

Lincroft-Holmdel Science Fiction Club  
Club Notice - 7/31/85 -- Vol. 4, No. 5

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>
08/07	LZ: A CASE OF CONSCIENCE by James Blish (Religion)
08/14	HO: THE FLIGHT OF THE DRAGONFLY by Robert Forward (11AM)
08/28	LZ: DINOSAUR BEACH by Keith Laumer (Time Travel)
09/04	HO: CODE OF THE LIFE-MAKER by James G. Hogan (2N-529)
09/11	MT: Organizational Meeting (tentative)
09/18	LZ: THE MARTIAN CHRONICLES by Ray Bradbury (Near Future History)
09/24	HO: ? (*Tuesday*)
10/09	LZ: THE SHEEP LOOK UP by John Brunner (Catastrophes)

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. Science Fiction is not a genre to shy away from the tough questions such as "What is the nature of Evil?", "Is there a God?", and "Does Spock come back to life?" On Wednesday, August 7, "Religion and SF" will be the topic for the Lincroft chapter of the Lincroft-Holmdel SF Club (hey, Holmlies; why do they put the "Lincroft" \*first\*?). The main book to be discussed is James Blish's A CASE OF CONSCIENCE, in which a Jesuit priest finds his faith sorely tested by a planet whose inhabitants appear not to need or want any religion at all. Other books on the same general topic include the TAROT trilogy by Piers Anthony, PROJECT POPE by Clifford Simak, and TO REIGN IN HELL by Steven Brust. [-jrtr]

2. In answer to Rob's question, we decided to leave Lincroft as the first name of the science fiction club so they would not be forgotten altogether when most of the action happens at Holmdel. (We're still waiting for most of the action to happen at Holmdel!)

3. Some of you might remember the character Chuck Yeager from the book or the film THE RIGHT STUFF. He was the unsung hero who really did have the "right stuff" but never got the attention because he was only a test pilot, not an astronaut. This month I have seen him featured in three or four magazine articles, they had a piece about him in the SPACEFIGHT TV series, and I just saw that a book YEAGER has been published and is headed for the bestseller list. This makes Chuck Yeager now officially The World's Most

\*\*\*\*\*Presorted\*\*\*\*\*  
\* Leeper, Evelyn C. \*  
\* 114A HO 1B-500A \*  
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Famous Unsung Hero. He has just nosed out for the 41 position some guy who was a WWII naval hero and then took a turn in politics in the late 50's and early 60's.

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

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Gary Larson and THE FAR SIDE  
A book(s) review by Mark R. Leeper

I have never been all that fond of books of cartoons. First of all, the vast majority of cartoons I see don't strike me as all that funny. And a cartoon that is funny on the first viewing will be much less funny on a second viewing. When I was growing up I liked Charles Addams, I suppose, but I don't any more. In my college days, I liked Gahan Wilson but while I still like two or three of his classics, he is not high on my list any more. Last summer I flipped open a cartoon book, In Search of the Far Side, in a bookstore and saw four cartoons across a page and all four were funny. I flipped to another page and at least two struck me as funny. That was my first brush with Gary Larson and his "Far Side" cartoons. Within a week, I had bought all three collections of Larson's cartoons then available: The Far Side, Beyond the Far Side, and In Search of the Far Side. I have given collections of Larson cartoons as gifts since.

The publication of a fourth collection, Bride of the Far Side, prompted me to comment how much I like Larson's stuff. Larson's world is one in which dogs are intelligent but humans only barely realize it. Cows are intelligent too and are planning to revolt. Great scientists are really just little kids at heart, and aliens visit us all the time but they are more like us than we'd like to believe. Let's take some cases in point. Two scientists are writing abstract formulae on a blackboard. A dog is at their feet staring intently at the formulae. One scientist says "Doggies is so cute when they try to understand quantum physics." A flying saucer has landed on Washington Mall. A stairway has descended. At the top are two disgusted aliens; at the bottom of the stairway one alien is sprawled on his back, obviously just fallen down the stairway. "Wonderful, just wonderful," says a disgusted alien. "So much for creating an air of awe and mystery!" A lawn has been cut in a very sloppy manner. The mower, still running, seems to have cut a random path. A dog is standing by the front door looking in and wagging his tail, but the angry man inside is looking at his lawn and saying, "Bad dog! No biscuit! No biscuit!" Two cows are watching the Great Chicago Fire from a distance and one says, "Agent 83 has accomplished her mission."

Larson's humor is always lively and off-the-wall. I recommend his stuff. Here in the New York-New Jersey area his cartoon is syndicated in The New York Daily News. I might subscribe to just about any newspaper but that one just to get his cartoons, but a friend gets it occasionally and cuts out Larson's stuff for me. Thank God for friends.

THE BLACK CAULDRON  
A film review by Mark R. Leeper  
(Slight spoiler)

Capsule review(\*): This is the most ambitious animated fantasy from Disney since the 1950's. But budget constraints hurt the art and animation quality and shortened the film to the point that it gutted the logic. Too many of the characters are too cute.

When you think of animated fantasy, what studio most often comes to mind? No question! Disney Studios. They created the standard. But even at Disney Studios, there are major and minor animated films. The majors tend to be classic stories, often fairy tales, that are made for perennial re-release. Oh, occasionally they put Rescuers or 101 Dalmations into circulation, but their majors are films like Snow White, Sleeping Beauty, Pinocchio, and three or four more you can probably name off the top of your head. For a decade, Disney Studios has worked on what seems to be their first major in a good long time. Now it is out. The Black Cauldron is an adaptation of parts of two books in Lloyd Alexander's "Prydain" series, itself based on the Mabinogion.

The Black Cauldron has the same basic age-old plot that Star Wars had. Boy from humble background (in this case, he's an assistant pig-keeper) dreams of glory in battle. Before he realizes it, he is swept into and becomes the key turning factor of a titanic battle. In this case, the battle is against a supremely evil supernatural being called "The Horned King." I don't know if we ever find out what he is king of, but he does have a few subjects that we see and will have a good deal more if he can unleash the power of the McGuffin of the title.

There is a serious problem with The Black Cauldron--it has too much story. Sleeping Beauty and Snow White had simple short plots you could tell in two or three sentences. They are ideal for animated films. An animated film takes a lot of work to make and Disney's tend to be 75 minutes or so. This one is 80 with a long credit sequence at the end. This means that the script does not have time to make things logical. Too many sequences are required to tell the story and so each sequence must be short. Let's look at an example. The hero is backed up against a wall. Evil guards are throwing a hail of spears at him and he's clearly in trouble. Someone realizes that he (the hero) has a magic sword that cuts through metal, so they stop throwing spears. Why? This sword is not a shield. The magic sword is no better than a regular sword against that sort of an attack, but it is a good excuse for ending the sequence and getting to the next one. There are several other escapes that are similarly senseless.

The visualizations of characters are classic Disney, which is to say that the images of evil are decent and the images of good are enough to put you in diabetic shock. The hero is callow, the heroine is

pretty, the pig is cute and looks very little like a real pig. Then there is a cute creature that looks like a miniature cross between a sheepdog and Albert Einstein.

The art style is an odd mixed bag of styles and at times somewhat below the Disney standard. In the early parts of the film it is much the usual Disney animation, though not as complex. At other times, they do a sort of pastel impressionistic background to save painting effort. A few scenes have live action mixed in to show flame or smoke. There was a lot of corner-cutting on the animation.

On the other hand, Disney has the highest standards in the industry for print quality. The print was done on high-quality celluloid with no frame-long white flashes or dark specks from cheap film. When I saw a brand new print of Krull, there were so many little flashes on the screen I thought at first they were intentional. That never happens with a Disney film and it's time they got some recognition for that.

On the whole, though, I am indifferent to this film, mostly because of a script that was so rushed that it killed the logic of the story. Rate it a straight 0 on the -4 to +4 scale.

(\*) Note: the suggestion to include capsule reviews is probably a good one. I will try it for at least a little while.

THE GOD OF THE LABYRINTH by Colin Wilson  
Mayflower, 1974, \$1.95.  
A book review by Mark R. Leeper

Capsule review: Colin Wilson--whose science fiction has some intriguing ideas--comes a cropper with his philosophical sex novel. His character investigates a famous rake as well as a number of odd sexual cults, and draws some dull conclusions on the nature of the sex drive.

I like Colin Wilson's science fiction in part because of the sheer audaciousness of his explanations for why people do what they do. In one of his novels, The Mind Parasites, he says that people who formulate degenerate philosophies--people like the Marquis de Sade--do so because we are inhabited by parasitic aliens who feed off of negative thought. The idea of a being so alien that it feeds off of a philosophy and which turns the course of human philosophy in order to feed is just crazy enough to be fun. It turned the book into a sort of War of the Worlds in which most of the battles are not in the countryside but physically in the minds of the characters. Wilson did some unusual things with a science fiction novel. For quite some time I wanted to see what he did with a sex novel. The book is The God of the Labyrinth, copyright 1970.

What a disappointment! In Wilson's science fiction, he uses science fiction concepts to keep the plot flowing. The God of the Labyrinth has a much weaker storyline and Wilson uses sex to attempt to keep the reader interested. It does not work. The story is about a literary person much like Wilson who is hired by a publishing house much like Grove Press to gather some information about a famous rake much like Frank Harris. (Actually Wilson deliberately blurs the distinction between himself and Gerard Sorme, the character, by attributing one of his own books to Sorme. In an afterword, it is unclear if he is writing as Wilson or Sorme when he describes his experiences with pornography and the law.) It seems the publisher wants to put a thin veneer of respectability on a weak piece of pornography. The more Sorme delves into the life of Esmond Donnelly, the more possessed by Donnelly's character he becomes. Sorme extends his study to a number of strange organizations and cults with odd sexual theories and, in particular, the Cult of the Phoenix, a sort of Hell Fire Club. Sorme is a rationalist, at least to the degree that he does not believe in instinct and wants to find rational explanations for his sexual drive. The book involves to a great degree his "experimental" investigations into sex. Yawn. There is some minimal intrigue as he collects information about the secret Cult of the Phoenix, but mostly the book is just the descriptions of weird encounter sessions. Sorme's revelations on the nature of the sex drive are far less profound than the author would have us believe.

With the exception of a few "stimulating" sex scenes, The God of the Labyrinth is pretty dull. The afterword, however, gives a cogent and intelligent argument against censorship which is better than the

main body of the book, and is as timely today as when it was written. In a nutshell, he says sex criminals he has investigated (and he investigated many for his books) seem to be more the product of sexual inhibition than sexual openness. Suppression of pornography, he feels, would increase the number of cases of people rebelling against the "forbidden-ness" of sexual activity by turning to sexual crime. (No flames, please, I am only quoting Wilson. I don't want to become embroiled in a discussion that has gone on in depth elsewhere on the Net.)