

**Letter to the Editor:**

Dear Aharon –

Much enjoyed the June *CyberCozen* and the article “**Remembering Douglas Adams’ Radio Days, and What Followed**” by Eli Eshed, and actually agreed with every word of it. When one considers how rarely I agree with anyone about anything, this is practically a reason to stop the presses. Just wanted to let your readers know that **audio CDs** of the original radio broadcasts of *The Hitchhiker’s Guide* are available from the British Amazon.com ([www.amazon.com.uk](http://www.amazon.com.uk)) in two sets, *The Hitchhikers’s Guide to the Galazy: Primary Phase* (first series) and *Secondary Phase* (second series). Definitely the best version, no question!  
Shalom, **Devra Kunin, J.F. Rivkin, Ellen Foxxe, etc.**

**Replying To An Invitation To A Scientists' Ball** (sent by Judi Roth)

Pierre and Marie Curie were radiating enthusiasm.

Heisenberg was uncertain if he could make it.

Einstein thought it would be relatively easy to attend.

Hertz said he planned the future to attend with greater frequency.

Volta was electrified and Archimedes was buoyant at the thought.

Henry begged off due to a low capacity for alcohol.

Ampere was worried he wasn't up on current research.

Audubon said he'd have to wing it.

Ohm resisted the idea at first.

Hawking said he'd try to string enough time together to make a space in his schedule.

Boyle said he was under too much pressure.

Darwin said he'd have to see what evolved.

Edison thought it would be an illuminating experience.

Schrodinger had to take his cat to the vet, or did he?

Watt reckoned it would be a good way to let off steam.

Mendel was invited because he was a man of breeding.

Stephenson thought the whole idea was loco.

Descartes said he'd think about it.

Wilbur Wright accepted, provided he and Orville could get a flight.

Newton was moved to attend.

Dr Jekyll declined -- he hadn't been feeling himself lately.

Pavlov was drooling at the thought.

Morse's reply: "I'll be there on the dot. Can't stop now must dash."

Gauss was asked to attend because of his magnetic personality.

**Emanuel Lottem noted some additional invitees:**

Faraday was invited because of his magnetic personality.

Guth and Linde couldn't afford to come; they wuz broke because of inflation.

A.G. Bell phoned to say he'll attend.

Hubble was joyfully expansive.

Deimler and Benz came in different cars, returned in a single one.

Mendeleev thought he could fit it in an empty slot in his (time)table.

Hahn, Meitner and Frisch had a splitting headache.

Boltzmann feared there would be ever-increasing disorder in the party.

Fermi asked "where is everybody?"

Tesla was the heart of the party, a living firework.

Copernicus preferred to bask in the sun.

Murphy feared something would go wrong.

**Emanuel Lottem says that a few philosophers were invited, too:**

Plato thought it should take place in a cave.

Feynman asked for a diagram.

Socrates wondered what's in the cup he was offered.

Wheeler was all for participation.

Nietzsche brought his whip with him.

Pagels thought it was not insurmountable.

Occam shaved cleanly.

Sagan feared there would be billions and billions of people there.

Ptolemy expected everybody to circle around him.

Jung was invited to another party at the same time, and wondered whether it was really a coincidence.

Olbers thought it should take place in broad daylight.

Gamow wouldn't come without Alpher and Bethe.

Diogenes and Davy had no problem finding the way, they were using lamps.

Thorne bet Hawking it will turn out to be a black tie affair.

Everrett wondered in which universe, exactly, the party took place.

Watson and Crick came in a helicopter.

Skinner's RSVP came in late, it was sent with a homing pigeon.

Cohen and Stewart predicted the party would collapse into chaos.

Hoyle expressed his hope that it would be a solid affair.

**Neale Creamer noted another couple of scientists who didn't come:**

Fahrenheit, Celsius and Kelvin must have been left out in the cold.

Mohorovicic was called but there was a discontinuity in the communication.

**Israeli Society for Science Fiction and Fantasy**

Shortcut URL to Society page: <http://sf-f.org.il>

I could not find the following announcement listed on the site, but they sent me a letter about it

**Lecture:** Tuesday August 7, 2001 at 19:00, in cooperation with the *Amateur Astronomy Society of Jerusalem* (in Hebrew)

**Subject :** "From Science to Science Fiction and Back Again – on the Mutual Influence between Science and Literature"

**Lecturer:** Dr. Aharon Hauptmann, from the University of Tel Aviv

**Where:** Hall 07, Levi Building, Ground Floor, Hebrew University, Givat Ram, Jerusalem

## **Book Review: A Very Good Science Fiction Book** reviewed by Aharon Sheer

*The Martian Race* by Gregory Benford (1999), 472 pages. Gregory Benford (1941-) is a physicist at the University of California at Irvine. His best writing has a strong basis in scientific work. The most famous example is his book *Timescape* (1980), reviewed in *CyberCozen* in June 1999, which won both a Nebula and a Campbell award, in which the heroes are scientists. In this book the heroes are astronauts, and some of them (such as the heroine) are also scientists. The subject, of course, is how to go to Mars, and what we might find there (life?). Current U.S. president George Bush is supporting a NASA trip to Mars which will cost 450 billion dollars. However, Benford expects this program to be cancelled because of its high cost.

Benford suggests an alternative. Government sets up a prize: The first group that gets to Mars, does a set of specified researches there, and successfully returns to earth with samples, gets 30 billion dollars. This is a great way for the U.S. to save 420 billion dollars and still go to Mars! In the old Heinlein tradition we have a successful self-made businessman, John Axelrod, who sees not only money in going to Mars but also a great adventure. Axelrod is ready to fund the trip, and hopes that everyone involved will make a lot of money – most of all, him. The trick is that NASA has already done a lot of the preparations, and Axelrod expects to buy a lot of that stuff cheap. NASA wants to make this thing a success, and is willing to cooperate.

To make it a thriller, there are two groups racing to get to Mars and get back first with the research results. Hence the “Race” in the title. I think it would have been thrilling enough with just the horrendous challenges of travelling to Mars, and living there until the next window opens for the trip back: in this book, that is two years living on Mars.

Benford sets up the book mostly with alternate chapters: in each pair, the first takes place on Mars, and the second takes place three years earlier during the astronaut training period. Thus he can play games with expectations. We see who is on Mars, and we see who is in training to go. They’re not all the same people. I don’t think I’m giving away anything important if I tell you that at the last minute the woman in a husband-wife team of astronauts decides to get pregnant (scared?) and stay home on earth. They have to get a substitute for *her*, but her husband goes to Mars without her.

Benford’s speculative science is fascinating -- are those aliens on Mars? The descriptions of the many problems of living on Mars are presumably accurate. Benford’s crew – only four people – seems absurdly small to me. Sure it makes the trip cheaper, but when danger is so great, I think you need more redundancy. I personally wouldn’t go with less than eight people on the trip. Then even if you lose a few of them, the rest are still likely to be able to survive.

Some of Benford’s characters are convincing, especially his scientist-heroine, Julia (I didn’t get her last name), who is the main character. A few others are caricatures. Well, it is a race, the heroine has to win, so the enemy must be nasty. On the other hand, does the heroine win? Well, it depends on what you mean by win. In fact, .... Well, if I tell you that, maybe it *will* spoil something.

Good reading, and hopefully good science (biologists will want to argue about it), and perhaps even something like what will eventually actually happen. Highly recommended.

## **Short Book Reviews, by Aharon Sheer**

*The Web Between the Worlds* by Charles Sheffield (1979, revised 2001), 337 pages.

Physicist author Sheffield (1935-) is chief scientist of the Earth Satellite Corporation, and as such is presumably quite up to date in what might be done to develop space travel in the solar system. The grand idea of the book is a space elevator, a gadget which will get us from the surface of the earth to geosynchronous earth orbit by riding up an elevator on a rather thick wire. From there we can get to the asteroids for mining purposes, for example. Strip mining asteroids is preferable to strip mining the earth, I suppose. The idea of a space elevator – a great way to cut the cost of getting people and products into space and back -- appears similar to Arthur C. Clarke’s *The Fountains of Paradise* (also 1979), but in this book the major interest is in how the thing will actually be built. That is, this is largely an engineering novel. However, Sheffield, as in his book *Cold as Ice* (1992), reviewed in *CyberCozen* in November 2000, has added some really weird characters. In addition to his hard driven engineer-inventor hero, Rob Merlin, he has an evil sadistic biologist conducting experiments by genetically engineering – and mistreating -- highly intelligent giant shrimp (or something). Another character is Darius Regulo, the insanely wealthy engineer businessman who is funding building the elevator. All of these characters are ambitious extremely

driven people for whom ordinary life as others live it is just not important. Underneath it all is a murder mystery. Sheffield's books are weird, and this is the weirdest I've read so far. If you are interested in the fantastic engineering aspects of building a space elevator, this book is recommended. Otherwise, I'm not so sure.

One little mistake that bothers me: Sheffield's hero Merlin has patented a wonderful new building device, which he calls **The Spider**, and one of the reasons he is hired is that nobody but him knows how this device works. I always thought the basic idea of a patent was "full disclosure". You tell people exactly how you do it, and then sell them rights to use your idea. So if Merlin patented it, you don't have to hire him to use his ideas, you just have to pay him if you use them. Businessman Regulo says to inventor Merlin, "You know, I noticed at once when you patented the Spider, three years ago. I thought it was just the thing we'd need if I ever got the chance to build [a space elevator]. We tried to duplicate the idea for ourselves thinking we might find a way around your patents once we understood the process. We never came close. ... It's one of my basic principles, hire anybody who does something that I can't." (p. 37) That just doesn't make sense to me. Any readers have an answer?

Amusing note: In Sheffield's appendix on the technical aspects of space elevators (which the author calls "beanstalks"), he says the following: "Kim Stanley Robinson included a Mars beanstalk in his Mars Trilogy *Red Mars*, *Green Mars*, *Blue Mars*. My only objection is that he destroyed the stalk cataclysmically in *Red Mars*, and in so doing obliterated the town of Sheffield that stood at its tether point." (p. 300). Good for Kim Stanley Robinson!

***O Pioneer!*** by Frederik Pohl (1998), 254 pages. Frederik Pohl is an old-timer in the sf field.

He's been writing since the 30s, and he's a real pro. Anything that he writes is likely to be enjoyable to read. Pohl's writing is often humorous, and this book is no exception. It's fun.

A new extra-solar planet has been opened up for earth colonization. The hero, Evesham Giyt, a successful computer hacker, moves there with his girlfriend. Earth has become so crowded that families live in retractable private rooms, "100 percent soundproofed... Kitchen and all conveniences nearby." (p. 7) So the chance to live in an almost uninhabited planet, with a whole house to a family, sounds good. The only problem is five extraterrestrial races already occupy the planet. In fact, the extraterrestrials call it "The Peace Planet" because it is a symbol of the abilities of the various races to live together in peace. The longer Giyt is on the planet, the more he likes the extraterrestrials, and the more suspicious he becomes of some of the humans running the place for the big earth corporation that is in charge of earth settlement there. Pohl's humor comes in full play, as the extraterrestrial are quite imaginatively portrayed and Giyt's innocent mistakes in dealing with them entertaining indeed.

This is far from being a great book. One gets the feeling that Pohl did it sort of automatically. He's so good at this kind of thing! Even at age 79. I wish I could write as well....

Note that Pohl's book *Gateway* (1977) is considered one of the best sf novels ever written.

**Other books by Pohl** that I have reviewed in *CyberCozen*:

***The Gateway Trip -- Tales and Vignettes of the Heechee*** (1990), reviewed in December 1993.

***The World at the End of Time*** (1990), reviewed in October 1997.

***The Cool War*** (1980), reviewed in February 1999.

***Jupiter Project*** by Gregory Benford (revised 1980), 182 pages. Benford wrote the following description of himself: "Benford is a professor of physics at the University of California, Irvine, where he has been a faculty member since 1971. He has published well over a hundred papers in the field of physics. Benford is the author of over a dozen novels, including *Jupiter Project*, *Artifact*, *Against Infinity*, *Great Sky River*, and *Timescape*...." (From ChiCon 2000 Programming Participants' Guide and Biographies)

Robert Heinlein isn't the only good sf hard writer who wrote juveniles (or "Young Adult" s it is euphemistically called today). Gregory Benford wrote this one, and it's pretty good. The seventeen-year old boy hero lives on a research station orbiting the planet Jupiter, in the same orbit as Jupiter's moon Ganymede. One of the station's objectives is to look for life in the atmosphere of Jupiter. But the station can't be too close, because of radiation danger. After ten years of looking, no life has been found, which makes future funding problematical. The politicians are pressing to use the money to help poor people on earth. The author has his young hero make comments like the following about that:

"The same logic would have kept Columbus at home until all of Europe's slums were emptied." (p. 133)

"Something has got to be wrong with a system that says Michelangelo shouldn't have taken money to do the Sistine Chapel as long as everybody wasn't eating prime beef." (p. 134)

The pressures of growing up in a relatively small community (several hundred people), in a potentially very hostile environment, are well described. Our young hero does work in which he risks his life by going outside the station. The risks may not be great if you are careful about what you do, but mistakes mean death. And accidents can happen too.

This is a more modern juvenile than Heinlein wrote in the 40s and 50s, so one of the subjects the boys discuss often is how to get laid. It's a lot harder than on earth, they think, where teenage boys get laid all the time (at least that's what the novels they read say). One of the boys says:

"I did a little researching, though, and turned up a study. *Sexual Suppression in closed Communities*, it was called. It turns out that in places like the Israeli kibbutzim, nobody gets laid either, unless they're married. There's a thing called 'outgroup bonding' that forms. Like an incest taboo, almost. You get to feeling you can't have sex or romance with a member of the group you grew up with." (p. 27)

I can't imagine such passages in a Heinlein juvenile – there the sex interest is all romantic! I enjoyed this book, which quite realistically done, and based on the latest (as of 1980) research on Jupiter and its moons. A fun way to learn some scientific facts, and find out what it's like to live in a closed community too.

***Citizen of the Galaxy* by Robert A. Heinlein (1957)**, 253 pages. Although the hero of this book is child at the start, and only 18 years old at the end, it's hard to call this a juvenile. The subject is too serious, and the outcome not at all what one would expect. A young boy slave named Thorby is bought by a beggar, the purchase partly funded by a wealthy man as a joke. All this takes place on a planet out of the way from the usual space lanes, where slavery is commonplace. But the beggar is not really a beggar, and he takes over Thorby's life, educates him, and makes a strong person of him. Before the beggar dies he gives Thorby a way to cash in some old debts, and the boy is able to get away from the planet and becomes a successful member of a space-travelling clan that call themselves the people. But he's not really happy. An anthropologist living on the ship and studying the People explains to him why:

"Thorby, you live in a steel prison; you are allowed out perhaps a few hours every few months. You live by rules more stringent than any prison. That those rules are intended to make you all happy -- and do -- is beside the point; they are orders you have to obey. You sleep where you are told, you eat when you are told and what you are offered – it's unimportant that it is lavish and tasty; the point is you have no choice. You are told what to do ninety percent of the time. ... Thorby, what sort of people have so little freedom? Slaves? Can you think of a better word? ... You slaves who call yourself the 'People' can't even hope for manumission." (p. 126)

(By the way, the description reminds me of kibbutz life as it was 30 years ago when I was on a kibbutz ulpan.) So Thorby has exchanged one kind of slavery for another.

Although Thorby manages to get out of ship life, he discovers that all of life is a kind of prison – even for the very wealthy. There are obligations that he has to take on, as burdensome as they are to him. No happy ending. This is one of the many very interesting Heinlein books, and I wonder if a teenager would like it.

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עורך גרפי ועיצוב: **אין**.

עיצוב לוגו: **מרים בן-לולו**.

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.

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

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