

Lincroft-Holmdel Science Fiction Club  
Club Notice - 9/18/85 -- Vol. 4, No. 12

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>
10/02	MT: CONTINENT OF LIES by James Morrow & Org. Mtg. (MT 3P-401)
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. Our next Wednesday science fiction discussion at Holmdel will be held on TUESDAY and will discuss fantasy. Why on a different day? Well, in fantasy the world obeys different rules. To the work-a-day world it will be Tuesday, but for one brief shining hour it will be a Wednesday for the purpose of the discussion. What will we be discussing? Steven Brust's JHEREG. A touching tale of a boy and his dragon who are hired killers. This is the heartwarming story of how they try to ice someone who got too greedy. You'll love it.

2. Isaac Asimov will be at the Walden Books store in the Quaker Bridge Mall in Lawrenceville, NJ (near the intersection of routes 1 and 295) on September 28. This information was imparted to me by Rich Ditch, so take it for what its worth. The Ditch worldview, shall we say, is occasionally at variance with reality as observed by unbiased observers. Information like this, however, with specific places and dates is usually invariant in transformations from the Ditch worldview to reality and back (assuming anyone but Ditch would ever want to go back).

3. The Arts and Entertainment cable channel is running a BBC mini-series of H. G. Wells' THE INVISIBLE MAN on Tuesday nights at 8PM and again at midnight. There are three segments and each segment is an hour long. The series started on September 10. I have not watched an episode so I cannot tell you how good it is. I have, however, seen three other BBC fantasy mini-series of the same style. They are DRACULA, AN ENGLISHMAN'S CASTLE, and DAY OF THE TRIFFIDS. The first and the third were the best and most accurate versions of their respective stories I had ever seen. AN ENGLISHMAN'S CASTLE was an original. All three were excellent.

\*\*\*\*\*Presorted\*\*\*\*\*  
\* Leeper, Evelyn C. \*  
\* 114A HO 1B-500A \*  
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After a track record of those three, this will undoubtedly be another production worth remembering.

The next film festival at my place will be on October 3 and we will be showing the new production of THE INVISIBLE MAN. Details will follow.

4. One copy of each of the following books has been sent to the Lincroft SF Library (one copy remains in Holmdel):

THE FLIGHT OF THE DRAGONFLY by Robert L. Forward  
CODE OF THE LIFEMAKER by James P. Hogan

5. The 1987 World Science Fiction Convention will be in Britain; the NASFIC (North American Science Fiction Interim Convention) will be in Phoenix that year.

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

Mercury Capsules - September 17, 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.

• A lot of this week's column consists of reviews of fantasies by new writers. It isn't because Evelyn and I prefer fantasy to SF. Instead, the new crop of writers seems to prefer it.

Why? A lot of it may have to do with the weak press the space program's been getting, and NASA's "success" at replacing dreams with engineering in orbit. This is \*not\* necessarily a by-product of having dreams come true! A counter example, the explosion of accessible, personal computers, proves that. The "hacker" and similar communities have managed to keep their discipline while expanding their creativity. (Indeed, I wonder how many would-be hard SF writers ended up writing software instead?)

To a large extent, a single writer made fantasy both artistically and commercially accepted. In 1965, J. R. R. Tolkien's fifteen hundred page novel, THE LORD OF THE RINGS, created a world more rich and vivid than any SF novel (even DUNE, which was published in the same year.) My copy (from 1973) came from the thirty-ninth printing! Publishers realized this thing could sell, and looked to buy more. What followed was a classic example of positive feedback: writers wrote more, publishers sold more, readers bought more, leading editors to buy more. . . .

Twenty years after THE LORD OF THE RINGS, we're through at least the second generation of "modern fantasy" writers. The commercial feedback has lead to a artistic one. Young writers in the field are as likely to be impressed by fantasy writers as SF writers. When they hit their mark, it's often fantasy they've been aiming for. Today, it seems most of the bright, exciting SF writers aren't writing SF at all!

Maybe it's somehow related to the "new wave" of experimental SF that rose in the 60's. (By encouraging writers to stray from hard science? Or by discouraging them from SF?) DUNGEONS AND DRAGONS and other fantasy role playing games probably had some influence, too (the greatest influence on \*them\*, though, was Tolkien). Anyway, the genre is now entering its third decade of crying for new hard SF writers. The 60's brought Larry Niven, and others; the 70's, John Varley, and others.



This decade will see more new faces, but "hard SF" will continue to bend in new directions.

Paul S. R. Chisholm

• THE BOOK OF KELLS: novel, by R. A. MacAvoy; Bantam, 1985, \$3.50.

John Thornburn, through Celtic music and artwork, opens a portal back to Tenth Century Ireland. A young woman of that time, Ailesh, comes through, fleeing from Viking raiders. John and she return, along with Derval O'Keane, a friend of John's who just happens to be studying Celtic history, literature, language, etc. What you start out with is an old standby of a science fiction premise (time travel); what you end up with is basically an historical adventure novel. After MacAvoy's first four novels, I was really looking forward to this one. Though it's competent, it doesn't have the magic touch that her earlier works did. I can't say that I strongly recommend it.

Evelyn C. Leeper

• THE EMPIRE OF TIME: novel, by Crawford Kilian; Del Rey, 1978, \$2.50.

Jerry Pierce, crack agent for the Intertemporal Agency, goes back in time to find out why an enormous disaster stuck Earth in the future. He meets an African Bushman named Anita !Kosi (who has some not very secret powers). They mention all sort of paradoxes without resolving or explaining any of them. Like, if someone gives William Blake a copy of his collected works published in 1980 before he's written most of them, does he actually bother to write them? If he doesn't, do they vanish? Kilian farbles around this by having these be either alternate worlds or our world, only earlier in time, depending on which suits his need. Disappointing.

Evelyn C. Leeper

• THE CONTINENT OF LIES: novel, James Morrow; Baen, 1985, \$2.95.

One of the nicest things about hanging around with SF fans is that you get the early poop on what's good and what's bad. You also get to borrow books other people recommend. That's what I'd intended to do with THE CONTINENT OF LIES, which a friend of mine highly recommended to me. But I was down at the beach, where the local "book store" sold as many video tapes as books, and at least as many magazines as tapes and books combined. I broke down and bought a copy.

So it goes.

In the far (but not drastically different) future, the single success of genetic engineering has brought us the "cephapple" (fruit of the "noostree", also know as "dreambean" or "brainbomb"). A specific dream can be chemically encoded into such an apple, and the dreams can

be mass produced so that different people can eat the same dream, to just about the same extent as you and I can walk into a theater in the Amboy Googleplex and see the same movie. (My friend's greatest criticism is that genetics couldn't have produced such a wonder without changing the world in other ways, ala Bruce Sterling's Shapers. I didn't have any trouble accepting this as a given.) But there's a rogue dreamer out there, hidden by reality and other, who's apples can make a lie of "reality".

THE CONTINENT OF LIES has all the elements I look for in an SF novel, and then some: a rich world, new ideas, interesting characters, good pacing. So why did everything seem shallow to me? I think it was the writing. Morrow frequently seems to be forcing the story, with flowery, overpowering prose breaking ranks and calling attention to itself, distracting from the story. I've no dislike for elegant language in its place, but its place is not scattered within the matter-of-fact prose of this novel.

Aw, nuts. I haven't been so uncomfortable about disliking a story since TEA WITH THE BLACK DRAGON. There's a lot here for a lot of readers, and the friend who recommended THE CONTINENT OF LIES is as sensitive to good writing as I am. And I'd love to have a Baen book to praise. Somehow, this isn't it.

Paul S. R. Chisholm

• THE DOOR INTO FIRE and THE DOOR INTO SHADOW: novels, Diane Duane: Tor, \$2.95. Originally published in 1979 and 1983.

These two books are finally both available in mass market paperback. (Due to quirks of the publishing industry, Tor brought out the second book \*first\*.) I'd heard a lot about Duane, and overcoming my mild antipathy towards fantasy, bought both books.

Duane nicely creates a vivid, interesting world. In the Beginning, there was the Goddess, actually three personalities, one woman at three ages: Maiden, Mother, and Eldest. She created the world too carelessly, too quickly to remove Death from it before she set it in its form. She will eventually lose to Death, as relentless as "entropy" in our understanding of the world, and aided in its destruction by the Shadow, the Maiden's Lover destroyed by jealousy. Every human has Fire (magic) within him or her, but only a few women and an occasional legendary man can control it, nurture it, keep it burning before it smothers from neglect, and use it. There are afterlives, and afterworlds, some pleasant, some not.

Ideas are fine, but fiction requires Story. It's here, both in the characters and in the plot. Herewiss is that once-in-an-eon rarity, a man with enough Fire to be a sorcerer, but without yet Control to keep it from burning out. Freelorn was a cheerful, adventurous firstborn prince, until his father died and the exchequer took rein of the kingdom



while Freelorn was out of it. Segnora, like Herewiss, has Fire but no Control over it; she's been kicked out of apprenticeships from one end of the Middle Kingdoms to the other, in desire, and finally, in shame. They're not cardboard cutouts; they have conflicting, sometimes hidden motivations, and doubts and fears. And always, rarely visible, the Goddess and the Shadow, Life and Death incarnate, play the eternal game that Good cannot forever maintain. There's plenty of action, too, none mindless. (The second book picks up later in the night that the first book ended on!)

A few random observations. THE BOOK OF THE FIVE consists of these and two more books, THE DOOR INTO SUNSET and THE DOOR INTO STARLIGHT. The third of the series will appear "in late 1985 or early 1986", probably in Bluejay trade paperback. (Why does THE BOOK OF THE FIVE consist of four books? I dunno.) The whole series is "light fantasy", not in the sense that everyone is always happy, but in that everything is convenient. Everyone is royalty and a polymath, no one has to go to the bathroom, inns have single rooms, and armor is easy and quick to take off for making love. There are several elements borrowed from Anne McCaffrey; I'm not sure if I liked that or not. There is a bit of psychiatry in each book; not surprising, Duane is a psychiatric nurse. (You may now bite back the elitist thought you just had about nurses.) The prose is good, a nice mixture of terseness with an occasional, appropriate flower.

Don't think of it as losing another SF writer. Think of it as gaining another fantasy writer, and a good one. And enjoy.  
Paul S. R. Chisholm

• The Chronicles of Prydain: THE BOOK OF THREE (1964), THE BLACK CAULDRON (1965), THE CASTLE OF LLYR (1966), TARAN WANDERER (1967), and THE HIGH KING (1968): children's novels, by Lloyd Alexander: Dell Yearling, \$2.95 to \$3.50.

I classified these as "children's novels" so you would know what shelf to find them on. I think they've stayed in print since they were written. Certainly with the movie THE BLACK CAULDRON appearing this past summer, booksellers have been stocking the series well. Note that the Dell Yearling editions are trade paperback sized, but cost no more than mass market paperbacks today. I highly recommend the whole series, to young readers and old.

Paul S. R. Chisholm

• THE BOOK OF THREE tells of Taran, a boy who dreams of adventure, honor, and glory. "I'm not even anything at Caer Dallben!", he cries in frustration. "Very well," says one of the men who raised him, "if that is all that troubles you, I shall make you something. From now on, you are Taran, Assistant Pig-Keeper." Such a title, even when the pig is a very special one, is not much of an honor, and Taran wishes for more.

He gets it; an evil wind blows through the farm, the pig digs its way out of its pen, and Taran chases after it into the worst threat to trouble Prydain since the coming of the House of Don stopped Arawn Death-Lord from taking the land. Taran is joined by a motly crew: Gurgi, a not-man, not-creature who is uncomfortable among humans and animals alike, searching even more desperately than Taran for a place in life. Eilowyn, a princess without a family, sent to learn sorcery under the second most evil soul in Prydain, Achren, former consort of Arawn. Fflewddur Fflam, a king of a small kingdom on the outskirts of Prydain, who wants to be a bard instead. Doli, a dwarf whose inability to turn himself invisible makes him an outcast among the Fair Folk. The "Companions" come face to face with the Horned King, Arawn's hand picked, hand corrupted war lord.

A special note about THE BOOK OF THREE. Just this past weekend, I finished reading it aloud to my nine-year-old. He probably could have handled most of it by himself, but he enjoyed listening, and I enjoyed reading it aloud. This book would make a good cassette; it would make a great few weeks of bedtime reading. Read it yourself first, work out the jawbreaker-looking names, pick a voice for every character, and enjoy. After the first five chapters, every other chapter has a cliff hanger ending you can't leave, so plan on reading two chapters a night. Leave enough time to read the last four chapters in one sitting.

Paul S. R. Chisholm

⊗ THE BLACK CAULDRON is the second book in the series. As I understand it, the movie (which I didn't see) takes most of its story, and all of its characters, from the first book. In the book, Prince Gwydion gathers bold men from all Prydain to Caer Dallben, where he plans a raid to the outskirts of the Land of the Dead, Annunvin, Arawn's domain. Taran is not an innocent boy, thrust into adventure. He is a (not very) experienced, (very) young man, picked for a dangerous task. He learns that the fate of heroes is not always to win, or even to die honorably. The task his band is set out on quickly becomes impossible, and they stumble onto a new quest, bolder and far more treacherous.

Paul S. R. Chisholm

⊗ THE CASTLE OF LLYR is where Eilowyn is sent in the third book, and the Companions escort her there. She has been sent there to learn something of being a lady and a princess. Taran is doubly uncomfortable about this, because his ignorance of his parentage makes him unsure of his station, and because the Prince of Llyr, whom Taran reluctantly befriends, is clearly a more suitable match for the Princess than an Assistant Pig-Keeper. But the powers of Annunvin are not far away. . . .

Paul S. R. Chisholm

⊗ TARAN WANDERER is unlike any children's book I've ever read. Taran abandons home and adventure to search for his identity, but finds both unbidden. There's plenty of action here, in what's both a transitional tale, and a surprisingly strong story.

Paul S. R. Chisholm

⊗ THE HIGH KING brooks no sequel. It is the last story, the tale of the final clash between the House of Don and the forces of Arawn. All the loose ends are tied up, or dealt with the way Alexander dealt with the Gorgon's knot. It tells of a war that is unavoidable, that must be fought, but that brings slaughter more often than glory. This is a grim book for children or adults, "a battle," according to Lloyd in his Author's Note, "whose aftermath is deeper in consequences than the struggle itself." Yet the story is as suitable for children as adults, except maybe at bedtime; it'll keep kids up late with nightmares, and older readers up with the midnight oil. Highly, highly recommended.

Paul S. R. Chisholm



### Book Reviews by Nigel

I recently acquired an invitation to join the SF Book Club. Seeing three titles that I have waiting for I signed up. Last week the first box of books arrived. So now I can tell you all about them.

This means that I have yet another source of books, and I only last week finished a new set of shelves that are full already. 50 feet of shelving doesn't seem to go as far as it used to.

#### THE HERO AND THE CROWN by Robin McKinley

Clearly blurred as a prequel to The Blue Sword, it gradually becomes clear who the heroine of this book is, assuming that you have read The Blue Sword. The book is comparatively slow paced for an adventure. Most of the plot is clear by the halfway point. I get the impression that either the last half was severely edited or that McKinley decided to finish it fast. There are allusions in plenty that are never expanded on.

On the other hand the pace could be a deliberate reflection of the heroine's state of mind at that point in the story. I would be glad to read anyone else's opinion on this point.

#### THE TRUMPS OF DOOM by Roger Zelazny

This is the beginning of the long-awaited second cycle of "The Chronicles of Amber." It contains a few of the familiar shadow walks. It has plots within plots and very little is resolved by the end of the book.

This is definitely a book for the converted. The characters of the players are sketchier than ever. Merlin has no perceptible personality. The only value of the book is that it continues the history of Amber and adds a few more details of the mechanics of the various patterns.

If you are curious, start with Nine Princes in Amber and see how far you get.

#### RENSIME by Jacqueline Lichtenberg

A Sime/Gen book. It contains a chronology in its last four pages which places itself somewhat more than halfway through. The outline of the chronology is probably good for any newcomer to the series.

The heroine goes through an event of severe emotional stress at the beginning of the book. She is convinced that this will cause her to die

within a year. She spends the rest of the book trying to let herself be persuaded that she might survive, while trying to complete her life's work, the masterpiece of biochemistry that will make everything worthwhile.

The book is the story of surviving simultaneously an emotional roller coaster, and an environmental roller coaster.

Characterization is thin and character development thinner. The purpose of the book seems to be to develop the future history while telling a readable story. If this is true then the book is a success.

MULENGRO by Charles de Lint

This is admittedly one of my favourite authors, on the other hand this book is more a horror story than SF. The setting is the Canadian border and the tale is almost totally within the Romany (sub-?) culture.

The main problem with the story is the lack of a character to identify with. It is almost impossible, for me at least, to identify with any of the victims, which defeats most of the horror. The only other significant characters are some policemen and some Gypsies who are equally foreign to me.

A good story but not quite my style.

A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET (and PLAYOFF NIGHT)

A film review by Mark R. Leeper

Capsule review: Basically a mad slasher film but one with an interesting premise and some imaginative horror. A cut above the standard Playoff Night-style of psycho-horror film.

At this point I think there have been about 839 films made that are minor variations on a film I have in my mind called Playoff Night:

The members of the Gooberton High School basketball team are being mysteriously murdered. One is strangled with hoop netting, one is found hanging from a hoop, one is found with a basketball shoved...well, you get the idea. The players are being picked off real easy because they only know how to screw and play basketball (at least that is all we ever see them do). Gooberton's star basketball player, Lank Albumin (played by someone you may have seen in another film) agonizes about the loss of his lifetime basketball buddies with his *Homecoming Queen* girlfriend (played by the incomparable Linda Blair). He tells Blair about how as kids they once all played basketball using Lank's baby brother Egland as the ball. Egland never recovered from having his head dribbled and was sent to the State Mental Hospital in Patuga where he was recently reported as missing. Comes the night of the playoffs. Lank looks around the locker room and realizes his is the only face on the team that isn't new. He goes to tell Coach Wheatstak that he's scared and thinks Egland has returned for revenge. When he comes back the locker room is awash with blood. Sitting in the middle is Egland, but Egland's dribble-destroyed brain gives him only enough motor function to jibber and stick his fingers up his nose. Then Lank sees her. It's Lank's mother, Thelma Albumin, who has committed these ghastly crimes! She's standing there with a basketball pump in one hand and a struggling Linda Blair in the other. Lank wrestles the pump from his mother's hand and, disarmed, she breaks down and cries for the first time since Egland was committed.

As I say, there are an awful lot of psycho-killer films that vary in only small details from Playoff Night. A Nightmare on Elm Street is one that does.

The killer in A Nightmare on Elm Street is already dead, but inhabits the dreams of the living. Night after night, he stalks the teenagers in their dreams. When he catches them, he kills them, not just in their dreams but in real life too. This is a fairly original



concept for a horror film, though in some ways related to the premise of Dreamscape.

Fred Kruger, the killer, behaves pretty much in standard psycho-killer fashion for this sort of film but for a few special powers that being a nightmare give him. Some of the nightmare sequences are reasonably effective. A Nightmare on Elm Street is a cut or two above the Playoff Night-style of film, but it is basically the same sub-genre. Give it a low +1 (on the -4 to +4 scale), because it does show some originality and occasionally has some startling surprises. Director Wes Craven is improving over his days of making dull horror films like Deadly Blessing. This may even be up to his more recent Swamp Thing.

Second Helpings  
Book reviews by Mark R. Leeper

Each of these books is from a series that I have reviewed at some point in the past. All the things I said before still apply to the series as a whole; I am reviewing only one entry in each series:

BOOKS OF BLOOD I by Clive Barker  
Sphere, 1984, L1.50(\$3.25).

I read the three books of this collection in reverse order. Three more volumes have been published and sit on my shelf; I'll review them eventually. Of the first three volumes, this is the best, and the best story in the volume is "Midnight Meat-Train," about a Jew from Atlanta living in New York and getting involved in a string of serial murders on the subways. "The Yattering and Jack" is a whimsical tale of a demon having problems frightening a man. A cut lower are "Pig Blood Blues," "In the Hills, the Cities," and especially "Sex, Death, and Starshine." The last spends 36 pages on a story with only an okay idea. All the stories in the series are bound together by the framing story "Book of Blood," not much of a story in itself (framing stories rarely are). Barker is my idea of a really creative horror writer.

New James Bond Series: ROLE OF HONOR by John Gardner  
Berkley, 1985, \$3.95.

This series is by a distinguished British author slumming, continuing the adventures of Fleming's unflappable hero. In Role of Honor, Bond is fighting a super-plot by a computer genius. The book in fact, plays a little subtle trick on people who are computer-literate. The entire book is leading up to a master caper called "The Balloon Game," the nature of which is revealed only in the final chapters. I would quibble with Gardner in that it seems that the results of the Balloon Game could be undone in minutes, but if the book had made that impossible, the Balloon Game would have been a clever idea. It is a pity that Bond is always playing for such high stakes. A cryptanalysis decoder is plenty high stakes in From Russia with Love. The films and this book seem to imply that a Bond story is not effective unless Bond is saving the entire Free World.

VALLEY OF THE FAR SIDE by Gary Larson  
Andrews, McMeel & Parker, 1985, \$5.95.

Larson is starting to lose his touch. A good three-quarters of the cartoons in this book are not hilarious. Most of those are only very funny. My favorite of the lot betrays my own prejudices: "French Mammoth" shows a caveman giving a prehistoric mammoth an absurd poodle haircut. The great indignities are timeless.

200 "Far Side" cartoons pack a lot of ideas and a lot of humor in a compact space.

MASS APPEAL  
A film review by Mark R. Leeper

Capsule review: Well-produced and acted, but ultimately superficial story of a parish priest caught in the crossfire between the Church establishment and a liberal young deacon. Neither side really gets much chance to present its views.

Jack Lemmon is an actor best known for comedy, but for several years he has been playing dramatic roles. In these, he has shown remarkable breadth in his acting talent and has been able to impart a real intensity to the characters he plays. He has given moving performances in Tribute and Save the Tiger and to a lesser extent in China Syndrome and Missing. He gives one of these fine performances in Mass Appeal, a film that could have been much better, but was nonetheless well-acted and above average as a story.

Lemmon plays a parish priest comfortable in his ways, a little overly fond of drinking, who is given a rebellious and free-thinking deacon to train for the priesthood. At first he is appalled at the young man's unconventional views, but not as appalled as the Monsignor (played by Charles Durning) who wants the young man dismissed from the clergy. Lemmon is caught in the middle of the ensuing battle and forced to take sides.

My big complaint with the film was that it had the potential to evolve into a philosophical debate on the liberalization of the church. I am not asking it to be another Inherit the Wind or Walk in the Shadow--that is a bit much to ask. But both sides have some valid reasons for their points of view. The young liberal would-be priest's ideas are only sparsely presented and the Church establishment is portrayed as being motivated only by Church politics. Even Inherit the Wind is not sufficiently even-handed, but it is miles better than Mass Appeal, which just degenerates into a good guys versus bad guys story, albeit well-acted. I'll take a good guys versus good guys battle over a car chase for excitement any day.

Final rating for Mass Appeal is a +1 (on the -4 to +4 scale). It could have been better.