

Lincroft-Holmdel Science Fiction Club
Club Notice - 8/21/85 -- Vol. 4, No. 8

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>
08/28	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: JHEREG by Stephen Brust (*Tuesday*) (12:30PM)
10/02	MT: CONTINENT OF LIES by James Morrow & Organizational Mtg (tentative)
10/09	LZ: THE SHEEP LOOK UP by John Brunner (Catastrophes)
10/16	HO: THRICE UPON A TIME by James G. Hogan (11:00AM)

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. This Wednesday, August 28, the Lincroft chapter will be discussing time travel in minute detail. Keith Laumer's DINOSAUR BEACH will be the primary book under discussion, but we're willing to talk about a second book, such as Robert Silverberg's HAWKSBILL STATION, and Kurt Vonnegut's SLAUGHTERHOUSE-FIVE, or short stories like Robert Heinlein's "All You Zombies". All are welcome, even if you haven't read anything I listed. Watch this space for further details. [-jrtr]

[For those who cannot manage to get to Lincroft on August 28, this discussion will also be held there on May 17, 1950. -ecl]

2. Channel 13 will be showing The Tripods, a science fiction series in 25 half-hour episodes, Wednesdays 8:30PM -- 9:00 PM, starting September 4 (according to VARIETY). The series is based on John Christopher's The White Mountains, The City of Gold and Lead/fR, and The Pool of Fire. It is made by the BBC (the same folks who did The Day of the Triffids and Threads). [-ecl]

3. It occurred to me over my dinner last night, a pizza, that the four basic food groups, meat, dairy, vegetables, and bread, are all represented in a "garbage" pizza. What is more, people seem to have a natural, instinctual affinity for pizza. This struck me as being rather odd. Most foods that generally appeal to most people -- you know, hot fudge sundaes, prime rib, bourbon, pecan pie, Swiss chocolates -- are not known to be the most healthful foods to

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

eat. And most supposedly healthful foods -- bean sprouts, Brussels sprouts, alfalfa sprouts, spinach, kale, calves' liver, macrobiotic what-nots -- have all the appeal of tomato-juice-soaked newspaper. Why is it that a food that is as popular as pizza surreptitiously covers at least superficially each of the four food groups? (We've all seen the National Pizza Council's ads "Pizza is nature's Perfect food." and "You never outgrow your need for pizza.")

Now why is it that humanity has adapted so well to pizza? It now seems clear that at some point our distant ancestors must have evolved for some long time in a pizza-rich environment. While some of our species and some related species, trying to fit in the same ecological niche, were trying to bring down mastodons and mammoths, surely a behavior of negative survival value, the more intelligent of our species was going out for pizza and remaining relatively unstomped. Those slower animals who were stomped may well have been the inspiration for the first pizzas, which were hoof-shaped undoubtedly for some reason. At all events, after giving the matter some thought, it is now clear that we all are descended from Homo Pizzivorous. Think that one over.

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

FRIGHT NIGHT
A film review by Mark R. Leeper

Capsule review: When a handsome young vampire moves in next door to a teenager, the horror begins. This just slightly tongue-in-cheek horror film does deliver what you pay for if you give it time. This is the first true vampire film released to theaters in quite a while and it is worth seeing.

Film reviewers have been talking about the return of the Western this summer and have almost completely overlooked Fright Night, the first real vampire film in a good long time. Usually when a film is written and directed by the same person and you have never heard of him, you should not expect too much from the film. Weird Science was directed by its relatively unknown screenwriter and he deserves to remain relatively unknown. Tom Holland, who wore both hats for Fright Night, is neither as polished a writer or director as this film needed, but he managed to put enough pleasure in this film that some of its rougher edges can be overlooked.

The story, which could as easily have come from a low-budget 50's film, is about Charley Brewster, a teenager who discovers his new neighbor is a vampire. Once the vampire (played by Chris Sarandon) knows he has been discovered, it becomes a duel between the two. Charley enlists the aid of TV horror show host and horror actor Peter Vincent (a cross between Peter Cushing and Vincent Price?), played a little too broadly by Roddy McDowell.

Holland, who previously scripted Psycho II, seems as willing to plant tongue in cheek as his vampire plants teeth in neck. At times, the humor gets away from him and threatens to destroy the horror, but luckily there is enough horror in the film so that it is not overpowered by the humor. Richard Edlund (who was one of the more familiar names of the army who did the special effects for Star Wars) has created a number of interesting effects for Fright Night, not all of which are completely believable.

Don't be fooled by the title into thinking that this is a quick, slapped-together horror film. Fright Night delivers a few chuckles and several gasps and in general makes it all work. Rate it +1 on the -4 to +4 scale.

TWILIGHT ZONE: THE ORIGINAL STORIES edited by Martin H. Greenberg et al
Avon, 1985, \$8.95.

A book review by Mark R. Leeper

Rod Serling had an eye for a good short fantasy story. He had to. Week after week he had to tell the American public a good story, and he usually succeeded. The Twilight Zone was a showcase for the best science fiction and fantasy writers of the previous decades. Writers like Richard Matheson, Charles Beaumont, Jerome Bixby, Damon Knight, and Ray Bradbury were the sources for the better segments of The Twilight Zone. Thirty of these source stories have been collected by Martin Greenberg, Richard Matheson, and Charles Waugh. It seems a bit self-serving that eight of the stories and the introduction are by Matheson, but then perhaps second only to Serling himself, Richard Matheson was the strongest creative influence on the better seasons of the series. The selected stories are spotty and a little uneven. On one hand, Bixby's "It's a Good Life" is a very fine story and it is my choice for the best episode of the series. Then there's the over-rated "To Serve Man." I was eleven when I saw it and even then I knew the ending didn't make sense. Matheson's "Steel" is a bitter mood piece which echoes Serling's Requiem for a Heavyweight. Matheson's "Little Girl Lost" deftly combines science fiction and horror. These are all stories from more memorable segments and now it is pretty tough to read them without picturing the TV version. At thirty cents a piece in paperback they are an expensive souvenir of the series, but it is a collection that has been needed for years.

THE DREAMING CITY by Michael Moorcock
Lancer, ?, ?.
ELRIC by Michael Gilbert and Craig Russell
Pacific Comics, Issues 1 through 4, 1983.
A review by Mark R. Leeper

Capsule review: A fairly simple little novel makes a very good comic book by changing very little in the transition. One can expect more from a novel and rarely gets more from a comic book.

A good while ago there was a small version of Mark Leeper who was a big fan of comic books. Then when I hit the ripe old age of twelve I gave away a collection which, if sold today, could pay off a nice piece of my mortgage. (As usual for such stories, there was a mother involved in the premature liquidation.) Then I did not read more than a comic book a year until relatively recently. What I did read convinced me that comics were maturing a little but were still silly and banal. Recently a friend who is a big comic fan got me reading a few. My conclusion is that my distaste for super-heroes rules out the vast majority of comics sold. At some point, I will probably write a general article about my conclusions about comic books.

A little more specifically, however, while I was gone on a recent trip Evelyn bought me the first four issues of a 1983 series published by Pacific Comics, Elric. This series is an adaptation from the novel The Dreaming City by Michael Moorcock. I read the comics and the novel almost in parallel. My conclusions? It is far better to read the two in parallel than to read either by itself.

Moorcock's writing style is ideal for adapting as a comic book. The Dreaming City tells one story, I suppose, but even more so it is a string of short stories, not unlike The Odyssey. None of the stories is particularly good by itself though. The whole of the book is much greater than the sum of its parts in that it makes a reasonably good story taken as one long adventure with a number of interesting ideas and sequences. This stringing-together of sequences, incidentally, is why it adapts so well as a comic book. Each sequence is about the right length to base a 28-page comic book on. And the comic books cut out some of the verbiage but very little of the story or its ideas. The Dreaming City is far better adapted as a comic book than it could ever be as a film.

Moorcock has a really good imagination when it comes to visual images, but I doubt that they would have come across as well without some of the stylized artwork of the comic book. Michael Gilbert and Craig Russell (the artists) have a style that is a little hard to get used to, but once you do it is quite imaginative. In some ways it is reminiscent of the work of Aubrey Beardsley. Sometimes it is simple; other times it is out-and-out florid. Reading the book I might have

noted quickly in passing the description of characters like Dr. Jest, but the comic's pinched depiction is constantly carried along with the character in the comic in a way that would have been impossible in the book.

The Dreaming City is not a very complex book. Yes, it is a little more complex than a Conan story. Elric does go on a search to find his own identity; I doubt Conan ever would. But just in case you missed that aspect of the character, Moorcock has Elric say things like, "I feel that [this] happiness cannot last unless we know what we are." The book has some subtlety, but little profundity. It was made to be a comic book and Moorcock is probably lucky that it was adapted as well as it was.

Rate the book a 0 and the comic book adaptation a +2 (due in part to low expectations) on the -4 to +4 scale.

DIASPORAH by W. R. Yates
Baen, 1985, \$2.95.
A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper

Baen Books seems to find (first) novels with interesting ideas behind them (FronteraR, The Torch of Honor, The Continent of Lies, and this one come to mind). Unfortunately, the authors of most of them haven't learned how to handle these ideas, and the reader ends up disappointed. (I have not yet read The Continent of Lies so it might not have this problem.) Diasporah is no exception.

The idea--Israel and the Middle East are destroyed and Israel moves into space--is a catchy one. I was hoping to see some political intrigue, some discussion of how religious rules would be interpreted in space (there have already been rabbinical rulings on how one determines sunrise/sunset on orbital flights for purposes of prayer), all sorts of interesting ideas. And what do I get? A bumbling U.N. agent (and this is not supposed to be a comedy), some stock Jewish characters (note that I don't say "stereotypes," because it's not that blatant), a predictable ending, and some of the most outrageous howlers to hit science fiction in a long time:

- In the back blurb, it says that the Middle East has been turned into a "mass of radioactive slag. But unlike Islam, Israel survives." Actually, Islam is far too wide-spread a religion to be destroyed even if the entire Middle East were wiped out--it is found on all continents, with especially heavy concentrations in Asia and Africa. (This is the blurb-writer's fault.)
- An agent is supposed to pass himself off as Jewish, but isn't briefed on the laws of kasruth (kosher).
- Chapter XII has a date of Elul 4 when it's obviously Tishre 1 (though the rest of the dates seem correct).
- Yates's use of Hebrew and Yiddish terms (with apparently random capitalization rules) indicates an unfamiliarity with them.
- The main computer is called "Gollum." Close, but no cigar--he means (undoubtedly) "Golem" (an "artificial man" in Jewish legend, not unlike the Frankenstein Monster). Actually, the glossary in the back has "golem," with its original meaning, but in the book, the spelling used is "Gollum."
- The glossary misses a lot of terms used in the novel, and seems to have a lot that don't show up (maybe I just knew what they meant and didn't notice them).

- A swimming pool would not also be used as a mikveh (there are water-flow requirements that wouldn't be met), and certainly not for both sexes if the users were Orthodox. Speaking of which, Yates doesn't seem to understand what Orthodox means. He has a character talk about how an Orthodox area is apparently becoming Chassidic, because many of the men are starting to wear yarmulkes all the time.
- The computer seems pretty much like our computers today, but suddenly it launches into a philosophical discussion with Greenberg, in which it professes to be Jewish.
- When a character's radio antenna is snapped off, Yates says, "The vacuum about them was filled with Hebrew curses." Sound doesn't travel in a vacuum.
- Early on, Yates claims that the Middle East has been destroyed, but later he says that Jerusalem is still standing (just heavily radioactive). If as many bombs were dropped on Israel as Yates claims, Jerusalem would be slag also--Israel is about the size of New Jersey.
- Yates can't decide if the United Nations controls all the atomic weapons in the world, or if the United States and the Soviet Union still have some power.

Yates had a good idea, but couldn't pull it off. Perhaps he will do better next time. But perhaps Baen Books should not buy books if they can't provide some editorial assistance where needed; they should have caught most of the flaws mentioned above. Me? I'm going to go back and see if The Texas-Israeli War: 1999 was any better.

Comments on The Science Fiction Book Club
An article by Evelyn C. Leeper

Recently, Ellen Asher of the Doubleday Science Fiction Book Club (SFBC) came to speak at NJSFS (the New Jersey Science Fiction Society). Some of her comments were fairly interesting, so I will relay them as I remember them.

The SFBC is one of seven Doubleday book clubs (Asher said she likes to think of it as one sucker on the book club tentacle of the Doubleday octopus). It is the largest of their specialty clubs (they also have a military history club and the Mystery Guild, for example). I don't recall if it's larger than their Literary Guild, though. The seven clubs have a membership totaling over one million, and since the mailing list that the SFBC sells (which includes expired members) is about 250,000, one can conclude that the SFBC itself has about 200,000 members. (The actual figures are secret, apparently.)

There was a lot of discussion about the books that are selected. There are several considerations. The books are printed "letter-press" rather than offset, so that books relying on strange typographies or complicated interior illustrations have little chance of being chosen (alternate selections can be printer offset in special cases, but the main selections cannot be). Most are issued as hardcovers, though they occasionally issue a trade paperback. (There is a new LeGuin--I've forgotten the title--that will be a trade paperback, slip-cased with cassette.) Because of the "negative option" method used (see below), and because so many of the members are minors, the main selections usually do not include "adult" (sexual) material. Doubleday has no desire to get hauled into court for sending unsolicited sexual material to minors.

Several of us (including me) decried the swing from science fiction to fantasy that we see the SFBC taking. There appear to be several reasons for this. One, fantasy sells (according to Asher, and she should know). Two, there is a lot more fantasy available than there used to be. (Look in you local Waldenbooks or B. Dalton if you don't believe this.) Three, and this is my observation based on an extended conversation, Asher likes fantasy better than science fiction, and Arthurian/high fantasy better than dark fantasy (including horror, but also works by such authors as Glen Cook and Stephen Brust). While she buys the obligatory science fiction (no one would dream of not offering the latest Asimov or Niven), she tends to go for the new fantasy authors more than the new science fiction authors. This is, of course, somewhat self-fulfilling. As more fantasy is offered, people who prefer fantasy join the SFBC because they can get more of what they want, while people who prefer science fiction leave (or are dropped) because they can't find what they want. (If a member hasn't bought a book in a year, they are sent a letter asking them to return an enclosed card if they wish to

remain a member. This way the SFBC doesn't keep spending postage on people who never buy anything.)

Someone asked about how well the book club editions hold up over time. Asher replied that they are printed on acid-free paper, so should last reasonably well. This provoked a stir of surprise, since Gregg Press and Bluejay Books have been promoting their books as being superior to most because of the acid-free paper. Why doesn't the SFBC mention this in their advertising? Asher said that every time this was suggested, the powers that be at Doubleday insisted that no one would understand what that meant, so it didn't pay to advertise it. If enough people wrote the SFBC and asked them to switch to acid-free paper, they might realize that we do know what the stuff is!

There has been some discussion about the "negative option" method that the SFBC uses (if you don't reply otherwise, you automatically get the main selections). People have claimed that there is some way to get on a "positive option" list, where you don't have to reply each month. When I asked about this, the response was that there was such a list, but it is reserved for people who have some good reason to be on it. Most of the people on the list, for example, are overseas, where the cost of postage and handling is high enough that the SFBC felt that the default sending of the selections wouldn't be fair (not to mention the problems of getting the cards back to the SFBC back in time to have them not send the selections, if negative option were in effect). I suspect that people who travel a good deal (the military, etc.) could also be put on the list.

No one talked about the cost of postage and handling. Everyone knows it's high; everyone knows there's not much that can be done about it.

THE FLIGHT OF THE DRAGONFLY by Robert Forward

Baen, 1985, \$3.50.

A book review by Mark R. Leeper

Capsule review: This is a good hard science novel, but several cuts beneath Forward's Dragon's Egg. The book seems inflated and flawed. If you want the ideas, just read the appendix.

Back in 1980, Robert Forward published a particularly enjoyable first novel. Dragon's Egg was about a race, the Cheela, rapidly evolving on a neutron star headed for our solar system. The book chronicled the human expedition to visit the neutron star and the story of the Cheela's entire history which, with their much faster timescale, covered little more than days of our time. The elements--hard science, an unusual environment, the resulting aliens, their contact with humans--all were reminiscent of Mission of Gravity by Hal Clement. It was the most enjoyable novel I'd read in a good while and I was disappointed that it was not even nominated for a Hugo. The Flight of the Dragonfly is Forward's second novel--the one that decides if he is a writer or a man who had a good idea for one book.

The answer is probably somewhere in between. This book is no Dragon's Egg. It's readable, but no great shakes. In this book he makes the mistake of having a much less interesting breed of aliens than in the former book, so Forward concentrates much more on the humans than on the aliens. Well, the humans are much less interesting than the aliens.

The plot is pretty standard stuff, really. Humans go to alien planet, humans meet friendly aliens, humans have adventure trying to leave alien planet. On this well-worn plot Forward hangs some details, usually based on scientific fact. He has details about the design of his interstellar craft, about the nature of his aliens, the Flouwen, and about planetary physics. He even has a few ideas about robotics. Forward, unfortunately, has a dramatic problem with his ideas for interstellar flight. He does not have a mechanism for bringing his travelers back to Earth. The very fact undercuts much of the possible suspense, since his humans don't really have a whole lot to live for. That being the case, it is difficult for the reader to make himself care if the humans survive. The limited technology also tends to make the first part of the book drag since it would take our humans a while to find the alien lifeform, so Forward has the choice of glossing over the interstellar flight and the search or of describing it in some detail. Forward opts for the latter, creating a thicker book which probably pays better, but making a novel which is less satisfying than the more pithy Dragon's Egg.

The book is further thickened by an extended appendix that recaps all the interesting ideas of the book, though it adds little to them.

The appendix of Dune worked very well to ass an air of authenticity to the book by fleshing out details and making Arrakis more complete and real. However, there is little in the appendix of The Flight of the Dragonfly that is not in the main body of the book. With an appendix, there is always some question as to when to read it. If you read it too soon, it can ruin plot details; if you read it too late, it does not perform the function of broadening the background.

There are standard Forward touches in The Flight of the Dragonfly. One of them is a curiously forced inclusion of sexual references. In Dragon's Egg the aliens take a special in a female astronaut's breast. In The Flight of the Dragonfly, we have a moon with a tit and sex demonstrations for the aliens.

And on the subject of strained touches, I enjoyed the allusion to The Space Merchants and "Chicken Little." That may well be what chicken tissue culture might be called because that was what it was called in that book. But references to science fiction go a bit far when one of the characters is a big fan of Dragon's Egg. One doubts that the book will be remembered in another 90 years.

Some of Forward's ideas either do not make sense or are not properly explained. The book seems to confuse the concepts of mere unlimited lifespan and true immortality. The Flouwen have no concept of death in a world that seems to have obvious physical dangers for them. The double planet system described might well be physically stable enough to exist, but more than that is necessary to make the world believable. I do not remember Forward explaining how the double world came into being. The Flouwen are supposed to be mathematically far advanced over us. Now this is not something easy to convey in a work of fiction and Forward does it by having mathematically immature Flouwen doing familiar proofs, like Cantor's, in their heads. In fact, he seems to pick out a bunch of well-known problems and has the Flouwen solve them with ease, as if all races would look at pretty much the same problems. Actually, in the history of mathematics--our mathematics--the paths taken have usually been closely associated with physical problems, problems that the Flouwen would not have faced. They might never have looked at some of our most interesting problems, and we might never have considered most of theirs. It seems unlikely that the Flouwen's environment would challenge them sufficiently to have the supremely advanced mathematics that Forward claims they have.

(Actually, I had given some though years ago to what really advanced mathematics would seem like to us and how to credibly portray it in science fiction, but that is really more of a digression than I can comfortably go into here. Buttonhole me sometime if you are really interested.)

In any case, The Flight of the Dragonfly is readable and diverting, but a real come-down from Dragon's Egg. You are better off re-reading that. Rate this book a +1 on the -4 to +4 scale.

THE PAINTED BIRD by Jerzy Kosinski
Bantam, 1965 (rev. 1978), \$3.95.
A book review by Mark R. Leeper

Capsule review: The Painted Bird is a harrowing experience. It follows a Gypsy boy through his first-hand experiencing of much more cruelty than most of us can imagine. It is a powerful novel, but the reader should have some idea of what he is getting into before reading it. This is real-life horror on a massive scale.

I have heard it claimed to be the great mystery of the Twentieth Century: "How could so many basically good people--people from all nationalities across Europe--participate in mass murder and true genocide?" Nobody comes closer to answering that question than Jerzy Kosinski in The Painted Bird. Kosinski paints a picture of peasant life in Eastern Europe in which the people could have slipped into the Holocaust without ever noticing the difference. For these ignorant and superstitious people, the Holocaust did not start in this century, but was a continuation of one long Holocaust that had been going on since the beginning of time against Gypsies and Jews, against people with Black hair, against unfaithful wives, against birds and horses and dogs. Among most of civilization, the book seems to say, callousness and cruelty are part of the daily way of life and its victims can be just about anyone, as close as a husband or wife or as distant as an insect. In the view of this novel, we sit here on an island of relative--only relative--civilization looking out on an ocean of barbaric history. Our eye fastens on one Holocaust and we ask ourselves, where did that barbarity come from? In fact, it is just one incident in centuries of barbaric cruelty.

The title of The Painted Bird comes from the sport of one of the characters in the book. He would catch a blackbird and paint the wings blue, the head red, the chest green. Then he would release it. The bird would try to rejoin the flock, but they would see the paint, the superficial differences, and would peck the bird to death. It is a vicious and cruel sport and as such it is just one more vicious and cruel aspect of peasant life and Kosinski's novel shows us dozens. But it is the central metaphor of the book because one can take it a step further and ask, why does it even work? The painted bird is merely returning to the same flock it left, birds it has flown with for months. Even birds will take any superficial excuse to pick out one of their numbers and subject it to pain and death.

So how did the Holocaust happen? Was it simply one German political party which found a little co-operation among a handful of peasants while the vast majority remained ignorant or looked on in horror? If that is your view of history, it is indeed a mystery how the Holocaust took place. But that isn't how it happened. The Holocaust could not have happened without releasing the ignorant hatred and

cruelty of a lot of common people that today it is easier to think of as just plain good folk. It was not a difficult task for the Nazis to point out some "painted birds" to the common folk and let in-bred ignorance and hatred take its course. That has to be the way it was done by the Nazis and the Stalinists and the Maoists and the Khmer Rouge--there have been many Holocausts in the last fifty years alone. What we call "the Holocaust" was just the one closest to the Western news and information sources.

The Painted Bird follows one Gypsy boy in an odyssey around Eastern Europe during World War II. But much of the inhumanity the boy sees has little or nothing to do with the fact that a war is going on. Most of what he sees could have happened any time since the Middle Ages. Scenes of children torturing animals for fun or grown men standing by and watching rape and murder could and do take place today in our own country. Kosinski does not try to explain why there is the callousness and cruelty the boy observes and often suffers. In most cases it makes little more sense than the peasants hating the boy out of fear that his black hair will attract lightning. But we do see that it feeds upon itself. At the beginning of the book the boy is purely a victim. By the end of the book he himself is involved in senseless murders. He has evolved from victim into victimizer.

The Painted Bird is as unpleasant as any novel you are likely to find. A case might be made that it is unrealistic to see all the gruesome incidents that are described in this story. Still, it is a deeply affecting book. It says a lot about humanity most of us would rather not think about.