



Why Call Them Back From Heaven?

Clifford D. Simak

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Immortality - The ultimate reward: To come back to life - and never die again - that's what Forever Center promises the human race. And that's why, in the year 2148, people spend their whole lives in poverty, giving all their money to Forever Center to ensure their happiness and comfort in the next eternal life.

Daniel Frost is a key man at Forever Center. When he accidentally stumbles onto some classified documents, Dan incurs the wrath of an unseen enemy who has him framed and denounced as a social outcast. With the notorious mark of ostracization on his forehead, he is condemned to the desperate life of a hunted animal. But a few people will risk their lives to help him: Ann Harrison, the beautiful renegade lawyer who is convinced of his innocence, and Mona Campbell, the brilliant mathematician who has discovered some shattering information about Forever Center...and the essence of life itself.

Why Call Them Back From Heaven? Details

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Author : Clifford D. Simak

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From Reader Review Why Call Them Back From Heaven? for online ebook

Michael Tildsley says

I read this book expecting hard sci-fi, but I was pleasantly surprised to find philosophy from cover to cover. The premise is the plot so to speak. The world has become one mega corporation whose soul purpose, no pun intended, is to secure everlasting life for its clients, i.e. the whole human race. No one takes any joy in their day to day lives because everyone saves every penny they can to buy more stock in the company so that when they are defrosted in the future they will be financially secure...or so they hope.

I love the philosophical ideas that are brought up and played with here. The questions that arise get at the fundamentals of human nature, our curiosity and ability to affect the world around us, and our inability to believe that we cannot, even with all our hearts and minds combined, know and control every aspect of our reality.

Very underrated book.

Bill FromPA says

Simak posits a future society that institutes a universal guarantee of cryonic preservation at death which he uses to create a somewhat standard-issue dystopia where those not subscribing to the dominant paradigm are marginalized or criminalized.

There are some interesting ideas about the technical and financial aspects of this scheme, but none are rigorously examined. The mechanics and logistics of the large scale cryonic project depicted are not examined in any great detail, with questions such as the continuous power supply needed being unmentioned. I found it difficult to credit the idea that practically all citizens would consent to hoarding savings in order to finance their “second lives” after resuscitation - which they have been assured will occur only when a formula for physical immortality has been developed. Similarly, while Simak touches on some of the philosophical aspects of his idea – a major group of dissenters are “the Holies” who adhere to a belief system retaining aspects of the Christian afterlife - he does not explore how the technological promises offered by the Forever Center are apparently as “faith based” as any promise of supernatural salvation.

The protagonist Daniel Frost, as in The Space Merchants, is an insider with the powers-that-be who loses his position and finds himself the lowest of outcasts. The main plot is a tale of corporate skullduggery and betrayal within the Forever Center, the corporate entity in charge of the cryonics operation; the plot is vaguely reminiscent of The Big Clock, and not particularly SF-dependent. SF concepts such as human juries replaced by computer and interstellar travel are thrown in without great elaboration - both of these developments would seem to be at least as society-altering as the cryonics issues, but the speculative focus is kept strictly on effect of the latter. (view spoiler)

Rachel Adiyah says

I gave up on this piece of s*&*\$ book after reading Simak's supposed "description" of a female mathematician thinking that she's warped by studying "unwomanly things", that a woman needs no more of mathematics than to balance the family budget, and no more to do with Life than birthing or rearing a new one.

I will never again in my entire life read another Clifford D. Simak book; I am on a permanent boycott of his sexist, horrible books. (Also, he had a female lawyer wondering if a woman had the right to defend a man when the jury was no longer human.)

I've known women with extremely advanced degrees in mathematics, technology, engineering, science, medicine, and law. I myself am a member of MENSA. Clifford, here's my one-finger salute. Roast in Hell.

Nicole says

Why Call Them Back from Heaven? by Clifford Simak was originally published in 1967. It's a dystopian story with an interesting concept. Cryogenics has become a massive movement which nearly everybody participates in. Most people have their bodies frozen at the time of death in order to be revived at a later date. The Forever Center is in charge of this process and people who participate leave their wealth in the hands of Forever Center at the time of their death. Allowing the company to invest the money and use it to carry out research in order to make reviving all their patrons a reality. When the people are revived, Forever Center will return the money, but Forever Center hasn't started reviving people yet. Instead, it has become the dominate economic force on the globe and the de facto owner of every government on the planet.

I found the concept of this book very interesting, but it did let me down a little bit. There are two parallel plots in the book, an action-adventure type plot following Daniel Frost – the man in charge of PR at Forever Center who gets charged with a crime he didn't commit for accidentally uncovering something he shouldn't have – and a metaphysical type plot which deals with some of the philosophical ramifications of life in this dystopian future. I liked the world building and the metaphysical plot was interesting; unfortunately I thought the action-adventure plot was kind of boring and forced. The resolution of this plot line was very strange as well, and not at all what I was expecting. An interesting idea, but the execution of the story fell flat for me.

For more of my science fiction and fantasy book reviews check out my blog:
<http://nicolepoweleit.wordpress.com/>

David Sarkies says

Can science ever replace religion

8 February 2012

I first heard of this book when a friend at Adult College reviewed it for year 11 English and since then I have had a keen interest to read it for myself. One of the things that I like about Science-fiction written around this period is that there seemed to be some philosophical theme around which the story is written. They tended

not to be science-fiction for the sake of science-fiction but rather using the genre to explore aspects of our society and where it is heading.

While the plot of this book involves some political intrigue, where a scam is uncovered and the protagonist Daniel Frost suddenly finds himself exiled on the grounds that he may know too much, the book seems to be more interested in the theme of immortality. The story is set about 100 years into the future and revolves around an institution known as the Forever Centre. The concept is that when we die, we are taken to the centre, all of our possessions are held in trust, and we are put on ice until a time when we are able to be unfrozen and all of our ailments cured so that we in effect live forever.

There is obviously a conflict in this book between religion and science as both of them offer people immortality. However, it seems that most people in this world have more faith in science than in religion. It appears that religion is little more than promises which science offers at least some hope that one day we will have physical immortality (however it is quite clear that this is not now, but expected to come about in the near future). As I read the book I was under the impression that the scam was all about the immortality and was under the impression that the crime that the Forever Centre was committing was that they were promising people immortality (and even encouraging them to die earlier) but were unable to deliver it. However, it is clear by the end of the book that this is not the scam, but rather still some vague hope that people have in science (and I won't be telling you what the scam actually is because then I will be spoiling the book).

Science and religion seem to clash a lot these days whether it be in regards to origins, to purpose, or to hope. In the world Simak has created most of the people have shifted away from religion to embrace science. In another way they have also gone out of their way to eliminate accident, that is the only way that somebody who is immune to aging and disease can die. Unfortunately by removing accident society has also removed risk and excitement. In the end everybody is looking forward to the day when they will be revived, and end up working their entire lives to this point, to the extent that they reject all other forms of enjoyment and entertainment. The belief is that since they are going to live for ever they will need the resources to enable them to live forever.

The other aspect of this novel, in relation to immortality, is the question of space. It is clear that space in this world is at a premium, so science is looking for a way to increase that space so that people may be able to live. However this appears to be a fruitless task since not only is the human race currently growing, but with all of the people in deep freeze, there simply is not going to be enough room on Earth for people to live, and even if they can establish colonies, it seems that they will not be able to build them fast enough. Simak does not even go into details on how these billions of people are to be fed since if there is no space for living, how could there possibly be any space for growing food.

It is interesting that the Malthusian crisis is not explored here. This is where the population grows exponentially while food production only rises in a straight line, and the theory that Malthus devised was that food production was not going to be able to grow in line with population growth (and in a way never can) so that the end result will be mass starvation (a sobering thought). This was written around the time of the agricultural revolution, and there is even a debate today as to whether we do actually have enough food to feed the poor (considering the amount thrown away in Western Society), however the further problem is that as the population grows, we begin to take up more and more space, until such a time as there is no arable land to grow anything, and by that time we will be screwed.

Frank says

Simak, again one of my favorites and an un-sung classic sci-fi writer, produced a short novel that is high on concept, low on plot. It's really a glimpse at a world where a type of immortality has been made possible, with some sort-of mystery plot in the middle of it. The resolution of the big mystery takes only two pages and is honestly less interesting then the plight of the hermit who keeps trying to rebuild a cross he buries in the sand. It's a good, quick read to get you thinking.

Manuel Antão says

If you're into stuff like this, you can read the full review.

Shoddy SF: "Why Call Them Back from Heaven" by Clifford D. Simak

(Original Review, 1980-11-28)

In response to a SF fan query about computers that can interpret law, I just finished "Why Call Them Back from Heaven" by Clifford Simak. Although a minor feature of the story, the law of the land dictates the use of jury trials in which the jury is a machine. A couple of paragraphs is devoted to a discussion of how the use of machines has caused lawyers to stick strictly to the letter of the law and objective facts instead of the "sympathy tricks" and other appeals to emotion that are often used in modern day jury trials.

Sandy says

Although the concept of cryogenically preserving the bodies of the living had been a trope of Golden Age science fiction from the 1930s and onward, it wasn't until New Jersey-born Robert Ettinger released his hardheaded book on the subject, 1962's "The Prospect of Immortality," that the idea began to be taken seriously. Ettinger would go on to found the Cryonics Institute in Michigan around 15 years later; over 1,300 folks have subscribed to this facility as of 2015, agreeing to pay \$30,000 to have themselves turned into human "corpsicles," and 130 are currently "on ice" there. (And let's not even discuss Boston Red Sox slugger Ted Williams, whose head is currently in deep freeze at the Alcor Life Extension Foundation in Arizona!) But getting back to Ettinger's book: This volume apparently impressed sci-fi author Clifford D. Simak so much that he was inspired to write a book on the cryonics theme himself. The result was the author's 11th sci-fi novel (out of an eventual 26), "Why Call Them Back From Heaven?," which was first released in 1967. Simak, who would ultimately win three Hugo Awards and one Nebula--and be named, by the Science Fiction Writers of America, its third "Grand Master" (following Robert A. Heinlein and Jack Williamson) in 1977--is an author who I had not read in several decades, but who used to be one of my favorites back when, largely by dint of such classic books as "City" (1952), "Ring Around the Sun" (1953) and, especially, "Way Station" (the 1964 Hugo winner). His simple, clean writing style, gentle prose, and rural settings have

endeared him to generations of readers, and, I am happy to say, "Why Call..." turns out to be still another of his wondrous creations.

In "Why Call Them Back From Heaven?," the year is 2148. Mankind, inspired by Ettinger's work, has decided that cryogenic freezing of its elderly and hopelessly ill inhabitants, against the day when they might be resuscitated and cured, is assuredly the way to go. Thus, the Forever Center has come into being, a mile-high building where the "living dead" are stored. As the tale begins, Earth holds some 50 billion living souls, with another 100 billion "on ice," as the Forever Center prosecutes its manifold projects; namely, finding an "immortality serum" to keep the newly awakened alive forever; finding habitable planets for living space; and exploring the possibility of dumping all those billions somewhere back in time! Meanwhile, the bulk of humanity lives in a state of penny-pinching frugality, hoarding all their money for use in their "second life," and amusing itself with inexpensive entertainments, such as watching TV and taking legal hallucinatory drugs (perhaps Simak had been reading Philip K. Dick at this point also!).

Against this backdrop, Simak weaves his tale of numerous characters. Foremost, we have the dilemma of Daniel Frost, a PR man at the Forever Center, whose life is turned upside down when he is, for reasons unknown, tried for treason and marked with the ostracism tattoo on his face (in a scene straight out of Franz Kafka's "The Trial"), then framed for murder and forced to take it on the lam into the deserted countryside. Other plot threads involve Franklin Chapman, another Center worker, who, after inadvertently causing the death of a client, is punished by having his "second life" denied him; Ann Harrison, who is Chapman's lawyer and comes to Frost's aid, as well; Mona Campbell, a Forever Center scientist working on time travel, who disappears suddenly; Ogden Russell, a religious hermit seeking God and truth on a Wisconsin river island; Amos Hicklin, who seeks a jade treasure in that same Wisconsin area; and the Holies, a religious band that rejects the Center's "physical immortality" in favor of its more Christian teachings.

"Why Call Them Back From Heaven?" (the title is derived from one of the Holies' many slogans) is a fast-moving yet thoughtful novel, written in Simak's endearingly straightforward style, but one that ultimately feels somewhat unsatisfying. The book could easily have been another 100 pages long, for my money, and given us a larger worldview, a more in-depth *weltanschauung*, of this unique society. Several plot threads in the book--a young man studying to be in the Forever Center, the rumor that cryogenic freezing allows for bacterial buildup in the brain, and, most especially, a suppressed book that claims the Forever Center is a monstrous fraud--simply peter out. Simak, pro that he was, cannot have forgotten them; more likely, he presented these tantalizing tidbits to make his story more interesting, although the result--for this reader, anyway--is one of frustration. The book is also marred by its dependence on unlikely coincidence (really, what are the odds of Frost and Mona winding up in that same Wisconsin farmhouse?!). Still, there is much to enjoy here.

Frost's story, in particular, is a thrilling one, growing increasingly nightmarish as it proceeds, to the point where he is a mud-caked, naked man stumbling along the road toward his old family farm near Bridgeport, Wisconsin. (Simak, who was born in nearby Millville, Wisconsin, in 1904, would use that rural setting in many of his novels.) The author gives the reader some very convincing thoughts regarding the afterlife (apparently, he has little confidence in the benefits of cryogenics, and pooh-poohs the heaven/hell concept offered by religion, instead opting for a model that equates matter/energy and life/death) and shows us, somewhat cynically, how even the clerics of 2148 are more trusting of the Forever Center than they are of the Bible's promise of "life eternal." Still, the Holies ARE shown to be the most practical and efficient when it comes to everyday, worldly affairs. And Ogden's assertion, at the book's end, that "God has turned his back on us" is surely undercut by Mona's startling scientific pronouncements. Yes, this is a novel that certainly gives the reader food for thought, in addition to providing action and thrills. With just a little more in the way of detail, "Why Call Them Back From Heaven?" could have been a true classic. Still, what we have here is

enough for my reserved recommendation. This is a book that will, at the very least, make you rethink your decision to send off a \$30,000 check to Ettinger's Cryonics Institute!

(By this way, this review originally appeared on the FanLit website, a fine destination for all fans of Clifford D. Simak...<http://www.fantasyliterature.com/>)

Joel Julian says

3.5

Not Simaks best - neither in terms of prose nor narrative structure - but I found the concept intriguing enough to keep me reading and overlook its flaws; the writing generally gets better as you get further into the book, as if it were a first draft that Simak was just settling into, and there are some nice pastoral passages reminiscent of some of his other, stronger work.

Lots of themes are covered in the book, some felt very apt and others a bit forced. The most prominent being religion, faith, life after death, which was often explored through minor characters, their stories interwoven throughout the main plot.

The closing chapter felt like a bit of a strange note to end on. Maybe I just didn't get it, but I don't see why Simak chose to end the story on the line that he did. Generally though, the overall experience is pretty satisfying - which is more than can be said for a lot of Simaks work.

On another, separate, Simakian note:

I find the ratings/consensus on what is good and what is bad of Simaks to be very bizarre and incredibly inconsistent. It seems that City and Way Station are hailed as great works of Science Fiction, yet I would argue they are among his weakest. City certainly starts off very strong, but is riddled with holes and eventually tumbles into a puddle of pretentiousness. Way Station, similarly starts off wonderfully, but goes nowhere and contains some very sloppy writing. Yet my 2 favourites of his (Ring Around The Sun and Time and Again) are among his most overlooked. It is for this reason that I have been working my way through his entire bibliography, regardless of reviews, and will continue to do so. None of his books are "Great" as far as I'm concerned (short fiction is another matter), but many contain nuggets of greatness and originality that you don't find anywhere else, and are a true joy to read, even if the overall product is flawed.

If you've enjoyed anything of Simaks, then I encourage you to keep reading - his short fiction especially. There's hidden gold to be found.

Johnny says

Clifford Simak often has a religious cloaking about his stories. *The Fellowship of the Talisman* centers around an Aramaic manuscript detailing the ministry of Jesus in a more objective manner than the gospels (all written for a specific kerygmatic purpose other than history *per se*). *A Choice of Gods* featured a group of robots who studied religion and tried to understand an authentic meaning of "god," while I picked up the book because of the wonderful "robot monk" on the cover of my edition. *Why Call Them Back from Heaven?* has religious themes common to Simak, as well as elements of his so-called pastoral sf novels and

his cautionary tales about immortality (*Way Station*) and overpopulation (*Cemetery Planet*). Maybe it should be called “pastoral apocalyptic” as some have styled it.

In *Why Call them Back from Heaven?*, “immortality” is a given “fact.” Well, it is according to the global megacorporation known as the Forever Center. The Forever Center is a combination cryogenics provider, insurance company, para-governmental entity, and “religious” institution. Ironically, it is the latter because its promise of immortality seems to have precluded any necessity for people to believe in “eternal” life beyond what science can provide. Indeed, one quickly realizes that recalcitrant religious conservatives are pretty much the lone dissenters from this (to borrow from Voltaire) “best of all possible worlds.” And, in a somewhat Orwellian fashion, something was very rotten at the core of the Forever Center such that they were forced to have their own propaganda, surveillance, and covert action group within the super-corporation.

The weakness of this novel is that it is relatively short to require jumping from prospective protagonist to another. As in an epic, these characters do become intertwined, but I always felt defensive about getting involved with one character or another because it was hard to tell whose story this was. Could it have been “society’s” story? Is it really the story of characters far away from the urban setting with the little teasers of their stories? Is it the guy who starts as a victim (or is it his attractive and idealistic lawyer?) or is it the guy who starts as a potential antagonist and ends up serving as a potential protagonist? I usually like to be emotionally invested in a particular character in order to experience a vicarious catharsis, but this “shotgun” character approach didn’t assist me in this way.

But while I didn’t like the point-of-view obfuscation (not during the scenes, but in the mix of scenes), I was very intrigued by the philosophical and religious questions posited by the novel. If everyone were saving up for (imagine the largest combination insurance scam and social security boondoggle possible) the best possible “immortal life,” would that mean that people would eschew cultural experiences such as the arts, film, legitimate theater, musical performances, and participatory or professional spectator sports? Is deprivation of immediate experience in favor of deferred satisfaction a slam at the promise of an afterlife for people who give up certain pleasures for “eternal” gain? I thought this briefly, but Simak makes it clear that this is not where he is going.

In a way, Simak is like (but not overtly so) me. He perceives that life lived under the limitations of one’s human life and continuing under the basis of the consequences of one’s previous failures (and poor choices) would not be welcome as a never-ending existence. Life, and indeed, personhood (the “Me” in Simak’s novel) needs more than existence. Meaning and relationships which underscore that meaning are required (as witness the struggles of a literal hermit who appears from time-to-time). Please check out some of the salient quotations from the book which resonated with me.

“There was about him an attitude of worship, as if he might have come seeking refuge and comfort. And this, in itself, was something unusual. For today few men came worshipfully. They came nonchalantly or with a calm assurance that said there was nothing here they needed, that they were only paying homage by an empty gesture to a thing that had become a cultural habit and very little more.” (pp. 41-42)

And more to the thesis of the book, “The man laughed—a low, vicious, brutal laugh. ‘But we have that already. We have everlasting life. And we do not need the faith.’ ‘Not everlasting life,’ said Knight, ‘Just continued life. Beyond that continued life there is another life, a different kind of life, a better life.’” (p. 43)

Again, in a later scene, “‘Faith is all man has,’ the man told him, quietly. ‘You take faith,’ Frost said, ‘and make a virtue of it. A virtue of not knowing...’ ‘If we knew,’ the man said, ‘there would be no faith. And we

need the faith.” I’m not entirely in agreement with the sentiment. I consider faith to be more than blind belief. It is taking one step at a time with the limited “light” available, a lifestyle rather than an isolated act. But that’s just me and I enjoyed the discussion in the fiction, recognizing that many people want their “faith” to be out there and largely imperceptible. This is said in a more amusing way (with more subtlety) much later in the novel when a character asks, “Could he play at cards with God and have an ace tucked up his sleeve?” (p. 153) That’s a thought-provoking perspective on some people’s theology.

Then, there was the issue of “continued life” versus “eternal life.” Many people don’t realize that “eternal” deals with a quality of experience beyond the temporal, not just unlimited “time.” Simak touches on this when a character considers: “What kind of world could there be, or would there be, when all of humankind lived eternally and in the flesh and guise of youth? Would wisdom come without gray hair and wrinkled brow? Would the old, long thoughts of aged people disappear and die in the exuberance of flesh and gland and muscle that renewed itself? Would the gentleness and the tolerance and the long reflective thought no longer be with mankind?” (pp. 113-114)

For all its powerful social and theological speculation, *Why Call Them Back from Heaven?* is only slightly above average as a novel. It was enjoyable and thought-provoking, but the characters failed to give me the catharsis I would generally expect from such a story. Indeed, the rather literal *deus ex machina* of the conclusion (for at least one of the characters, but certainly not all) seemed hurried and unsatisfying. I’m glad I read *Why Call Them Back from Heaven?*, but it doesn’t meet the bar I felt Simak set in *Fellowship of the Talisman* and *A Choice of Gods*. It won’t stop me from seeking out more of his work, though.

Faiza Sattar says

★★★?? (3/5)

A selection of my favourite passages from the book

Aphorisms

- It had solitude, all right, but it had little else.
- Memories don’t run that long or bitter.
- There is no way of winning. But our conscience tells us that we must bear witness.
- “You take faith,” Frost said, “and make a virtue of it. A virtue of not knowing...”
- Hell, that’s all we’re doing—filling up the hours.
- Man had fled from this land and now it should be left alone, it should be allowed to rest from man’s long tenancy.
- There was never more than one way and now it doesn’t work.

Humanity & the Self

- Standing there, he wrestled with his conscience and tried to look into his soul and into the immutable mystery of that area which stretched beyond his soul, and which still remained illusive of any understanding. And there was still no insight and there was no answer, as there had never been an answer.
- And I further contend that in any mechanical contrivance there is one lacking quality essential to all justice—the sense of mercy and of human worth.
- The newsmen sat in the front row seats, watching for the slightest flicker of emotion, for the tiny gesture of

significance, for the slightest crumb upon which to build a story.

- And he knew it was this woman sitting in the room who gave it warmth and light, but a dying warmth and light, like the warmth and light given off by a dying fire. In time, when she had left, once the memory had worn thin, the room again would become cold and dingy, as it had been before.
- It was too nice a night, he told himself, to go back into his room. But even as he told it to himself, he knew that it was not the beauty of the night, for here, in this ramshackle neighborhood, there was nothing that held any claim to beauty. It was not, he knew, the attractiveness of the night that had turned him back, but a strange reluctance to go back into the room. Wait a while, perhaps, and its emptiness might wear off a little, or his memory might become slightly dulled so that he could accept the emptiness the better.
- He had fled from people. He had turned his back on life. He had come to this place where he'd be safe from both life and people. But the world intrudes even so, he thought, in the form of a man paddling a canoe up and down the river
- Once you've touched reality, once you've felt the reality of the naked land, once you've lived with dawn and sunset...
- And lost causes. She was a sucker for lost causes, an inevitable and unremitting champion of misfortune. And what had it gotten her?
- And that is right, he thought. We are we? A mere dot of consciousness that stood up in arrogance against the vastness and the coldness and the emptiness and the uncaring of the universe? A thing (a thing?) that thought it mattered when it did not matter? A tiny, flickering ego that imagined the universe revolved around it—imagined this when the universe did not know that it existed, nor cared that it existed?
- She had fled, not to protect herself, but to protect the world. She walked the lonely road because she could not bear to let mankind know it had been wrong for almost two centuries.
- Cautiously, he straightened up and fear touched one corner of his brain, whispering a suspicion of what had caused the pain.
- There was no sign that he was aware of her and her heart welled up with pity at the sight of him, for there was about him a lostness and an emptiness that robbed existence of all meaning.

Faith & Science

- There were times, on stormy mornings, when the view was cut off by the clouds that swirled about its top, but on a clear morning such as this the great slab of masonry went up and up until its topmost stories were lost in the blue haze of the sky. A man grew dizzy looking at it and the mind reeled at the thought of what the hand of man had raised.
- Hurry and huddle—hurry so that one could gather all the assets he could manage, then huddle in his idle time so that he would not spend a single penny of those assets.
- Could he seek for a spiritual eternity while he still clung to the promise of a physical eternity?
- With cars powered by longlife storage batteries, there was no longer any need of service stations.
- We either colonize other planets or we build satellite cities out in space or we turn the earth into one huge apartment house—or we may have to do all these things. Time was the easy way, of course. That's why Forever Center was so interested...
- They dug into the fact and the purpose of the universe and to do this they developed mathematics that they used not only to support their logic but as logic tools.
- And that kind of thinking, he told himself, could have been justified at one time. But not any longer. Not if what Mona Campbell said was true. For if what she said was true, then each little flickering ego was a basic part of the universe and a fundamental expression of the purpose of the universe.
- Would there be no end to it? he asked himself. Would there ever be an end? Was there no limit to the debasement that a man must heap upon himself?
- And in that awful moment he knew that he had lost, that he was wanting in that essential capacity for humility that would unlock the gates of understanding he had sought so earnestly and, now it seemed apparent, priced at a cost too high—a cost that his basic brute humanity would never let him pay.

Perry Whitford says

A somewhat underdeveloped effort by Simak, but darker in theme than the other books I have read by him, more serious and prescient, in which dead have all been frozen with the promise of a future regeneration when society can support them, but do the living really want them back?

Daniel Frost works at the Forever Centre, the corporation responsible for the preserving of the bodies of the dead. By accident he discovers some dark secrets and has to go on the run from the authorities and his own employers, finding refuge with a militant underclass that want to expose the folly and greed behind the dream of forever.

The story is reminiscent of some previous classics of the genre, such as *The Time Machine* and *Brave New world*, but it has some original features to it that could be buffed up a little and still considered fairly novel today.

The same cannot be said of the characters though, they are most certainly from a time before the cultural revolution of the late sixties.

Simak is certainly a better writer than most of the science fiction authors that straddled the golden and silver ages, managing to keep the pulp fiction weaknesses of his contemporaries in check to some degree.

He also has a certain quirkiness which has brought me back to him time and again.

Williwaw says

Despite the excellent quality of the writing and the well-paced plot, I found this to be an oddly dissatisfying story. Simak simply leaves too many loose ends, and fails to explore deeply the philosophical and sociological potential of his premise.

His premise is that a single company, Forever Center, has obtained a monopoly on cryogenics and the promise of a second life. The bulk of the population has signed up for the program, which entails surgically implanted transmitters so their dead bodies can be scooped up quickly and sent to the deep freeze.

Keeping one's body and finances in good condition have therefore become a paramount objectives, so everyone has given up dangerous pastimes like sports and gambling. A lack of prudent financial investment before death could lead to dire poverty in the second life, so everyone's main goal is to toil their lives away, preparing for the future at the expense of the present.

Paradoxically, the promise of a technologically-enabled hereafter has pushed humanity into a dark age, similar to the Middle Ages, where this life was considered but a brief and nasty prelude to the better life to come. The here and now are nothing but an opportunity to prepare for the next life. Which means that this life can be little more than tedious and unpleasant.

But Forever Center hasn't quite got the answer to immortality yet, or a complete solution to the limited living

space available in this terrestrial realm. (Waking up the dead will, of course, cause a tremendous population boom.) So while the Center is busy caching dead bodies, it is also desperately trying to work out the problems of immortality and adequate living space while everyone (both dead and alive) faithfully waits.

A minority group of religious protesters (the Holies, I think it's called) has boycotted the immortality program and lives on the fringes of society. Another dissenting group (pure Luddites, it seems) lives like savages in the countryside.

The central character (Frost) is a PR director for Forever Center, who becomes involved in some internal intrigue because he has unwittingly acquired custody of some documents that may incriminate important officials. He is falsely convicted of a crime; convicted; and ostracized. Officials at Forever Center then try to frame him for murder, so he goes on the lam and heads to a remote farmhouse (in Wisconsin, maybe?) where he used to live as a youth (not sure I got that right - but something like that).

Anyway, the climax of the story and denouement all happen at the farmhouse. (How everyone coincidentally ends up there is not fully explained.) There are some half-baked philosophical and technological revelations, but oddly, it seems as though Frost's name has been cleared, and that he will return to his job. And the established order, which seems highly unsustainable, will remain intact for some time. It seems that Simak did not have the stomach for telling us the story of the ultimate debacle.

Perhaps I missed something. "Why Call Them Back From Heaven?" worked well as an adventure story, but I'm not sure if it worked so well as a science fiction novel.

Printable Tire says

My first Clifford Simak novel. In style as well as subject, it's not really different from any Philip Dick novel of the period, except there's no flying cars, white teeth, and the philosophy behind the science fiction seems a little different, though hard to say exactly how just yet.

The plot is pretty silly- sort of a Life Alert Nanny State to the extreme, and maybe dealing with the biggest Ponzi Scheme in history- but there are moments, concerning a man trying to keep a cross erect on an island, that are pretty literary. I do wish, however, that the man sentenced to "die" and have no second life was more of a character in the book, as the back cover implied him to be the main protagonist when he is really a very minor character. Along those lines there are a great many subjects and situations that could have been addressed with the premise of the book, and I left feeling that it only skimmed the surface. As it is, though, there were some great if frustrating angles to this future, such as the idea of people hoarding stocks in this one great monopoly for some future eternity, thus shirking from enjoying the life they have to live now.

Mark says

The Forever Center is the leading medical research corporation on the planet. They offer to freeze your body before death and then revive you later when they are able to heal you. The catch is that you have to sign all your wealth over to them while you are frozen, setting up a snowball effect as the company grows bigger, researches more, and fills building after building after building with frozen bodies. This is interesting! Near

immortality + monopoly == massive social change! However, after setting up the situation the book gives up on exploring the consequences and becomes an oddball Fugitive plot where a Forever Center executive is framed for a crime. Sadly disappointing.
