

Holmdel Science Fiction Discussion Group
Club Notice - 1/25/80

MEETINGS UPCOMING:

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

<u>DATE</u>	<u>TOPIC</u>
1/30/80	BERSERKER by Fred Saberhagen, rm 3H-506
2/20/80	LAST AND FIRST MEN by Olaf Stapledon, rm 3H-506
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	MASKE: 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 1G-318A x6334) is Club book-buyer.

1. As usual, this notice is a reminder of the upcoming meeting, in this case a discussion of BERSERKER (by Fred Saberhagen). Preliminary comments indicate a lively discussion, so come early for a ring-side seat!
2. Attached to this notice you will find various and sundry reviews, convention information, and an index of the notices.

Mark Leeper
HO 2B-502A x7093

TITAN, by John Varley. Berkley-Putnam (SFBC), New York, 1979, 277p, Cloth, Novel, \$9.95. ISBN 0-425-04468-8.

This book, although very good when compared with most SF written today, is somehow not up to the standards set by Varley's shorter fiction. One problem may be Varley's difficulty in sustaining the development of several characters throughout an entire novel.

The plot deals with Captain Cirocco ("Rocky") Jones and her crew: Eugene ("Gene") Springfield, April and August Polo, Gaby Plauget, Calvin Greene, and Bill (who doesn't appear to have a last name, at least as far as I could tell). Jones, Plauget and the Polos are female; the rest are male. They have taken a spacecraft to Saturn to investigate certain anomalies in one of the eleven moons, but when they arrive they discover and even stranger twelfth moon, which they name Gaea. Gaea is toroidal, and obviously artificial. They are attempting to land on it when tentacles reach out and pull their ship inside.

From this point on, the book follows the characters as they travel through the many zones within Gaea (sort of a cross between RINGWORLD and THE STARLOST). They discover a race of intelligent centaurs, who periodically battle a race of angels, along with immense airborne whales and other assorted oddities. As the story progresses, various characters get written out, either through mishaps or their own choice to remain where they are. Finally, the story narrows to Rocky, Gaby, and Gene, and their attempt to reach the module at the center of the torus, where they hope to find the answers to their questions regarding Gaea. And it is in this section, when he is writing about the development of Rocky and Gaby's relationship as they work together towards their goal, that Varley's talent shows through. While the first part concentrates more on the adventure aspects, the second half goes more into character development. By concentrating on two or three main characters, instead of seven or more, Varley is able to use his talents to the fullest.

Varley seems to be striving to write the type of novel popular in the fifties, full of adventure and strange new worlds and beings. Indeed, throughout the novel are tributes to SF literature and film (although a typographical error results in the mention of a movie called 2000: A SPACE ODYSSEY). But he combines with it the more recent trend of character study and growth. The result, while patchy at times, is a very rewarding and enjoyable book. Look for this one as a Hugo nominee.

Evelyn C. Leeper

JESUS ON MARS, by Philip Jose Farmer. Pinnacle Books, New York, 1979, 256p, Paper, Novel, \$1.95. ISBN 0-523-40184-1.

This is the type of book that one wishes came in a plain brown wrapper; I found myself carrying it with the title facing in so that passerbys wouldn't know what I was reading. Somehow the title "Jesus on Mars" makes the book sound like an offshoot of the "ancient astronauts" syndrome. And, having read the book, I'm not sure that is far wrong.

The book begins with four astronauts from Earth: Orme (a Baptist), Danton (a Catholic), Shirazi (a Moslem), and Bronski (a Jew). They are sent to Mars after a unmanned probe discovers there what is obviously the wreck of a spaceship, and a tunnel with the Greek letters "tau omega" over the entrance. When the astronauts arrive on Mars, they are captured by the inhabitants, who turn out to be mostly orthodox Jews, with a sprinkling of aliens from a distant star. The Jews claim that Jesus, whom they believe is the Messiah, lives in the artificial sun which lights their underground living area.

Having carefully achieved a religious balance in his crew, Farmer now proceeds to show how they react to this "news". Unfortunately, the various reactions are too predictable. There are other problems also. Although we are told halfway through the book how there comes to be a Jewish colony on Mars, the Martian Jews don't act in a consistent manner with that explanation. They profess not to understand how Bronski can claim to be a Jew and yet not believe in Jesus as the Messiah, when their origins should have prepared them for that. The ending seems to be of the "deus ex machina" variety (literally!). And running throughout the book are typographical and editing errors that keep pulling one out of the story. It is "Bronski" on one page, "Bronsky" on the next. And a fairly long passage on Shirazi's feeling towards Jews is repeated, almost verbatim, about 20 pages after it first appears.

All in all, this is one of Farmer's minor efforts. (The lack of attention paid to the editing, etc. would certainly support this.) Unlike some of the Riverworld novels, which were delayed months and even years so that he could get them just right, this appears to be an insubstantial novel, with a "cult" title, published to make a quick buck. This would be a barely acceptable "first novel"; as an offering by an established and respected author, it is an insult.

Evelyn C. Leeper