

Lincroft-Holmdel Science Fiction Club
Club Notice - 8/7/85 -- Vol. 4, No. 6

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>
08/14	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)
09/18	LZ: THE MARTIAN CHRONICLES by Ray Bradbury (Near Future History)
09/24	HO: ? (*Tuesday*)
10/02	MT: Organizational Meeting (tentative)
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. The Lincroft people have pioneered the concept of the theme meeting. They don't just discuss one book, they have a book as a focal point but discuss a whole category of science fiction. On August 14, the Holmdel branch is going to be discussing science fiction stories with insects in the title and particularly FLIGHT OF THE DRAGONFLY. So if you have read or can read FLIGHT OF THE DRAGONFLY, "Empire of the Ants," "The Fly," "The Large Ant," THE BUTTERFLY KID, "Moonmoth," THE LADY OF THE BEES, or "The World of Giant Ants," you must attend. You will also be welcome if you saw DEADLY MANTIS, LADYBUG LADYBUG, or THE SILVERFISH KING. Sorry, if you try to discuss SPIDERMAN, SPIDER KISS, THE BLACK SCORPION, TARANTULA, or DADDY-LONGLEGS you will be asked to leave as well as take a course in zoology. I haven't yet decided what to do with people who want to discuss BUG JACK BARRON.

2. The Middletown organizational meeting has been slipped three weeks, just like everything else having to do with Middletown (at least on my project).

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

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

LIFE PROBE by Michael McCollum
Del Rey, 1984, \$2.95.
A book review by Mark R. Leeper

Capsule review: Life Probe is a leisurely "first contact" story with most of its ideas in the prologue. It sets up its premise and then works it out. The working out is enjoyable reading but weak on content.

I read a science fiction book for ideas and entertainment and Life Probe has both. Life Probe is a slick, enjoyable novel by a relatively new author, Michael McCollum. The odd thing about Life Probe is that the ideas are all, or nearly all, in the first three pages and the rest of the book is the entertainment. In the prologue, we learn that the Makers are scouring the galaxy looking for races that might have FTL (faster-than-light) travel. Why do they need FTL travel so desperately? Pretty much for the same reasons (in my opinion) that Earth currently space travel. The implication is that when you start outgrowing your planet you need space, but without FTL travel, space only postpones problems--it does not eliminate them. Eventually the same species that outgrew its planet will outgrow its neighborhood of the galaxy. Of course, it will take a long time by our standards to do that.

Those first three pages over, McCollum sets out to tell us the story of what happened in 2065 when the probe came to our solar system looking for FTL travel or help in developing it. And, as has become traditional in this sort of story, the aliens are willing to trade their technical knowledge for ours. The rest of the novel is a pleasant enough story of how Earth reacts to the coming of the probe and to its offer of technical exchange. There is a girl-meets-boy subplot with characters fleshed out just enough so that the reader wants to know that they get together, or at least wants to see how it will happen. And the whole story is set against the background of a new Cold War in which it is the Americans and Europeans on one side and a unified Africa on the other. That part is not well-handled since if we went in with a text editor and replaced all the African names with Russian ones, the story would work just as well. We never see how a Cold War with an African bloc is any different from one with the Soviet bloc.

I have to give Life Probe my most common criticism of novels of the 1980's: there is enough idea and story here for a really good, really tightly written short story. There is occasionally something to be said for stretching a good short story's material out into a leisurely novel, but it is done too often these days. If publishers somehow paid by content rather than by word count, we would be getting a lot of good short stories and a lot fewer novels. Life Probe is a +1 book on the -4 to +4 scale.

Mercury Capsules - August 7, 1985

"Mercury Capsules": SF review column, edited by Paul S. R. Chisholm. Appears in the "Lincroft-Holmdel SF Club Notice".

A medium for quick reviews of anything of interest in the world of science fiction. I'll pass along anything (not slanderous or scatological) without nasty comments. I prefer to get reviews by electronic mail: send to pa!psc from the AT&T-IS ENS systems in Lincroft, {pegasus,mtgzz,ihnp4}!lznv!psc from everywhere else. If that's impossible, I'm at 113A LZ 1D-212, 576-2374.

⊗ REQUEST FOR REVIEWS

Has anyone read any of the following? Tom O'Bedlam by Robert Silverberg; R. A. MacAvoy's The Book of Kells; The Continent of Lies by William (?) Morrow. Comments would be appreciated. Short reviews would be greatly appreciated.

Coming soon: spoiler discussions of Varley's "Press Enter _" and Niven and Pournelle's Footfall. Aloha.

Paul S. R. Chisholm

⊗ Liavek: single-world fantasy anthology, edited by Will Slatterly, 1985.

I read Liavek a little while ago. It seems as good as or better than the first Asprin Sanctuary book. Perhaps this is because more work went into defining the environment before the stories were written. Either that or the authors were more familiar with it so that there was fewer instances of 'that was a neat idea, how can I turn it to match my story idea'.

Nigel Haslock

⊗ Medea: Harlan's World: anthology, edited by Harlan Ellison; 1985.

This is something that's been tried before: several SF writers writing stories set in the same world. Ellison mentions Fletcher Platt's The Petrified Planet, and A World Named Cleopatra, edited by Roger Elwood; the success of the Thieve's World books has spawned other such fantasy anthologies.

It's been done before, but it's done well here. Hal Clement, Poul Anderson, Larry Niven, and Frederik Pohl wrote some basic

specifications, Kelly Freas painted a pretty picture (enclosed in the Bantam/Spectrum trade paperback; and used as the dust jacket of the hard cover); Thomas Disch, Frank Herbert, Robert Silverberg, and Theodore Sturgeon brainstormed other possibilities, under Ellison's loose moderation, to an enthusiastic UCLA extension seminar. Then the nine writers above, plus Jack Williamson and Kate Wilhelm, write eleven stories of the planet.

So Medea has four suns and a superjovian to heat it, East and West poles, foxes that cast off pairs of legs to give birth, sentient balloons, and a patchwork of ecological niches. Similarly, Medea has eleven different stories. Some are about the "foxes", some about the "balloons", some about the weather. Some are about the humans on Medea (and Earth). And some are first and foremost about ideas.

Such an eclectic collection has at least one story you won't be too fond of, but it'll be a different story for different readers. This much variety also means you're likely to find at least one story you'll like, and probably one you'll like quite a bit. Will it be Niven's "FlareTime", when both the Medean ecology and the human settlement are changed by life-as-they-don't-usually-know it? Or maybe Theodore Sturgeon's tale (one of the last before he died, dammit) "Why Dolphin's Don't Bite", of what it takes for one culture to accept another. Frank Herbert has a story of Ship, with his typical "I know you know I think you feel I'm lying" games; but "Songs of a Sentient Flute" is very much a Medea tale.

These stories aren't parts of a single tale, they're not necessarily set in chronological order, and they're not all externally consistent. What they are is good stories by good writers. Themes and tricks aside, isn't that what it's all about?

Paul S. R. Chisholm

• Footfall: novel, Larry Niven and Jerry Pournelle, 1985.

(The usual caveats: Jerry Pournelle is an acquaintance of mine. We've exchanged letters, he's bought me some drinks, and it's conceivable that the character "Brant Chisholm" got his name from mine.)

(Second caveat: nowhere on the cover do the words "science fiction" appear. This is a mainstream novel by two SF writers, with an SF plot. Whatever that means.)

Alien invasion stories have been done before, too. They seem to be enjoying a renaissance. They're a natural for excitement, suspense, and lots of action. They can also serve as a platform for neat ideas, political and philosophical statements, and examination of just what in our world is worth fighting for.

Footfall is long on excitement, suspense, action, nifty weapons, and characters. Oh, lord, characters. There are one hundred and twenty-two characters (they're listed inside the covers, and again after the table of contents). A lot of them are spear carriers. None of them is very three dimensional, though some are original enough to come alive slightly. If you read novels for characterization, skip this one.

If you read SF for brilliant, original ideas, you too may not be very interested. Niven and Pournelle don't touch Fermi's Paradox ("If there's intelligent life in the universe, where is everyone?"). There's not much motivation as to why the Fithp are in our solar system (the motivation is in fact mentioned near the end of the novel), or why, aside from being a warrior race, they want to take over our planet and keep us alive. There **are** some reasons they want to take over our planet, instead of just building space habitats, and those reasons are part of the conflict.

So, Footfall doesn't do for alien invasion stories what Star Wars did for SF movies; it does entertain. There are some really spiffy weapons in here (orbital tank killers?!) The prose is more than competent. The high stakes make the suspense nearly unbearable. And, dammit, the pages turn and turn, and the story keeps going on, picking up steam as it goes.

This isn't **THE** alien invasion story. It's just a pretty good one.

Paul S. R. Chisholm

• Terry Carr's Best Science Fiction of the Year: anthology, edited by Terry Carr, 1985.

Let's see. Carr's Best SF of the Year #12 must have appeared in 1983 for it to have one a Locus Award in 1984, so this must be number fourteen. Oddly enough, neither a series number nor the year appear anywhere in the title; I think the name changed when Carr started editing the series for Tor. But what'll they call it next year?

"Best of the Year" anthologies have a tendency to be pretty good, Carr's more so (in my opinion) than others. His picks (like Gardner Dozois's, for his anthology) tend to include more experimental stuff than others. If that doesn't appeal to you, maybe you'd be better off with another "Best".

The lead story is John Varley's Nebula-winning "Press Enter _", and let me say something right here about the typography. The last character in the title is supposed to be a blinking block cursor. Oddly enough, none of the books that make reference to the story manage the blinking. I can't even manage the block, so I've substituted a underline (that's what my cursor looks like). I've got lots to say

about "Press Enter _"; I'll say it some other time.

The other stories? "Blued Moon" by Connie Willis is a funny, twisted story about life in a research corporation where the most common language is Jargon, one young man intends to use his three fiances ("fee-an-sees") as stepping stones to the boss's daughter, said daughter is looking for someone who speaks English, and the company linguist is wondering just what he was hired for. Charles L. Harness's "Summer Solstice" is a historical tale of an alien in distress, and Eratosthenes in Ptolemy's court in Alexandria. I don't know enough of the period to know if this is supposed to be an alternate history story. Alternate or ours, if you like historical SF, you'll like this story more than I did. "Morning Child" is a typical Gardner Dozois tale, with vivid prose, a gimmick you'll likely guess before the end, and not much "story" worth mentioning. George Alec Effinger tells us about "The Aliens Who Knew, I Mean, Everything" with wit and skill.

I don't usually care for Tanith Lee, but "A Day in the Skin (or, the Century We Were Out of Them)" got to me. Neat idea, good execution. Bob Leman's "Instructions" isn't a story, exactly, but it's a nice piece of writing, and I liked it. Carr bought Kim Stanley Robinson's first two novels, The Wild Shore and Icehenge, for Ace, and "The Lucky Strike" for Universe 14. I liked it a lot there, I like it a lot here, it's another Nebula winner, and I told you so. "Green Hearts" is Lee Montgomerie's first story, a tale of genetic modification. It brings to mind Alan Gopin's generic comment, "It seems to be vague, but is in fact meaningless." The story's not bad, but I'm not sure it belongs in a "Best of". (If Carr wanted something from Interzone, couldn't he have found something stronger? I guess his tastes and mine diverge.)

Octavia E. Butler copped another Nebula award with "Bloodchild". This is a hell of a piece of writing. This is a terrific story. Not recommended for reading right before bedtime. Otherwise, highly recommended.

Michael Stanwick's "Trojan Horse" is about a lot of things: personality transfer and surgery, God, love, God, religion, and psychology. Pamela Sargent's story is called "Fears"; it's a very paranoid story about a person who, considering the world of the story, is justifiably very paranoid. If you're still fighting "Women's Lib", you won't want to read this one at all. (But maybe half a dozen tag-team feminists will force feed it to you?) "Trinity" by Nancy Kress is another story about God, this time using cloning and drugs to examine divinity.

Quite a variety. You'll find something you'll dislike. You'll find several stories that will haunt you. You'll find all three Nebula award winners for short SF. "Best" is a hard title to justify; Carr has.

Paul S. R. Chisholm

• "24 Views of Mt. Fuji, by Hokusai"; short story, Roger Zelazny. Appeared in the July 1985 issue of Asimov's.

"1. Mt. Fuji from Owari

"Kit lives, though he is buried not far from here; and I am dead, though I watch the days-end pinking cloudstreaks above the mountain in the distance, a tree in the foreground for suitable contrast. The old barrel-man is dust; his cask, too, I daresay. Kit said that he loved me and I said I loved him. We were both telling the truth. But love can mean many things. It can be an instrument of aggression or a function of disease."

If you haven't liked Zelazny's other stories involving computers (e.g., "Home is the Hangman", and the rest of My Name Is Legion), I suspect you won't like this one. If you don't like the games he's played with religions and gods (e.g., Lord Of Light and Princes Of Light And Darkness), you probably won't like this story, though it's not the same game. If you don't like his writing style (I quoted the beginning of the story above), avoid this one. And by the way, see if you can get someone to surgically implant some taste into your soul.

This is a story of a woman undergoing a pilgrimage. She travels through Japan, visiting sites where twenty-four sketches of Mt. Fuji were drawn (by a ancient Japanese artist named Hokusai). She dreams. She ponders. She fights - but not often or long. If you're looking for action, go watch a re-run of Star Wars (go ahead, I'll wait).

The first time I read "24 Views", I was startled by the brilliance of the writing. (The prose is not Zelazny at his best, which is not brilliant, but blinding). The second time I read it, I was disappointed at the lack of action, and concerned about some ambiguities and the nature of a computer net's behavior in regard to the ending. (I give him the epigons. I'm generous. Also, ignorant of the term and any relation to Japanese tradition.) On the third reading, I was still concerned about the net and the ending, but I came to understand better what I'd considered ambiguities. (Some are deliberately left ambiguous; some are merely subtle.)

Not bad. Keep "24 Views" in mind, come Hugo nomination time.

Paul S. R. Chisholm

• Between the Strokes of Night: novel, Charles Sheffield, 1985.

I hold in my hand a book that proves that good story and hard science aren't incompatible. It has characters that come to life, a gripping story line, and a wealth of ideas.

The book I hold in my hand is not Sheffield's Between the Strokes of Night.

Between the Strokes of Night begins on (and around) Earth, in the early twenty-first century. Things are going to pot. The main characters are researching how to eliminate people's need for sleep, so everyone will be more productive and help get Earth out of its jam. The rich, eccentric-but-wise trillionaire, who's built several thriving, lucrative habitats and factories in orbit, is interested in this research.

Cut to: the two hundred and eightieth century (more or less). Several young (sixteen to twenty) men and women have just competed in a planetary Olympics for the honor of getting trained for some sort of leadership. Some of them are "troublemakers", which means they're not content with going along on this trip through (or to) whatever awaits them. They're all bright, and constantly impress each other (and naïve readers) by deducing what's going on. They stumble (by risking their lives in truly incredible ways) on to several secrets, which may lead them to What's Really Going On.

Like Asimov's Foundation trilogy (plus one), nothing happens. Or at least, it all happens off screen. Unlike Foundation and its sequels, no one actually does anything that has any effect during the "action" of Between the Strokes of Night. The characters are so thin, they could be built up with a single ply of tissue paper. The "scientific" basis for the Big Secret is ludicrous. The romantic relationships transcend "unbelievable" and pass into "silly". Mankind, his technology, and his culture don't change as much from 2010 to 28000 as they did during any ten year period this century.

There was some discussion as to where the good books would go after the Baen/Pocket split. Baen did a terrific job at Galaxy. Baen did a good job at Tor. I'm sure there's some dynamite novels coming out of Baen Books - somewhere. . . .

Paul S. R. Chisholm

• The Adventures of the Stainless Steel Rat: three novels, Harry Harrison.

Harrison has a remarkable talent. He writes straight adventure SF, but writes it *so *straight, it comes out funny. Add a little humor, and what you've got is a fun little read.

The Adventures of the Stainless Steel Rat is a collection of three novels: The Stainless Steel Rat, The Stainless Steel Rat's Revenge, and The Stainless Steel Rat Saves the World. The universe has been fairly well tamed, there is plenty for everyone, and things are mostly quiet. That's fine for ninety-nine percent of the world's population; the

oddballs want a little more. One such is James "Slippery Jim" diDriz, who in a stainless steel world can still find holes in the wall to hide in. His greatest weakness is his soft heart. With a pocketful of grenades and a recoilless .75, he fights, steals, and chases his way across the galaxy. There's an impossible escape about every twenty pages, a beautiful woman or so, and dozens of great straight lines.

Four dollars is still a lot of money for a paperback. When the paperback has three novels in it, it's a bargain. Recommended as a good light read or three.

Paul S. R. Chisholm

• Weird Science: film, directed by John Hughes.

Back in the 1950's, science fiction filmmakers discovered a new force, atomic energy, which they claimed could do all sorts of interesting things. It could make people and animals grow to incredible sizes or shrink or become indestructible. Whatever kind of weird fantasy they wanted to get on the screen, they could explain it with atomic energy. Luckily, we are out of that phase. Filmwriters now use computers instead. Logic does not have to apply as long as there is a computer present. The worst example to date, and the worst film I have seen in a theater this summer, is Weird Science.

The story deals with two 15-year-old high school misfits--add 30 I.Q. points and they'd be nerds--who build a simulation of a girl on their home computer. They feed it pictures of what they want her to look like (I can't feed pictures to my home computer) and it creates a real three-dimensional girl. (Well, you can do anything with computers, can't you?) Much of this garbage plotting could be overlooked if once they got through this premise they did something reasonable with it. They didn't. The computer simulation (who looks like a 22-year-old sexpot) sets out to teach the boys how to get girls and have sex. There is about a half-hour's worth of bad plot to follow, and it is padded out to feature length with a series of stupid non sequitur scenes. In one scene, the boys go to a black bar and win over the patrons by talking jive, drinking whiskey, and smoking cigars. Yes, they do. In another scene, we see the boys waking up the next morning. We see one boy's feet sticking out from under the covers, but lo and behold, his head turns out to be at that end of the bed and he's just balanced his shoes on the pillow. Lots of big laughs like that. Also lots of really funny vomit and flatulence jokes. Whoopee.

John Hughes both wrote and directed this film, so the screenwriter got the director he deserved (and vice versa). Even beyond the basic premise, there are giant holes in the logic. Lisa (the sexpot) has all sorts of knowledge that there is no way she could have. She is able to manipulate matter in impossible ways; she can even "cloud men's minds." This is a low -2 film burrowing its way to -3 (on the -4 to +4 scale).

Mark R. Leeper

THE EMERALD FOREST
A film review by Mark R. Leeper

Capsule review: The Emerald Forest is an enjoyable fantasy film that is by turns introspective, perceptive, and exciting. It contains a fascinating--if not wholly believable--portrait of life in the rain forest. As long as you don't take too seriously the claims that it is based on truth, it is worth seeing. Rate it a +2 on the -4 to +4 scale.

It has been a while since I saw The Emerald Forest, but it was during a stint of 60-hour work weeks so I never got around to reviewing it then. In response to a request, I will make some comments on it now. The Emerald Forest is John Boorman's mystical tale of the Indians of the Amazon rain forest. Admittedly, once I say it is a Boorman film, it is a trifle redundant to say that it also is mystical. Boorman, who is best known for Deliverance, Zardoz, and Excalibur, always has an undertone of the mystical in his films. My strong recommendation for this film is that the viewer ignore the claims that this fantasy is based on a true story. Undoubtedly there are incidents in this film that really happened, but there is also a lot that anyone who does not read the National Enquirer should recognize as fantasy.

The story deals with an engineer (played by Powers Boothe) whose son is kidnapped by a tribe called the "Invisible People." This sounds like a ghastly criminal act, but by the end of the film it seems even to the viewer as an act of compassion. Boorman turns the world inside out, making us see a world in which the life of the Invisible People is natural and the non-Indians are the strange and deadly invaders. Once our main character finds his son a lot happens, both in the jungle and outside. Much of what happens seems unrelated, but in fact, Boothe's entry into the jungle is really the catalyst for everything that happens from that point on.

Boorman's film is beautifully photographed and scripted. The nature photography is some of the best I have ever seen in a film in years. The script makes the Indians comprehensible and likable. Unfortunately, I cannot judge how accurate the portrait of Amazon culture is. Certainly there is a bit of Robert Flaherty's or Pearl Buck's style in The Emerald Forest, and one never really felt that they were showing us a people, warts and all. This seems a rather idealistic view of rain forest life. Perhaps there is more virtue in the way the film makes us see ourselves as strangers. For example, in a nice touch we see a young Indian woman kidnapped for a local whorehouse and forced to wear clothing so that she can do a striptease.

The Emerald Forest is an enjoyable film fantasy about a culture not too well known to most people. In many ways it is comparable to films like The Last Wave or even The Gods Must Be Crazy. It is quite worth seeing.