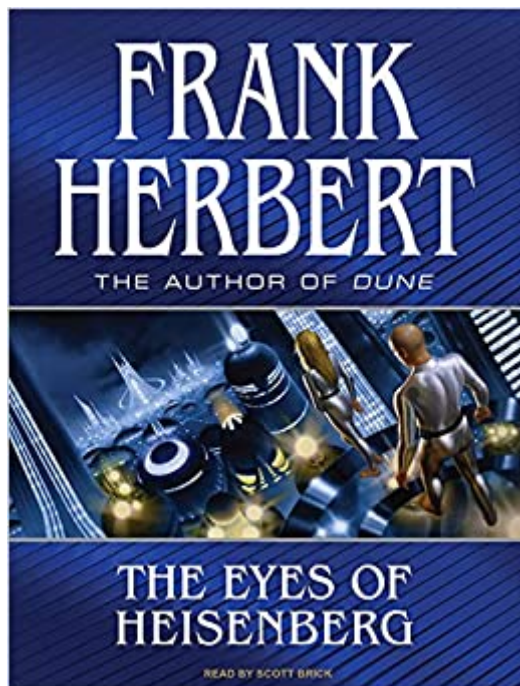


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The Eyes Of Heisenberg



Synopsis

Public Law 10927 was clear and direct. Parents were permitted to watch the genetic alterations of their gametes by skilled surgeons...only no one ever requested it. When Lizbeth and Harvey Durant decided to invoke the Law, when Dr. Potter did not rearrange the most unusual genetic structure of their future son, barely an embryo growing in the State's special vat-the consequences of these decisions threatened to be catastrophic. For never before had anyone dared defy the Rulers' decrees...and if They found out, it was well known that the price of disobedience was the extermination of the human race.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"Award-winning Dune narrator Scott Brick perfectly captures this grim look at a world shaped by genetic engineering.... Brick skillfully emphasizes Herbert's favorite themes.... Herbert fans will enjoy this audio experience." ---AudioFile

Frank Herbert's most popular works are the well-known Dune books: Dune, Dune Messiah, Children of Dune, and the extraordinary bestseller God Emperor of Dune. Scott Brick has recorded over five hundred audiobooks, won over forty AudioFile Earphones Awards, and twice received Audie Awards for his work. Scott was chosen as Publishers Weekly's 2007 Narrator of the Year, and he has been named a Golden Voice by AudioFile magazine.

I had read this book over thirty years ago and was fascinated then by the social structure conceived by Herbert. Now that much of what he wrote seems to be happening, this was a fascinating read, which I did in a single sitting! Herbert is both a great story-teller and a powerful sociologist.

I feel like this story should've been much longer than it was. The characters didn't get enough time to truly develop in my honest opinion, so I couldn't call it Frank Herbert's best work.

This novel reads like Philip K Dick or A E Van Vogt. Weird little book from a specific time in SciFi when you could get away with anything. The breakdown of the Optimen is a personal favorite scene of mine. Precursor ideas used later in the Dune series pop up throughout.

a little slower than i like but still a good read.

This book was a fun weekend read. Great look at possible issues immortality can cause in humans.

slow moving

Frank Herbert, known to most science fiction fans for his classic six book Dune sequence, published an extensive catalogue of other novels and short story collections. A trademark of so many works of Herbert's corpus is his near immaculate world-building skills. As in Dune, the true extent of the world and all its hidden powerplays are slowly uncovered over the course of the narrative. Although the basic premise is standard for the genre, Herbert's multi-faceted world combined with his ability to develop characters and the pure hysteria/sheer hopelessness that permeates every page makes The Eyes of Heisenberg worth reading for fans of Dune and 60s science fiction.

Brief Plot Summary/Analysis

The Eyes of Heisenberg (1966) is a disturbing far future vision where humans ("Folk") are the mere pawns of two far greater powers: the Optimen -- genetically superior humans able to live thousands of years -- and the Cyborgs, an underground movement that extends the lifespan of the normal human by adding computers, mechanical limbs, and even strange weapons that emerge as devastating protrusions from the chests of their wearers. The Optimen keep the Folk subjugated by controlling their fertility with contraceptive gasses that are pumped throughout their cities. Also, a large percentage of the Folk population is sterile. Optimen employ a cadre of genetic surgeons who control which Folk are able to reproduce. The embryos are housed in high-tech vats where they are subjected to "cuts" i.e. genetic manipulation. A minute amount of the embryos are

found to be abnormal -- these, subjected to extensive enzymatic treatments become Optimen who are virtually immortal. Unfortunately, the Optimen are sterile and thus rely on the Folk surgeons to comb the populace to find embryos suitable to be transformed into Optimen. These surgeons, who are often sterile themselves, are rewarded with enzymatic treatments that extend their lives. One of Herbert's central themes is the loss of identity that the Sterries, sterile Folk, undergo. Because they are unable to naturally reproduce, "They're all people without pasts and only the hope for a future to cling to. Somewhere out past was lost in an ocean of darkness. The Optimen and their gene surgeons have extinguished our past" (40). Hence, many of them join the Cyborgs in a desperate attempt to extend their own lives. The Optimen themselves, some whom are 40,000 years old, are transformed by their inability to reproduce and their extreme age. In Central, separate from the Folk habitations of the surrounding metropoli, they exist in almost perpetual adolescence filled with dalliance and play where terms like "death" or "degradation" and "violence" have exited their vocabulary, in part due to the fear of potential enzymatic imbalance that might result from depressing thought. With childlike glee, they "rediscover" mankind's obsession with violence and destruction over the course of the narrative. In this power struggle between the Optimen and the Cyborgs the Folk are mere tools. They can be duplicated by both groups, their embryos can be manipulated or destroyed on whim, they are prevented from naturally producing, and their embryos are needed to perpetuate the Optimen. However, a majority of the Folk revere the Optimen who grant their most trusted pawns extended lifespans and select certain individuals from the ranks to reproduce. Enter Lizabeth and Harvey Durant, members of Parents Underground, an affiliate organization of the Cyborgs. They arrive at a local hospital to witness the genetic re-sequencing of their embryo. Due to the strange properties of the embryo, Potter, a high-ranking surgeon is called to oversee the operation. He discovers that the embryo contains unusual qualities, increased intelligence, full fertility (the implication is it's immune to the contraceptive gas), and incredible life expectancy. However, the fetus does not contain the properties indicating an Optimen, hence, he is obligated to destroy it. However, at the last moment with the assistance of a nurse, Potter destroys the record of the operation. Lizabeth and Harvey Durant (able to communicate non-verbally with each other by means of hand pressure) want to keep their child. The Optimen want to destroy the embryo. The Cyborgs want to study the embryo in order to extend their own lives. The Cyborgs implant the fetus into Lizabeth and attempt to escape to clutches of the Optimen...Final Thoughts (*spoilers*) Herbert's prose is dense (although less so than in Dune) and won't appeal to all readers. In a typical conversation the thought process of every participant is described. The perspective moves from character to character to character over the course of a few paragraphs. Lizabeth and

Harvey Durant's thoughts are conveyed by their non-verbal ability to communicate. Not only that, but they are graced with the heightened ability to "read" people. Hence, we often learn more about other characters through their observations, related by means of hand pressure to each other, than through their spoken words which are all an act. As a result, Herbert is able to develop simultaneously the external character and the internal thoughts of every individual, however minor, in the narrative. This creates a depth seldom achieved in other short (158 pages) sci-fi novels! My critique of the work is two-fold. First, the plot functions around the messianic qualities of the particular embryo. How these qualities developed is unclear besides that an unknown external force was at work (God? The nature of man resurfacing after millennia? Some other universal constant upset by the centuries of unnatural manipulation of the genome?). This is a particularly frustrating cop-out that functions much like a prophecy in a work of fantasy. Yes, this is the same complaint I have about Dune although Muad'Dib's role, shall we say, is infinitely more complex. Second, Herbert often, perhaps to stretch the narrative, adds an exorbitant amount of biological lingua. For example, the many pages on the genetic re-sequencing of the Elizabeth and Harvey's embryo read like this: "Krebs cycle fifty-eight," the computer nurse said. "Second cut," Potter said. "Armed," Svengard said. Potter searched out the myxedema-latent isovalthine, found it. "Give me a tape on structure," he said. "S-(isopropylcarboxymethyl) cystein" (29). Isopropylcarboxymethyl and unknown external forces aside, *The Eyes of Heisenberg* is a worthwhile read.

This book takes place in the distant future, tens of thousands of years from now. It is a grim look at a world shaped by genetic engineering which is run by the Optimen, sterile humans whose genetic makeup supposedly allows them to live forever through pharmacology. Even "meres"--"normal" humans live for hundreds of years, so to control the population various things such as contraceptive gas are used, and breeding is strictly controlled. Against the regime of the Optimen are the Cyborgs and a group of humans supporting natural birth, and a mysterious outside force--could it be Nature itself, or perhaps God? One of the major resolutions smacks of a Greek Deus ex machina, and the very ending stuck me as pretty horrifying, but Herbert didn't really explore the ethical consequences of his "solution." However, it was a pretty good, albeit quick read--it's a slim volume. Worth a look if you run across it, not really worth going out on a hunt for.

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