

Holmdel Science Fiction Discussion Group
Club Notice - 3/30/79

MEETINGS UPCOMING:

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

DATE

TOPIC

4/4/79

UP THE LINE by Robert Silverberg

4/25/79

GATE OF IVREL by C. J. Cherryh

future dates: 5/16/79, 6/6/79

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

1. Be reminded that we meet on Wednesday to discuss UP THE LINE by Robert Silverberg, or, if you prefer not to be reminded, don't. The conversation on that day will probably also wander onto LUNACON which straddles the change of month this year.

2. A word to the wise -- GATE OF IVREL has recently gone out of print. The library has two copies, and the expediter (Evelyn Leeper) is attempting to find copies for those who requested individual copies. It is suggested that you do not wait until the last minute to try to find a copy to read. See the librarian today!

3. It has been suggested that we purchase SPEAKING OF SCIENCE FICTION by Paul Walker. This is a collection of interviews with various science fiction authors. Comments on the purchase of this (or any other reference-type books) for the library would be appreciated.

4. Attached is a review by Ditch the Disgusting.

5. This notice was prepared mostly by the Expediter due to circumstances beyond her control. I was incapacitated by the inability of my supervisors to accept that they have to schedule their emergencies around the activities of this club, rather than in conflict with its activities. The expediter, as usual, has my undying gratitude.

Mark Leeper
HO 1B-512 x7093

Leeper, Evelyn C.
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This is one Farmer who is NOT outstanding in his field!

INSIDE OUTSIDE
by Philip Jose Farmer

This 1964 copyright novel has been in and out of print many times, and is currently available in a Berkley edition. The primary reason for reading this book lies in its relationship to Farmer's Riverworld novels. Inside Outside was written and published while To Your Scattered Bodies Go, the first of the Riverworld books, was tied up in legal hassles. (Ask Roy Krupp for details.)

As a result, it appears that Farmer used many of the ideas of Riverworld in Inside Outside, as it was probably an easy way to write a book, and since he probably did not know when TYSEB would be made available.

Our hero, Jack Cull, lives and works in a hellish world entirely inside a planet-sized sphere. A "sun" occupies the center of the sphere, and dims regularly to simulate night. The world rotates, imparting "gravity" to Jack's part of the world. At times, the entire fabric of the sphere undergoes major change, making the sphere bigger, to accommodate more people. There are also present a substantial number of "demons", but since they are currently outnumbered by humans, their status is approximately that of "nigger". Against this background, Jack Cull has vague "memories" of his "previous" life on earth as he carries on his not unpleasant existence.

Jack has a job in the Exchange, sort of a combination CIA and telephone company. Jack reports to work each day, sitting in his seat at the Exchange, and taking incoming calls from field agents. A roomful of others do the same. It transpires that the Exchange is attempting to discover as much as possible about X, a Black Christ who zooms around Hell in an ambulance or hearse (without any engine), while wearing sunglasses. Honest.

The similarities to Riverworld abound: the people "remember" vaguely a past existence on earth; anyone killed in this hell is resurrected; no one under 20 is present; no one has clothes, gets pregnant, or grows older; etc. In fact, Farmer carries the similarities even farther; there seem to be Authorities (sometimes even called Ethicals) who are responsible for this artificial existence; food is provided miraculously by clouds of "mana"; corpses provide raw materials such as skin (for paper and water bags); etc.

The plot takes Jack on a quest with two others to discover the purposes behind this hell, just as everyone searches for the head waters of the River in the Riverworld novels. Farmer could have made this quite interesting, but just as in his other novels, he gets sidetracked in unnecessary details. For instance, the reader is forced to endure many pages as Jack kills and dismembers a demon so that he may use its leathery wings for his own flying. He attaches these wings to his arms with a piece of telephone wire, jumps cut from a huge piece of sewer pipe ("gravity" has been turned off at this point in the story), and proceeds to tow his two companions to safety. This is only one sample of the overdone absurdities of this novel.

As in other Farmer books I have encountered, there are no chapters to help contain idiocies such as this. This indicates to me that Farmer never plans any of his books, but just plunges on blindly until even he can't figure out where he is going or has been.

Another example of Farmer's lack of control is embodied in his telephone technology. At no time does he even attempt to explain where the materials for this system come from, who built (or created) it, and for what purpose. As all the rest of this world is shown to be stone-age primitive, this is quite an obvious oversight. Also, since Farmer tries so desperately to justify the workings of things in the rest of this story, it is disturbing that he does not account for the telephone equipment in some manner.

The real problem of this novel, however, and the frightening implications it has for the final volume of the Riverworld series, is the resolution in the final pages.

NOTE THAT I AM ABOUT TO REVEAL THE ENDING OF THE STORY

It turns out that the Authorities really are "Ethicals", in that they are making extreme efforts to protect the souls of other creatures. The entire world of Inside Outside has been created by them, not to serve as Hell or Purgatory for the souls of earth humans after death, but to be a sort of pre-existence holding tank for creatures with souls who will exist at some future time. Thus, Jack Cull has never been a person before, has never experienced the things he vaguely "remembers" from earth, and HAS HIS ENTIRE PERSONALITY AND ETHICS PREFABRICATED for him by the Ethicals. When the reader discovers this, none of the preceding story makes any sense at all. Lets hope that Farmer has something better in store for those of us who have already invested a great deal of time in the Riverworld novels.