

Lincroft-Holmdel Science Fiction Club
Club Notice - 5/15/85 -- Vol. 3, No. 44

MEETINGS UPCOMING:

Unless otherwise stated, all meetings are on Wednesdays at noon.
LZ meetings are in LZ 3A-206; HO meetings are in HO 2N-523.

<u>DATE</u>	<u>TOPIC</u>
05/22	HO: WAR DAY on cassette
06/05	LZ: TACTICS OF MISTAKE by Gordon R. Dickson
06/12	HO: GREAT SF 1 (1939) edited by Isaac Asimov and Martin Greenberg
07/03	HO: JOB: A COMEDY OF JUSTICE by Robert Heinlein
07/24	HO: DAMIANO by R. A. MacAvoy
08/14	HO: THE INTEGRAL TREES by Larry Niven

HO Chair is Mark Leeper, HO 1E-412 (834-2657). LZ Chair is Rob Mitchell, LZ 1B-306 (576-6106). LZ Librarian is Lance Larsen, LZ 3C-219 (576-2668). HO Librarian is Tim Schroeder, HO 2G-427A (949-5866). Jill-of-all-trades is Evelyn Leeper, HO 1B-500A (834-4723).

1. The Holmdel people, who have always been a little more serious-minded than certain other chapters of the club who shall remain nameless, are going to have a meeting with real revelance (that is the Joisey spelling of "relevance." What we are going to be having at our next meeting is a radio drama based on shocking novel WAR DAY by Whitley Strieber and James Kunetka. This is the light-hearted story of the aftermath of a nuclear war. What is more, you can just sit and listen to it, you don't have to read anything. That should bring in some people from a certain local satellite facility. That's noon, May 22, in 2N-523. That is, assuming that our room is not taken over again by acupuncture people who have the wrong room.

Mark Leeper
HO 1E-412 834-2657
...mtgzz!leeper

*****Presorted*****
* Leeper, Evelyn C. *
* 114A HO 1B-500A *

TORCH OF HONOR by Roger MacBride Allen
Baen, 1985, \$2.95.

A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper

The science fiction war story seems to be making a come-back, and this is one of the new breed. The setting is New Finland, which has been attacked and conquered by the Guardians, a society of neo-Nazis who fled into space in the 21st Century via the newly discovered faster-than-light travel. (Ah, yes, another Nazis-from-space story!) Our protagonist, operating a survey ship in the vicinity, finds himself in the middle of the war to recover New Finland and save the universe (or at least this small portion of it) from the clutches of the bad guys.

In general, the book is well-written and the plot moves along quickly. My knowledge of military strategy is not such that I can comment on the accuracy of the maneuvers or the likelihood of the outcomes, but it sounds convincing. But this book does have a couple of flaws--one literary, one logical. The literary flaw (if one can call it that) is that it is told in the first person. In a novel of self-discovery, this works out well. In a novel of war, it tends to telegraph the ending--while it's true that the reader could be reading the journal of someone who dies in the last chapter, it is much more likely that some of the reader's interest is blunted by the almost certain knowledge that the character won't die.

The logical flaw is considerably worse. The main character is sent to build a receiver at a certain latitude and longitude. But when he looks it up, it is in the middle of the ocean. It turns out that after the original latitude and longitude lines were drawn, the best location for the capital city was right on the equivalent of the International Date Line (180 degrees longitude). So the colonists re-drew the lines, but Earth was still working from the old maps. The receiver must be at this point (because of balancing orbital and coriolis forces or some such), so the protagonists go to great lengths to circumvent this problem. But if Earth was using old maps, they should have been also, and then the point that Earth wanted would have been perfectly accessible! In fact, the point under water was a totally wrong point!

In spite of this (and thank goodness it's not the crux of the novel), Torch of Honor is engrossing, and a prime example of the new hard SF. Try it.

SONGMASTER
and
ENDER'S GAME

—
two novels by Orson Scott Card
—

reviewed by Paul S. R. Chisholm

Let's begin at the beginning. Do the names John Campbell and Stanly Schmidt mean anything to you? They're the original and current editors, respectively, of Analog (nee Astounding). Between them served a gentleman named Ben Bova. Do the names Greg Benford, Ed Bryant, Joe Haldeman, Dean Ing, Donald Kingsbury, Vonda McIntyre, George R. R. Martin, Kevin O'Donnell, Jerry Pournelle, Stephen Robinette ("Tak Hallus", and whatever became of him?), Spider Robinson, Charles Sheffield, Somtow Sucharitkul, Joan Vinge, or F. Paul Wilson mean anything to you? They're some of the writers whose first (or early) stories were published in Bova's Analog.

Why is he telling us this? Because Songmaster and Ender's Game started as novellas in Bova's Analog. Because their author, Orson Scott Card, was an established short story writer by the time "Mikal's Songbird" was published. I read it eagerly; I'd grown to be a fan of Card's short fiction. (I never read the novella "Ender's Game".)

Well, now he's a novelist, and not as well respected in the longer length. I wouldn't presume to say why. I can talk about his two novels I read recently.

Personally, I didn't like Songmaster as well as Ender's Game, partially because I heard the novella rattling around inside the former novel. Ender's Game strikes me as a stronger, more unified story. I'd guess a more objective reader might think so, too.

Songmaster (1980) is a "startships and straw huts" story, ala Frank Herbert's Dune. The basic environment is mostly low tech, with no obvious amenities that don't exist today, and the implied absence of some that do exist now. On the other hand, there is interstellar travel, and a few gadgets beyond current ken. (As in Dune, this is to emphasize the forces of the story, which are neither high-tech nor low-tech, but non-tech.)

Within the boundaries of Mikal's Empire, there are two institutions all acknowledge as powerful. One is the Empire, of course. But the Empire is twenty years younger than Mikal himself, who conquered all humanity in his youth. It's doubted that the man's empire will much outlive the man.

The other force is the Songhouse. Dozens of generations old, it does nothing but train exemplary singers. In particular, the Songhouse trains Songbirds, prepubescent children whose voices enchant the appreciative. Songbirds are loaned only to those who can really hear and be moved by the music, and not all Mikal's blustering and threats can change that. But Mikal turns out to be appreciative, and deserving of a Songbird.

Songmaster tells of the selection, training, service, and later years of Ansett (sp?), Mikal's Songbird. It's the story of the Empire's effect on him, and his on it. "Mikal's Songbird" is roughly the second quarter of the novel, and tells of a subtle and original conflict: I won't spoil the details. As an envelope for the original novella, Songmaster could be better, and as someone who enjoyed "Mikal's Songbird" when it first appeared, I find it hard to judge the novel objectively.

As Ansett is the most gifted singer ever to enter the Songhouse, so is Ender Wiggin the most potentially gifted child ever found for another talent: waging war. There have been two battles between humans and "buggers", an alien race who invaded our solar system, most recently about a century ago. A single human commander, one Mazer Rackham, snatched victory out of the jaws of defeat during the Second Invasion. Not even the Interstellar Force knows how Earth won. This, though, they believe: to win the next battle, they need above all else another single man to lead the fleet to victory.

They believe they've found this man in Ender Wiggin. So, at the ripe age of six years old, they recruit him to "Battle School", a space station where normal studies are all but neglected for "the games", a zero-gee gymnastic team sport. (Not at all incidentally, the games are really neat.) He's taught never to expect anyone, especially not an adult, to get him out of a problem. He's taught solve problems with ruthless finality. He's constantly singled out as the best, long before he's given the training or the skills to handle whatever situation he lands in. Ender's Game is to learn the lessons he's being taught, survive, and remain a human being.

This 1985 novel is gripping. Science fiction has often told tales of childhood alienation. (Any relationship between SF characters being alienated in stories, at any age, and SF fans being alienated from "normal" society, at any age, is unlikely to be a coincidence.) This is a good one, depicting children as much like adults, but emphasizing traits that are considered extremely antisocial in adults. All of the games Ender plays make him grow up, little by little, and the process advances the story while building the character in the reader's mind.

A novel should build to a climax. Ender's Game does. When I realized just what Card was headed, it literally knocked the breath out of me. (Yes, I know what the word "literally" means. The shock hit me harder than some punches I've taken. Literally.) Card lays enough hints

so you can probably see it coming, too, and the suspense is damned effective.

It's easy for a war story to wind down and trickle off into nowhere. This one winds down and rises to Myth. (Songmaster tried to; Ender's Game succeeds.) Good ending.

These two stories have a lot in common. They deal with super-children, each the most talented in his field in all recorded history of the field. They are faced with tremendous pressures, from their education, from their talented but less able peers, from their loneliness, and from their loss of childhood for a greater pursuit. They have enormous control over their emotions, but that control is stretched past the breaking point many times. And they undergo their hardships, not just for some abstract art's glory, but for the betterment or survival of the entire human race. The necessity of the suffering is clearer in Ender's Game, which is one of the reasons I thought it the superior novel.

After all these years, I was happy to come across fiction by Orson Scott Card that was up to the short stories of a decade ago. Songmaster is a good novel. Ender's Game is a very good novel, and I recommend it strongly. Watch for it in paperback, and watch for it in Atlanta on the Hugo ballot.

DEATHQUAKE

A film review by Mark R. Leeper

Toho's earlier days of filmmaking endlessly showed Tokyo being destroyed by giant lizards. Their more recent releases to American television still have the destruction but now try for more of a tone of relevance. Deathquake at first blush seems to be a rip-off of American disaster films, yet in spite of occasionally unconvincing visuals, this film packs considerably more wallop than anything Irwin Allen ever thought of putting on a screen.

The plot has one renegade scientist predicting an earthquake for Tokyo. When it does come, it is massive. More destruction is done, at least on the short term, than anything anyone dared to put in The Day After. For one thing, Deathquake shows not too unrealistically (I think) a fire storm. Also harrowing are scenes in a flooding subway tunnel. By not having to concentrate on a few recognizable stars the way The Towering Inferno and its ilk do, it can concentrate on showing the effects of the disaster. Toho has finally found monsters which are believable and frightening.

THE HOUSE OF LONG SHADOWS

A film review by Mark R. Leeper

What do you do when you have a weak script and a weaker director? How do you make a film that anyone would ever pay to see? You assemble a cast of famous horror film actors of yesteryear so their names can decorate your marquee. Four well-known horror actors get together to share the lowpoints of their careers in The House of Long Shadows. A young writer makes a bet that he can write a melodramatic novel in one night if he can do it alone in a moody and empty old house. After he arrives, a number of assorted weirdos shows up. Peter Cushing is wasted with an Elmer Fudd speech impediment. Christopher Lee fares little better. John Carradine and Vincent Price have often lent their names to poor films, so it is harder to feel sorry for them. The surprise twist ending was obvious fifteen minutes into the film. Rate this one -2 on the -4 to +4 scale. Blech!

THINNER by Richard Bachman (Steven King)

A Book Review by
Terry Burke

Had I not known that Richard Bachman is actually Steven King, I probably would have enjoyed Thinner even more. During a large portion of my reading time, I was looking for the writing style of Steven King. It is there, of course. What is more important however, is that whether it's Bachman or King, it's a great little story.

Thinner is an expanded novella. There hasn't been too much stretching to make it a novel but some padding is there to make it 309 pages. For the most part, the story zips right along.

The main character in the plot is Billy Halleck, a Connecticut attorney (yuppie) with about fifty pounds of excess fat, a lukewarm wife, and a teenage daughter upon whom he dotes. Billy, (as anyone can learn by reading the flyleaf) while driving down the main street in town, runs over and kills an old woman who walks out from between parked cars. He is exonerated. Walking away from the hearing, he is approached by an ancient male gypsy who touches Billy on the cheek and whispers, "thinner". Got the plot? You're right, but it takes some interesting twists and turns.

The book has a bit of gore, a few surprises, and more than a few cliches but it's "couldn't put the book down" reading. Bachman-King takes the reader north from Connecticut to Maine where Billy searches for the band of gypsies in order to have the curse removed. He is eventually aided by a member of the Mafia, while wifey and the family doctor try to find him and have him committed because of his strange behavior and even stranger stories.

Thinner has no moral, no message, and no symbolism. It's just plain fun and entertaining.

EMERGENCE by David R. Palmer
291 pages Bantam Books \$2.95

A Book Review
By Terry Burke

EMERGENCE is one of the novels nominated for this year's Hugo. Looks like I'm trapped into reading the other four so that I can make a reasonably fair judgement.

This is the story of an eleven year old named Candy who is a survivor of a bio-nuclear war. She is a genius by nature and nurture. She and her pet macaw, Terry set out to find others of her ilk, following sketchy information left her by her Karate teacher.

For me, the most interesting part of the tale was Candy's journey *from Wisconsin to the east coast and then west in search of other survivors*. However, somewhere along the line she becomes unbelievable. A little like Buckaroo Banzai - she can do ANYTHING - doctor, mechanic, pilot, astronaut, etc.

The style of writing used by David Palmer is a little disconcerting for the first twenty or so pages. You are reading the diary that Candy has written for posterity. Because Candy has little time or patience for this type thing, she teaches herself Gregg Shorthand in a few days and uses it to keep the diary. You are therefore reading her version of shorthand. There are no pronouns, the verb to be is omitted and there are few adjectives. It is rather choppy but once the story takes over, it's possible to read faster.

Two parts of this book were printed in separate issues of Analog in 1983. Knowing this in advance, it is obvious that other parts were written around the original story. There is some repetition. I would have been satisfied with less adventures, specifically the last fourth of the book.

While I don't consider this to one of my top ten favorites, it was entertaining.