

Lincroft-Holmdel Science Fiction Club
Club Notice - 10/08/86 -- Vol. 5, No. 13

MEETINGS UPCOMING:

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

LZ meetings are in LZ 3A-206; MT meetings are in MT 4A-235.

_D_A_T_E

_T_O_P_I_C

10/15 MT: (Re)organizational Meeting for MT discussion (Rm 4A-235)

10/29 LZ: MALLWORLD by Somtow Sucharitkul (Commerce)

11/19 LZ: THE LEFT HAND OF DARKNESS by Ursula K. LeGuin (Sexual Identity)

12/10 LZ: NEUROMANCER by William Gibson (Consciousness)

HO Chair is John Jetzt, HO 4F-528A (834-1563). LZ Chair is Rob Mitchell, LZ 1B-306 (576-6106). MT Chair is Mark Leeper, MT 3E-433 (957-5619). HO Librarian is Tim Schroeder, HO 2G-427A (949-5866). LZ Librarian is Lance Larsen, LZ 3C-219 (576-2668). MT Librarian is Bruce Szablak, MT 4C-418 (957-5868). Jill-of-all-trades is Evelyn Leeper, MT 1F-329 (957-2070). All material copyright by author unless otherwise noted.

1. Hello, there, you young whippersnappers. This is the Old-Timer. Yup! Land-o'-Goshen, I look up from my from my roll-top desk here in AT&T Middletown and I just about don't recognize this place. It shore is different then when I came here. Times used to be you couldn't see the smoke from your supervisor's campfire. 'less maybe it was a real clear day. The dirt roads are all getting filled in with concrete. Them new-fangled street lights are all around telling folks when they can drive their cars and when they can't. We got ourselves a library here now. Yup! And a science fiction library. It has a whole mess o' books. We even got our own ejucaation center. We don't have to borrow the school-marm from Neptune. Times are different now. Now you have to get in line in the cafeteria to get yor grub. You may not even be able to fit into the first elevator that comes along. They got souls packed in two in an office. You come in after 8:30, you have to walk a right fair piece after parking your car. Yeah, the problem ain't so much we don't got enough people here at Middletown. We got more people than you can shake ten sticks at. So with all these people, maybe we got enough to have science fiction meetings here at Middletown and expect to have folks show up to discuss books. Maybe we can run it like other sites where we pick books, put them in the

library, and have people discuss them on lunch hours. Are you interested? Then come to our organizational meeting on Wednesday, October 15, high noon, at MT 4A-235. Tell us what books you want to read, what films you want to see, what you want to do with the science fiction club, what science-fiction-related trips you want

- 2 -

to go on. If you snooze on Wednesday, you'll be snoozing for a long time to come.

2. The following books have been donated to the Middletown Branch of the SF Club Library:

Anderson, Poul	A Knight of Ghosts and Shadows
Bester, Alfred	The Computer Connection (hardcover)
Budrys, Algis J.	Michaelmas
Gass, William H.	Omensetter's Luck
Knight, Damon	Oribit 5
Merril, Judith	England Swings SF
Moorcock, Michael	Best SF Stories from New Worlds 5

3. The Monmouth Chapter of the L5 Society wishes to announce its next meeting will be Thursday, October 16, at 7:30 in the Middletown Public Library. Dale Skran, president of the North Jersey L5, will present the North Jersey L5 Chapter slide show. Contact Michael Confusione, 176 Lynch Road, Middletown NJ (671-3218) for more details.

Mark Leeper
MT 3E-433 957-5619
...mtgzz!leeper

The Good Old Days
Comments by Evelyn C. Leeper

I just finished reading two books by Jack Finney: T_i_m_e_a_n_d_A_g_a_i_n (Warner, 1974 (1970c), \$1.50) and A_b_o_u_t_T_i_m_e (Fireside, 1986, \$7.95). The former is a novel; the latter is a collection of short stories. Jack Finney is known (if not by name) to a generation of young adults as the author of "Of Missing Persons," a staple in most junior high school and high school readers that I've seen and included in A_b_o_u_t_T_i_m_e. That's the story of the man who finds a travel agent who will send him to Verna, an idyllic paradise of forests, streams, and only "good" technology--there are washing machines, but no television. But he only gets one chance. Finney has also had several other stories which have been much anthologized, including another story from this collection, "The Third Level."

If one were to characterize Finney, one would probably call him "Bradbury-esque." His short stories are often set in rural Illinois, and he spends a lot of time yearning for the "good old days." In "Where the Cluetts Are," a new house built from Victorian plans somehow drifts

back in time and the occupants spend their hours playing croquet and sipping lemonade, then strolling into their mansion lit with flickering gaslight. Sounds great, right? Finney can make it sound so enticing--until you ask yourself what sort of plumbing the house has, and whether the occupants will get scarlet fever, and how they preserve their food. Such picky little details are avoided in Finney's nostalgia. "I Love Galesburg in the Springtime" is another story about how peaceful things were and how wonderful it is that a new factory isn't being built in town, since that would ruin the atmosphere. (The point-of-view character is employed, of course; one wonders what the jobless of the town would have to say if they were asked.)

Though A_b_o_u_t_T_i_m_e is billed as a collection of time travel stories, several of them have nothing to do with time travel. "Of Missing Persons" is one; others include "The Coin Collector," "Lunch-Hour Magic," and "Home Alone." In most of these Finney isn't so hooked on his anti-technology schtick--in "Lunch-Hour Magic" he even shows some of the benefits of advanced technology--and I found these more enjoyable. Finney's romantic (or perhaps I should say, romanticist) writing style is a joy to read.

In T_i_m_e_a_n_d_A_g_a_i_n, Simon Morley is just an average guy when he is recruited for a top-secret project: he is going to go back in time. The reason is not clear. He is told not to interfere, though that restriction seems to ease up as the novel moves along. His time travel method is similar to the one Matheson used in S_o_m_e_w_h_e_r_e_i_n_T_i_m_e; he puts himself in an environment devoid of 1970's technology, or for that matter, any technology since 1882. And he hypnotizes himself into going back. The novel is really Finney's portrayal of life in the 1880's in

- 2 -

New York. He is too tied up with the wonder of the city to spend much time on characterization or plot (though there is a rudimentary mystery). If you're not a fan of loving descriptions of life a hundred years ago, you could skip this. (If you are, by the way, I recommend Mark Helprin's W_i_n_t_e_r'_s_T_a_l_e.)

Jack Finney seems determined to pick up where Bradbury left off in the paean to those wonderful days of yesteryear when life was simpler and things were better. The back blurb of T_i_m_e_a_n_d_A_g_a_i_n even says "Would you like to travel back in time to a better, simpler world?"

However, my tolerance for "good old days" stories is rapidly wearing thin, probably because the more the Moral Majority (or whatever they're calling themselves these days) tells me how I should want a return to the old-fashioned values, the more I remember all the baggage that came with them.

Although Finney gives a nod to such advances as antibiotics, antiseptics, and anesthesia, he seems more interested in emphasizing the pollution, injustice, and pettiness of the present. Simon Morley even says, "We had a chance to do justice to our Negroes, and when they asked it, we refused. In Asia we burned people alive, we really did. We allow children to grow up malnourished in the United States." But Morley seems to have forgotten that every generation since the 1600's has had the chance to do justice--and didn't. He has forgotten the Inquisition and the witch trials in England during the Protectorate. He has forgotten that through most of history most people have grown up malnourished--if they grew up at all. One of the things the government agent tells Morley helps him pinpoint the year as 1970 instead of 1882 is the way that Morley and a passing Negro would "eye each other warily." Ah, yes, things were so much better back in 1882 when those other people knew their places. (That's sarcasm, folks.) Suffice it to say that while Finney writes these stories well, I can't bring myself to really like them. Like T_o_m_O'_B_e_d_l_a_m, the writing style can't overcome my distaste for the world-view that Finney presents.

COSMIC BANDITOS by A. C. Weisbecker

Vintage, 1986, \$5.95.

A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper

The tag-line ("A Contrabandista's Quest for the Meaning of Life") and the blurb makes this sound like a rip-off of/tribute to H_i_t_c_h_h_i_k_e_r'_s G_u_i_d_e_t_o_t_h_e_G_a_l_a_x_y. (Isn't it odd how a well-done work is a tribute, while a hack work is a tribute?) Well, it is and it isn't.

At the start of the book, the narrator, his friend Jose, and his dog High Pockets are in hiding in the Columbian jungle. They had been trying to eke out a humble living as fantastically wealthy and dissolute Dope Lords, but a few things went wrong.... And then a few more things.... Having as a partner someone who believes that "there are very few personal problems which can't be solved by a suitable application of high explosives" didn't help.

About a third of the way into the book you suddenly find yourself in the midst of some serious discussions of quantum physics and the conflict between the particle theory and the wave theory of light. If this sounds strange to you, imagine how it sounded to the contrabandistas after a few magic mushrooms. Eventually you discover that the plot itself is an example of the "new physics" in ways which are best discovered for yourself.

This book defies description. It is a comedy, but it is also a treatise on quantum physics and a book about drug dealing and who knows what else. You will almost certainly get something out of it, though it may not be what you expected to get out of it. As if these weren't reason enough, you should read it for the thought-provoking quotes from well-known scientists sprinkled through it, such as Einstein's "God does not play dice with the universe" and Hawking's rejoinder, "Not only does God play dice with the universe, but sometimes He throws them where they cannot be seen." However, I can't help but feel that the author and the proof-reader were both high on the leftovers of Mr. Quantum's stash-- Gary Zukav, the author of T_h_e_D_a_n_c_i_n_g_W_u_L_i_M_a_s_t_e_r_s, is quoted several times, and each time his name is misspelled "Zukov," and for some reason Jose's name has no accent mark.

RACE AGAINST TIME by Piers Anthony
Tor, 1986 (1973c), \$2.95.
A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper

I hadn't read any Anthony for a while, but this looked like it might be an alternate history novel, and I did like some of his earlier works (I didn't realize at the time that this w_a_s one of his earlier works).

Well, my recommendation on this is that you pass it up. Aimed (it seems) at a teen-aged audience, it seems to consist of all those wonderful racial and sexual stereotypes that you had hoped science fiction had gotten rid of (at least I h_o_p_e you hoped they had gotten rid of them). The message that Anthony is putting out is that racial purity is necessary to species vitality and, by extension, that miscegenation is bad. Anthony apparently thinks that racial lines are clear-cut and that the current racial groups are somehow internally "pure." That is horse-puckey and so is the book.

GODBODY by Theodore Sturgeon
Donald I. Fine, 1986, \$14.95.
A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper

Sturgeon's last novel is pure Sturgeon. It's full of Sturgeon's philosophy of love and humanity. The characters are real and you feel as if you might meet them just around the next corner. But much as I want to, and as much as every one else is, I cannot whole-heartedly recommend this book. It's all a bit too obvious. Anyone who tries to write a story centered around a Christ-figure needs to do something different to keep it from being predictable, and this applies even to Sturgeon.

G_o_d_b_o_d_y is enjoyable reading. Sturgeon's message of love is appealing but when you boil it down it's the same story as last time. While perhaps not as overdone in science fiction as the "Adam and Eve" scenario, the "Messiah with a message" story has become a standard and as such I find it hard to get excited over it this time. My recent reading has led me to conclude that I am beginning to develop a serious dislike for old themes, no matter how well done. If you don't have this reaction, then I recommend this book. If you do...well, read it anyway.

CROCODILE DUNDEE
A film review by Mark R. Leeper

Capsule review: This vanity production by Australian commercial actor Paul Hogan has a handful of amusing scenes about a sort of outback superman. But a handful of scenes are a long way from making a film.

Australian films are starting to be a major force in the world film market. Generally they are very nicely crafted films, even when they are exploitation films like R o a d W a r r i o r. But don't count on the fact that a film is Australian being a mark of quality. C r o c o d i l e D u n d e e is apparently one of the most successful Aussie films of all time and why

this one is so successful is beyond me. _ C _ r _ o _ c _ o _ d _ i _ l _ e _ D _ u _ n _ d _ e _ e is a
vanity

production starring Paul Hogan with a script co-authored by Paul Hogan,
based on a story by Paul Hogan. What story there is is hackneyed, but
that makes little difference. It is really just an excuse to string
together a collection of scenes, each of which is about the great
Australian backwoodsman. He is simple, frank, a big drinker, and has
incredible skills that make him superhuman anywhere in the world.

One can imagine Hogan devising all the scenes in this film, not
particularly in chronological order, then stringing them together with
the most minimal excuse of a story. Some of the scenes take place in
the outback and some in civilization, so the film is broken into two
sections: one that would be Australian adventure, one set in New York.

In the outback the world is divided into _ r _ e _ a _ l _ m _ e _ n and wimps. Dundee is
the only _ r _ e _ a _ l _ m _ a _ n around. In New York everyone is wimpy and while
Dundee doesn't quite fit in, his simple Australian ways make him equal
to any situation that comes along. In fact the same sort of thing has

been done before in _ T _ a _ r _ z _ a _ n ' _ s _ N _ e _ w _ Y _ o _ r _ k
_ A _ d _ v _ e _ n _ t _ u _ r _ e. That film is in many
ways similar but has more connective story.

At least for a collection of scenes, _ C _ r _ o _ c _ o _ d _ i _ l _ e _ D _ u _ n _ d _ e _ e does have
some enjoyable ones. But Hogan--whose background is in commercials--
doesn't have much that works for longer than a minute. For additional
interest value there is a small role by David Gulpilil, the only

Australian aborigine who seems to get steady acting work in such diverse
films as _ W _ a _ l _ k _ a _ b _ o _ u _ t, _ T _ h _ e _ L _ a _ s _ t _ W _ a _ v _ e, and
_ T _ h _ e _ R _ i _ g _ h _ t _ S _ t _ u _ f _ f. Slightly less
welcome is a rather unconvincing giant crocodile. Give this one a -1 on
the 4 to +4 scale.

Subject: Children of a Lesser God: Review, spoilers

Path: mtuxo!mtune!codas!bsdph!ides!kimi

Date: Mon, 29-Sep-86 17:26:30 EST

Review of "Children of a Lesser God", with mild spoilers

I caught the sneak preview of "Children of a Lesser God" last weekend (opening Oct. 10). In short, don't miss this unsentimental love story about a speech teacher for the deaf and a woman whose brilliance has always been hidden from the hearing world.

This is a guaranteed Oscar nominee for best picture, for William Hurt as James and for Marlee Matlin as Sarah for best actors. Should it win? Too soon to tell, but I give the movie a +4 on the -4 to +4 scale, in comparison to last year's Oscar nominees all being +3's and +4's.

I have not seen the Tony Award winning stage play, and knew almost nothing of the plot. What follows is a totally personal view of this film.

Mild spoilers follow...

Although no one will be able to forget the underwater love scene or the "big fight", the visions that stay with me from this movie are small moments--James floating underwater alone, trying to grasp what it feels like to be deaf, coupled with a later scene when he stares at the odd-child-out in his speech class (the one who never even signs) and realizes the immensity of the gulf between them. The savage satisfaction on Sarah's face after she and James have coupled in anger rather than in love. A few seconds while she looks in the mirror, forming silent words. The flurry of signing that made me realize sign language is faster than speech.

Early in the movie Sarah signs, "You'll forget that I'm deaf." James translates this out loud and then swears that he won't. This line is important as both a threat and a promise to the viewer as well as James. I felt shock and sympathy when I saw James forget, in the most intimate of encounters, and ask his lover to do what she could not. So, safe in this knowledge, I was not prepared for the moment when I forgot right along with James. And what I forgot was that only James speaks aloud. The credit that goes to both Hurt and Matlin for this accomplishment is huge.

In spite of the power of scenes like these, I felt a wall grow up between me and this movie, especially at the end. Maybe this feeling

came out of the filmmakers' successful attempt to avoid the sentimentality of "Terms of Endearment", where tears are jerked out of the viewer. Maybe the ending is just too expected, after so many surprises. I think the getting there was more involving than the getting. I would probably totally dissolve at a live presentation of the play, where intensity can do what sentimentality should not.

"Children of a Lesser God" was well worth my time, the trip across town and the full admission price of \$4.25. My husband's four word review, "Well, that was different."

I have one question. Either I missed the reference or it was not in the movie--from what poem or quotation does the title come? Please e-mail.

* Kimiye Tipton USENET: ihnp4!abfl!kimi *

Subject: notes on Half Moon Street
Path: nike!cit-vax!elroy!smeagol!usc-oberon!sdcrcfl!ism780c!ism780!steven
Date: Mon, 29-Sep-86 15:16:00 EST

Misfired romantic thriller has two redeeming virtues: Sigourney Weaver toplless on exercycle, and Sigourney Weaver making statement, "I had a Chinese lover."

Weaver is Dr. Lauren Slaughter, erudite but poor fellow at a Middle Eastern think tank in London who takes a job as a high priced escort girl to make good money. Her assignments take her to the doorstep of one Lord Bulbeck (Michael Caine, subdued but commanding), sensitive diplomat who falls for her. Unfortunately for them both, moviemakers throw in a tired conspiracy plot to further complicate the romance.

Slaughter is stiff and sleek but with the impossibly broad ranging intellect of a James Bond characterization. Worse, her "intelligent" character fails to even consider aloud the possibility that her sexual liasons/friendships with mysterious Middle Easterners could compromise/endanger her lover Caine, who is, after all, a diplomat engaged in super secret peace negotiations between Arabs and Israelis. Swain's brutish direction illustrates the presence of unseen danger in a painfully obvious manner, and sacrificeseemotional complication and some much-needed leavening wit for the sake of hokey intrigue.

Weaver and Caine make a good solid pair, though. Both are professional as always and never less than interesting. Supporting cast and photography are below par.

Two stars out of four.

- 3 -

Subject: A (Late) Review of "Brazil"
Path: mtuxo!houxm!ihnp4!ihulh!jailbird
Date: Fri, 3-Oct-86 12:21:10 EST

They said it couldn't be done. They said that it was old news. They said not to even bother trying. But I don't care. Here is my review of:
"BRAZIL"

Film such as the "Star Wars" sagas, the "Indiana Jones" adventures, and the multitude of teen-oriented sex-slasher-gore movies are generally merited solely for their entertainment value. It would be unfair to judge Terry Gilliam's "Brazil" by that standard, though it is an entertaining film. Gilliam (formerly of Monty Python) describes "Brazil" thus: "It is Walter Mitty meets Franz Kafka." One should include George Orwell in that list as well. Often a bombardment of disturbing, funny, spectacular, and thought-provoking scenes, "Brazil" is a film that is both art and entertainment.

"Brazil" is a black comic portrayal of an insane society that is neither futuristic nor whimsically technological; indeed, what we see is a monolithic, uncaring bureaucracy that would make Franz Kafka sit up his grave. The "Walter Mitty" characterization refers to Sam Lowry (played by Jonathan Pryce), a dreamer whose only escape from the oppressive system he willingly participates in is through his imagination. The plot ignites when Sam sees the woman in his dreams (Jill, played by Kim Griest) in real-life and pursues her. The struggle to reach Jill, a suspected terrorist, is an amalgamation of comic and dramatic near-misses in the real and imaginary worlds.

The contrasting features and dual existence of the real and the dreamed in "Brazil" is of primary importance; the viewer is challenged to determine when the dream sequences cease and to decipher the elaborate symbolism. Ironically, it is the waking world that appears to be a nightmare: noise, color, grotesque caricatures, and charmingly malevolent personalities dominate. In contrast, the dream sequences are light, beautiful, graceful, and effortless. In the real world, humans are dwarfed by the system they live in, not by their peers. In the dream world, Sam must confront his own fears and anxieties which threaten to crush him.

The imagery in "Brazil" is often overwhelming. Gilliam's ingenious use of special effects, very different from most films (other than Gilliam's earlier works), leave one speechless. The sets are vast and mechanical, the colors and lighting otherworldly, the acting overstated. Interestingly, we are not burdened with explanations about the maddening quirks of the society: the obsession with a youthful appearance at any cost; terrorism and bombings so common that one pays little heed to them; the indifference to human suffering; notorious repairmen who *must* do all maintenance "or else"; life-like and innumerable pipes and

- 4 -

ducts; the mish-mash of new and ancient technology. The viewer is transported to a very different world filled with familiar objects that are brilliantly combined to be both comical and disturbing.

However, "Brazil" is not perfect. The cast is excellent, but is an awkward mix of British and American actors. Ian Holm plays a wonderfully incompetent supervisor, and Michael Palin (also of Monty Python) plays a sadistic, loving father. Katherine Helman (of "Soap") plays Sam's ambitious mother, and Robert DeNiro plays a "subversive revolutionary." Because of Gilliam's direction, it is often difficult to recognize the actors behind the characters. In addition, some scenes are *so* bizarre and complex that several viewings of the film are needed to take everything in - an enjoyable, but expensive, endeavor. Despite these flaws, the film suffers little.

Some background on the film: Because of Terry Gilliam's Monty Python reputation, the producers at Universal Studios expected a whacky Pythonesque comedy; instead, they got a serious artistic creation.

Therefore, Universal refused to release the film in the United States - despite it being finished on schedule _ a_ n_ d within budget. Gilliam sued Universal for not fulfilling their contractual obligations. In addition to the pressure of the impending suit by Gilliam, the Los Angeles Film Critics Association voted "Brazil" "Best Picture" after it was seen in Europe. Gilliam won his case, and "Brazil" was granted a limited release with scant promotion other than its reputation and the publicity of the history-making lawsuit. "Brazil" also picked up some Academy Award nominations along the way too.

Just goes to show.

"Brazil" is not a new film, but I feel that it is an important one. It paints a gloomy picture for the individual in any large, dogmatic society; yet there is hope if one can think freely, stand up for oneself and refuse to be a cog in a vast, uncontrollable machine. It is an ironic twist that the difficulties being an individual in a large bureaucracy became a cause for Terry Gilliam in the film *and* in his subsequent lawsuit at Universal. I think that after you experience "Brazil," you will understand what the subtitle, "Its only a state of mind," really means. "Brazil" gets a 9 1/2 on Ron's Rate-a-Flick scale.

P.S. If "Brazil" is not playing at any of the local artsy theaters, it should be available in your local video stores.