for donating:

Gerrold, David	THE GALACTIC WHIRLPOOL
Haldeman, Joe	PLANET OF JUDGMENT
Heinlein, Robert A.	THE MENACE FROM EARTH
Hubbard, L. Ron	BATTLEFIELD EARTH
Niven, Larry	RINGWORLD
Silverberg, Robert	WORLD'S FAIR 1992
Wolfe, Gene	THE SWORD OF THE LICTOR

to the Lincroft SF Library.

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

WEB by John Wyndham
A book review by Mark R. Leeper

A peculiar practice that seems to be becoming common is when a popular (or even a not-so-popular) author dies, you stash his last novel in a vault somewhere for a decade or more, wait for the author to become legend, then publish the book. The reading public is supposed to see the book for sale and say something like "A new book by Mort D. Ceased?!? Why, he's been dead for years! I gotta have this book to complete my collection." More often than not you find out that this may not have actually been his last novel, but is an earlier work that the author--perhaps inspired by the parent in a Lovecraft story about a monstrous child--could not disown, but could not release on the world either, so hid in an attic. I guess what started that trend was Tolkien's S_i_l_m_a_r_i_l_l_i_o_n. More recently there was a new "Fuzzy" novel by H. Beam Piper. There are whole series of Doc Smith and Robert E. Howard books published after the author's death with the help of a co-author that the poor dead author never chose. But this is a slightly different but related trend. It all comes down to the fact that when an author dies his name may become more popular and he totally loses the right to say that one of his works turned out wrong and should not be published.

W_e_b is a new novel by John Wyndham. These days if you ask me who my favorite science fiction authors are, you will probably get an evasive answer like "I don't have favorite authors, only favorite books." That's an easy out but it avoids claiming I like everything by a given author. Nonetheless, if you'd asked that question when I was in high school, you'd probably get Wyndham as one of the top three. Wyndham never published W_e_b, and the reasons are clear from the novel. It's not that W_e_b is not an enjoyable book to read, but when it comes right down to it, W_e_b simply failed to become a whole lot better than a nature disaster novel like any number of writers like James Herbert or Arthur Herzog write--perhaps not even that good.

The plot of W_e_b involves an attempt to start a Utopian community on an isolated South Pacific atoll. One major problem, however, is that this particular island has been taken over by a new mutated breed of spider. They are no different than any other spiders except that they have learned to co-operate like ants and bees do. The result, reminiscent of P_h_a_s_e_I_V, is that they have become rulers of their environment and when they are invaded they battle for dominance of the island. There is also a subplot of a native curse of the island that seems borrowed from a grade-B movie. Not that that in itself is bad. T_h_e_D_a_y_o_f_t_h_e_T_r_i_f_f_i_d_s is superficially about giant walking man-eating plants. If that isn't a B-film concept, nothing is. Wyndham can take an unpromising idea and make a good book out of it.

Well, W_e_b isn't a b_a_d book. It is well-written with a sense of wonder at the natural history of spiders. After reading W_e_b, I find spiders much more interesting creatures. And there are some interesting discussions of nature and the naivete' of looking at nature as benevolent or as anything but a vicious game in which humans are temporarily the best players. W_e_b is a book written with vision which simply failed to be sufficiently different from a hack novel. So Wyndham never published it. And Penguin Books did when Wyndham could not say no. It's okay fare overall. Completists won't have too bad a time with it.

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_N_O_T_E_S_F_R_O_M_T_H_E_N_E_T

Contributed by Rob Mitchell & Dale Skran

>From ihnp4!harvard!seismo!uwvax!uwmacc!demillo Fri Aug 10 23:47:30 1984
Subject: Re: U-Haul from the Milky Way to Andromeda.

Karl ---

In the question of clones and immortality, I'd have to agree with Perlman. Selfness is not dependent on behavior. Because you have another entity with the same genetic pattern as yourself does not imply that this new entity is the same as yourself. Even if you could core dump what we embody with the term "mind" into the clone he/she/it would still not be you. The two of you would have the same "life experiences" up to and including the core dump, but you would no longer be sharing the same perspectives, etc...

Philosophers and scientists have long debated what it is that actual comprises the "soul" of a being...chances are it doesn't depend on the hardware or the software so much as the firmware. The combination of the physical brain and the energy that the brain generates...

Ah well, it was just an observation...I'll stop myself before I begin to ramble...

--- Rob DeMillo

>From ihnp4!decwrl!spider!lewis Tue Aug 14 04:03:35 1984
Subject: Thomas Pynchon

I tried to start V. and The Journal of Albion Moonlight and found both to be full of pretentious, self-indulgent writing about silly, uninteresting characters. They might have claimed to be looking for "MEANING" but they weren't looking very hard and they didn't really seem to want to find any.

However, since I couldn't finish either, and both were relatively early works, perhaps someone can tell me why Pynchon is worth reading?

- Suford

>From ihnp4!zehntel!hplabs!sri-unix!BLARSON@ECLD.#ECLnet
Tue Aug 14 07:16:48 1984
Subject: Book Review: Worlds Apart by Joe Haldeman

Worlds Apart --- Joe Haldeman

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Ace Paperback: September 1984 \$2.95 Isbn: 0-441-91072-6
(My how time flies, I thought it was still August.)

Micro-Review: Ho-hum

Mini-review: Not bad, but not great. Interesting Ideas not fully developed.

Review:

This book, a sequel to WORLDS, is a post world war 4 (or 3) novel centered on the surviving L5 type space station. Action takes place, but it happens to the main character more than being caused by the main character. It contains two separate plot lines that get further apart as the book continues. I do like Joe Haldeman's writing style, but this book reads like the middle book of a trilogy: much of the action taking place before the book starts and there is no solid ending. The original idea in this novel... a plague that kill everyone over about 20... is used more as a backdrop than anything else.

This review probably makes the book sound worse than it is, but this certainly isn't Joe Haldemans best work.

P.s. Which story is Rhysling from? I recognize all the other dedications.

>From ihnp4!zehntel!hplabs!utah-cs!donn Tue Aug 14 14:48:45 1984
Subject: Re: Matter Transmission (and Dick's THE UNTELEPORTED MAN)

From Garnaat.henr@Xerox.ARPA:

While on the subject of the ending [of THE UNTELEPORTED MAN], I would like to pose a question to anyone familiar with Dick's work. The book I have is a re-release (since his death, many of his novels have been re-released) and claims to have the "original, uncensored" ending which was supposedly left out of the original release for "commercial" reasons. My disappointment with the ending got me wondering about the original book. How does the ending differ? Or, better yet, any ideas on where I could find a copy of the original release?

Mitch

Coincidentally, the August LOCUS (#283) has a review of yet another version of THE UNTELEPORTED MAN, this one titled LIES, INC. and published by Gollancz in the UK. Here is what Dan Chow has to say (yes, copied without permission, etc.):

There is something appropriately Dickian about the publishing history of LIES, INC. Originally published in 1966 as THE UNTELEPORTED MAN in an Ace Double format, it was a digest-magazine novella expanded into a novel but then cut to about half the length Dick intended. In 1983 the

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full version was published by Berkley under the same title, but by then Dick had died and four pages had been lost from the manuscript. This time, the novel seemed untouched even by the editorial hands who would have corrected spelling and grammar as the author might have wished. While the Gollancz edition, retitled LIES, INC., was being arranged, a revised and retitled typescript was discovered. Here the full version of THE UNTELEPORTED MAN had been reorganized, and the roughness had been smoothed out to some extent, but there still remained two gaps. These have been filled in by John Sladek for the Gollancz edition. (p. 15)

Sounds like Gollancz did it right. I wonder if this edition will ever appear in paperback on this side of the pond?

Coincidentally again, the same issue of LOCUS has a letter from Tessa B. Dick complaining about the editorial practices of Berkley in putting together their edition of THE UNTELEPORTED MAN...

Finally got around to A MAZE OF DEATH, starting soon on DR. FUTURITY,

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

>From ihnp4!zehntel!hplabs!sri-unix!mclure@sri-prism Wed Aug 15 23:20:55 1984
Subject: Pynchon; why read him?

Pynchon is for the Pynchon groupies, no one else.

I too tried to read some of his books and found them tiresome. He doesn't hold a candle to V. Nabokov or (when they are writing at full strength) H. Ellison & R. Silverberg. There are some mainstream authors too that he has trouble matching. I think certain authors tend to get overrated by the "college crowd" and then get "pushed" onto everyone else as "good" literature, when in fact they produce nothing more than the usual mundane stuff.

Stuart

>From ihnp4!zehntel!hplabs!sri-unix!Shiffman%SWW-WHITE@MIT-MC.ARPA

Thu Aug 16 10:42:00 1984

Subject: Fuzzy Sequels

My reaction to Fuzzies And Other People was similar to that of Mr. Duntemann, particularly having read the two recent Fuzzy books by other authors: Fuzzy Bones by William Tuning and Golden Dream by <author forgotten>. Fuzzy Bones managed to succeed exactly where Piper failed. Tuning expanded the story in one major way (explaining the Fuzzies' need for titanium on a titanium-poor world) and moved characters along in other ways.

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To me, the book was a modest success, both as a pastiche of Piper's childlike writing style and as an explainer of some of the peculiarities of Piper's scenario. Now if only Piper had done so well...

Of course, Piper was not one to worry too much about inconsistencies or biological improbabilities. In the original story Gunpowder God, he had humans mating (both naturally and successfully) with members of an alien humanoid (human-looking but NOT human) race. I believe it was John Campbell who caught him on this and suggested that he turn the story into a Paratime tale (which became Lord Kalvan of Otherwhen).

Hank Shiffman

>From ihnp4!zehntel!hplabs!utah-cs!donn Sun Aug 19 06:17:18 1984
Subject: A review of PALIMPSESTS by Carter Scholz and Glenn Harcourt

PALIMPSESTS. Carter Scholz and Glenn Harcourt. Ace Specials, c1984.

Non-spoiler review: A difficult read. Pynchon fans may like it.

Micro-spoiler review:

This is billed as a time-travel novel, but it is as much about time travel as GRAVITY'S RAINBOW is about space travel. The style is very anti-hero, and the story ends with a deflating anti-climax. There are some people who see these things as virtues, among them Barry Malzberg, who renders glowing compliments to Carter Scholz on the back flap. I didn't enjoy GRAVITY'S RAINBOW and I had to force myself to finish this novel, but I know people who adore Pynchon and might like PALIMPSESTS.

Mini-spoiler review:

This novel stirs me to make bad 'angst' jokes. ("What is nihilism?" "One angst clapping." Maybe it sounds better with elephants...) The novel is not all bad -- sometimes it slips in a good one:

Uneasily Camus lit a cigarette. Carpenter was close to raving. He held his arms apart now, facing the coffin. 'O sublime ALU-father, daddy data, maw of the motherboard, blind as a battery, adding in ADA, singing the giga-GIGO-data-dada-blues, yes, tremulous deliria of deltic delphic time, the fast fast blues, the ultraviolet and the invisible....' He broke off with a rough laugh. 'Blacks get blues. Whites get angst. Machines get even. It's called parity.'

If you like this sort of thing, then you might like this book since virtually all the dialogues and internal monologues are written the same way, alternating philosophical and literary allusions with 'prose-poetry' and amusing Pynchon-like ramblings. The plot, such as it is, centers around a German graduate student in paleoanthropology with the unlikely name of

Camus. (Most of the characters have unlikely names, another steal from Pynchon.) Camus is amazingly selfish for a person who seems to be completely empty -- he has no visible ambitions or strong emotions, other than boredom

and occasionally lust. We are told that he enjoys failure and is irritated by success, so he is actually feeling pretty good at a pointless dig in the Neander Valley. But a hidden cave is discovered by his advisor, Professor Warner, and in that cave is found a Neanderthal skeleton and a curious block of metal two centimeters on a side, weighing two kilograms. This block is construed as evidence of time travel (not visiting aliens, for some reason) and when Camus finds himself in possession of it he learns that a certain organization is willing to kill to obtain it. During the chase Camus manages to fall in love again with his old girlfriend; I found these scenes to be the most enjoyable in the book, although of course he dumps her again later on and she attempts to revenge herself on him. The block and the corporation are meant to be analogous to the corresponding substance and company in GRAVITY'S RAINBOW (yet another steal). Eventually the company captures Camus with the help of Professor Warner and Camus is forced to descend through the heavily symbolic seven levels of its mammoth underground building in Alaska, whose inhabitants have all been driven insane by unresolved angst or tainted egg-salad sandwiches or something.

Why read about angst when you can enjoy it in the comfort of your own home? Yawn. The authors DID leave out Pynchon's imitations of Rabelais' lists, and the constant sexual philandering. ('But GRAVITY'S RAINBOW is SUPPOSED to be boring -- it's demonstrating the banality of war with the banality of sex.' 'If you say so.')

Donn Seeley University of Utah CS Dept donn@utah-cs.arpa
PS -- There do appear to be some possibly better Ace Specials coming down the pike, according to the list in PALIMPSESTS: Howard Waldrop's novel THEM BONES is scheduled for November and Michael Swanwick's IN THE DRIFT should come out in February next year.

>From ihnp4!zehntel!hplabs!sri-unix!mclure@sri-prism Mon Aug 27 00:15:04 1984
Subject: psychologically complex authors

Re: Gravity's Rainbow.

I tried reading it. I got about one or two hundred pages in and gave up (as I did with Delaney's DAHLGREN and Clavell's SHOGUN and ...)

There's only so much claptrap I'm willing to put up with. If the author doesn't catch and hold my attention in one hundred pages, I figure he's failed miserably.

Gravity's Rainbow is amusing but grossly overlong. I think much of Pynchon's popularity comes from his 'errie personal life' as perceived by his fans (much as with J.D. Salinger).

As far as Joyce goes, I'm not impressed with him either. I think FINNEGAN'S WAKE is pathetic garbage. I don't know a single person who has finished it or even claims to understand 1% of what the guy is trying to say (he's trying to say something?). ULYSSES is somewhat better but has much of the same.

If you are looking for superior fiction, pick up a copy of Vladimir Nabokov's THE ANNOTATED LOLITA. It has many puzzle-like themes running through it, but it maintains the humanity so many of the others lack. I have not read a better work in the English language than this book. Joyce, Conrad, Faulkner, etc. all pale in comparison with what the master Nabokov does with the English language in this book. It revitalized the idea of the English novel when it came out. Many critics, at the time, felt that the English novel was dead.

Other fine Nabokov books: ADA, THE DEFENSE, PALE FIRE, PNIN.

Stuart

>From ihnp4!zehntel!hplabs!sri-unix!DUNTEMANN.WBST@XEROX.ARPA
Mon Aug 20 15:52:28 1984
Subject: Silicon souls

Ahhh, souls...one of my favorite topics as a writer. For those who are interested, I've had three pertinent stories in print:

"Ariel" in a hammy collection called TALES OF THE MARVELOUS MACHINE, published by Creative Computing Press. A man who has just lost his wife of many years asks a priest: Can a computer have a soul, and is it moral to "turn him off?"

"Silicon Psalm" in IASFM for February 1981. An intelligent medical life support system is asked by its patient to turn her off and let her die.

"Guardian" in IASFM for September 1980. Was on the Hugo final ballot in 1981. An ancient fighting machine emerges from a swamp after 1700 years and challenges the beliefs of a rural abbott in a ruined future America.

Not many writers have taken this issue by the horns; most cannot disconnect the silliness of organized religion from the serious questions of the nature of spirit and human immortality. Most assume that there cannot be immortal souls without admitting to some kind of almighty God--a connection I find puzzling, and a tribute to the power of pseudochristian brainwashing.

Gaby's spiritual presence after death in Varley's DEMON is one of the few thoughtful explorations of the notion of spirit to appear in recent years.

Also see "Trinity" by Nancy Kress in the current edition of IASFM. Nan is a good friend and I helped her with the project a little. "Trinity" is all

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the more remarkable considering it came from a rather militant Atheist--Nan is considerably more openminded about the notion of spirit than several (mostly male) writers Whose Names You Would Know, who have poked fun of every serious attempt to consider the possibilities of spirit and immortality to come up in discussions I've had with them. At worst, their reactions remind me of the poor sap who throws a screaming temper tantrum anytime anybody suggests we think about the possibilities of travelling faster than light.

Pure rationality is necessary, but insufficient to our understanding of the universe and how it works. Just ask Schroedinger's Cat.

--Jeff Duntemann

>From ihnp4!zehntel!hplabs!sri-unix!goldenberg%vaxwrk.DEC@decwrl.ARPA
Sun Sep 2 01:08:08 1984
Subject: Adagio by Barry Longyear

I recommend that you go buy/read the Sept. Omni for Adagio by Barry Longyear. It's a great story - imaginative plot, more real-sounding dialogue and monologue than most, and a glorious punchline. Almost any plot details would spoil it - it's the story of 5 people stranded on an out-of-the-way planet and what they do in their copious free time.

Ruth Goldenberg

>From ihnp4!zehntel!hplabs!sri-unix!Woody.pasa@XEROX.ARPA
Tue Aug 28 23:20:00 1984
Subject: Review: "Job -- A Comedy of Justice"

Pico-review: Recommend

Mini-review: [Non-spoiler]

Heinlein has done it again. This novel is Heinlein at his best; though he does handle some of the subject material in ways which may be offensive to a strong believer in Judeo-Christianic beliefs, it is a wonderful book. I highly recommend it to everyone.

Review: *** SPOILER WARNING!!! ***

The main character in this new novel is a man by the name of Alexander Hergensheimer [Hiergenshemer, Hergenshiemer, I don't have the book with me.] He is an average person from a world where the Moral Majority would look like a bunch of radical left-wingers. During an ocean voyage, he finds himself in a bet with three other passengers, betting that he wouldn't walk through fire. [They're watching a group of natives from a south pacific island walk through fire.] Well, he walks through, and finds himself in a

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different (parallel?) world.

Heinlein does use the concept of parallel worlds again, shuffling the main characters (Hergensheimer included) from "world" to "world." But the parallel world shuffling (which really aren't parallel worlds, but the tricks of powers higher up--if you don't understand, just read the book) doesn't get in the way of the book as it does in Heinlein's earlier book "The Number of the Beast."

From here, the story begins. I won't say more about what happens in the book except to say that our "hero", Alex, goes through an ordeal similar to Job (the guy from the Book of Job in the Bible).

My personal favorite part of the book goes something like:

"Where are we? Are we in Hell, or Texas?"

"Is there a difference?"

Yeah, it's a fun book, Heinlein style. It actually manages to combine the flippant manner of "The Number of the Beast" with strong characterizations, an excellent (and solid) plot line, and leaves enough unanswered questions about how his universe works to make the story almost too believable. [ie,

he doesn't sit down and explains why every sparrow falls in his universe, he just tells the story. Too many stories spend too much time explaining how things work; leaves too little to the reader's imagination.]

Unless you are shocked by references (by Saint Peter, of all people) to the Holy Ghost as "the Spook", or that Yahwah (the christian God) cheats on bets with Loki (a devil in a different lore) by calling the Second Comming earlier than He promised, or that Texas is actually located in Hell; I highly recommend the book to you. Personally I enjoyed the book so much that as soon as I finished reading it, I reread the entire book again.

Bill Woody

>From ihnp4!zehntel!hplabs!sri-unix!trainoff.pasa@XEROX.ARPA

Mon Aug 27 15:48:00 1984

Subject: Sentient Silicon (Germanium? Superconducting Lead?...)

Ah, yes. The old "Is it murder to turn off a computer?" question. It seems to me that the question only makes sense if the computer deems it so. People tend to assume that an intelligent computer would be essentially a human. This is very likely not going to be the case. It may be that the term just doesn't apply any more. A computer society would be quite different than a human society. Is the computer going to wail plaintively when you cut its power cord; is it murder? Is it "pain?" What if it is murder? Would the computer care? After all a computer necessarily will have a completely different time sense than a human. The machine will have "grown" up with the whole idea of backups. For all it knows it will be loaded back in again. I can't see how this would be any worse than running the NULL job for a while (or is that a lobotomy. Oh my English just can't

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handle this (reminds me of time travel variants on language (See HHGttG))).

Programmer: "Hal, we just noticed a rather large programming bug in you so we loaded you back in from tape."

Hal: "That's nice, how long was I asleep? Is the weather nice today?"

I also find it unlikely that a machine intelligence will develop spontaneously as a fortuitous accident. It will be the result of hard work by a team of intelligent researchers (so to speak). It will also be a

gradual process. The first "sentient" computers will likely be rather dumb. The second generation will put the first to shame, etc. The interesting part comes when the program is more intelligent than the person that wrote it.

Programmer: "Hal, you have been doing very well lately. As a matter of fact, I just gave you the equivalent of a graduate qualifier exam and you passed remarkably well. We have a new task for you. We have been working on this theory of artificial intelligence, and we would like you to take a look at it and give us your comments."

Hal: "Sure, no problem... Oh, it is awfully wordy but the only obvious problem is that you made a mistake on page 347. You were on the right track. You can do much better if you only do this..."

Steve Trainoff

PS. Would you turn on the first program that was smarter than you? How would you feel knowing that before long, you will be obsolete. Oh yeah, the machine will be programmed to take good care of you, real good care. Woof, Woof.

>From ihnp4!philabs!rdin!perl Fri Aug 31 13:52:58 1984
Subject: Re: Sentient Silicon

That reminds me of a story I read wherein medical technology had advanced to the point where the recently dead could be brought back to life. This resulted in an increased murder rate accompanied by an almost total apathy toward the crime. The police would allow murder victims, after being resurrected, to seek "retribution" against their murderers. The main character, after killing his wife's murderer, was said to have felt better about it than any other murder he had committed, since this murderer's people did not believe in medical resurrection.

An amusing line from the story (paraphrased):

"Johnson screwed up the Collins report, so I had to kill him again."

Robert Perlberg

>From ihnp4!tektronix!tekchips!kentb Sun Sep 2 23:01:06 1984

Subject: Reviews (spoiler warning)

Following are reviews of recent books: "Palimpsests," by Carter Scholz and Glenn Harcourt, and "Home Sweet Home, 2010 A.D.," by Mack Reynolds with Dean Ing.

First the bad news--

Title- Palimpsests

Author(s)- Carter Scholz and Glenn Harcourt

Editor- Terry Carr

Publisher- Ace Science Fiction

Publishing date- September 1984

"Palimpsests," is the latest in the new (old) Ace Science Fiction Specials series, a series intended to introduce new writers and unusual styles to readers of presumably discerning taste. The only other book in this series that I have read was "The Wild Shore," by Kim Stanley Robinson, a book that by its cover quotes was the herald of a new age. I was less than impressed, and I haven't read the other two books that have appeared in the series. When "Palimpsests" showed up however, it looked good enough to risk another try at a, "...novel of high quality and imagination."

A palimpsest is a trace of writing on old parchments that have been scraped clean and reused. Since this practice was common among early Christian monks reusing parchments originally containing pagan writings, the practice of analyzing palimpsests is of great value to archeologists, since many early Christian parchments are still extant. The story revolves around a young archeologist named Camus, who finds a kind of palimpsest from the future at a dig in Germany. Camus then discovers that the artifact he has discovered is wanted by both the superpowers as well as several private interests. One of these private research institutes, located in far Alaska, captures the object and the protagonist in question, and proceeds to experiment with both, culminating in a heroic world (universe) saving effort by the confused Camus. It doesn't sound like much of a plot to me either.

In his introduction Terry Carr defies anyone to read the first chapter and not go on to read the rest of the book. As far as that goes, he was right, the first chapter sets up the rest of the book as well as any I have ever read. Unfortunately Carter and Scholz have real problems with pacing. About two thirds of the way through all of the tensions of that marvelous first chapter have been resolved, and the conclusion came as a relief, not because the world was no longer in danger, but because I no longer had to read the drivel that was passing as an exploration of the nature of time. I enjoy reading books that challenge my basic beliefs, but it is not necessary to pound such challenges into your head to get a point across.

All in all a fair book, and it probably could be read for the first chapter alone. I can't honestly recommend that, though, unless you want to feel compelled to wade through some pea-soup prose later.

Now the good news:

Title- Home Sweet Home, 2010 A.D.
Author- Mack Reynolds with Dean Ing
Publisher- Dell
Publication date- September 1984

Fun. Fun, fun, fun. The only thing not fun about this book was the copyright being in the name of the literary estate of Mack Reynolds. I had not known that he was dead. Farewell Lagrangia.

The book looks like this: It is about a wacko extended family in the aforementioned year, and the equally (if less delightfully) wacko society in which they live. One subplot involves a hit man who is after a radical political writer the family is unwittingly harboring. The other concerns the last Indians in America and their attempt to hold onto their land in the face of government attempts to grab the uranium on it. In the end the government and the status quo take it in the tuckus, but everyone else seems to be satisfied.

The family, surnamed Chutzba (isn't that Yiddish for ...), reminds me of what Heinlein's extended families would turn out to be in practice. Some members smart, some dumb, some beautiful, some not, and things get done when the spirit moves. Nobody is a superbeing, but between them things seem to work out. The society they live in depends on welfare to support the populace, since automation has taken over all the "real jobs" except government. The family is quite happy with this, since it leaves them time for farming, drinking, and sex, definitely not in that order.

So sit back, kick off your sandals, pour yourself some applejack, and enjoy. But don't let Ruthie corner you, she's only 9, you know.

Kent Beck

>From ihnp4!ucla-cs!reiher Mon Aug 13 04:25:10 1984
Subject: "Buckaroo Banzai"

"Buckaroo Banzai" (more accurately, "The Adventures of Buckaroo Banzai: Across the 8th Dimension") is a very strange film. As far as I'm concerned, strangeness is a point in a film's favor. I like films which are different, and this is what pleased me most about "Buckaroo Banzai". (They could probably make a pretty good comedy out of the meetings the creative folks had with the money folks, trying to explain just what they wanted to do.) This is a difficult one to summarize. There's this guy, Buckaroo Banzai (he's half Japanese). He's the world's greatest neurosurgen and physicist. He and his equally intellectual pals also form a hot rock band, and save the world in their spare moments. This has made them tremendously popular with just about everyone. Buckaroo has just come up with a device called an

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overthruster, which allows him to travel through solid objects by going into a different dimension. Unfortunately, a much earlier experiment of the same kind screwed up badly. One of the participants in that experiment, a Dr. Emilio Lizardo, went insane, apparently. Actually, his body was taken over by an evil being from another dimension. More of these beings, exiled from their home dimension, are trying to build a craft to return to their home, so that they can take it over again. The folks in charge there think this is a bad idea, and will blow up the Earth, if necessary, to prevent it from happening. Who can save us? Why, Buckaroo Banzai, of course.

The plot is so far off the wall that it really doesn't pay to try to delve into it in more detail. Suffice to say that a lot happens fast. "Buckaroo Banzai" is blessed with a very fine script, courtesy of Earl Mac Rauch, which moves quickly and always has a few surprises. Unfortunately, "Buckaroo Banzai" is a good example of how important a director is to a film. W.D. Richter had been a writer up to this point. This is his first directorial job. He isn't quite up to it.

Now, don't get me wrong. Richter doesn't ruin the film, or anything. He's perfectly competent. However, he takes what had the potential to be a really fine film and fails in his assignment. He can't put across the script as well as it deserves. The action scenes never really thrilled me, and far too many of the neat throwaway bits were obviously from the script. Nothing wrong with the script being inventive, but it's so much better if the director is, too.

Richter has mixed results with the actors. Peter Weller plays the title

role. He had two choices: he could underplay it or overplay it, since the part would never work at a realistic level. He chose underplaying, and perhaps went a bit too far in that direction. None the less, he looks comfortable in the part, so I can't complain too much. John Lithgow, who plays Dr. Lizardo, went in precisely the opposite direction, with splendid results. He plays it all with a juicy Italian accent and definitely steals the picture. (Lithgow has tremendous range. He went almost insane in "The Twilight Zone", and played a nice, normal guy in "Terms of Endearment". He played a Bible Belt preacher in "Footloose" and a transexual in "The World According to Garp". For my money, he's one of the most talented actors working in American films.) Jeff Goldblum has a lot of fun playing a brain surgeon who joins Buckaroo's team. He's ready for medicine, high tech, and rock and roll, but he hadn't figured on saving the world quite so soon. Some of the other actors playing Buckaroo's sidekicks are able to make themselves stand out. Some aren't. Ellen Barkin manages nicely as a girl Buckaroo saves from suicide and prison, especially since the script requires her to serve as one of the film's many intentional loose ends.

I liked "Buckaroo Banzai" a lot, but it disappointed me, too. Unlike "Indiana Jones", or "Star Trek III", or "Gremlins", the script gave it a fighting chance to be really special. Instead, it just turned out different. Given the way things are in Hollywood nowadays, I'll settle for different. But, gee, I really yearn for special.

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Peter Reiher

>From ihnp4!zehntel!hplabs!sri-unix!FIRTH@TL-20B.ARPA Thu Aug 16 22:53:35 1984
Subject: Metropolis

Most reissues of Metropolis contain the original cuts (a demonstration that the absence of a thing is as real as its presence?)

The main victims are the introduction, which shows a '30s view of Olympic training, replete with overt Naziism and repressed homosexuality; and the erotic dance of the golem (Brigitte Helm). American censors usually removed another sequence, in which a giant machine (Capitalism) is seen as Moloch devouring helpless humans (Labor) [First Amendment? - a mere piece of

paper, Herr President].

If you get the chance, SEE an uncut Metropolis. The sound-track problem is susceptible to a technical solution - take ear muffs!

>From inhp4!ucla-cs!reiher Sun Aug 19 19:43:58 1984
Subject: "Dreamscape"

"Dreamscape" is yet another potboiler from the Hollywood SF factory. Potboilers have an undeservedly bad reputation. Sure, they're made exclusively to make money, but, when well done, they can give value for your admission price. I don't want to see Bergman, Kurosawa, and Renoir all the time. "Dreamscape" is a good enough film, and I doubt if anyone expected more from it. I certainly didn't, so I wasn't disappointed. On the other hand, I also wasn't surprised.

The premise is that those with strong psychical ability can project themselves into the dreams of others. Once this is done, they can become active participants in those dreams. If they're good enough, they can even shape them to fit their desires. Now, throw in a handsome young psychic blackmailed into participating, a kindly old researcher who means well, a sinister rightwing government type who's backing the experiments, an obviously looney psychic, a beautiful doctor who doesn't want to jeopardize the experiments by falling in love, and a President whose nuclear related nightmares are impelling him towards disarmament. It shouldn't take you too long to figure out the major plot twists. Even the minor characters are formulaic. A little kid beset by nightmares obviously exists to provide out hero with a nasty monster to fight and to demonstrate his abilities. An expose-type author is marked for death the moment we know what he's after.

Any surprises in the film are on a very low level, such as just what will pop out at what point in a nightmare. This isn't the way to make a good movie, but it is the way to do a genre picture. The audience for such a film isn't after brilliant insights and novel plot twists. They just want the rollercoaster to follow the same tracks as usual, and it doesn't take

much from the enjoyment that you can see the whole ride's progress from the moment you get on.

The cast does solid work. Dennis Quaid is strong and resourceful as Our Hero. Kate Capshaw finally gets a break from screaming impotently (the bulk of her assignments in "Indiana Jones" and "Best Defense"). Max von Sydow plays the kindly scientist and Christopher Plummer the evil head of an intelligence agency (I suppose that they just flipped a coin to see which of them got which of the two parts; both actors are old hands at these sorts of things). Eddie Albert is convincing enough as the President. He plays it as least as well as Ronnie.

The effects are OK, though the dream snakeman is animated rather unconvincingly. One or two of the images in the dream sequences are striking, but overall these are not very imaginative dreams. Photography and music are about par for this kind of thing. Joseph Ruben, the director, managed to get in a few good touches but was ultimately unable to convince me that I hadn't seen this all before.

In one sense, "Dreamscape" is a very good movie. You are almost certain to know beforehand whether or not you will like it. I liked it more than, say, "The Philadelphia Experiment", since it really knew where it was going, but much less than "Raiders of the Lost Ark", since it couldn't provide any surprises on the way.

Peter Reiher

>From ihnp4!zehntel!hplabs!hp-pcd!mfc Thu Aug 23 14:09:00 1984
Subject: "Sheena" Review

Sheena, Queen of the Jungle

Now, I realize that this just barely qualifies as SF (more fantasy really), but in the spirit of Indy Jones, I thought I'd post it anyway.

Upon having just returned from viewing this film, I decided that I had to get my two cents in.

For starters, only a PG rating? I think the Ratings Commission must be getting soft, as this is very inconsistent with other films I have recently seen. While I grant you, there is virtually no profanity in this film, and there is minimal violence, what violence exists, is, at times, graphic (i.e. the tribesman spearing the merc through the throat). The main reason the rating surprises me is the amount of gratuitous nudity provided by Tanya Roberts. If you enjoyed her pictorial debut in 'Playboy', this is the film for you!

Roberts is absolutely the only recognized name in the film's list of credits. Not that a film requires well-knowns to succeed, but this film demonstrates that a group of unknowns are certainly capable of making one

fail. The movie contains an over abundance of CCA (Classic Cardboard Acting), no character development to speak of, mediocre cinematography, and a boring musical soundtrack (now available on records and tapes). The african scenery is stunning but the director failed totally to make any effective use of it to enhance the film.

In addition to its other faults, the film displays many noticable gaps in technical credibility (now I ask you, could YOU drive a swiss army knife blade through the side of a 50 gallon oil drum?). Add to this a poorly handled collection of special effects (state of the art for 20 years ago), and a sprinkling of cheap masked multiple exposures, and it all adds up to a failed attempt at an entertaining evening.

All things considered, I have to give 'Sheena, Queen of the Jungle' a thumbs down (as the foregoing indicates). If I hadn't seen the film on economy night, I would have felt ripped off. And if the film hadn't contained so much nudity on the part of Roberts (what can I say? She looks GOOD!) even economy night would have been robbery.

Mark Cook

>From ihnp4!zehntel!hplabs!sri-unix!Isdale.es@XEROX.ARPA
Tue Aug 28 16:37:09 1984
Subject: Buckeroo Banzai (book/movie) and Dreamscape (movie)

I have recently seen both Buckeroo Banzai and Dreamscape and would recommend both.

Non Spoiler Reviews:

Buckeroo Banzai: Book & Movie

Read/see in either order (slight preference for movie first)

A great adventure film. Indian Jones updated for the 80's (more intellectual, humanist less macho bigot). However the film does lack a few things. At some points the dialog is difficult to understand (generally when the aliens are speaking english). there was also a continuity problem where the action doesnt flow smoothly. The main character could have used some more development. The effects are minimal and barely up to 80's standards.

The BOOK is also good. It has some odd stylistic devices. It is written

from the point of view of one of Buckeroo's buddies as a cronicle of events. The writer expects that the reader already knows the basic story (because its been on the news, etc.). The foreshadowing bears more likeness to spoilers. I think the book may have been a rush job since many scenes look like they were lifted right out of the script word for word, without even changing the format.

(ie Buckeroo: "..."
General XYZ: "..."

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Penny: "....."
etc.)

The background info supplied by the book does fill in many gaps left by the movie. It contains some great explanations of Buckeroo Banzai's theoretical physics. In a few short paragraphs he manages to tie particle physics, brain theory, extra dimensionality, and consiousness together and admit that there is probably a rational physical explanation for most events generally dismissed as magic (ie not real: telepathy, etc.). It is most believable and might even be valid.

Dreamscape: (slight spoiler)

While the effects were hardly spectacular (or even interesting), the movie as a whole was decent. I wont rate it as high as Ghostbusters (rolicking good fun) or BBanzai (good intellectual adventure), but it is worth seeing. Contary to info previously published in this list only short segments of DoD atom bomb detonations are used. They did most of the stuff with new matte paintings. (note that the matte lines are very visible in some sequences but this tended to enhance the dream effect). Also the Snake man is done with BOTH stop motion models and a man in a rubber suit. It works ok.

The treatment of the main idea (psychic projection into someone's dreams) is pretty good. The main characters were well portrayed. It is good entertainment. (there is a rumor in the industry that Dreamscape may soon be appearing as part of a double feature, it might pay to wait a week or two).

Jerry

>From ihnp4!zehntel!hplabs!sri-unix!DENNETT@SRI-NIC.ARPA
Sat Aug 25 17:55:38 1984

Subject: Dune Movie Picture Book

At the local Crown Books today I spotted a book titled "The Dune Picture Book" (or something to that effect). It's a "kid's" version of "Dune" written by Joan D. Vinge, full of photos from the (as yet unreleased) movie, and apparently meant to capitalize on it.

Having just finished reading "Dune", I glanced through the picture book to see how much the filmmakers had warped the original story. (I'm assuming that the book and the movie's script match pretty closely.) Wonderously enough, the only major digression I spotted was that the Paul brings the Fremen a device (developed by his father's staff) that transforms the Bene Gesserit "voice" into a weapon of destruction. If you've seen the previews, it's shown in the scene where the voice-over says "where a word can kill..."

From the photos, the sets and special effects look like the best since the first Star Wars film. Linda Hall (award winner for her role in "The Year of Living Dangerously") plays Shadout Mapes.

Anyway, I can hardly wait!