



Science-Fiction Newsletter

Vol. X, No. 5; May, 1998

Thanks to Guy Eldar

No doubt you have noticed a remarkable change in the appearance of **CyberCozen**.

All this is due to the efforts of Guy Eldar, who volunteered to apply his graphical layout talents (using the secrets of Word 97) to the simple file that I prepare. Just keep in mind that if Guy ever takes a vacation, all that elegance will disappear! If have no idea how he does it.

תודה לגיא אלדר

בלי ספק שמתם לב לשנוי הגרפי המדהים שחל ב**סייברקוזן** בזמן האחרון. כמה שבחים קבלנו על זה! כל זה הודות לגיא אלדר שהציע להפעיל את כשרונו הגרפי ולשפר את מראה העיתון. גיא לוקח את הגרסה הפרימיטיבית שאני מכין, עובד עם Word 97, ויוצר יצירה גרפית מיוחדת. אזרה: אם גיא יצא לחופשה -- הכל יחזור לצורתה המקורית ... אין לי מושג איך הוא עושה את זה.

SOME THOUGHTS ON SF AND THE SENSE OF WONDERby **Elliot Lazerwitz**

Do you remember your first primal flash of wonder, that sense that anything can be done, any goal reached through pure technology, when you picked up your first SF book? That sort of almost physical jolt, that opening up of new horizons and unlimited possibilities as far as "the stars themselves"?

To this day I still recall first picking up a SF anthology in my father's car in 1968. I was nine. I can visualize the car dashboard, the snow encompassing us, the Brandeis campus in Boston. I instinctively flipped to Damon Knight's short story "**Ticket to Anywhere**", a tale of a man trapped in a teleportation system, forever doomed to roam from world to world. I was nearly stupefied from the story's scope, its soaring imagination. That was only the start.

Isn't this the primary role of good SF, hard or soft --- the preparation of readers for the next century, for the intricate, involuted technological, environmental and political

developments lying in wait and that no man can foresee? No, the future cannot be foreseen --- how many political scientists foresaw the rapid breakdown of Communism and the Soviet bloc? --- but given the tools of SF and such new disciplines as futurology, it is fathomable. SF, basically a product of American culture, follows a long tradition of tools for the making of democracy, enabling the masses to acquire the means to plan for what will be, to avoid what Alvin Toffler christened "future shock".

Let me qualify that. In the United States and Israel, SF and the awareness it engenders are limited to a kind of elite. Correct me if I'm wrong, but how many SF writers broke out of the ghetto, or even rose from the working class? People in that position are too busy trying to keep body and soul together to indulge in the luxury of pondering what lies ahead in the next century. Here in Israel, how many Oriental Jews,

(Continues on page 2)

The Israeli Society for Science Fiction and Fantasy**Monthly meetings** (in Hebrew) on **Science and Science Fiction**

Wednesdays: Tentative dates: 17/6

Join the Society, get its announcements, and go to its meetings!

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Meetings are held in **Beit Ariela**, 25 Shaul HaMelech, Tel Aviv at 8 p.m.**In This Issue of CyberCozen:**

- SF Book reviews (English and Hebrew)

בגיליון זה של **CyberCozen**: ביקורות על ספרי מדע בדיוני

Israeli Arabs or Palestinian Arabs read SF? I contend that SF reading is, tragically, a pursuit of the sociocultural elite.

I'm prepared to go out on a controversial limb. I absolutely enjoyed the recent Star Trek/ Babylon 5 film festival at the Tel Aviv Cinematheque. The movies, ambience and personal encounters were stimulating as fine wine. But how many Sephardic kids did we see there? How many young persons from development towns, from South Tel Aviv? Even the poster publicizing the event, while witty, seemed to put down "Prosper", the resident

"chach-chach", with his arm around Spock.

I'm not saying SF has to be an egalitarian movement. What I mean to say is that it grieves me that more people, with no access to the reading skills and cultural riches those who read CyberCozen were imbued with as kids and teenagers, aren't exposed to that primal sense of awe, that sense which both summons forth our amazement at mankind's potential, and will enable today's luckier children to keep balance tomorrow when confronted with the incredible choices they will be required to make then. More's the pity.



*Ed. Note: Heinlein's **Starship Troopers** is today one of the ten best-selling sf books in the U.S.. (That's no doubt true in Israel too, but then there aren't much more than ten sf books in print in Israel at any one time, if you don't count Asimov's **Foundation** series, and Douglas Adams' books.) Obviously the film version of the book resulted in renewed interest in this venerable classic. Here is our third review of this controversial novel, this time by Dotan Dimet:*

נערי רפול (ביקורת מאת דותן דימת)

לוחמי החלל מאת רוברט היינליין (1959) עברית: עמנואל לוטם, הוצאת כתר, 267 עמודים.

גרעיני ידני. מה שאותי מטריד יותר מהאלימות הן ההרצאות הפוליטיות הדידקטיות להחריד. הרעיון הפוליטי הבסיסי של היינליין הוא שהחברה העתידנית היא כזו שבה רק למי ששירת שירות לאומי (ובמשהו רציני, לא סתם גיוב בקריה, אלא חי"ר, עבודת פרך בסיביר או קריירה כשפן ניסיונות רפואי) יש זכות בחירה. השאר הם נתינים, עם זכויות אדם אך בלי אזרחות מלאה. כאמור, העולם על פי רפול. כמי שחידד עפרונות ברוב השירות, חשתי שאולי הרתיעה האוטומטית שלי עושה אותי לא כשיר לשפוט את האותנטיות של הספר. אז נתתי את הספר לידידי הטוב אופיר, שאכל את כל הבוץ שיש לטירונות צנחנים להציע. אופיר צלל לתוך הספר וחזר עם קביעה כי טוב, נהדר אפילו. "זו היתה ממש חזרה על הטירונות שלי", דיווח אופיר, "כל התחושה הזאת של המסכנות והתחושה המטומטמת הזאת שאתה יותר טוב מכולם כי אתה חי"רניק. רק דבר אחד שהוא מספר שם שונה מאצלנו. הוא כותב שהיה להם אוכל חם ובשפע. חם מילא. אני לא זוכר אף פעם שהיה לנו בטירונות אוכל בשפע". וכמו שחשבת אני מניסיוני הצבאי הדל, הקטע שהכי שובר אותנטיות אצל היינליין הוא הקטע שבו שותה הגיבור במהלך הטירונות "קפה עם שמנת והמון סוכר". שמנת? סוכר? בקפה צבאי? מדע בדיוני.

הספר מתאר את סיפור חניכתו של צעיר מפונק ופציפיסט, שהופך לאחר שורת התנסויות לקצין מורעל וגאה ביחידת חי"ר במהלך מלחמה נוראה בין האנושות ליצורים מגעילים דמויי עכבישים שנקראים "גיוקים". היינליין מתאר באופן מיומן ועדין את אימי המלחמה וזוועות הטירונות, אך הדגש שלו כאן, כמו בספרים רבים שכתב אחר כך, הוא על משנתו הפוליטית הימנית קיצונית. בנוסף לפוליטיקה, הוא תורם כאן כמה קלישאות יסוד למדע בדיוני.

תגובתי הראשונית למראה הספר היתה להיאנח עמוקות על הבחירה של לוטם, שעל פניה נדמת צפויה ואנכרוניסטית. אבל לאחר הקריאה, נראה שבכל זאת מגיע ללוטם קרדיט. ממעמקי הקונסנווס של המדע הבדיוני הקלסי שבו הוא מצטנף, כמתרגם וכעורך, משגר לוטם פצצת אקטואליה שלא היתה מביישת את עורכי "פופוליטיקה". לא נוקפים העמודים, ואנחנו רואים שהיינליין הקשיש והטוב שרטט לנו כאן תרחיש אקטואלי להפליא. לוחמי החלל מתאר את העולם על פי רפול.

האלימות בספר מרובה ודחוסה: דמויות משנה צונחות כזבובים והסצינה בה נפתח הספר מתארת בצורה נלהבת איך הבחורים המצוינים בחליפות הקרב המופלאות זורעים הרס וחורבן בלב אזור עירוני מאוכלס בכבדות, תוך שימוש בנשק

הערות:

1 - הביקורת התפרסמה ב-13 למרץ, 1994, במקומו **צומת השרון**. מי ידע אז שהולכים להסריט את **לוחמי החלל**, מה שלא ספק מעורר בספר עניין מחודש? כנראה שעמנואל לוטם הוא בחור יותר מעודכן משחשבתני אז.

2 - רפול נחשב פעם כתומך נלהב של גיוס בחורי ישיבה ושל מלחמת חורמה בתופעת ההשתמטות משירות סדיר. סתם תזכורת למי שלא זוכר למה האיש הזה קיבל פעם 7 מנדטים.

The Summerlands by Ellen Foxxe

Review: by Aharon Sheer

Season of Shadows (Volume One of **The Summerlands**) as by Ellen Foxxe (1995), DAW Fantasy, 398 pages.

This is the review copy I received from one of the two women authors, Devra Kunin, mentioned in the April issue. Called fantasy, it starts promisingly indeed. A different world history novel, it takes place in what corresponds to our 1700's, with sailing ships and muskets. In the wake of religious persecution and a revolution against the aristocracy, many have fled to the New World to establish independent colonies. There they find themselves under attack by large tree-living birds, who are bothered by the colonist's clearing the forests in which they live. Gradually the colonists learn that the birds are sapient: they have a language, they build cities in the treetops. What's more, the birds have a kind of telepathy: they can communicate feelings without speaking. One young man is sensitive to these telepathic feelings, although few other humans are. Thus we have the beginnings of something that might remind us of Anne McCaffrey's **Pern** series, or perhaps Mercedes Lackey. We anticipate a developing relationship between humans and birds, a study of the difficulties and rewards of

communicating with alien beings. We expect perhaps even close personal contacts. Perhaps even a love affair. But we get none of that. Instead we have a rollicking war story between the colonists and the rulers of the Old World, who send ships filled with soldiers who try to conquer the colonists and place them under Old World domination. The colonists arm the birds with muskets and enlist them as allies in the war, both as scouts and killers. Alas, the only appearances the birds make after this are in the sky. They are the Indians of this New World, allied with one side and fighting the other. No further personal relationships are described. No communication, no companionship, no love affairs. Nisht! The book was nevertheless fun to read as parallel history. The authors have created their own hateful, spiteful, stupid religion (without Christ), their own clever and superior aristocracy, their own shifty, dishonest, two-faced villains. All in good fun. But what a waste of a good beginning.

Season of Storms (Volume Two of **The Summerlands**), 400 pages

Mostly more of the same. Here there is a lot of emphasis on sailing ships and sea battles. Here too there is a little too much Political Correctness: a woman hero, Rolande Vendeley, becomes a sea captain, and leads her ship into battle. What bothered me? First she freely takes a lover from her crew. I see two serious problems: 1) jealousy among the mostly young male crew, and 2) pregnancy. Since this is alternative history, it might be possible to explain this, but I don't recall seeing any explanation. The same Vendeley's ship wrecks on a pirate island, and she and her crew find themselves unarmed and surrounded by armed pirates. Yet she is neither raped nor forced to sleep with the pirate leader. The same Vendeley, in the enemy port, steals the clothes of a respectable gentleman, wears them, steals a government seal, and pretends to be an important

official. She is accepted and respected as that important woman, although she is wearing a man's clothing, with no modifications. The only case where a reasonable explanation is provided is when Vendeley is thrown into a prison cell together with other sailors, both men and women. The guards do not abuse the prisoners, and this *is* explained:

"[Vendeley] said, 'Look here, they don't put folks to the question here without a reason... It was so even before the Uprising, and the Deps [the Church] are all the stricter about such things. I know them. They'd enjoy torturing the lot of us, no doubt, but luckily they've laws to forbid anything they'd enjoy.'" [p. 212]

I wish that a similar effort had been made to explain those other anomalous items.

In summary, the two books were fun to read. However, I would call them "*Eighteenth Century Adventures in a Different World*" rather than "*Fantasy*", and say that the primary audience is teenagers.

Good Characterization in Science Fiction?

In the APA **Jewish Space**, issue #15, Kresel (Karen) Housman asks Aharon Sheer: "My sister and I may be the only two participants in this APA who are not science fiction fans, but I'd like to get into it. We are not technically-minded and we like good characterization. Can you recommend any science fiction that we would like?"

The problem is of course that the main objective of a science fiction book is not to present good characterization. Some sf books do deal well with the response of people to changes in society, and in such books characterization can be important. Here are some books which I've liked:

China Mountain Zhang by Maureen F. McHugh (1992) (reviewed below).

The Man Who Folded Himself, by David Gerrold (1973) (reviewed last month).

Red Mars, by Kim Stanley Robinson (1993) (reviewed in July 1974).

Fahrenheit 451 by Ray Bradbury (1953).

Except for the Bradbury, you will have to suffer a lot of technology in each of them, but you can sort of skim those portions and still enjoy the characterization. **Red Mars** especially is heavy on the technology, but the characterization is superb.

I ask our readers: *What SF books can you recommend which have good characterization?* Why don't you write us and tell us!



A book by Maureen F. McHugh

reviewed by Aharon Sheer

Quite a while back I asked for information about some younger writers, and gave a list of names with dates of birth. In response, Sara Svetitsky recommended the following book by Maureen F. McHugh, born 1959:

China Mountain Zhang by Maureen F. McHugh (1992), 312 pages. Recommended by Sara Svetitsky. This is one of the best books I've ever read. It was a Hugo award nominee. The author -- who studied in the People's Republic of China -- has imagined a 22nd century world in which China is the world's leading country technologically. Chinese multinationals dominate world trade. The United States (but not Canada) has had a revolution, and now has a Chinese-style system of government. The system seems to be a mixture of Communism (the government will help you find a job, but you'd better not be too picky about which job you take) and Confucianism (a well-ordered system of educational and administrative grades and levels), along with racism (there is a complex quota system for non-Chinese who want to advance professionally). The book describes fascinatingly the future life of various people in

extremely varied environments: New York city, Baffin Bay Canada (north of the Arctic Circle), Nanjing China, and a Mars colony. The most important character in the novel is a bright young half-Chinese technician, who is also a homosexual (a capital offense in China, and a serious barrier -- if discovered -- in Chinese-dominated America). This hero walks a dangerous line in every aspect of his life, and his chances of succeeding are always in doubt. In this respect, I want to quote John Clute's review in the **Grolier Science Fiction Encyclopedia**: "It is a world more complicated than he can understand -- in both her novels Maureen F. McHugh serenely violates any presumption that the protagonists of a genre fiction must eventually understand and control what's happening to them -- and for that reason it is a world readers may find alarmingly familiar."

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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.

עורך : אהרון שיר.
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עבור משלוח בדואר של *CyberCozen*, הנכם מתבקשים לתרום 30 ש"ח לשנה; עבור דואר אויר לארה"ב \$15; אם אהרון שיר יכול למסור את העיתון באופן אישי, 15 ש"ח.

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