

Lincroft-Holmdel Science Fiction Club
Club Notice - 12/10/86 -- Vol. 5, No. 22

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

12/17 MT: ENDER'S GAME by Orson Scott Card (War in Space)

01/7/87 LZ: NEUROMANCER by William Gibson (Consciousness)

01/14 MT: Movie: (to be announced)

HO Chair: John Jetzt HO 1E-525 834-1563

LZ Chair: Rob Mitchell LZ 1B-306 576-6106

MT Chair: Mark Leeper MT 3E-433 957-5619

HO Librarian: Tim Schroeder HO 2G-427A 949-5866

LZ Librarian: Lance Larsen LZ 1C-117 576-2068

MT Librarian: Bruce Szablak MT 4C-418 957-5868

Jill-of-all-trades: Evelyn Leeper MT 1F-329 957-2070

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1. Earth has already lost two wars to the Buggers, merciless insectoid aliens. We need one superior commander to lead Earth's forces to a much-needed victory. So we're building one. Ender Wiggin was bred for the job and is being given the most rigorous training imaginable. ENDER'S GAME is the story of that training. This novel by Orson Scott Card won both the Hugo and the Nebula awards this year for best novel. It is in the Middletown SF library and we will discuss it on Wednesday, December 17, 12 noon, in MT 4A-235. Be there. Aloha.

2. [Note: this arrived late--deadline is 5 PM Tuesdays---but since Charlie wrote it, I'll include it.]

About the LZ Club's December 10 book, Charlie Harris writes:

I nominated THE LEFT HAND OF DARKNESS because my wife says that it's her favorite s-f book. Now Rob tells me that since I nominated it, I have to write the blurb. (He assures me that this is a long-standing tradition...but as far as I can recall, all of the LZ blurbs have been written by Rob--or by Mark, when Rob hasn't sent his in on time.) How can I write a blurb about a book I haven't read yet? Rob says go ahead and do it; that will show that

even people who don't read much s-f have something to contribute to the Club.

[Evelyn: Is that enough to fill up the space in the Newsletter? No? OK, then...]

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I told Rob that if I wrote the blurb, it would just be quotes from the blurbs on the paperback. He said fine. So here's what the covers say: "SF Masterpiece"--Newsweek. "Winner of the Hugo and Nebula awards for best science fiction novel of the year." "She's taken the mythology, psychology--the entire creative surround--and woven it into a jewel of a story."--Frank Herbert. Well, I for one am not inclined to pay much attention to Frank Herbert's esthetic judgments. And I still had no idea what the book is about.

As last resort, I will simply quote from THE SCIENCE FICTION ENCYCLOPEDIA: "The first work of [Ursula K. Le Guin's] real maturity as a writer is THE LEFT HAND OF DARKNESS (1969).... Once again an ethnologist visits a planet, this time Gethen, whose people are androgynous in that...at the peak of their sexual cycle they have the capability of becoming either male or female.... The strength of the novel comes from the interplay between the strange and the familiar; the Gethenians are very like us in many respects, and our slow understanding of their differences has much to say about the nature of sex [q.v.] and sexism in our world, and of cultural alienation generally."

Sounds good to me. [-mtuxo!xchar]

3. Hi. This is Fearless Leader again. I want to say something about LEFT HAND OF DARKNESS. While far from perfect, this is the example of what good science fiction should be, as I tell people like newspaper reporters covering science fiction conventions. It is useful, or at least interesting, to know how having two disjoint affects how our society works. There is, however, no way on Earth (literally) to create a society just like ours with this one modification. In science fiction, however, one can postulate how a society with this one change might be different and study our own society in that way. If used in this way to fiddle with society and see how things change almost as one might do in a laboratory

experiment, science fiction rises well above escapist reading.

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

CONTACT by Carl Sagan
Simon and Schuster, 1985, \$18.95.
A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper

Well, here we have a first novel by an author (who in this case has written a fair amount of non-fiction). If anyone should be able to write a "first contact" novel showing realistic scientists, Carl Sagan is that person. And in fact he does a fairly good job.

A message is discovered coming from Vega. Sagan spends a lot of time showing how the message would be deciphered in the classic way: the transmission would consist of a number of ones and zeroes, the number being the product of two prime numbers. Therefore the bits could be arranged in a rectangular matrix in only one way (well, actually two, but it's easy enough to decide which one gives useful information). One wonders, though, if beings from another star won't have some equally obvious (to them, at any rate) method which baffles us entirely.

Anyway, back to the novel. While Sagan understands science, he shows less comprehension of how politics works, and the political

scenario he paints is unlikely, to say the least. His main character, Eleanor Arroway, is vaguely reminiscent of Asimov's Susan Calvin and somewhat stereotypical of female scientists (or perhaps even scientists in general). There is, of course, the convenient financier to foot the bills for the contraption that the aliens want us to build, etc. In fact, there isn't much that new in this novel. Even so, everything works together and keeps the reader moving right along, until....

Unfortunately, Sagan runs out of steam with his ideas of what an actual meeting with aliens would be like. What should be the exciting culmination of the novel falls flat. Perhaps it's just an idea that has been done so dramatically in science fiction that a more low-key portrayal seems mundane by comparison. The conclusion--almost an afterword, really--is clever, though the characterization and motivation suffer badly in this section.

All in all, not a bad novel, and certainly better than many of Sagan's detractors would have predicted. Sagan's nomination for the J. W. Campbell Award for Most Promising New Writer was, however, a bit much. Call him rather a competent new writer. (Hey, these days, that's not such a bad thing!)

THE HERCULES TEXT by Jack McDevitt
Ace, 1986, \$3.50.
A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper

Well, here we have another first novel by an author (who has written some short fiction). Like C o n t a c t, it deals with first contact with alien intelligence. (Terry Carr points out in his introduction that McDevitt wrote T h e H e r c u l e s T e x t before

_ C_ o_ n_ t_ a_ c_ t was published.)

Like _ C_ o_ n_ t_ a_ c_ t, contact is first made via radio messages. Unlike _ C_ o_ n_ t_ a_ c_ t, deciphering the messages is done in a most illogical fashion.

Where Sagan concentrated on the scientific aspects of first contact, McDevitt is more concerned with the social and political. The political climate in _ T_ h_ e_ H_ e_ r_ c_ u_ l_ e_ s_ T_ e_ x_ t is more convincing than in _ C_ o_ n_ t_ a_ c_ t, being set only a dozen years in the future (before the Millenium). (The only unrealistic touch is having a female president, but then, who knows?) In McDevitt's novel, the contents of the message are a chip in the continuing East-West poker game. The information being sent by the Altheans, rather than the specifics that Sagan deals with, is more encyclopedic and, as with all knowledge, carries with it responsibility. Where Sagan's characters are very trusting in following the Vegans' suggestions, McDevitt's are far more suspicious, far more cautious, and far more realistic.

The political machinations form the major part of the novel and the scientists are not as well drawn as in _ C_ o_ n_ t_ a_ c_ t. Neither are the religionists--I think Sagan shows a much better understanding of them than McDevitt, who remembers the Book of Kells but forgets the burning of the Mayan codas or the Incan quipus. As with _ C_ o_ n_ t_ a_ c_ t, _ T_ h_ e_ H_ e_ r_ c_ u_ l_ e_ s_ T_ e_ x_ t leaves one with the feeling that McDevitt had an almost-great novel, but bobbed it at the end. _ T_ h_ e_ H_ e_ r_ c_ u_ l_ e_ s_ T_ e_ x_ t is disappointing only in that it could have been great, but instead is "merely" very good. McDevitt's handling of the background and characters indicates that future works by him should be very good indeed.