

Holmdel Science Fiction Discussion Group  
Club Notice - 10/1/79

MEETINGS UPCOMING:

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

DATE	TOPIC
10/3/79	Book exchange, room 4H-205
10/10/79	A FAR SUNSET by Edmund Cooper, rm 4H-505
10/31/79	STAINLESS STEEL RAT by Harry Harrison and nomination of officers, rm 4A-215
11/21/79	THE STARS MY DESTINATION by Alfred Bester and election of officers
12/12/79	GAIEWAY by Fredrick Pohl
1/9/80	BLIND VOICES by Tom Reamy
1/30/80	BERSERKER by Fred Saberhagen
2/20/80	LAST AND FIRST MEN by Olaf Stapledon
3/12/80	DINOSAUR BEACH by Keith Laumer
4/2/80	JUPITER THEFT by Donald Moffit
4/23/80	MOON IS A HARSH MISTRESS by Robert Heinlein
5/14/80	MASTERS OF SOLITUDE by Kaye & Godwin
6/4/80	MASK: THAERY by Jack Vance
6/25/80	JEM by Fredrick Pohl

Our library is in HO 2D-634A. Rich Ditch (x3432) is librarian.  
Evelyn Leeper (HO 4E-507B x6334) is Club book-buyer.

1. Our next meeting is the book exchange. This will be held on October 3, at noon in 4H-205. Feel free to bring with you any books that you are willing barter away. Included in the books that will be available will be second copies of books from the library which will be willingly traded for books that will improve the library's selection of books.

2. One week after the book exchange we will be discussing Edmund Cooper's A FAR SUNSET.

3. The somewhat science fictional mini-series, AN ENGLISHMAN'S CASTLE, will be repeated on Wednesday nights starting October 3 on channel 50/52/56 (they all run the same programming simultaneously) at 9 PM (I believe). There will be three 45 minute sections run once a week. The story is set in an alternate history world where Germany won the second world war. You will probably find the acting is quite good, though I have heard one person complain that the story is too slow moving. Still it is far better than its competition on the commercial stations, I am sure.

4. By combining the previous order of discussion books with an order for a number of non-club related books, we were able to

create an order of over \$100, which increase our discount by 5%. Those people who ordered discussion books through the club can expect to get a larger refund when the cost of the books is divided up.

5. Books reviewed in the current notice include NEBULA MAKER by Olaf Stapledon and ALIEN by Alan Dean Foster. Also reviewed is the film MONTY PYTHON'S LIFE OF BRIAN.

Mark Leeper  
BO 1B-512 x7093

## MONTY PYTHON'S LIFE OF BRIAN

A review by Mark R. Leeper

The August 29, 1979 issue of Variety reported that LIFE OF BRIAN has been condemned by the U.S. Catholic Conference. The same film has been called "blasphemy" and "grossly offensive to ... those who call themselves Christian" by the Lutheran Council of the U.S.A. And it has been called "blasphemous, sacrilegious, and an incitement to possible violence" by the Rabbinical Alliance of America. Clearly there must be something extraordinary in the film to cause this amazing show of ecumenical solidarity. If there is, however, I missed it.

The film is about the making of a reluctant messiah in Judea of 33 A.D. While the messiah is clearly patterned on Christ, the filmmakers took what I assume they thought was the safe way out and made clear that their character was not Christ. The ersatz messiah, anachronistically named Brian, seems to win converts by doing stupid things that are misinterpreted as miracles and saying stupid things that are misinterpreted as great and holy wisdom.

The film's speculations, even if applied to Christ, seem harmless enough and, if presented in a serious manner, would probably be called nothing worse than interesting but misguided. Unfortunately, the speculations are shrouded in typical Monty Python humor, which makes buffoons of Romans, Jews, and believers in the new messiah equally. It is this humorous stripping away of dignity from the pseudo-biblical story that is probably at the

heart of the religious hatred toward this film. I suppose that someone who really enjoyed and appreciated Arthurian Legend and lore could have been similarly irritated at the buffoonery in HOLY GRAIL.

On the other hand, the film does have faults quite apart from its apparent heretical nature. My major complaint would be that the film just is not particularly funny. It could be that after years of being flooded in this country with Monty Python humor, that humor is no longer as effective as it once was. This film definitely has a number of witty sequences, but at most one scene (a completely off-the-wall science fiction parody) seems to have the verve and brilliant insanity that characterize earlier Python work or MONTY PYTHON AND THE HOLY GRAIL. Perhaps most disappointing is that, apart from the credit sequence, there is none of the clever animation that characterized HOLY GRAIL. Also, more care was taken in HOLY GRAIL to separate characters played by the same actor in multiple roles. In BRIAN, John Cleese, for one, plays just too many characters that look and dress too much alike. All in all, if you ignore religious objections and see this film you may not be punished, but you will not be rewarded with much more than a show of tired, albeit brilliant, minds trying desperately to be funny.



NEBULA MAKER, by Olaf Stapledon. Sphere, London, 1979, 130p, Paper, Novel, 85p. ISBN 0-7221-8115-9.

This is one of Olaf Stapledon's minor works, which is to say, it is probably only twice as good as anything else to be published this year. This novel appears to be a much shorter version of the type of writing found in STAR MAKER. The main character is taken, by metaphysical means unspecified, through a tour of the history of the cosmos. He sees the chaos before the beginning of the universe, the birth of the universe, the formation of the giant nebulae, their evolution, and their eventual decay and death. In particular, he tells the story of two nebulae: Bright Heart, who preaches love and co-operation to the imperialistic nebulae, and Fire Bolt, who claims that revolution is the only way to overcome oppression. The parallels between Christ and Bright Heart, and between Marx and Fire Bolt, are perhaps over-emphasized, but Stapledon may be allowed this one flaw.

Stapledon's descriptive passages are exquisite. For example, in describing the birth of the universe he says, "As flax, issuing from between the fingers of a woman spinning, comes forth as thread, so from God's countless fingers chaos issued as fine threads of smoke." Later, when talking about the giant nebulae, he describes them as "small soft globes or flecks of light, snow-flakes whirling in the huge gulf of space." Stapledon's explanation of the consciousness and life of the giant nebulae may not be scientifically convincing, but it is none the less awe-inspiring. Stapledon's poetic style and immense scope combine in this to make it one of the best books published this year.

(Although currently available only in a British edition, this book will probably be published in the U.S. soon.)

Evelyn C. Leeper

ALIEN, by Alan Dean Foster. Warner Books, New York, 1979, 270p, Paper, Novel, \$2.25. ISBN 0-446-82977-3.

This novelization of the screenplay has several flaws. Its major flaw is in Foster's unwillingness to maintain a single point of view. Rather, he jumps from character to character, almost at random, giving us their innermost thoughts in a most disconcerting manner. While it is true that focusing on a single point-of-view character would strongly imply that character's survival, at least until the end of the novel, Foster carries his impartiality to extremes -- we even get to hear the cat's innermost thoughts, dealing mostly with birds and mice.

With this book, as with most novelizations, there is deviation from the actual film. In part, this is due to the changes that can occur in a shooting script after it has been turned over to the author who will write the novelization. In fact, a scene towards the end of the novel which was not in the released version of the film, had in fact been filmed and shown in the preview versions. (One review that I read discussed what a well-done scene it was!) Also, some scenes from the film are not in the book, particularly the "space jockey". Whether they were added to the script later, or Foster decided to trim them himself, is unclear.

The net result of all this is that the book fails to stand on its own, mostly due to the point-of-view problem. It also fails to serve as a "souvenir" of the film, due to the heavy-handed introspection of the characters and the deviations from the film. Lastly, the visuals from the film were so striking (with credit due to Giger) that any attempt to describe them is almost certainly doomed to failure. Foster is a good writer, but should stick to the action-adventure style of writing that he does so well.

Evelyn C. Leeper