

# Cyber Cozen

Science-Fiction Newsletter

Vol. XI, No. 11; November, 1999

**Apologies to Yaakov Macales for misspelling his name in the October issue!**



## Letter to the Editor

**Dear Aharon,**

I enjoyed your review of *Phantom Menace*. I agree on most of the points you brought out except I did not enjoy the Jar Jar Binks character; not because he seemed a parody of blacks, but because I thought the character was dumb. On the other hand, Raz Greenberg's review almost sounded like he had been paid by the studio's PR department to write a favorable review. Which all goes to show something I have always contended: Movie reviewing is a highly subjective art. **Ted Henderson**

**Ted** – I'm glad to hear that *CyberCozen's* standing in the sf world is so high that the studios are willing to pay people to write reviews of their movies for publishing in *CyberCozen*. Since Raz is a student, I'm sure he made good use of the money. May many others do the same! **Aharon**

The Israeli Society for Science Fiction and Fantasy  
 Meetings (in Hebrew) on *Science and Science Fiction*  
 Next Meeting: **Wednesday, November 24, 1999, 20:00**  
**Dr. Elana Gomel on "Aliens and Politics"**

Each meeting attracts about 100 people with a lecture and discussion

Meetings are held in **Beit Ariela, 25 Shaul HaMelech, Tel Aviv** at 8 p.m.  
*Join the Society, go to its meetings! Call 03-528-3803 or 03-604-4959*

### Save Crusade!

*Crusade* is the sequel/spin-off to *Babylon5*. *Crusade* was to be a five year story created by *Babylon5* creator J. Michael Straczynski; however, TNT, which was to air *Crusade*, cancelled the show before they had shown a single episode. This was because J. M. Straczynski refused to compromise the integrity of the show and add the sex and violence which TNT programmers believed were necessary to make the show a hit.

Between June 9 and September 1, 1999 TNT aired the 13 episodes of *Crusade* which had been filmed before their decision to discontinue the show. Despite the excellent fan response to these episodes, *Crusade's* fate remains up in the air. *Crusade's* best hope is to find a new, more Science Fiction friendly home. To make that happen, we need your help!

Watch *Crusade*, starting Jan 8<sup>th</sup> 2000 on Channel 3 in Israel!

**Write Letters!!! For more details enter "Crusade for Crusade" site at**  
<http://www.astro.umd.edu/~fleming/index.html>



01.01.01

The end is also the beginning..



[www.armageddoncon.org](http://www.armageddoncon.org)



In Memoriam  
**Marion Zimmer Bradley (1930-1999)**

Obituary by Julie Stampnitzky

Marion Zimmer Bradley, author and editor of fantasy and science fiction, died September 25 in Berkeley, California.

MZB was well known among SF fans for her *Darkover series*, which combined themes from science fiction and fantasy. The series eventually included 21 novels, written over four decades. It was set on a planet colonized in the early days of galactic exploration. The colonists lost contact with the rest of humanity, and within a few generations their descendents, having lost technological knowledge, were living in a neo-feudalist society with a few science-fictional twists. For one thing, some of the individuals developed various psychic talents. These telepathic gifts, known as *laran*, were genetically based, and the group of families (known as the Comyn) carrying these genes became the center of the aristocratic power structure. A new challenge was introduced when representatives of a Terran Empire rediscovered the "lost colony." Most of the books revolve around the conflict between the technophilic Terrans and the Darkovans, and Darkover's attempt to maintain its independence and cultural integrity in the face of Terran encroachment.

The first book I ever read by Marion Zimmer Bradley was *The Forbidden Tower*, one of the Darkover series. It is the direct sequel to *The Spell Sword*, though I did not realize this until after I read it. *TSS* is a nice enough book, a fairly standard Sword-and-Sorcerer tale involving a telepathic link enabling an able-bodied young man to draw on the skill of an elderly swordsman, along with a maiden who must be rescued from a band of "cat-men." She is, of course, rescued, and everyone lives happily ever after. Right? Wrong.

*The Forbidden Tower* opens on the eve of the double wedding of four main characters from the first book. One of them is Andrew Carr, a Terran who has chosen to marry a Darkovan woman and make Darkover his home. Many among Darkover's aristocracy regard him with suspicion. To make matters worse, his bride, Callista Lanart-Alton, has abandoned her training as a "Keeper" in order to marry him. At this period in Darkover's history, all high-level psi operations are confined to locations called "towers". A group of telepaths works in the tower, led by a keeper, who must be a virgin. Callista has been trained to avoid even touching a man, and she finds it very difficult to have a physical relationship with Andrew. Moreover,

conservative elements are shocked that she chose to leave her position and marry. The main characters eventually attempt to form a telepathic circle, even though they are not in a tower. Their struggle forms the main plot of the book. Marion Zimmer Bradley succeeds in combining realistic characters with well-knit plots and subplots; this book hooked me on the series.

In general, the Darkover books can be read in any order, since it is not a "series" in the usual sense. Indeed, Bradley wrote in an essay that she was "not up to the kind of planning and long-range forethought that a 'series' demands of its creator." As a result, the analytical reader will notice many contradictions between the various books. Some of these were deliberate; MZB did not hesitate to change various underlying premises from book to book, when she felt that they could be improved on. I would advise anyone who insist on reading a series in order to read the books in the order in which they were published, keeping in mind that the earlier books are sometimes juvenile and unpolished, and not a good basis to judge the series as a whole.

For those not interested in order, a good starting point is *Heritage of Hastur*, one of the best books in the series. Another is *The Spell Sword*; but while this book is enjoyable, in my opinion its direct sequel, *The Forbidden Tower*, is truly superb. A third starting point is *The Shattered Chain*, the first of the three books focusing on the Free Amazons. These women, also known as Renunciates, choose to forgo the sheltered lives of most Darkovan women in order to be independent.

The most recent books, co-written (some would say ghostwritten) by Adrienns Martine-Barnes, are an exception to the claim that the novels can be read in any order. *Exile's Song*, *Shadow Matrix*, and *Traitor's Sun* should only be read after *Heritage of Hastur* and its sequel, *Sharra's Exile*.

The world of Darkover soon spawned an active network of fans, and some of them wrote stories set on Darkover which were published in fanzines. In 1980, MZB edited an anthology of these stories, entitled *The Keeper's Price*, and eventually edited ten more such anthologies, along with one collection of her own short Darkover works. Having turned her attention to editing, she went on to edit a new

annual series of anthologies entitled *Sword and Sorceress*, of which 16 have been published to date. In 1988 she established her own magazine, *Marion Zimmer Bradley's Fantasy Magazine*, selecting the stories to be published in it. A number of current authors got their start in one or more of these venues, most notably Mercedes Lackey.

Bradley achieved mainstream fame with the 1983 publication of *The Mists of Avalon*, an original retelling of the Arthurian saga from the point of view of the women involved, most notably Arthur's sister Morgaine, here a priestess of the "old religion" on the island of Avalon, trying to maintain her religion in the face of Christianity's spread. The book's portrayal of paganism and goddess-worship influenced a

certain number of readers to adopt similar religious beliefs.

Similar themes were featured in *The Firebrand* (1987), which covered the events of the Trojan War, as seen by the prophetess Cassandra. Again we are told how the old-time, unconstrained, woman-centered religions were driven out by newer, male-chauvinist ones. A third book along these lines is *The Fall of Atlantis*, but this story (written in the early 1950's) is poorly written and unconvincing.

A number of the author's short stories and novellas were published in *The Best of Marion Zimmer Bradley*. This anthology includes some excellent examples of her science fiction (e.g. "Elbow Room") and fantasy (e.g. "The Secret of the Blue Star").

Note: more information about Darkover can be found on the web at <http://neskaya.darkover.org>. You can find a list of all her books at <http://www.mzbfm.com/mzbworks.htm>



## Book Review

by Noam Shomron

*L'Aurore des Dieux* by Jacques Dixmier, 143 pp.

Dixmier is not a professional writer; at least, certainly not a professional science-fiction writer. If you open this book, opposite the title page, the list of works by the author includes such classics as *Algèbres Enveloppantes* and *Les C\*-Algèbres et leurs Représentations*. Mind you, in case you are not familiar with the subject, I am throwing out some big names here. Alain Connes (his student, a Fields Medallist, and one of the greatest mathematicians of our time) wrote the preface, in which he credits Dixmier's command of the metaphorical language of mathematics for his approach to metaphysics through fantasy.

The book, consisting of 15 short stories, is quite fascinating, and I devoured it eagerly. Again, these are not polished stories witnessing the author's mastery of the craft of writing; instead, they speak on a more abstract level. They are not packed with inscrutable layers of meaning like a millefeuille jigsaw puzzle, yet all the stories mean something to me, as a mathematician and as a human being.

If there is any theme to the book, it would have to be the universal irony of man's quest to be like God in knowledge and power, a difficult task for creatures who have a hard time deciding what to have for lunch. Man's ambition to destroy god, his illusion that he has the minutest speck of control over his destiny, and his pitifully arrogant preoccupation with himself,

are all explored. We are impotent, yet we are vain, and still there is the genuine curiosity of the researcher, for whom half the fun is generating an ever-growing list of questions.

In the opening story, men, and especially scientists, are mere bacteria, whose ideas and emotions, brilliant and deep, are simply raw material fed to them by incomprehensible "gods", and are subject to eventual harvesting. (You may remember something vaguely similar by Isaac Asimov, but Dixmier puts a completely new twist on it.) The aura of the gods may be seen and measured via "quantum crystals," and this notion, that the mental world of ideas is somehow as real as the physical world, perhaps more real as far as humans are concerned, is another thread common to several of the stories. There is also a microstory in which the universe is merely a child's toy, no more, no less.

In "La seconde loi de Rickshaw", mankind encounters another humanoid civilization in the galaxy, and amicable relations are established. On the other hand, observations of thousands of other galaxies indicates that all such "dibiotic" galaxies end up hosting a cataclysmic war until one or both civilizations are destroyed. This law is established to the point of being considered fact. Can mutual good will and free will save us from this fate? The

story has a surprise ending, which I find delightful.

The endings, thanks to Dixmier's interesting sense of humor, transform what, at first, seem like third-rate yarns into cute stories with a message. This is a good device for the short story format; it would take much more work to produce a novel on similar principles.

Many of the stories remind me of old-fashioned SF tales. For instance, in two different stories, innocuous inventions (a machine to control the weather, and a time-pump) are developed into superweapons. Man's insatiable greed, egocentrism, and their consequences, not just his vanity, are within the author's scope.

There is a charming story in which God is put out of business, due to industrial espionage. There is a story (less good) with an

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account of the plagues befalling Egypt when the ruler refuses to release, not the Hebrew people, but capital for foreign investment. There is a story of the Galactic Federation's (unsuccessful) attempt to impose peace on earth, by force!

The last story, appropriately named "Oméga", is enigmatic, and vaguely disturbing once you "get it." I could go on, but, by now, either you are interested in reading the book, or not. I personally recommend it. Some knowledge of French is required --- this is not *Les Misérables*, but I am not aware of any existing translation. I apologize for not being confident enough to write a review in the same tongue. I hope I successfully communicated some of the book's flavor; feel free to contact me if you have any questions.

### P.S. Important addendum to review

Yes, mathematicians need to know French. It seems, however, that they also need to know German: It has come to my attention that the title of the book (and opening story) may have something to do with Wagner's *Gotterdammerung*. Perhaps someone else can elucidate this (I would have attended a Ring Cycle last summer, but the cost of the tickets was quite beyond my means).



### BOOK REVIEWS:

Star Rider and Mistwalker

by Miriam Ben-Loulu

Most Science Fiction stories deal with radical changes in technology rather than physiological changes in people. It is interesting to note that in many stories the degree of technical advancement is not always consistent and we find FLT (faster-than-light travel) together with a description of computers like the ones used today (as opposed to the computers of the past or what computers might become in the future). But when it comes to people it is almost always assumed that humans are going to be the same as they are today, although space travelers may have "deep space tans". However there *are* some books that try to predict how humans would mutate to suit the environments of other planets. Here and there you can even find a book where this mutation is a real part of the story and not just thrown in to provide ambience. Two books of this sort are *Star Rider* and *Mistwalker*.

In *Star Rider* by Doris Piserchia, the human race has evolved both physically and mentally into a new race altogether. Humans have what amounts to a symbiotic relationship with dogs (also evolved physically and mentally) which allows them to hop around the universe. The problem is that these "jaks" ("Jakalowar")

are the type of people who have always pushed back the frontiers --- and they are running out of frontiers. Challenges keep them alive as a race. Challenge, change or both is necessary to prevent the race from dying out. The book is written from the viewpoint of a young heroine and has only a small amount of romantic interest. She is uneducated and her story-telling style reminds one of cowboys, Annie Oakley and various other stories of the Wild West. The book is full of action and humor, as well as having some interesting things to say about human societies.

*Mistwalker*, by Denise Lopes Heald, concerns the way humans have adapted and mutated to suit the environmental conditions of a specific planet. This story also reminds one of the Wild West. The inhabitants of the planet Ver Day live off of the land with little technology, very much as the pioneers in America lived. However, unlike the pioneers, this is voluntary in order not to ruin the native ecology. But people are moving out of the two overcrowded cities into the wilderness and, as in the Gold Rush days, they don't care about the environment. So change is coming to the frontier and more changes are needed in order to adjust to this fact.

The word "Green" is given several meanings: 1) the people where the heroine lives are like the political parties called "Green" that exist today because they are interested in saving the environment; 2) they are also green in color due to a local food. In addition to the environmental issues, this story concerns two sorts of prejudice. The green skinned people are prejudiced both against newcomers and against non-green people. This is directly connected to the environmental issues. The prejudice against non-green skinned people is the usual one of "we" and "them", especially when a non-"greenie" is usually from off planet. The prejudice against newcomers includes the people from the two cities on the planet, and a newcomer may live in the wilderness for three years and still be a "newbie". A newcomer is disliked because most "newbies" aren't tough enough to measure up to the local standards. Since the "newbie" does not know how to behave in the difficult and often dangerous conditions in the wild parts of this jungle-like planet he may be a danger both to himself and to others. But they are *especially* disliked because it is emotionally dangerous to like (not to

mention to love!) someone who will not survive long.

Again the story is told by an uneducated heroine --- this time a mature one. There is, of course, a young man, and the romance between them is an important part of the story. The heroine obviously has no intention of falling in love with a "newbie", no matter how good he seems to be at surviving. And the hero has some political problems of his own that he doesn't really want to saddle anyone else with. Add to this the mistwalkers themselves – a native life form with a degree of intelligence that hasn't been investigated. The story has humor, action, romance and imagination. One of the interesting aspects of the ambience is the combination of foods we recognize with local foods, and the language differences, especially slang terms, used by the local people compared with that used by the off planet people.

I recommend both books. Some of you may be asking yourselves, "Yes, but what actually *happens* in these two stories?" I have no intention of spoiling your reading pleasure by telling you any more. You can borrow either book from me. Get my phone number from



Aharon.

Science Fiction and Fantasy

News and Rumors

Collected and brought to you by Guy Eldar



A short news flash on the upcoming hit for summer 2000. All eyes are set at live-action adaptation for the silver screen of the 40-year-old comics *The X-Men*.

If you visited any movie site on the Internet in the past few months, you had to come across news of this film. It's the story of mutated humans turned superheroes to help mankind and to establish peace between humans and mutants.

The best thing about this upcoming movie (besides it being based on one of the best

comics/cartoons ever made – watch it Saturdays 5:00AM on Star World) is the star heading *The X-Men*. This is the man we all love to see in the captain's chair (*Star Trek: The next Generation*) and in so many other SF and Fantasy films, *Patrick Stewart*. I for one am eagerly awaiting seeing him in the role of *Professor Charles Xavier*, as well as finding out what the mutant will look like in real life. I hope that this great childhood memory won't be ruined like so many others.

Comments, News and Rumors, facts and sites would be appreciated. Write to: [eldarguy@netvision.net.il](mailto:eldarguy@netvision.net.il)

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