ENGLISH 208B: SCIENCE FICTION
WINTER 1999. MONDAY 7:00-10:00, 139 HAGEY HALL
Instructor: Paul Stuewe. Office Hours: Monday 4:00-6:00 or by
appointment, PAS 1065. Telephone: 884-8110, ext. 3634.

We will be considering Science Fiction as literature—in terms of what
it has in common with other kinds of literary texts—and as a genre—in terms of how it has acquired characteristics peculiar to itself
over its short but turbulent history. Through the reading of
historical and contemporary novels, we will follow these joint strands
of development and try to relate them to both changes in literary
fashion and the internal dynamics of Science Fiction as a special
field of cultural production. Contrastingly, we will also note how the
classroom sharing of our individual responses to texts generates an
interpretive community that is as potentially enriching as it is
unpredictable, complicated and—in the best sense—unruly.

REQUIRED TEXTS are available in the bookstore. Do not use any others.
Mary Shelley, Frankenstein (Bantam)
H.G. Wells, The War of the Worlds (Signet)
Aldous Huxley, Brave New World (Flamingo)
Arthur C. Clarke, Childhood's End (Del Rey)
J.G. Ballard, Crash (Vintage)
William Gibson, Neuromancer (Ace)
Orson Scott Card, Ender's Game (Tor)

The Little, Brown Compact Handbook, edited by Jane E. Aaron and Murray
McArthur, is recommended. All royalties derived from the sale of this text
will be donated to the Department of English scholarship fund.

COURSE ORGANIZATION AND READING AND WRITING ASSIGNMENTS:
Jan. 4: Introduction and Issue Card Practice.
Jan. 18: 
Feb. 8: Childhood's End. Fourth Issue Card due.
NO CLASS on Feb. 15: READING WEEK
Mar. 1: 
Mar. 8: Neuromancer. Sixth Issue Card due.
Mar. 15: 
Mar. 29: 
Apr. 4: Discussion of Essay Topic Proposals and Conclusion.

GRADING SCHEME: Based on an essay (40%) and issue cards (6 highest averaged
= 60%). One class participation assignment and an essay topic proposal (one
page maximum) are required but ungraded.
THE ESSAY: 8-10 pages, typed, double-spaced, with one-and-one-half inch
margins, on a topic suggested by your issue cards, or on one approved by
the instructor. Due on MONDAY, APRIL 18, at 4:00 pm, in my mail box in the
English Department mail room, 229 Hagey Hall. Include a SASE if you'd like
your essay returned.
ISSUE CARDS: An issue-oriented comment productive of class discussion, typed or neatly written on one sheet of paper, with your name on the REVERSE side. Due at the beginning of the indicated classes.

CLASS PARTICIPATION: You will be responsible for serving as a "Designated Talker," and reading and responding to an issue card, during one class. No special preparation is necessary.

THE ISSUE CARD

The key is "productive of class discussion." Comments that are (1) so OBVIOUS that everyone will see the same thing, or (2) mere OPINION--'I liked/didn't like it' and nothing more--or (3) plain old PLOT SUMMARY--grounds for an automatic 'F'--aren't going to generate a lively exchange of views. What will produce such discussion is harder to identify precisely, but here are a few tips:

A. Distinctions between manifest, surface content and latent, beneath-the-surface content can be fruitful. Morals may receive lip service while the text undermines them in various ways, and apparently 'bad' characters may be described in sympathetic language or 'good' characters dumped on.

B. A recurrent image/phrase/situation/whatever may strike you as having particularly important significance that (1) isn't obvious and (2) enriches our response to the book. Sometimes these have interesting relationships to things outside (myths, religions, other texts) as well as inside the text. Conversely, an image/whatever may strike you as used to excess, to the point of predictability and banality.

C. The text may raise a moral or other issue on which you have strong views. These tend to be either very engrossing--for those who reflect on and reconsider their opinions--or extremely irritating--for those who dogmatically lay down the moral law in 'I'm right!' terms. Remember, the point is to produce class discussion, not control or direct it.

D. You may be convinced that the author has a specific purpose in mind, and that this has influenced the production of the text. These can be fruitful, although be careful about saying that you 'know' what the author intended; since my first question will be "How do you know that?," you will probably want to use less assertive language.

E. Some aspect of the author's style may strike you as remarkable. If characters are always introduced in terms of their facial expression and clothing, for example, we might--and let's stress that might--reasonably infer something about the author; or this could be related to a decision to use some specific kind of language, say a journalistic or scientific idiom.

As you're reading, jot down ideas, and the pages where you found them, for ease of future reference. Thus if you find yourself frequently remarking on some aspect of plotting, characterization or setting--three of the standard ways of analysing fiction--you'll be able to pull this together into an issue card.

Last, but definitely not least, ALWAYS GIVE EXAMPLES, using page numbers, of how what you are saying is actually there in the text. This way we'll be talking about the same thing while we discuss whether or not what you've observed means what you think it does.