

**The Beauty of Nature:
Introduction to a Supplement to a Book that Never Existed**
by **Noam Shomron**

Nature, which we would like to understand, is like a beautiful princess atop an ivory tower. But this comparison is perhaps misleading: although at first we imagine we see the tower, and its presence, like a strong punch to the stomach, we cannot help but feel we see

nothing, although it rises to infinite heights before us.

We, her friends, see only the trellis surrounding the bottom of the tower, which fades into view like invisible ink. There are a few pathetic thieves attempting to climb a rickety
(Continues on page 2)

Next SCIENCE FICTION CLUB Meeting:

Tuesday, August 4, 1998, 8:15 p.m. -- Lecture (in English)

Dr. Gary Weisinger, Ichilov Medical Center and University of Tel Aviv Medical School, will lecture on
"Genetic Medicine – Science Fiction or Reality"

Rehovot Science Fiction meets (when it meets) on a Tuesday evening
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:

- Elliot Lazerwitz writes about SF and Politics.
- Good characterization in Hebrew translations of SF books - a list by Oren Rahat. (Hebrew)
- Two Short book reviews by Aharon Sheer.

בגיליון זה של CyberCozen:

- אליוט לזרביץ' כותב על מד"ב ופוליטיקה. (אנגלית)
- עיצוב דמויות טוב בספרי מד"ב מתורגמים לעברית, מובאים על-ידי ארן רהט.
- שתי ביקורות קצרות לספרים מאת אהרון שיר. (אנגלית)

ladder to the top. As we step back and see more of this picture, the ladder narrows as it rises, and we notice that no climber has reached much higher than the base.

Although the scene first revealed itself in fuzzy blobs of grey, it is now in color -- rich, beautiful, dazzling color. The narrow wooden ladder to the sky rises with a slope, and we see it is supported by a series of columns. The columns are gorgeous cylinders of red and white marble, decorated and ornamented with some sort of fancy bricks. As our gaze follows the ladder up, it tapers until it consists merely of a single beam of wood, and then crosses itself and widens again; this is repeated a few times, and it is quite unclear how such a dilapidated contraption of wood and nails can exist.

Finally the ladder stops altogether; no more has been built yet by the thieves. But, as

we go further, there are still the supporting columns, waiting for future extensions of the ladder. Then we reach supports that are not yet complete: the tops are truncated and covered with the grey mess of a construction job in progress. As we proceed, less and less of the supports are built. Eventually, we reach a point where only the foundation exists, covered by clumps of grass and old, broken lawn furniture. Soon there is nothing but sparse vegetation around, and a few deciduous trees.

Only now do we turn around and look back toward our starting point. We cannot see any of the columns, the ladder, or the thieves any more, only the clear blue sky and the tower itself in the distance, the tower rising from the ground back where we started. The base of the tower, that is. Looking up, there is more and more of it. The tower is infinitely tall.

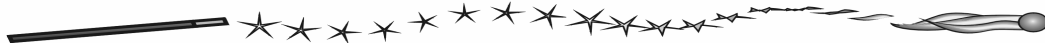
Transcriber's note:

At this point I suddenly wake up and hastily try to write down all I can remember, only to manage this inexcusably undetailed account. **The Beauty of Nature** is the title of a (long!) supplement to another (really long!) book. I don't remember who wrote the first book, nor what it was about, but **The Beauty of Nature** is an attempt at a description thereof. It is filled with formulations of mathematical theorems (mathematics is only a language, after all), and proofs, as well as expositions (which is why it's so long!) I wish I could remember, from what was less a dream and more a chaotic storm of electrical activity lasting a few seconds before I finally awoke, who actually *wrote* this book (the volumes had green covers, by the way, but nothing like Birkhäuser), or the mysterious first one (who can imagine what it was about?), but I am not entirely sure.

There is one woman who could have done it, but I may be confusing her with her advisor. This particular person is a biologist; her forté is biochemistry, DNA in particular, but of course she knows everything. In linear terms she is one hundred and twenty-eight years old, looks twenty-something, and acts like an eight-year-old on a constant caffeine IV. She has more energy and her mind runs faster than any activity could possibly require as a sink (including pure mathematics); with her background, she is strong at calculating things .

I do not believe one needs to approach this ideal in order to feel beauty. But it becomes necessary if one hopes to ever understand it.

Ed: Note: The author, club member Noam Shomron, is now doing his doctorate in Mathematics at the University of California in Berkeley.



Letters to the Editor

Aharon,

With respect to your review of **The Man Who Folded Himself**, by David Gerrold, which appeared in **CyberCozen** in April. It has been a year or two since I read the book, and I remember it somewhat differently.

The protagonist, Danny, did not fall in love with himself. He was lonely, I believe, and he liked himself, as many people do, and found himself to be the perfectly matched partner. Of course, that may be the same as being in love with himself, but if so it was already the way he

felt about himself even before he had the time machine.

By the way, it is my considered opinion that no human being would actually find a carbon copy of himself/herself to be a compatible match. It is more likely that one would be driven to distraction when exposed for any length of time to a carbon copy of oneself. What we look for in a mate/friend is someone whom we can complement, and who can complement us, along the lines of "the rocks in his head fit perfectly into the holes in her head."

Furthermore, Danny does not find a female clone of himself. He travels back into history and meets his female self of a parallel universe. In other words, since history branches into two (or more) paths whenever two alternatives become possible, history at some point branched off when he was conceived and the other universe produced a female version of him. Danny travels back to a point that is the common source for both timelines, and there the two of them meet.

I do not recall that any of them became

nuts with boredom. I recall that one of them went nuts with power.

Aside from that, you seemed correct in what you wrote, especially when you wrote that the author "... gives the reader something to think about."

By the way, you have a good publication (and even your style of reviewing has much improved), so why do you need the dirty jokes? Okay, so I'm a prude, but why ruin for me (and perhaps others) what was otherwise a good issue?

Mordechai Housman

Dear Mordechai - I thought the idea of the joke so ridiculous that it never even occurred to me that someone would think it was dirty! Every time I think of it I start laughing. **Aharon**



SF and the Political Game by Elliot Lazerwitz

I've learned during 23 years in Israel that the simplest way to start a fracas is to start talking politics. However, I would think that **CyberCozen** readers are a touch less hotheaded. Also, please note that I am not dealing with *Israeli* politics! So, here goes.

Its a little-known fact that President Reagan in the 1980s had among his advisors people like Larry Niven, and Alvin Toffler, the futurologist. Together with Edward Teller, the father of the hydrogen bomb, they reinforced Reagan's pure free-enterprise philosophy of government. It was Teller himself who was the prime mover in Reagan's arching Star Wars program. I recall a phrase from Toffler's recent book **Powershift** denegrating corporate heads who displayed wooly-headed altruism. Of course, wooly-headed altruism is the last best hope of millions of minorities, unemployed or disabled people. But what concern is this to the guardians of the American Dream? It is not to Larry Niven's credit that he helped engineer the massive damage done to millions by Reagans policies. Better he should have stuck to **Ringworld** engineering.

Perhaps SF as a whole is a product of American character: action-oriented, lone-hero theme, rugged individualism (the lone scientist who saves the world in the movie Independence Day). I see a tie-in here with Ayn Rand's works such as **Atlas Shrugged**, with its noble technocrat heroes, and the rest of the world be damned.

It's a fact that sales of straight science fiction books are being nibbled away by other,

associated genres. More and more readers are neglecting more and more fine SF writers. Has SF limited itself to an elitist audience? Or perhaps other **CyberCozen** readers can suggest alternative explanations?

It'd be interesting to get ahold of a socioeconomic breakdown of SF readers (or, for that matter, Internet users), with reference to voting habits, economic status, leisure time, or (in Israel), country of origin. If SF is to continue as a tool for the sense of wonder, for flexibility and preparedness for the future, its audience must be widened. (Easier said than done!). If the coming century is to witness growing polarization between northern and southern hemispheres, between haves and have-nots, could good SF serve as a seed through which capable youth in developing countries could be inspired to study technological vocations and, returning home, help lift their countries up by their bootstraps? Could the brain drain be reversed? Could it happen here in Israel?

Concluding on an optimistic note, who among us hasn't read George Orwell's **1984**? What a magnificent work, readable on many levels. **1984** is the ultimate political SF novel. Resistance to a totalitarian regime, as well as true love (and aren't the two linked?) are stamped out by a boot smashing one mans face. The good news is that the year 1984 is fourteen years behind us. True love remains, and Communist ideology is no longer dominant. **1984** is an averted alternative future, proving the power of SF to both envision future scenarios and raise awareness to help prevent their occurrence.

Good Characterization in Science Fiction?

In May I published Kresel Housman's query about good characterization in sf, and Oren Rahat responded with a list of books that he had read in Hebrew translation which he thought qualified. Here is his response

בהמשך לבקשתך אודות ספרים המתעסקים יותר בעיצוב דמויות הרי רשימה של ספרים

שם ספר	שם סופר	Title	Author	מתרגם	הוצאה
הנידחים	הנדרסון זנה	PILGRIMAGE The Book of the People	Zenna Henderson	במברגר שולמית	עם-עובד
המשחק של אנדר	קארד אורסון סקוט	Ender's Game	Orson Scott Card		אופוס
קול למתים	קארד אורסון סקוט	Speaker for the Dead	Orson Scott Card		אופוס
גר בארץ נכריה	היינליין רוברט	Stranger in a Strange Land	Robert A. Heinlein	לוי דפנה	כתר
למות מבפנים	סילברברג רוברט	Dying Inside	Robert Silverberg	עדיני שרונה	ש. פרידמן
האיש במבוך	סילברברג רוברט	The Man in the Maze	Robert Silverberg	גונן שלמה	מועדון קוראים מעריב

און רהט -- Oren Rahat

Short Reviews: by Aharon Sheer

bellwether by Connie Willis (1996), 247 pages. I really enjoyed reading this book. If you want to read something light and amusing, something with a happy ending, this is for you. Both a love story and a clever social science fiction novel, its subject is **fads**: why do we have them, what starts them and what stops them. Think how much money could be made by a company which could generate new fads, or direct them. Hence the heroine is hired by a company to do research on just this subject. But the employing company, like its employees, and the surrounding society, is influenced by fads; in fact, we are all surrounded by the latest fads even if we are hardly aware of them. The author entertains us with brief tales of remarkable fads of the past (recent and not so recent) and present, delightful filler for the slight story line. Connie Willis can write very serious stuff: Her novel, **Doomsday Book** (1992), which shared the 1993 Hugo award and won the Nebula, is a time-travel story set at the time of the Black Death (around 1350), and is very dark although still optimistic. But she also writes wonderful humor, and this book is an example.

Crashlander by Larry Niven (1994), 281 pages. Recommended by Bill Silverman. This is a collection of all of the Beowulf Shaeffer stories in one volume. It includes the Hugo winners, "Neutron Star", and "The Borderland of Sol", as well as a complex and imaginative new story, "Procrustes". In addition, it contains new material linking the stories together into one chronological sequence, and providing a kind of tense background environment for the tales. Several of the stories contain puzzles which the reader is invited to try and solve before the author tells us the answer. To my mind, the great thing about Niven is his thinking about the ramifications of new technologies and new ecologies: how these will effect people and society? Just a simple example from this book: If you have just watched an exciting game at a big stadium, and want to leave the fastest way, how should you do it? Answer: walk out the exit. Reason: most of the people are standing in line inside the stadium waiting to use the teleportation booths. It was fun and fascinating to reread these fine stories.

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For mail delivery of *CyberCozen*, please donate 30 shekels per YEAR; For airmail to US \$15; If Aharon Sheer can hand-deliver it, 15 shekels.

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