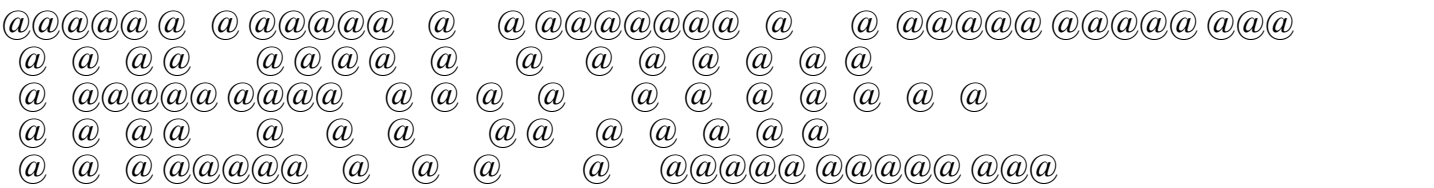

Mt. Holz Science Fiction Society
Club Notice - 05/18/90 -- Vol. 8, No. 46

MEETINGS UPCOMING:

Unless otherwise stated, all meetings are on Wednesdays at noon.
LZ meetings are in LZ 2R-158. MT meetings are in the cafeteria.

_D_A_T_E _T_O_P_I_C

05/30 LZ: L. RON HUBBARD PRESENTS WRITERS OF THE FUTURE #5 (New authors)

_D_A_T_E _E_X_T_E_R_N_A_L _M_E_E_T_I_N_G_S/_C_O_N_V_E_N_T_I_O_N_S/_E_T_C.

05/19 NJSFS: New Jersey Science Fiction Society: Saul Jaffe (editor of
SF-LOVERS DIGEST (phone 201-432-5965 for details) (Saturday)
06/09 SFABC: Science Fiction Association of Bergen County: picnic
(phone 201-933-2724 for details) (Saturday)

HO Chair: John Jetzt HO 1E-525 834-1563 hocpa!jetzt
LZ Chair: Rob Mitchell LZ 1B-306 576-6106 mtuxo!jrrt
MT Chair: Mark Leeper MT 3D-441 957-5619 mtgzx!leeper
HO Librarian: Tim Schroeder HO 3D-225A 949-5866 homxa!tps
LZ Librarian: Lance Larsen LZ 3L-312 576-3346 lzfme!lfl
MT Librarian: Evelyn Leeper MT 1F-329 957-2070 mtgzy!ecl
Factotum: Evelyn Leeper MT 1F-329 957-2070 mtgzy!ecl

1. I was talking in the notice recently about the early years of my life in sports--or more accurately, my life out of sports. I think I was talking about how early on, my mother tried to seed in me an interest in sports by giving me sports-related gifts. She was somewhat more successful in applying this strategy to my brother. I remember she gave him a baseball board game called "Line Drive." This game was played on a board with a deck of special cards and taught basic baseball skills such as shuffling disks and moving plastic disks. When he became exhausted moving the plastic disk players around the board, she got him Electric Baseball, in which pitching was realistically simulated by putting a little square

magnet on a plastic springed catapult, while the other player hit it back with a little springed bat. Then you flipped a switch and the whole playing field vibrated and this caused little plastic ballplayers to run.

Giving this last game was a mistake in my mother's philosophy. Usually her gifts were only superficially related to sports. You know and I know that playing baseball has almost nothing to do with shuffling decks of cards or catapulting little square magnets. But oddly enough, if you vibrate a ballfield, the players really do run, as the last World Series proved.

Actually, my mother's strategy seems to have worked much better on my brother than on me. He seems to have only a mild distaste for sports where I have a genuine hatred. I think I have even heard he plays tennis occasionally, though I am not sure I believe it.

Mark Leeper
MT 3D-441 957-5619
...mtgzx!leeper

The limits of tyrants are prescribed by the endurance of those whom they suppress.
-- Frederick Douglass

THE BOAT OF A MILLION YEARS by Poul Anderson
Tor, 1989, ISBN 0-312-93199-9, $19.95.
A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper

Poul Anderson is a good writer and this isn't a bad book--it's just not a great book.

It could have been. The idea (that there are a few immortals born among us) has a lot of promise, and Anderson develops this idea through the first 350 pages of the book. Unfortunately, the plot then takes a 90-degree turn with the immortals traveling off into deep space, meeting aliens, and generally finding themselves in a totally different plot than they started out in.

The book starts with Hanno the Phoenecian traveling to Thule (Norway) and progresses through all of history up to our own time and beyond. The earlier episodes--those set in the Mediterranean, the Middle East, or Asia--are the most interesting. The reader really gets a feel for these times and places, and for the problems an immortal

might face and how s/he might deal with them. When Anderson gets up to more recent times, the stories become less interesting, or perhaps it's just that the background is more mundane, and the problems of immortality (and their solutions) more obvious to a modern reader. The distribution of stories, unfortunately, is such that most of the book is more recent--Anderson starts by skipping a few hundred years at a time and gradually whittles that down to ten or twenty years between episodes. Eventually the immortals all meet up (through some carefully worded advertisements placed by Hanno in our time), though even before this some have found each other. The two Asian immortals heard of each other and arranged to meet, Hanno heard of another immortal (Rufus) in ancient Rome and sought him out, and Hanno and another immortal met accidentally about a thousand years ago and neither realized that the other was immortal. The sort sort of coincidence represented by the last meeting is what made the book unbelievable for me.

It isn't giving too much away to say that by the time the book gets to the present (it starts in Phoenecia) we have a set of eight immortals, four men and four women, displaying the sort of racial balance that people dream of for a National Brotherhood Week committee. The chances of eight randomly chosen people being split equally between men and women, by the way, is only about 27%. But an imbalance would make the "pairing off" of the interstellar crew impossible, which would be inconvenient for the story. All this is perhaps minor, but everything happens too conveniently; for example, the one immortal we meet who dies is the fifth male, not the fourth woman. And the characters are somewhat hard to tell apart, in part because they keep changing their names. Tu Shan and Yukiko always have Chinese or Japanese names, and Hanno has a one-handed companion for most of the

book, but I found it difficult to distinguish between Aliyat (the Palmyran woman) and Svoboda (the Russian one) much of the time. And that these individuals are born during a time when they are able to travel and hence cover their immortality is also artificial. Macandal (the black woman), for example, is not born into a tribe in Africa a few thousand years ago, but in the South a hundred years before Emancipation. Wanderer (the Amerind) is also born shortly before a period of great upheaval. This allows them the freedom to travel around to escape the stigma of immortality. I suppose one can argue that the immortals who were born without this freedom didn't survive, and so we

never see them, but that would probably imply a larger number that we would see. Patulcius's story of survival as an obscure civil servant for thousands of years through dozens of empires would have been interesting, but we don't really get much of that.

In that it made me want to know more about the main characters, this was a good book. In that it didn't tell me enough, and took the easy way out at times, I was disappointed.

AYESHA: THE RETURN OF "SHE"
Dover, 1978 (1904, 1905c), ISBN 0-486-23649-8, $3.
A book review by Mark R. Leeper

Back in the 1960s, when I was a big fan of Hammer films of Britain, they made a screen adaptation of H. Rider Haggard's _S_h_e. I am not sure it is a great film, or even a particularly good one, but it captured my imagination. _S_h_e was Ayesha, She Who Must Be Obeyed, an ancient Egyptian sorceress of incredible beauty who had found the secret of immortality. Ayesha set herself up as the monarch of an isolated land in East Africa and had spent millennia looking for the reincarnation of her lost love Kallikrates. The story is told from the point of view of college professor Horace Holly and his student and ward Leo Vincey who, as it turns out, is the reborn Kallikrates. At the end of _S_h_e, Ayesha is dead and Leo is now the immortal. Hammer made a sequel to their film, _T_h_e _V_e_n_g_e_a_n_c_e _o_f _S_h_e, and Haggard wrote a sequel, _A_y_e_s_h_a: _T_h_e _R_e_t_u_r_n _o_f '_S_h_e'. I had more or less expected the film to be based on the book. Just recently I finally had an opportunity to see _T_h_e _V_e_n_g_e_a_n_c_e _o_f _S_h_e (and a pitiful sequel it was too), so I took the opportunity to read _A_y_e_s_h_a.

The opening of _A_y_e_s_h_a finds Leo and Holly back in England, with Leon haunted by the memories of his lost Ayesha. Then Leo has a vision that Ayesha is in Thibet--uh, Tibet--living in the shadow of a great _c_r_u_x _a_n_s_a_t_a. Not too surprisingly, it is not long before Leo and Holly are climbing the mountains of Tibet on foot looking for the sites from Leo's vision and for Ayesha herself.

The original _S_h_e was published in 1887. Haggard waited seventeen years before writing his next "She" book. In 1904 and 1905 it was serialized in _W_i_n_d_s_o_r magazine. In that seventeen years one would expect that Haggard's writing might have improved and that he might have been able to write a more entertaining adventure. Actually, much of the reverse is true. Much of the mystic feel of the original is lacking in the sequel. The adventure is just not as much fun without the long trek through the Mountains of the Moon. The myth of Ayesha is worn a little thin being stretched to another novel. In addition, besides some oblique references to reincarnation, we are never actually told how Ayesha came to be alive again after her spectacular end in _S_h_e. The prose also seems to have gotten more stodgy and archaic, with lines such as, "'Thou deniest me,' he went on with gathering strength; 'and that thou canst not do, that thou mayest not do, for Ayesha, thou has sworn, and I demand the fulfillment of thine oath.' 'Hark thou. I refuse thy gifts....'" A quick look back at _S_h_e indicated there was considerably less archaic language and more adventure. So _A_y_e_s_h_a is something of a disappointment, being decent but not up to the original novel or up to what one generally expects of Haggard.

With _A_y_e_s_h_a: _T_h_e _R_e_t_u_r_n _o_f "_S_h_e" haggard ended the story of Ayesha, but had not yet begun it. In 1921 he wrote _S_h_e _a_n_d _A_l_l_a_n, a prequel to the original novel in which his two most famous characters, Ayesha and Allan Quatermain, meet. Finally in 1923 he wrote _W_i_s_d_o_m'_s _D_a_u_g_h_t_e_r, which told the story of Ayesha and Kallikrates in ancient Egypt. There have been at least two other "She" novels: _T_h_e _K_i_n_g _o_f _K_o_r (written in 1903 by Sidney J. Marshall) and _T_h_e _V_e_n_g_e_a_n_c_e _o_f _S_h_e (written in 1978 by Peter Tremayne). _S_h_e was a popular story in silent film days and there were seven different silent adaptations. There have been three sound versions: a 1935 version set in Tibet and starring Helen Gahagan, and Indian film made in 1953 called _M_a_l_i_k_a _S_a_l_o_m_i, and finally Hammer's adaptation in 1965 starring Ursula Andress.

NATURAL HISTORY by Joan Perucho
translated by David H. Rosenthal
Alfred A. Knopf, 1988, ISBN 0-394-57058-8, $17.95.
(Ballantine, 1990, ISBN 0-345-36560-7, $4.95)
(originally published as LES HISTORIES NATURALS 1960)
A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper

This is the best vampire novel translated from the Catalan I have ever read. In fact, this is the best novel of any sort translated from the Catalan I have ever read. Actually, come to think of it, this is the _o_n_l_y novel translated from the Catalan I have ever read.

It's not too surprising, actually. Though Catalan literature flourished during the 1930s, in 1939 Franco's victory caused the suppression of Catalan for almost twenty years. Only since the 1960s have books been published openly again in the Catalan language. Catalan, by way of explanation, is the language of Catalonia, an area of Spain bordering on France, and is a Romance language more closely related to French than to Castilian ("Spanish"). (This creates a bit of a problem in the translation--the excerpts in French and Italian which were probably intelligible to readers of the original Catalan are left untranslated and therefore incomprehensible to most readers.) Catalonia has produced such artists as Salvador Dali and Joan Miro, and one can see echoes of their surrealism in this book.

While the history of this work is of interest, the novel itself is disappointing, at least as a vampire novel. It takes a quarter of the short (under 200-page) novel to get around even to mentioning the vampire, and the search for the vampire and its ultimate destruction (not really a spoiler as vampire fiction goes) is straight from every vampire movie you've ever seen. The value of the book lies in its humor, but whether it is intentional or not, I can't really say. Consider the passage:

> They say the vampire will be driven from Pratdip by a "new force," then they vaguely mention an owl. It seems they also refer to a fratricidal war in Spain. The owl will serve a king; this "new force" will pursue and defeat him. The force will already be known to the owl, who will urge him, through premonitions, to desist from his task. At last, the vampire will find peace.
>
> A long silence followed Father Villanueva's speech. ... Many previously impenetrable mysteries had now become clear.

Surely this cannot be meant seriously. But when runs across a sentence such as "Two sharp fangs pierced his neck, while children of the night howled outside," one has to ask if this is intentionally parodying the genre or not.

On the other hand, the rewards from _ N_ a_ t_ u_ r_ a_ l _ H_ i_ s_ t_ o_ r_ y extend beyond its genre. Perucho has a pen for florid description. In describing the attendees at a dinner party, he describes "Oriol Mani and Josep Maria Pasqual, two jurists who wore dark glasses; Francesc Escoda, the postmaster, a great huntsman and singer of _ j_ o_ t_ a_ s; Josep Sol, a rich wholesaler and brilliant mathematician; and Pablo Ruiz, an apothecary and amateur philosopher, one hundred percent Aragonese, who knew the recipe for one of Spain's most delicate dishes: _ e_ s_ p_ e_ d_ o." And he spends this much detail on people that you will see only this once.

So on the whole I'd have to say I recommend that you read this book, not for the plot, but for the poetry; not for the vampirism, but for the vividness. The prose reminds me, I suppose, of one of Salvador Dali's paintings, brilliant, if not always coherent, images.

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STRANGE TOYS by Patricia Geary
Bantam Spectra, 1989 (1987c), ISBN 0-553-26872-4, $4.50.
A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper

Sometimes you read a book and it's wonderful and you want to recommend it, but you find you can't describe it. This is such a book.

If I were to say it deals with a young girl growing up; having strange dreams, visions, and premonitions; meeting with voudon in New Orleans; and eventually coming to terms with the magical world around her, it would convey just a small feel of what _ S_ t_ r_ a_ n_ g_ e _ T_ o_ y_ s is like. I could say it won the Philip K. Dick Award, and that would tell you something as well. But this is one of those books that I find trying to describe similar to trying "to nail Jell-O to the wall" (as Joe Haldeman once put it).

All I can say is that you should read it. (And why wasn't this book more featured or discussed at Nolacon in New Orleans? It might have fit in at the "Ghosts Along the Mississippi" panel, for example.)

DANCING AT THE EDGE OF THE WORLD by Ursula K. LeGuin
Harper & Row, 1989, ISBN 0-6-097289-0, $8.95.
A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper

In 1978 Ursula LeGuin's first collection of essays, _ T_ h_ e _ L_ a_ n_ g_ u_ a_ g_ e _ o_ f _ t_ h_ e _ N_ i_ g_ h_ t: _ E_ s_ s_ a_ y_ s _ o_ n _ F_ a_ n_ t_ a_ s_ y _ a_ n_ d _ S_ c_ i_ e_ n_ c_ e _ F_ i_ c_ t_ i_ o_ n, appeared. (At least, I think it was 1978--I can't find a copyright date on my copy, but the LC number starts with "78-".) This has remained a major work in the field of science fiction criticism, with such oft-cited articles as "Dreams Must Explain Themselves," "From Elfland to Poughkeepsie," and "Science Fiction and Mrs. Brown." So when _ D_ a_ n_ c_ i_ n_ g _ a_ t _ t_ h_ e _ E_ d_ g_ e _ o_ f _ t_ h_ e _ W_ o_ r_ l_ d appeared, I eagerly snatched it up--perhaps too eagerly, as the subtitle "Thoughts on Words, Women, Places" should have given me a hint that it was not more of the same. But it was nominated for a Hugo, so it must have something to do with science fiction, right?

Well, there are a few articles and reviews connected with science fiction here, perhaps comprising half the book. The rest deals more with women and feminism and how repressive men are and how women have to throw off the shackles and some science fiction, or that their (at times) autobiographical nature means they refer to a science fiction writer, or that they are important issues, but, unlike _ T_ h_ e _ L_ a_ n_ g_ u_ a_ g_ e _ o_ f _ t_ h_ e _ N_ i_ g_ h_ t, this is _ n_ o_ t science-fictional enough to be nominated for a Hugo. One might as well nominate any science fiction author's non-fiction works. (In all honesty, I can't say I'm any more pleased with most of the other nominees, though it's possible they all suffer in comparison with the Panshins' book.)

Given that I consider this mainstream non-fiction, what then? Well, many of the articles are actually speeches transcribed for publication, and speeches are generally meant to be spoken. I found almost all of the speeches hard to follow--the intonation and inflection was lost. I also found much of the content too strident; you might have guessed that from the preceding paragraph. There are some articles I did enjoy: her travelogues, and her commentary on her eleven-year old article "Is Gender Necessary?" But what does it say when one of the most interesting pieces is a reworking of a piece from the previous volume.

I know this collection wasn't meant to "entertain" me. I wasn't supposed to "enjoy" it. I was supposed to read it and learn from it and go out and change my life because of it. But I couldn't even get past the first part--reading it--and in that regard for me it was a failure.

[It does strike me as odd how LeGuin appears to be putting herself forward as an ardent feminist in this volume, while Sarah LeFanu in _ F_ e_ m_ i_ n_ i_ s_ m _ a_ n_ d _ S_ c_ i_ e_ n_ c_ e _ F_ i_ c_ t_ i_ o_ n (Indiana University Press, 1989) seems to claim LeGuin's writing marks her as more a male chauvinist than a feminist. But then LeGuin here does somewhat tear down her portrayal of the default on Gethen being male rather than neuter or female, so perhaps the inconsistency is not so strong as one might first imagine.]

THE BEAR by James Oliver Curwood
(originally published as THE GRIZZLY KING)
Newmarket Press, 1989 (1916c), ISBN 1-55704-054-0, $16.95.
A book review by Mark R. Leeper

As some of you may remember, I was quite fond of Jean-Jacques Annaud's film _T_h_e _B_e_a_r, based on James Curwood's 1916 novel _T_h_e _G_r_i_z_z_l_y _K_i_n_g. At the time I tried to find the novel, to no avail. But as I expected it _w_a_s republished shortly thereafter and also as I expected it was retitled _T_h_e _B_e_a_r.

One of the critics of the film (who was otherwise very favorable) said that the only time he really knew he was watching a film was when the bear acted very unrealistically at the climax of the film. (I will not say how, for anyone who does not know.) Curwood himself was a bear hunter who had killed several bears. The scene that a major critic said seemed so unbelievable actually happened to Curwood and it turned him from a bear-hunter into a conservationist. Well, he continued to hunt bear but with a camera rather than a gun. (Still, the book has a photo of Curwood proudly holding a magnificent fish he has just killed. I do hope he ate it at least!)

I suspect the "novel" would be better termed a "novella" being 190 pages of large print, widely spaced. This is generally what I would consider a one-sitting book. As one-sitting books go this is not bad. It is no _O_f _M_i_c_e _a_n_d _M_e_n but it certainly bears a reading. The book has been out of print in English for many years but has been in print longer in a French translation. It was a French edition that came to Annaud's attention. So it was the French translation that kept the story from being forgotten and has resulted in the book's new popularity. I was not very pleased that as a literary expedient Curwood named his bears. Much of the book tells what the bears are thinking, based, no doubt, on Curwood's experiences with bears. But he perhaps was short-sighted and over-anthropomorphized the bears. Naming the bears was just one example. Unlike in the film, the adult bear (Curwood calls him Thor) is the main character of the novel. Muskwa, the cub, does not enter into the first fifth of the novel and it is not until much later that we actually find out where he came from.

My impression of the novel is that it tells the story better than

the film does because the filmmaker could tell the bears' story only in pantomime. On the other hand, I trust the film's limited interpretation of bear emotion better than I trust Curwood's more detailed and probably more fanciful interpretation. Still, the book is blessedly free of the intoxicated bear scenes of the film. There is also no struggle with a mountain lion. These were apparently Annaud's additions.

In summary, this is a pleasant novel, worth the reading. Its message against sport killing is flawed only in its insufficient vehemence.