



Science-Fiction Newsletter

Vol. X, No. 8; August, 1998

Story: The Reverse Side of the Painting by Leonid Reznick

"It's against the rules!" the demon cried angrily, "You are a Jew, and Jews may not call up demons!"

"Who determines the rules?" I asked.

The demon looked at the ceiling, made a languid gesture with his hand in the direction of the blue sky visible through the rectangle of the window, and silently moved his lips.

"Do you think that HE is an anti-Semite?" I couldn't hide my indignation.

"Certainly not! On the contrary, HE protects his chosen people from trouble. Rash acts will land you in trouble. I'm sure you realize that temporary well-being is the most any one manages to get from demons like me."

(Continues on page 2)

Next SCIENCE FICTION CLUB Meeting:

Tuesday, September 8, 1998, 8:15 p.m. -- Lecture (in English)

Dr. Gary Weisinger,

Ichilov Medical Center and University of Tel Aviv Medical School,

"Genetic Medicine -- Science Fiction or Reality?"

Rehovot Science Fiction meets (when it meets)

at the home of Tova and Bill Silverman,

19 Eisenberg St., fourth floor, Rehovot, Tel. 08-947-6142.

There is a REFRESHMENT CHARGE of 3.50 Shekels (for those who partake).

Israeli sf and fantasy Convention !!

The Israeli Society for Science Fiction and Fantasy is organizing a 3 day convention on the 6th to 8th of October (Succoth vacation) in the Tel-Aviv Cinematheque.

Speakers will include noted British Science Fiction authors

Brian Stableford and **Ian Watson**, who will attend as guests of

The Society and the British Council.

All Con events (except those featuring the guests) will be held in Hebrew.

Anyone interested in participating in the Con program should contact:

Dotan Dimet, email: dotan@corky.net, Phone: **09-7409329**

Join the Society, get its announcements, and go to its meetings! Call 03-528-3803 or 03-604-4959

This Issue of CyberCozen:

- A new movie review section by Guy Eldar.
- A little about books and some URLs by Dotan Dimet.
- Two Robert J. Sawyer books, reviewed by Aharon Sheer.

בגיליון זה של CyberCozen:

- מדור חדש לביקורת סרטים מאת גיא אלדר. (אנגלית)
- מעט על ספרים וכמה כתובות באינטרנט מאת דותן דימת. (אנגלית).
- ביקורת לשני ספרים מאת רוברט ג'י. סווייר, על-ידי אהרון שיר. (אנגלית)

"What do you mean?"

"Humans can make three wishes which a demon is obliged to carry out. When the term of the wishes comes to an end, the roles are reversed. Then the human soul comes into our complete dependence." The demon's smile was mostly like baring his teeth. And what teeth....

"But while a wish is being granted, the demon fully devotes himself to carrying out the client's wishes?"

"That is correct. However the client can only have three wishes, and cannot request eternal life and invulnerability. That is not in the power of demons."

"And how long is a demon's life?"

"From a human's point of view, the duration of our life is close to eternity. But a human cannot be transformed into a demon. It seems you are wasting your time. Let me go."

"I can't. I know only the spell for calling."

"You are boring me. You are a humanlike commonplace."

"Your speech is very picturesque. And maybe you are right about me."

"You must send me away! Otherwise I can only leave by granting you three wishes! We cannot violate the canon."

"Aren't you afraid of what HE will do to you if you grant my wishes?"

The demon smiled indulgently.

"This rule is not for us," he said, "but for you. For the Jews."

"For some reason it seems to me," I allowed myself an answering smile, "that you haven't thought about the reverse side of the painting."

"Now what!" the demon expressed his bewilderment.

"The fact that Jews are not supposed to call up demons absolutely does not mean that this interdiction protects Jews. I think it protects demons."

The demon enlarged his dimensions a bit. His eyes flashed with otherworldly fire, his mouth bent in a grimace of contempt.

"Give me your wishes, mortal," the demon roared. "Remember, it is forbidden to demand three additional wishes in your third wish. I recommend a standard set, guaranteeing the absence of unpleasant surprises: vigorous

good health, a long and happy life, and good luck in financial affairs."

The demon was right about one thing. I could not criticize these three items, though the criterion of length of life required some specification. There would be only one problem: even that long, happy, rich and healthy life would one day come to an end. And long before the end it would become intolerably boring.

"What do you think," I studied my reflection in a mirror, "is it possible to fall in love with me?"

"With you?" The demon critically looked at my hair growing thin, at my pot belly. "It's unlikely you will waste your wishes on a banal love story. Well, instead of good luck in financial affairs, how about this: Women will fall passionately in love with you, and become devoted and adoring. I suppose that Hollywood and its rich beauties will be enough for you up to age hundred and twenty. A perfect choice! I approve."

If a demon approves of something, that doesn't smell good. However, his approval is quite capable of explanation. He felt threatened. He had realized (not without reason) that there is nothing stronger than real love.

"Here are my wishes. First: you will turn yourself into the perfect woman, where perfection is in conformity with my ideals of beauty."

In a few seconds the embodied dream of my whole life stood in front of me. The demon's eyes darting flashes of lightning could not spoil the divine lineament of her face.

"The second command: You will fall infinitely in love with me, passionate, devoted and adoring, with the strongest of love."

"You have won," the perfect creature cooed. "You are a genius! You have absolutely everything and you have managed to do it with only two wishes. I shall put the whole world at your feet! Where shall we spend our honeymoon? Only hint..."

"And, last," the honeymoon could wait some seconds. I appreciated my freedom very much. It was for me even more valuable than the boons promised by the love of this most beautiful demoness. "My third command: You will never be jealous. Absolutely never jealous."



Guy Eldar has volunteered to update us on the latest films:

Film Reviews by Guy Eldar

Every summer brings us its box-office-hits-big-budget-movies. Surprisingly, in the last few years, these movies have been Sci-Fi movies such as *The Fifth Element* or *Independence Day*. This year is no different. For this first movie review in **CyberCozen**, I wish to review two movies that will make big bucks during the summer of .1998

All bets for this summer's big hit were on *Godzilla*. No one was more surprised than the *Walt Disney Company*, when *Godzilla* turned out to be a flop and their *Armageddon* took the lead as this year's biggest box-office hit. And why not? *Armageddon* has every thing a box-office hit needs. A great story that holds you to your seat through the whole movie until its American

expected ending, a leading star actor, **Bruce Willis** (Die *Hard* series, *The Fifth Element*) with **Ben Affleck** (*Good Will Hunting*), **Liv Tyler**, and **Steve Buscemi** (*Reservoir Dogs*, *Fargo*), and explosive visual and audio effects.

The movie is an action/disaster story where a team of deep land drillers is brought in to drill through an asteroid which is threatening the Earth. *Armageddon* is very light, providing lots of Disney style jokes (mostly by **Steve Buscemi**), big and believable effects (such as the wiping out of Paris) and beautiful grand photography. If you like the suspense (even knowing the obvious ending), the blasts, and seeing the world being saved once more, this is the movie for you. **My Rating: 7.5 / 10**

In a whole different direction, America is now recycling its past. With a new version from *Disney* of *The Parent Trap*, and *Spelling's* new version of his hit series *The Love Boat*, comes a movie based on the popular series from the 60s, *Lost in Space*. Like the series, the movie tells the story of the Robinson family, who join the father of the family on a ten year mission to save the Earth's population.

The story is very shallow and most of it is non-believable. The cast, although famous indeed, including **William Hurt** (*The Doctor*),

Mimi Rogers (*Austin Powers*), **Matt LeBlanc** (TV's *Friends*), **Lacey Chabert** (TV's *Party of Five*), and all time villain **Gary Oldman** (*The Fifth Element*), does not help lift the movie above its big-budget lots-of-effects look. So why see it? The movie's strongest point - due to the heavy involvement of *Silicon Graphics* in the making of this film - is that it has lots of very realistic computer-generated images, and that justifies seeing it on the big screen and not on video. For effects I'd give this movie **9 / 10**, but on the whole - **My Rating: 5 / 10**



A Little About the Con Guests by Dotan Dimet

Two Ian Watson books and one Brian Stableford book have been translated into Hebrew, and this is mentioned in the article about them that Eli Eshed wrote, which will appear in the next issue of the Society's publication, **The Tenth Dimension** (המימד העשירי) (which will come out in August, barring acts of God or plain bad luck). Ian Watson's **The Jonah Kit** came out in Keter's SF line (nice hardcovers, part of an early SF boom) as "Liviathan ushmo Yonah" ('a whale named Jonah'), and his **Hard Questions** was published by Am Oved last year (I think - it's fairly recent; in any case. Oren Rahat wrote a brief review of it in a recent Maariv). Brian Stableford's **Halcyon Drift**, the first of his early **Hooded Swan** space adventure series, was translated some years back, according to Eli.

I've found a web-page dedicated to Ian Watson, by someone who wrote a book about him. Here's the URL: <http://www.kdsi.net/~dmackey/watson.htm>

It has a nice autobiographical essay by Watson in it: <http://www.kdsi.net/~dmackey/autobio.htm>

Here's a quote from early on in the essay:
"Incidentally, for some reason I only ever laid out my pocket money on one sf magazine, a copy of Astounding Science Fiction which deeply puzzled me with a story set in hyperspace where a character stepped outside of the ship and perceived 'an infinite plane.' Oblivious at the time to the geometrical meaning of this, I imagined a space-vehicle distorted by hyperspace so that very long wings stretched out on either side, a momentous concept. Quite a few of my own subsequent stories have been inspired by willfully misinterpreting some common or garden phrase, so as to turn the world upside-down and inside-out." Ian Watson



Two Books by Robert J. Sawyer

Reviewed by Aharon Sheer

Sawyer is a young (b. 1960) Canadian hard sf writer who writes with the style of a popular best seller. Whether he is writing very far future, as in **Starplex**, or very near future, as in **Frameshift**, his style reminds me of one of the latest **Star Trek** or **Star Wars** novels. He got the Nebula award for his novel **The Terminal Experiment** in 1995. Reviewer Russell Letson, writing in **LOCUS**, said of Sawyer's 1997 novel **Illegal Alien** (which is also not reviewed here, because I haven't read it yet either), "It could be that rare animal, a crossover book that can be enjoyed on both sides of the great divide between genre initiates and normal people."

Frameshift by Robert J. Sawyer (1997), 347 pages. This was one of the nominees for the Hugo Award for Best Novel of 1997. It is a near future sf thriller based on some interesting ideas on future developments in genetics. In addition it has a bit of Holocaust/Nazi hunting, quite a discussion of the problems of medical insurance (in the U.S.) for the seriously ill (tied to problems of genetic testing), a little telepathy, and even some discussion of the future (and past) evolution of the human race. I found the book difficult to put down, very human and moving at times, with quite a bit of interesting technical material well presented. At the end the author tied things up a little too nicely; I doubt if things would end up so well (or so badly) in real life. But this is a novel, after all.

Starplex by Robert J. Sawyer (1996), 289 pages. This is a Star Trek novel. Not really - there are no Star Trek characters in it. But here's the giant space ship, set up for first contact with new alien races. On the ship is the bridge with its human and aliens working together. There is even a drawing of the station and bridge at the start of the book. Here are wormholes ("shortcuts") built by an unknown alien race,

which allow mankind to easily visit other stars and meet other intelligent races. There are a few silly statements; for example, we are told that to accommodate ship's alien crew members from the planet Rehbollo: "The ship's common areas were kept at fifteen degrees Celsius, equivalent to a hot summer's noon on Rehbollo". [p. 22]. What would the temperature be on a hot summer's noon on earth? 50 degrees C (Egypt)? 40 deg. C (Eilat)? 30 deg. C (Tel Aviv)? 25 deg. C (London)? That doesn't tell us much about what temperature people from earth like. Here is future science: "Since the twentieth century, humans have known of six flavors of quarks -- up, down, top, bottom, strange and charmed.... But when we met the Ibs [an alien race], they were aware of two more, which we refer to by opposing lusters, glossy and matte. ...the Ibs had done unique work pulling matter out of quantum fluctuations. ...What we've got here are the first-known naturally occurring luster quarks." [p. 64] We even learn that that in ten billion years there will be *green* stars, in addition to the blue and red and yellow and brown stars known today. And of course, there is time travel. It's readable, there are some nice adventures, but I don't know if it can be made into a TV series.

Quote of the Month:

"So what about building a dinosaur? The answer should be clear. If dinosaur DNA were a complete blueprint for a dinosaur, a dinosaurian Book of Life, then reconstruction would be a purely technical problem. Admittedly, we have no idea how to do it -- and until biologists start to spend less time poring over the document and more tinkering with the photocopier, we never will -- but it could, in principle, be done. However, dinosaur DNA does not describe a dinosaur. It prescribes a dinosaur, within the context of another dinosaur. So to reconstruct Baby Dinosaur, all you need is Mommy Dinosaur.

"Tough...."

- *From The Collapse of Chaos, by Jack Cohen and Ian Stewart, p. 307.*

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