

Lincroft-Holmdel Science Fiction Club  
Club Notice - 11/14/84 -- Vol. 3, No. 18

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

12/04 LZ: Video meeting: THE FLY (part 1)  
12/05 LZ: Video meeting: THE FLY (part 2)  
12/05 HO: STARTIDE RISING by David Brin  
01/09 LZ: THE CIRCUS OF DR. LAO by Charles G. Finney  
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. If anyone out there 1) gets The Movie Channel, 2) has a VHS VCR,  
and 3) is willing to tape a film for us Saturday (it's on three  
different times), please contact either myself or Evelyn (phone  
numbers above). Thanks.

2. From my mailbox:

>Mark,

>

>I have just finished reading your review of "Terminator." I  
>am somewhat confused by your rating system (especially when  
>I make a comparison to how you've rated things in the  
>past).

>

>I can recall reading a review where the movie sounded quite  
>interesting and well worth viewing, and where the movie  
>received a +1. Now I read this review, which makes the  
>movie sound like a real dog and see that it gets a 0 ( I  
>would have expected a -2).

>

>It might be instructive to put some attributes around your

>rating system (you probably did this once and I missed it)  
>and list some sample movies that fit each of the categories.  
>  
>George [MacLachlan]

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Good idea. Let me explain what the system is and why it may look like ratings contradict what is said in the review. There are nine possible ratings for a film in what I call the "CFQ" rating system. The system rates films from a -4 to a +4 in whole numbers. A neutral film is a zero. This rating system was used at one time (and unfortunately abandoned later) by CINEFANTASTIQUE magazine. It has the virtue that positive numbers mean I (or whoever uses it) feel positively toward the film, negative means I feel negatively. The one to four rating system has seven possible ratings, so this one is a little more articulate. It is conceivable that a film could come along that is much better than any +4 film I have ever seen. I am not sure what to do in this case, but luckily that has never happened.

A -4 film is one that show a high degree of either incompetence or cynicism toward the viewer. It has no value in the manner in which it was intended. It may have some value as a laughing stock, but I always feel self-conscious laughing at a film because of its incompetence. A -2 is really pretty bad, but still watchable for more than humor value. A 0 film is ok but nothing very special. A +2 is well worth seeing. A +4 make a movie one of the reasons I like fantasy films. It is a memorable and enjoyable experience.

The following are examples of fantasy films I give each rating:

+4 FIVE MILLION YEARS TO EARTH  
+3 WAR OF THE WORLDS  
+2 KRULL  
+1 LAST STARFIGHTER  
0 GREMLINS  
-1 WARGAMES  
-2 SPACEHUNTER  
-3 GIANT CLAW  
-4 CREEPING TERROR

This is not too helpful, of course, because they are very subjective ratings. But it will give you an idea of some benchmarks. The following are my +4 fantasy films:

- o+ KING KONG - A blockbuster and a groundbreaker of a film. Miles ahead of what came before.
- o+ FORBIDDEN PLANET - Something for the eye, something for the mind.
- o+ PHASE IV - A war between two truly alien intelligences. The most interesting part is how each uses its own physical differences against the other. Tremendous insect photography.
- o+ FIVE MILLION YEARS TO EARTH (QUATERMASS AND THE PIT) - Better sf than any but a handful of written pieces of sf. It has some amazing and sweeping ideas.

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- o+ STAR WARS - A blockbuster and a groundbreaker of a film. Miles ahead of what came before.
- o+ DRAGONSLAYER - The highest level of traditional-style fantasy I have seen in a film; an interesting script and impressive visuals. Extra bonus: it has the only dragon I have ever seen that really looks like it could fly.

But now, why does one film seem like a complete dog and get a zero rating and another film sound really good and get only a +1? I will usually try to say something about a film that I feel should be said. If I were to review RETURN OF THE JEDI today, what I would probably say would involve how cloyingly sweet the ending was and how irritating the introduction of Ewoks was. How it degrades the series. So saying all that about it I must really hate the film, right? Wrong! I would give it a +3. If I like it that much, why say such negative things about it? Well, what should I say? That it has great special effects and exciting sequences. Did you have any doubt it would? I say about a film what I noticed that someone else might not or might not have thought about. Sometimes what I say might leave a different impression than my overall impression of the film. The rating is unambiguous. In the

case of TERMINATOR, there is a lot that is really pretty bad. Still there are some ideas, not all good, but not all bad. Also there is an interesting sequence near the end that I did not want to describe for fear of giving away plot. When the tone of a review and the rating disagree, believe the rating. It is often there because for some reason I did not make the tone of the review exactly fit my feelings toward the film. There is a lot that should have been tightened up in TERMINATOR's script. But overall it came up to being just ok.

Mark Leeper

LZ 3E-215 x2571

...{houxn,hogpd,hocse}!lznv!mrl

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Mercury Capsules - November 14, 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.

The quote from Doris Lessing last week was from "Some Remarks", a forward to S\_h\_i\_k\_a\_s\_t\_a, the novel that was also reviewed last week. This bug brought to you by n\_r\_o\_f\_f and the editorial staff (me). (Whoops, make that t\_w\_o weeks ago; u\_u\_c\_p didn't get this column to the publisher in time.)

I'd also like to apologize to R. A. MacAvoy, for misspelling her name in the review of R\_a\_p\_h\_a\_e\_l.

o+ Re: Rob Mitchell's question about the "K" in Ursula K. LeGuin. The "K" stands for Kroeber, which is what I would call her former real name and what others like to call her "maiden" (bleech!) name.

Carol E. Jackson

o+ T\_h\_e\_S\_i\_l\_v\_e\_r\_H\_o\_r\_s\_e: novel, Elizabeth Lynn, 1984.

Last month I reviewed a Bluejay Books release, D\_a\_r\_k\_e\_r\_T\_h\_a\_n\_Y\_o\_u\_T\_h\_i\_n\_k by Jack Williamson. This month I got another Bluejay Books story to read. T\_h\_e\_S\_i\_l\_v\_e\_r\_H\_o\_r\_s\_e is by World Fantasy Award-winning author Elizabeth Lynn. It's about a little girl who dreams she is in Storyland where all the toys that never got proper names end up. She meets several toys that come to life and has an adventure saving her brother from Dreamland, where he is a prisoner of the Dreamlady.

The illustrations by Jeanne Gomoll aren't any good either.

Mark R. Leeper

o+ M\_e\_l\_a\_n\_c\_h\_o\_l\_y\_E\_l\_e\_p\_h\_a\_n\_t\_s: collection, Spider Robinson, 1984.

So, what do we have from SF's next Robert Heinlein? We don't have imitation Heinlein (except maybe for the title story, which is a cute idea with Virginia Heinlein as the main character). What we seem to have is stories heavily influenced by Ted Sturgeon. Spider's working the antinomy mine again. "Antinomy" is defined in the story of that name (it and three others are from the collection of that name, sadly lost in Ace's abandonment of SF in 1982 or so): in essence, it's a conflict between two important and mutually exclusive goals or principles.

The characterization is good, the writing enjoyable, the ideas fresh and exciting . . . but the s\_t\_o\_r\_i\_e\_s are less than I expect of Robinson. There are t\_w\_o stories about why time travel in New York is dangerous. There are any number of tomato surprises, and a few more bland tales about how love makes things better. There is one story (published in O\_u\_i) about masturbation.

As Joe Bob might put it: eight breasts, two beasts, one quart blood, one car chase, no kung foo . . . and not enough story to get in the way of the characterization, or the cute ideas. I was hungry an hour later!

Paul S. R. Chisholm

o+ I\_c\_e\_h\_e\_n\_g\_e: novel, Kim Stanley Robinson, 1984.

No relation to Spider; this is the guy who did T\_h\_e\_W\_i\_l\_d\_S\_h\_o\_r\_e earlier this year. He's the only writer I know who has t\_w\_o shots at the 1985 Hugo for best novel.

Forget what you read on the blurb: this isn't primarily a story about ice monoliths on Pluto. It's a story about history. People live long in this universe, five centuries or more. One catch is that they can't remember much more than a century's events. Autobiography is a vital hobby, and even so, the totalitarian government can rewrite history, even of events people still alive have lived through.

The first third of the novel (which first appeared as "To Leave a Mark") concerns some people trying to make history, one way or another. The second is about an archeologist trying to unearth that history, three centuries later. The third, about a hundred years later still, concerns the

curious structures on Pluto, and the way they've affected history, and vice versa.

Good stuff. Robinson has some terrific ideas on how near-immortality could change the way the human race lives. The characters are neither supermen nor wimps. The plot is a tad lean, and occasionally predictable, but good, with a nice finish. Recommended.

Paul S. R. Chisholm

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## \_N\_O\_T\_E\_S\_F\_R\_O\_M\_T\_H\_E\_N\_E\_T

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Subject: Gene Wolfe's The Book of the New Sun

Path: ihnp4!sdcarl!sdcc3!loral!ian

Date: Fri, 9-Nov-84 20:51:25 EST

While reading some of the repartee concerning Harlan Ellison (including those oh so sage comments from the oh so ever present Chuq), I saw several references to Gene Wolfe's four book series, collectively know as "The Book of the New Sun". There seems to be relatively wide agreement that these are excellant books. I too have read all four of the New Sun books, plus most of Wolfe's other books. From this I guess it could be concluded that I like Wolfe, and it is true. I liked the New Sun books because of the writing style, Wolfe's descriptions and the action element of the story. In these books Wolfe has woven an incredibly complex plot whose central point I hoped would be revealed in the last book. For me at least, this did not happen and the books remain enigmatic. In the last few pages of the last New Sun book, "The Citadel of the Autarch", the new Autarch, whose previous carear we have followed, states that he is leaving the Book of the New Sun behind on earth and going to meet the extra-terestrials. While on this flight he will rewrite the book a second time. Since he has perfect memory, he can reproduce the book exactly. He says that if you don't understand the book, read it a second time, just as he is writing it a second time. I have not done this yet.



Even though the plot of Wolfe's New Sun seems to be only a collection of strange events, I believe that it is clear that the books contain more. I just have not discovered it yet. The question I pose to you out in net land is what ties the events in the book together.

Those of you who believe Wolfe to be such a great writer presumably see what I have missed. If you don't, I wonder if perhaps you are confusing Wolfe's obscureness with literary greatness. I like Wolfe, but I am not yet convinced that he is a great American writer.

Well I hope that this will provide much interesting discussion and perhaps some enlightenment for

Ian Kaplan

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Subject: Re: Yes, \*H\*A\*R\*L\*A\*N\* \*E\*L\*L\*I\*S\*O\*N\*  
Path: hocs!hogpc!houxe!drutx!ihnp4!zehntel!dual!proper!mikevp  
Date: Sat, 3-Nov-84 14:54:40 EST

In article < ix241@sdcc6.UUCP (ix241) writes:  
It is much more enlightening and fun to read his (Ellison's) commentary

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on just about anything. His acerbic wit makes his prose on any subject enjoyable to read even if it pisses you off. It makes you think as well.

I certainly agree with that. My comments were strictly aimed at Ellison's fiction. A friend gave me a copy of a book of his short stories, saying "Here's his least depressing stuff" (She really liked Ellison), and they were as morbid as the rest of his stuff that I dislike. However, I did enjoy his introductions to the stories, and I have liked his nonfiction, such as his articles about his misadventures in TV land.

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Subject: Re: Yes, \*H\*A\*R\*L\*A\*N\* \*E\*L\*L\*I\*S\*O\*N\*  
Path: ihnp4!decwrl!dec-rhea!dec-amber!chabot  
Date: Tue, 6-Nov-84 15:43:46 EST

Davis Tucker == >

He's a hack, just like all the others, it's just that he's a young hack who made it early enough so nobody wants to call him a hack, ...

"Young"? Well, maybe "young at heart"?

What a joke - the guy's been living in Hollywood too long, ...

"Hollywood"? Actually, it's Sherman Oaks.

But at least he's got company - John Varley, George R. Martin, Barry B. Longyear, Anne McCaffrey ... Neat ideas and far-off worlds and fantastic expositions don't make up for bad characterization, weak plots, and no character development, no matter *\*how\** many tribbles you strew around.

"Tribbles"? As far as I know, David Gerrold is the only one who's written about tribbles, and his name's not in that list up there. Perhaps you have the wrong Star Trek episode in mind.

If I read one more Harlan-Ellison-I'm-SO-depressed-and-nobody-likes-me-so-I'm-going-to-blow-up-the-whole-world story, I'm going to be ill.

Gee, I've read all the Harlan Ellison books I could lay my eyes on, and I've never come across one of these stories. Anybody have any references?

And all this "Final Dangerous Visions" crap - so he's got a writer's block, eh? On an *\*anthology\**? Give me a break!

Whatever the reasons for the delay are, are we to assume that you, David, have experience in producing anthologies? Or have you at least seen anthologies such as DV and ADV which do involve an amount of writing on the part of the editor?

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...he finally believes all the nice things everybody says about him  
...

The guy has *\*no\** understanding of the word "subtlety". His idea of

compassion is maudlin sentimentality and shameless pandering to the popular swings of fandom.

Weird. The usual line is that people say nasty things about Harlan Ellison (usually in fun, though). But of all the nasty things I've heard "maudlin sentimentality" and "pandering" were never among them.

Did I miss something? Was that letter supposed to be a joke, or what?

L S Chabot

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Subject: Re: RE: Yes, \*H\*A\*R\*L\*A\*N\* \*E\*L\*L\*I\*S\*O\*N\*  
Path: hocsl!hogpc!houxm!ihnp4!zehntel!tektronix!orca!ariels  
Date: Wed, 7-Nov-84 13:04:24 EST

Re: Harlan Ellison stories guaranteed not to depress you.

Don't forget "I'm Looking For Kadak," to be found in Jack Dann's "Wandering Stars" collection. Kadak has to be the funniest Jewish extraterrestrial ever conceived.

Ariel (So why am I talking to a butterfly?) Shattan

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Subject: Re: Ellison  
Path: hocsl!hogpc!houxe!drutx!ihnp4!zehntel!dual!amd!decwrl!sun!idi!qubix!jdb  
Date: Wed, 7-Nov-84 19:11:28 EST

Just a note here...

In all the talk lately about Ellison, I'm a little surprised that nobody has mentioned A Boy and His Dog. Ellison's strengths are at their best in that one with the offbeat-but-deep friendship, and the gross violence that he does to the "Hollywood Happy Ending" is in the league with Blazing Saddles' assault on western cliches.

At the same, Ellison's scary side comes across, too. If the sex of the characters had been reversed, I would have been hard put to keep my mind on the statement being made about friendship and priorities. Ellison has a fine eye for where you can be jerked into "Wait a minute, that's US he's talking about". He probably does us a subtle service by making us face our own pavlovian conditioning, but I would appreciate some help in the struggle, instead of just being thrown in.

Foo, Im rambling on.....

Dr Memory

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Subject: Re: Re: Harlan Ellison  
Path: hocsl!hogpc!houxm!ihnp4!nsc!chuqui  
Date: Thu, 8-Nov-84 02:53:33 EST

In article <11700028@ea.UUCP> mwm@ea.UUCP writes:

I suppose if what you like is terminally depressing unrelieved morbidness, Ellison is the writer for you. Personally, I would rather read something that has at least one little glimmer of humanness somewhere in it.

If this is what you want, I suggest Kurt Vonnegut instead. Harlan does have a warmer side (Repent, Harlequin! comes to mind) although even then he bites. Vonnegut is unrepentently depressing. So is Heller, for that matter.

In article <984@druri.UUCP> isiw@druri.UUCP writes:

If I read one more Harlan-Ellison-I'm-SO-depressed-and-nobody-likes-me-so-I'm-going-to-blow-up-the-whole-world story, I'm going to be ill. The guy has \*no\* understanding of the word "subtlety". His idea of compassion is maudlin sentimentality and shameless pandering to the popular swings of fandom.

Hmm... I've never seen anyone accuse Harlan of being subtle. He isn't, and doesn't want to be. Maudlin sentimentality? shameless pandering? Are you sure you don't have one of those wonderfully high quality Star Trek novels in your hand? Harlan has been notoriously uneven for years-- at his worst he comes across as self-indulgent and immature but at his best he is one of the best writers in America. Period. His is not an easy form of literature to read because it makes you think and it forces you to consider the unpleasant aspects of life. He isn't a light read, but then neither are writers such as Kafka, Dante, Cervantes and most of the other classic writers. Of all of the SF that I feel will survive the test of time, harlan's stuff is a good contender, along with Gene Wolfe's New Sun stuff and Bradbury. These authors will be around long after the Clarkes and Asimovs of the world are out of print because they aren't just good SF, they are good works of literature. That doesn't make them easy things to read, or enjoyable, but they are compelling and technically excellent.

And all this "Final Dangerous Visions" crap - so he's got a writer's block, eh? On an \*anthology\*? Give me a break! He's a hack, just like

all the others, it's just that he's a

You obviously have never seriously tried to write. I could make a snide comment about the chances of your success by the quality of your posting, but I'll be nice and refrain. Anthologies are a LOT of work. Harlan's

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writers block also had a physiological base (there was an article in Locus a few issues back on this-- I can detail it if necessary) that made it impossible for him to work at all. One thing Harlan has NEVER been is a hack. Just ask all of those castrated editors who tried to modify his work when he didn't agree with their changes. Hacks care about money, harlan cares about words...

But at least he's got company - John Varley, George R. Martin, Barry B. Longyear, Anne McCaffrey (oh, those dragons are just \*so\* cute!).

Oooh, lets just take a potshot at ALL of SF while we're at it. Jump on Issac, jump on Arthur, you forgot Terry Carr and R. A. MacAvoy, too.

Meanwhile, mainstream fiction has Martin Cruz Smith, Mark Halprin, geez - even Rosemary Rogers writes better than they do! Wake up! Neat ideas and far-off worlds and fantastic expostions don't make up for bad characterization, weak plots, and no character development, no matter \*how\* many tribbles you strew around.

There are at least as many BAD authors in 'mainstream' as there are in any genre. Perhaps more. You can put the best SF authors and worst mainstream people together and get just as biased a discussion in the other direction. It sounds to my like you simply have a bias against SF.

chuq

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Subject: Re: Yes, \*H\*A\*R\*L\*A\*N\* \*E\*L\*L\*I\*S\*O\*N\*

Path: hocsl!hogpc!houxm!ihnp4!drutx!druri!isiw

Date: Thu, 8-Nov-84 11:48:52 EST

Well, well, well, chuq...

You should have your reader's license suspended for reading while indoctrinated if you can even utter Ellison's name in the same \*day\* as Kafka, Dante, and Cervantes! Just because he's written some good stuff (I do agree with you there - he's come through a few times, but...) does not qualify him as an artist, nor does it qualify his work as literature. Ask any English teacher.

BTW, even hacks don't like their work changed (just like hackers don't like their code changed...) - even Alan Dean Foster barks a few times, I would think. But just because Ellison has garnered a rep as being \*the\* enfant terrible of the genre is no reason to assume that the words he defends are any good. "The squeaky wheel gets the grease" - that's all it means.

Anthologies I have had experience with, as well as working on a large newspaper. Ellison has no excuse for 10 years of "writer's block" on what could be at most 40 pages which don't require much creativity, just background information and a little fanfare by way of introduction (i'm not

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going to mention his penchant for self-indulgent forewords in the previous DV-ADV... let's just say those forewords are so odious they could gag a maggot on a meat wagon).

You're probably right about mainstream fiction and \*its\* hacks. I bow to that one - mainly, I read magazines like "Easyrider", "Hustler", "Gung-Ho!", "Reader's Digest", "Ebony", "Tiger Beat", "Mad", "Parade", "People", "Us", and "National Enquirer". So I'm not so up-to-snuff.

And as far as Gene Wolfe goes, I agree with you double on that one. He's so far above the rest of his peers... I just hope the quality of his literature inspires others in the genre to get out of their ruts and try to rise above their sometimes painfully obvious levels of incompetence. It's about time.

Davis Tucker

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Subject: Re: Harlan Ellison

Path: hocsl!hogpc!houxe!drutx!ihnp4!zehntel!dual!ames!barry

Date: Fri, 9-Nov-84 14:41:56 EST

I have a question: a number of people have mentioned a "writer's block" in connection with Ellison's delays getting LAST DANGEROUS VISIONS to the publishers. Since it's now been about 10 years since the original date announced for the publication of LDV, and since Ellison has written MANY stories in the last decade, my question is this: WHAT writer's block? Does it only affect his writing of introductions to other people's stories?

This question is not meant sarcastically; perhaps such a specialized sort of writer's block is possible. I am genuinely curious if anyone has any hard information on this. Can anybody help?

- From the Crow's Nest -

Kenn Barry