

Holmdel Science Fiction Discussion Group
Club Notice - 03/21/79

MEETINGS UPCOMING:

(All meetings are in room 3H-506 on Wednesdays at noon.)

DATE	TOPIC
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4/4/79	UP THE LINE by Robert Silverberg
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4/25/79	GATE OF IVREL by C. J. Cherryh
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future dates: 5/16/79, 6/6/79

Our library is in HO 2D-634A. Rich Ditch (x3432) is librarian.

1. We are now an official Bell Labs Club as the attached letter will indicate. It appears that the official name for the club is the HOLMDEL SCIENCE FICTION DISCUSSION GROUP. I tried to have us called the HOLMDEL SCIENCE FICTION CLUB when it seemed like whatever we called ourselves, they were going to attach the suffix "CLUB", but we seem to have escaped that fate.

2. A note in the last notice said vaguely that I thought I had seen FIVE MILLION YEARS TO EARTH listed to be shown on March 24 on a local station. Apparently it was shown March 18 instead. My apologies.

3. My stack of reviews to publish seems to have gotten deep prematurely so I will unburden myself of them in this notice.

4. It is not surprising since classical music makes a very good background for reading science fiction, but large numbers of Science Fiction Discussion Group people are showing up at Audio Club Meetings. As long as we are quiet, Bob Hallock, the chief honcho of the audio club, seems not to mind (audio people are very particular about background noise as may be expected). For some of the meetings science fiction fans have outnumbered the non-fans.

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BELL LABORATORIES CLUB

MURRAY HILL
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HELEN T. EIDBERGER
EXECUTIVE SECRETARY

TELEPHONE - AREA CODE 201
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March 16, 1979

M. R. Leeper:

The Bell Laboratories Club in its letter of acceptance of your activity stated that this acceptance was for a six months trial period. This time has now expired and from every indication it appears that your group is active and growing, therefore the Club is accepting the Holmdel Science Fiction Discussion Group on a permanent basis.

MH-7934-HTE-db

Copy to
J. Pease
C. H. McGould

Helen T. Eidberger
Helen T. Eidberger

THE REFERENCE CORNER

by Evelyn C. Leeper

Cameron, Alastair -- FANTASY CLASSIFICATION SYSTEM

If you are stranded on a desert island with a good-sized collection of science fiction, a large supply of index cards, and about five years, this book will help you fill the time and publish a nice index after you are rescued. If, however, you have neither the time nor the inclination to index such a collection, this book will be of limited interest. Basically, it is an outline of science fiction topics of the form:

80 Extrapolations on Time

81 Supernatural Temporal Variations

81.1 Reincarnation

81.2 Ancestral memory

81.3 Visions and Dreams of the Past

81.4 Visions and Dreams of the Present

81.5 Visions and Dreams of the Future

81.6 Hunches

81.7 Works of Art Prove Prophetic

82 Variations on Rate of Time Flow

82.1 Living in Reverse

82.2 Growing Younger

82.6 Time Stands Still

82.7 Rate of Perception and Activity Slowed Down

82.8 Superspeed

There is a code for each level and sublevel, somewhat like the Dewey Decimal System of classification for books. For example, 76.3:84.2 means time travel from the present to a future in which an insect civilization is dominant. (84.2:76.3, on the other hand, means insects from the present travel to the future.) While this book would be very useful if there existed a coded index of

science fiction, its breakdown of science fiction topics is interesting in itself. I can see the hack novelists now, with a table of random numbers in one hand, this volume in the other, saying "29.4. Let's see--intelligent extraterrestrial marine life. I can get a novel on that out in a week." Seriously, though, the completeness of the listing is remarkable. (Published by the Canadian Science Fiction Association, 54 Ellesmere Avenue, St. Vital, Manitoba in a limited edition of 500; contact them if you are interested.)

Devore, Howard & Franson, Donald -- HISTORY OF THE HUGO, NEBULA,
& INTERNATIONAL FANTASY AWARDS

This is a booklet filled with valuable information, but terribly arranged. (This may not be true of later editions.) It starts with a listing a Hugo winners (by category), through 1970, followed by listings of Hugo winners by year from 1971 to 1976. Then come the Nebula Awards, arranged in a similar slapped-together fashion, followed by the International Fantasy Awards. The lists are typed on at least two different typewriters, and are not consistently formatted (one wishes they had used the tab key on the typewriter a little more often!). However, this is the only source that I know of that lists all the nominees for a given year, rather than just the winners. (For the Nebula Awards, this may be going a bit overboard -- there seem to be dozens of nominees for some awards.) Recommended for its content, not its format.

TANDEM RUSH by Fredric Vincent Huber

A Review by Mark R. Leeper

TANDEM RUSH is a rather pedestrian "thriller" based on two premises: 1) That the phone system is all that stands between the U.S. and complete chaos and 2) That the phone system is vulnerable enough that a talented outsider could bring the whole system to a dead stop. The Bell Laboratories reader is likely to find himself complimented by the first premise and insulted by the second. I am told by people who know more about the phone system than I do that Huber's picture of the phone system is all wet. I know he is all wet in his argument that the phone system is more vulnerable to tampering now that it depends more on computers and less on manual systems. (There was an article recently in COMPUTERWORLD saying that in fact manual systems were far more vulnerable to crime than computerized systems. Granted COMPUTERWORLD is hardly an unbiased source, so take it for what it's worth.)

The idea of the novel is that James Bethea, Jr., a "blue box phone phreak", has learned enough about Ma Bell that he can disable and make useless every telephone in the country. An unlikely conspiracy links him with a number of shady characters with aspirations of taking over the government. As usual for this sort of glossy thriller, the main character is some poor shmook of an innocent by-stander who at first knows nothing of the plot and is slowly drawn into the realization of what is afoot. In this case the by-stander is the son of a murdered conspirator. Sonny bulls his way into the line of fire trying to find out who murdered his father and why, and ends up foiling a large piece of the plot. (The rest is foiled by a rather unlikely coincidence.)

Huber's writing style is reasonably crisp, but 75% of the book is pretty standard chase-investigation story stuff that has nothing to do with the main premise of the book. The main character could just as easily have been looking for a murderer or a bank robber and the story could have been nearly identical. Overall I cannot recommend the book for much but curiosity value.

Dall

THE POISON THAT FELL FROM THE SKY
by John G. Fuller

A Short Review and a Long Digression
by Mark R. Leeper

The most frightening horror stories are not those written in an effective horror style. A Stephen King or even an H.P. Lovecraft is limited by the fact that he is writing fiction. The reader can maintain an emotional distance from a story simply by remembering the story is fiction. The most frightening book I have read in a long while was written by an author for whom I have always had very little respect, John G. Fuller. Fuller has a tendency to write what are called non-fiction books about flying saucers (INCIDENT AT EXETER) or ghosts (THE GHOST OF FLIGHT 401). This immediately puts his credibility under suspicion in my mind. His latest book, however, has nothing to do with supernatural events or UFO's. It is a pity, because it would be easier to write it off and forget it. THE POISON THAT FELL FROM THE SKY is the factual account of an industrial accident in Italy that released a cloud of chemical poison into the air. Relatively predictable incidents caused an amount of dioxin equivalent to one billion times the lethal dosage for a guinea pig to be blown over Seveso, Italy and the surrounding area.

Fuller explains that at first it seemed just a minor inconvenience, a foul-smelling cloud. Within a week birds were falling dead from the sky, farm animals were hemorrhaging and falling dead. Pets were staggering in the streets and dying. It was not long before people who had been exposed were dying also, as well as suffering from disfiguring skin diseases and internal and external lesions.

The book is very short and just tells in a factual manner what happened as a result of the accident. In an afterword Fuller also gives the text of an interview he had with officials of the chemical company responsible (if that's really the word) and a short account of other chemical disasters, including the PBB problem in Michigan.

One aspect Fuller did not cover as completely as I would have liked was the government reaction to the problem. Unfortunately, I got a close-up look at how local governments must handle this sort of problem because I lived in Michigan during and after the time of the PBB problem (if there really is an "after"--actually the problem will continue for decades). One small chemical company had sent out a fire-retardant chemical which was also a slow poison where they should have been sending an innocent cattle feed additive. Within weeks PBB had worked its way into the meat, milk, and eggs produced in most of Michigan. Safe tolerances of PBB had already been established and what should have been done was fairly straight-forward. The animals with too much PBB in their systems should have been destroyed. (How to dispose of the bodies was another matter since PBB is not bio-degradable.) The problem was that it was not one farm or ten farms, but a large area of Michigan. That runs into

Buckley

tens, maybe hundreds of millions of dollars. The chemical company could have gone bankrupt without making much of a dent in the damages they had done. The state was forced to do what it could with its welfare-drained economy.

What it did was to take the opinion of a minority of the scientific community and set a very high tolerance level for PBB in cattle. Only farmers whose cattle had higher concentrations of PBB could be compensated for their cattle. The rest could go to market with the state's seal of approval. Further, the concentrations were determined in state laboratories. Meat from the same cattle that had to be smuggled to out-of-state laboratories was found to have PBB concentrations far higher than were detected in Michigan.

Farmers who owned the so-called "low-level" herds would not be compensated for their cattle and were given the choice of slaughtering their cattle and going bankrupt, or sending the cattle to market. There were many farmers in each category. The farmers who simply wrote off their farms rather than send sick, deformed cattle to be eaten are about the only "good guys" of the whole saga. Understandably, they were outnumbered by the owners of the "low-level" herds, who, with state approval, allowed poisoned meat to be sold in Michigan groceries. Now that most of the highly contaminated "low-level" herd meat has been destroyed or eaten, the laws in Michigan have been changed to allow much less PBB in food sold. But it was rather frightening to live in Michigan through the period that the poisoned meat was sold and then, after the damage was done, to hear the level of protection that the state of Michigan offers its people.

Incidentally, the EBC did a rather good documentary called THE POISONING OF MICHIGAN that was run on PBS and from which I got most of my information about the incident. Anyone from the Club who would like to borrow a recording of it on cassette or reel-to-reel audio tape should let me know.