

Lincroft-Holmdel Science Fiction Club
Club Notice - 9/25/85 -- Vol. 4, No. 13

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. During WWII, all the best people from the physics departments around the country disappeared. The reason was they were all moved to one location in the desert for the Manhattan Project. It is not quite as secret so you many already know, but all the best AT&T people are being moved to Middletown, New Jersey. This could spell disaster for the Science Fiction Club, but since there is a high correlation between the best technical people in the company and the active members of the Club, it may not. The move could have robbed the Club of its best members. In effect, however, it may bring enough good members together in Middletown so that the Club can continue there. We will find out. On October 2, there will be an organizational meeting of the Middletown branch of the Club. This will be for the people in Middletown already, but people scheduled to move to Middletown may want to attend in order to have their opinions heard. (If you are not able to attend, you can email comments/opinions to mtgzz!ecl or mtgzz!leeper.) If you are good enough that you will be going to Middletown, but are not there yet, there will be a branch of the Science Fiction Club when you get there. I will try to be at the meeting though I don't actually move there for another four weeks.

2. At the Middletown meeting we will also be discussing James Morrow's THE CONTINENT OF LIES, about which one of our members has said: "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

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

same movie. ... 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." [Shamelessly quoted out of context-ecl]

3. On Thursday, October 3, at 7:30 PM at my place, we will be showing the new BBC production of H. G. Wells's THE INVISIBLE MAN. This will be the first any of us will have seen it, so for once I am getting to see something new at a film festival. If there is time afterward, we will also show the original Claude Rains version of the story.

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

Mercury Capsules - September 25, 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 palpsc 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.

• Tom O'Bedlam: novel, Robert Silverberg; At the beginning of the twenty-second century, mankind has avoided exterminating itself with nuclear bombs. The bad news is, war broke out anyway; radioactive dust has been scattered in large parts of the world (sound like Heinlein's "Solution Unsatisfactory" to anyone else?), and the parts that survive are isolated. What's worse, the survivors are gripped by despair that makes them unable to cope with much of anything. And slowly, something else has started to happen to them, not sickness, nothing physical, not even something people are sure is real.

The good news is that Silverberg has written his first science fiction novel since Shadrach in the Furnace. (Yes, he's written a fantasy or three in that time.) The bad news is, while it certainly is full of sound and fury, well . . . The technology is very little ahead of our own; yes, society has taken a bad blow, but there should be interesting relics. There are lots of characters, but none are well fleshed out, especially not the enigmatic title character. My main complaint is that it doesn't go anywhere; it just sort of winds down. The prose is good, but I found the story lacking.

Paul S. R. Chisholm

• The Gallatin Divergence: novel by L. Neil Smith, 1985.

This is apparently part of a series of books by Smith set in the same universe, or rather, set of alternate universes. (Other books in the series include Tom Paine Maru, The Nagasaki Vector, and The Probability Broach.) This one is set at the time of the Whiskey Rebellion in a universe in which was formed the North American Confederacy instead of the United States.

I really wish I liked Smith's writing style more--he has such interesting ideas, but I find his books agony to read. The first-person, "slangy" style in which he writes does not flow well (at least to me) and attempting to follow the various speaking styles of the characters (one of whom is a dolphin--what is it with dolphins these days? Every third author seems to feel he should include intelligent

dolphins in his novels) is not an easy task. If you can take the style, I would recommend it, but it's not for everyone.

Evelyn C Leeper

• A Matter of Time: novel by Glen Cook, 1985.

The still-warm body of a man who died fifty years ago is the first clue in this mystery of agents from the future trying to preserve the past to insure the continued existence of their future. While Detective Cash tries to solve that mystery, his son is being brain-washed by the Chinese Communists to carry out a very important mission. If it sounds like The Terminator meets The Manchurian Candidate to you, well, you're not far off. Nothing great or earth-shaking here, but a good read, especially for those who like mysteries or spy adventures. (I bought it as an alternate history, which it isn't really, but it has the thread of time paradox running through it if that's your thing.)

Evelyn C Leeper

• Infinity's Web: novel by Sheila Finch, 1985.

The back blurb says "Each life is the result of an infinity of choices--choices that separate who we are from who we might have been.... This is the tale of the many possible lives of Anastasia Valerie Stein which come to touch one another through a twist in the fabric of spacetime..." To this Finch has added the mysteries of the Tarot and her interpretation of quantum physics (apparently Gregory Benford checked the physics sections, so I suppose they have some validity). The cover is pretty bad too.

Joanna Russ did it better.

Evelyn C Leeper

• The Mycroft Memorandum novel by Ray Walsh, 1984.

This is yet another "Sherlock Holmes meets Jack the Ripper" story (the appendix to this novel lists several others, and points out why *this* novel is obviously more to be believed than those). Nothing obviously wrong with it (either factually or stylistically), but nothing to particularly recommend it either. The denouement is predictable--the main difficulty all authors of S. H. meets J. the R. have is that they must explain why the identity of Jack was never revealed, and Walsh has come up with yet another obvious answer.

Evelyn C Leeper

• Lifekeeper: novel by Mike McQuay, 1980.

Mike McQuay got such good reviews on the Net, I thought I'd give him a try. In Lifekeeper, Doral Dulan (an "Exceptional") goes to Milcom Forty-Three and meets Beatrice Delacorte (an "Outsider"). They fall in love, in defiance of the Milcom's orders, and... Well, if you've read Brave New World, you can pretty much substitute "Alpha" for "Exceptional," "Primitive" for "Outsider," etc., and know what's going on. The big secret at the end is no secret, and in general, don't waste your time on this one.

Evelyn C Leeper

JHEREG by Stephen Brust
Ace, 1983, \$2.95.
A book review by Mark R. Leeper

(**Spoiler warning**)

One of the great things about fantasy is its ability to drop you into the middle of a fully realized world completely of the author's construction. If you are dropped into the middle of an alien world, you will quickly discover that the best thing to have along is a great memory for new names and foreign terms. This is one of the reasons I do very poorly when dropped into the middle of alien worlds: I can keep straight maybe six characters in a novel without taking notes. That's why of science fiction, horror, and fantasy, fantasy is what I read the least. The last fantasy I really enjoyed was Damiano by R. A. MacAvoy. It has just a few characters and the supernatural beaties it deals with are unimaginative things like angels and devils. If you have a reasonably good memory, first, I envy you, and second, expect a different reaction to Jhereg than I had.

The basic story is not a bad one, though I am a little surprised that it was able to make a whole novel. In a world where magic works, a man who is basically a cheap detective of the Sam Spade sort is given a single task not too different from one he might be given in our world. (I'm trying not to reveal too much.) The rest of the novel is how he discovers why he is performing the task of revenge, why the object of his revenge is doing what he is doing, what the complications are, and finally, how he accomplishes his mission. In and of itself the problem is not all that complex and somehow the solution seems too simple.

So the plot is not the strong suit of Jhereg. Brust, however, has an ear for witty repartee and for characterization. Some of his dialogue is a positive joy to read. When the pacing is slow, the dialogue is what keeps the reader going.

Brust has created a world where different rules work. Characters who are killed may or may not come back, characters teleport at will--there are a number of differences. But the world is self-consistent and with some substitutions not really very different from ours.

Aside from the multiplicity of unfamiliar names--probably not a drawback for most other readers--the story is fairly well-written. I did, however, all too often come up confused as to who was who in the book and because of that, did not enjoy the book as much as I might have. Rate the book a +1 on the -4 to +4 scale.

BOOK REVIEWS by Nigel

AT ANY PRICE by David Drake

Yet another "Hammer's Slammers" book. It contains a novel, a short story and a long story (~50 pages). The various stories are unrelated, except that they all claim to be about Hammer's Slammers.

Just in case anyone has managed to read the stories without seeing the point of it all, David has added an author's note to explain it. In brief, so you don't have to read the book, war is nasty and hurts people, not all of whom had anything to do with it. Thus and so, don't vote for war unless you are ready to be hurt.

The settings are mostly well put together, but I am tired of the message.

DAUGHTERS OF THE SUNSTONE by Sydney J. Van Scyoc

Don't Panic. This is the book club title for the combination of
DARKCHILD
BLUESONG
STARSILK

There are a number of premises made in these stories, not all of which will feel right for most readers. The links between the books are tenuous at best.

Starsilk is by far the most scientific, mostly because it takes place on a separate world. It is also the weakest of the three in terms of story.

Darkchild introduces us to a world where humanity has adapted, developing so amazing mental abilities in a period of 10 centuries. It also shows us that the adaptation was unnecessary for survival. Still, it was a pleasant story.

Bluesong introduces two more cultures on the same world, neither of which show any signs of weird adaptations. This is a fairly straightforward boy meets girl and have an adventure together story.

Starsilk is a completed quest story, in which the object of the quest was far away and tough to get to but they brought it home in the end.

The thread connecting these stories is that the protagonists are successive generations of the same family.

SILVERTHORN by Raymond E. Feist

This is a sequel to Magician which was highly acclaimed about this time last year and was only released in trade format.

As a sequel it is very weak. On the other hand, it states (at the end) that it is volume two of a trilogy.

Regular FRP gamers (D&D freaks to the non-cognoscenti) should be able to recognise how the books were developed from a long and well-run campaign.

This book has a merry band of heroes set off in search of the antidote to the poison that was accidentally intercepted by one of the heroes fiancée in the middle of their wedding ceremony.

A minor thread has Pug, the magician of Magician, rush off to the other world for various excitements.

I would recommend waiting for the final volume to see if the story regains some of its original grandeur.

KISS OF THE SPIDER WOMAN
A film review by Mark R. Leeper

Capsule review: This Brazilian prison drama is well-made but still drags on and on. It is only in the last half hour that it really has much entertainment value at all. Hurt overacts, but Julia is good in his part.

For its first three-quarters, Kiss of the Spider Woman moves along at a snail's pace, then finally in the last half-hour it picks up to a turtle's pace. The film really has two inter-related goals. One is to contrast cinematic intrigue with its real-life counterpart; the other is to show life in a Brazilian prison.

Luis Molina (William Hurt) and Valentin Arregui (Raul Julia) are cellmates. Julia has been tangentially connected with an anti-government underground; Hurt has been imprisoned for homosexual activities. In the tight confines of the prison cell, they carry on a hot and cold relationship. Hurt keeps Julia entertained by describing a couple of melodramatic films (one of which is called Kiss of the Spider Woman) and they are both played like puppets by the prison governors.

Julia plays his part with complete conviction. I have not been particularly fond of Julia's previous roles that I have seen. He was only adequate in The Escape Artist and he really seemed out of place in Overdrawn at the Memory Bank. (I haven't seen his current Compromising Positions.) Yet he was totally believable as Valentin. The actor who seemed out of place was Hurt. He had a much harder task than Julia and I am sure that we will hear from the critics that he gave a stand-out performance, but for me it did not work for a minute. He neither looks nor sounds like he has been in Brazil long. This is never more obvious than in a scene in which he is walking on a Brazilian street. He looks like a newly-arrived American tourist. If he doesn't seem Brazilian enough, he seems much too homosexual. If Hurt ever wanted to prove he was heterosexual, his performance in this film would do it. His mannerisms are every bit as overdone as those of any black comic-relief actor in any '30's or '40's film.

In spite of a mis-calculated performance by Hurt, I think the film deserves a +1 (on the -4 to +4 scale) for its artistic merits. But as an entertainment film it drags badly and cannot get more than a -1.

THE PASSWORD IS COURAGE
A film review by Mark R. Leeper

By this point there have been a fair number of films and TV stories made about the resourcefulness of POW's held in German camps during World War II. The best was a British TV series, Colditz, but also quite good were Stalag 17, The Great Escape, The Colditz Story, and a handful of others. The worst account was the TV series Hogan's Heroes, which turned the POW-escape story into a stupid farce. I cannot remember any such story coming from the United States after Hogan's Heroes was broadcast unfortunately.

Showtime this month is running a 1963 film I had never heard of, The Password Is Courage. It stars Dirk Bogard as Sgt.-Major Charles Coward and purports to be the true account of Coward's various escape attempts during the war. Because the film has so many interesting stories of escape attempts, it is hard to believe every one of them happened to just one man. The film begins with Coward just one of a whole line of British soldiers being marched to a POW camp. Coward's leg has gone stiff and he knows he will be unable to keep up with the line. In this case, a stiff leg is a terminal disease so Coward stages his first escape. He spends the rest of the film escaping in clever ways and being recaptured. Occasionally he takes a spot of time off for a bit of sabotage. Coward is able to do more for the war effort captured than he could have ever done before he was captured.

Part of what makes me think that not everything in the film happened to one person is the tunnel escape Coward leads. A number of the incidents led me to believe that this escape was the same as the one that Paul Brickhill described in the book The Great Escape (on which the movie--also 1963--was based). But the facts that the escapees were working on only one tunnel and a few other details would have been mentioned in Password but were not. That makes it seem that the attempt in the film was partially based on the attempt Brickhill described and partially on one or more other escape attempts. To be fair, the script seems to be based on a biography of Coward alone. That biography was written by John Castle (according to the credits). If just one man did all the film claims he did, he must have been some sort of superman.

Even if this film is a compilation of many escape stories, it is well worth watching, and what British soldiers were able to do in reality compares favorably with the fantasy of Hogan's Heroes. The film compares favorably even with the bigger-budget The Great escape, showing more "escape-ology" than just about any other source I can think of. Rate the film a +2 on the -4 to +4 scale.