



Science-Fiction Fanzine

Vol. XIV, No. 12; December, 2002

The Israeli Society for Science Fiction and Fantasy

המפגש הבא בסיידרת ההרצאות ע"ש עמוס גפן יתקיים בבית-אריאלה, שד' שאול המלך 25, תל-אביב,

ביום רביעי 25.12.02, בשעה 20:00 - הכניסה חופשית

על הגבול הדק בין מציאות ודמיון

מסע הזוי למציאות בלתי אפשרית

מהי המציאות? האם מה שאנו רואים קיים במציאות האובייקטיבית? האם אפשר בכלל לסמוך על החושים שלנו? אלה הן שורה של שאלות בהן מתחבטים פילוסופים, סופרים ואנשי מדע לכל אורך ההסטוריה האנושית. בהרצאה ינתנו הגדרות שונות ומשונות של המציאות כמו גם דוגמאות למקרים "אמיתיים" בהן נראית המציאות לא יותר מאשר תוצר טהור של הדימיון האנושי.

המרצה: עמי בן-בסט

עמי בן בסט הוא סופר וכתב לענייני מדע וטכנולוגיה, ומכהן כמנהל פרויקטים, חבר מערכת וכתב מדעי של המגזין "מסע אחר". פרסם שורה ארוכה של מאמרים בנושאי מדע פופולרי בעיתונות הישראלית. ספרו האחרון (יחד עם פרופ' חגי נצר): "מסע אל התבונה", יצא בהוצאת ידיעות אחרונות לפני כשנתיים.

More information is available (in Hebrew) at the Society's site: <http://www.sf-f.org.il>

Best SF and Fantasy Books of 2001 - My Summary of LOCUS Poll

Three best SF novels:

Passage, Connie Willis

Shadow of the Hegemon, Orson Scott Card

The Chronoliths, Robert Charles Wilson

Three best Fantasy novels:

American Gods, Neil Gaiman

The Other Wind, Ursula K. LeGuin

The Curse of Chalion, Lois McMaster Bujold

Best Anthology:

The Year's Best Science Fiction: Eighteenth Annual Collection, Gardner Dozois, ed.

Best Collection:

Tales From Earthsea, Ursula K. LeGuin

Quote of the Month:

Ted Chiang is a young sf writer (born 1967) who has published only eight stories in twelve years, but his stories have received two Nebula awards, five Hugo award nominations, a Theodore Sturgeon Memorial Award, a Sidewise award and a LOCUS award. I thought his following comments very convincing:

"I think the idea of nanotech is fascinating, but I think some of its proponents seriously underestimate the difficulty of the problems involved. The one I always think of is self-replication. We've never come close to building a machine that's capable of building a duplicate of itself, even at full-size, let alone at microscopic scale. It's hard to find a set of machine tools that can be used to make another set of those exact same tools, even if you allow a human operator. And the more sophisticated the tools, the harder it becomes. Before long, you need most of an industrial civilization. A single machine that could reproduce itself would almost certainly be worse at doing other things, compared to machines that weren't meant to reproduce. Designing for self-replication will involve a lot of tradeoffs in performance."

Comments by Ted Chiang, from an interview in *LOCUS*, August 2002, p. 75

"Replying to an Invitation to the Scientists' Ball of 2002"

By Miriam Ben-Loulu

The **2001 Scientists' Ball** (reported in *CyberCozen*, July 2001) was so successful that it was decided to make it a yearly event. This reporter interviewed a number of the scientists to see whether they would be attending. Note that this year, in contrast to last, several **oceanographers** were also invited.

Matthew F. Maury said he would come, even though he might be out of his depth, because he was concerned about current trends.

Jacques Piccard sent his regrets – he was too deep in research at the time.

Walter Garstang complained that the invitations should have been written in verse. However, he offered to be in charge of the entertainment and said he would read selections from his popular book *Larval Forms and Other Zoological Verses*. The others agreed providing he did not include "The Onchosphere" ("He's now a *Cysticerus* in the muscles of a pig, With just a sporting chance of getting out to grow up big. If you'll consent to eat your pork half-raw or underdone, His troubles will be over, and a Tapeworm will have won....") which they felt might affect the digestion of the other scientists.

Jacques Cousteau felt a ball would be too noisy – he said he preferred *The Silent Sea*.

Robert W. Bunsen was burning to come.

Peter refused to come – just on principle.

The person who invented the wheel offered to help get things rolling, but preferred to remain anonymous to avoid being lynched by car drivers stuck in traffic jams, and drivers who had had flat tires in the middle of a desert.

The man who invented the periscope wanted to have a good look at the invitees before he decided.

Sir Frank Whittle and Hans von Ohain declined to come because they were suffering from jet lag.

Pasteur was rabid about the idea.

Pavlov was salivating at the thought of a second **Scientists' Ball**, but he wanted to know if he could bring his dogs.

Several scientists couldn't come because of poor health:

1) Sir Isaac Newton had a terrible headache and is quoted as saying, "That @#%**&!!!~#\$!!! apple was HARD!"

2) Antoni van Leeuwenhoek was suffering from eye strain.

3) Gregor Mendel was hospitalized due to a genetic disorder.

Benjamin Franklin was shocked at the suggestion that he leave his duties to attend the ball, and suggested that the organizers, "Go fly a kite!"

Darwin was unable to come because of injuries caused while observing British soccer matches as part of his work on "Survival of the Fittest".

Charles F. Richter said he was coming for the dancing – "Let's shake it up, baby."

This reporter was unable to interview other scientists as she quit her job when Tetsuya Theodore Fujita invited her to twist with him. He wanted to come pick her up in his new Tornado.

Star Trek Book Review by Gary Roth

Mutiny on the Enterprise by Robert E. Vardeman (1983), pp. 189

This book had its moments but never reached its potential, unfortunately. The Enterprise is ordered to transport three Starfleet diplomatic negotiators in order to quell a bitter dispute between two less advanced, yet strategically important civilizations -- one affiliated with the Federation, and the other with the Romulan Empire. All goes awry when the Enterprise beams a shipwrecked female alien aboard. She has special persuasive speaking powers (she learns languages in five minutes, too). The well-meaning Lorelei decides that the starship's arrival at the vicinity of the two rival planets will wreak havoc, rather than quieting the situation, and therefore embarks on a successful effort to convince most of the crew to mutiny against Captain Kirk.

While the plot, dialogue, narrative, and pace were quite good, the novel suffers from too many leaps of faith: two foreign diplomats are beamed aboard from different locations without coordinates; creatures without any hearing apparatus manage to fall under the spell of Lorelei's voice; an uncharted planet appears out of nowhere with desperately needed materials for the damaged ship's engines, etc. The author did a good job of maintaining the personalities of Kirk, Scotty, and Spock -- it would be nice to have done the same for McCoy, Uhura, Sulu, and Chekov.

Overall, this book was enjoyable to read, with some pleasant surprises and a predictable happy ending. Rating: B.

Two Reviews of the Movie: *Open Your Eyes [Abre Los Ojos]*

(1997), 117 minutes, in Spanish with English subtitles. Filmed in Madrid. Directed by Alejandro Amenábar, who also wrote the script (with Mateo Gil) and composed the music (with Mariano Marín).

Film Review: *Open Your Eyes [Abre Los Ojos]*

Reviewed by **Avi Chami**

A short story – and two film reviews...

Recently I was at Aharon's house and we saw *Abre los ojos [Open your eyes]* together, an excellent Spanish film. Before we saw it Aharon told me that it was like a Phillip Dick story – and I couldn't agree more. In the film, the boundaries between reality and dreams are completely erased.

What I liked about the film is that it was made simple and neat. You won't find magnificent special effects there, and yet it succeeds to keep you at high tension, and also succeeds to create a believable alternate reality.

The next day after seeing the film I came to my work place, and the first thing I did was to recommend it to the people in my room. We keep a list on the board with the films each one has seen recently and recommends.... (My list currently includes *Iron Giant*, *Galaxy Quest*, and *Abre los Ojos*). The list from one of my friends includes *Vanilla Sky*.... And guess what? (Well – many of you readers probably already know this): *Vanilla Sky* is the Hollywood remake of *Abre los Ojos* (actually – the female protagonist is the same actress, Penélope Cruz!).

This is one of the phenomena from Hollywood that I fail to understand: Why do they take contemporary movies (*Abre los Ojos* is from '97) and do them again with (mostly) American actors? – They did that with *Three men and a baby*, with countless other titles that I don't recall now, and by the way, they also did that to *Eskimo Limon* – Did you know there is an American remake of this Israeli classic? (Don't recall the name now – will send it if anybody is interested....)

Another one of the films in the list at work was *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon [Namer Drakon]* (2000), which was one of the films at **ICON 2002**, the Israeli Sci-Fi and Fantasy Con. So I went there with Aharon to see it. (See Aharon's review in *CyberCozen*, October 2002.) Although I agree it is a film that can barely be included in the fantasy category – I liked it very much. Usually I am not so impressed by films that are commented as "with excellent photography". I am more attracted by a good story line. But in this film the story line is compelling and the photography is simply gorgeous. Even the men (and women) flying in the film look almost natural. I am not a martial arts fan either, but I cannot less than warmly recommend this film.

Film Review: *Open Your Eyes (Abre Los Ojos)*

Reviewed by **Aharon Sheer**

Recommended by Steve Davis. This fascinating film seems to be a psychological thriller. Only near the end do we discover that it is a science fiction film as well. The hero, played by Eduardo Noriega, is a very good looking, sexually attractive, and wealthy young man. He is a wonderful flirt, who can get any girl he wants. But he is casually cruel – he tells his friends proudly that he has never slept with the same woman twice. He romances them, and then drops them, never feeling any regrets. But then he is involved in a serious auto accident, which leaves his face horribly disfigured. Although he can afford the best plastic surgery, he is lucky to have a functioning face, eyes that work, a mouth that can talk. Now he is repulsively ugly. How does this formerly magically attractive man deal with the distress and disgust that he sees on the faces of people he meets? How does he respond to seeing women turn away sick when they see his face? But as we watch this movie, curious things happen. Each day, it seems, he lives a somewhat different life. Is he dreaming? Which of these strange events

are actually happening to him? Part of the time he is in a mental institution, locked up forever for committing murder, and wearing a mask to hide his disfigured face. Other times he is wining and dining a beautiful woman (played by Penélope Cruz), with whom he has fallen in love, and his face has been fully repaired by a new technique in plastic surgery. Which is the reality? In this respect we are reminded of books by Philip K. Dick, in which the reader (and the book's characters) are constantly surprised by contradictory events. However, a reading of the director's description of how he planned the script indicates that the story is entirely his own – he does not mention having read anything by Philip K. Dick. Yet Philip K. Dick could have written this story, from beginning to end. This film is fascinating, puzzling, confusing. It is human and very well acted. Strongly recommended, but not for children.

The film was remade in Hollywood as *Vanilla Sky* (2001) with Tom Cruise playing the hero, and the same Penélope Cruz playing the girl friend.

Science Fiction and Fantasy in Israel at the Start of the 21st Century

By Eli Eshed -- Part 2.

Futurism, Prophecy, and Alternative Science

In Hebrew, as in many other languages, there is an enormous range of speculative futurism, pseudo-scientific, and "alternate science" literature, which in many cases are close to science fiction.

UFO Research

UFO research expanded in the 1990s as a result of a wave of reports of sighting of UFOs, and meetings with aliens. The result was the establishment of a society which researched UFO reports, published a periodical, and organized yearly conventions. The high point was a television show with an exceptionally high rating presented by well-known entertainer Dudu Topaz, which was based on the prediction of a "Communicant" that aliens are going to land here that night and present themselves to the public. Thousands went out to the streets to wait for the aliens who were supposed to land to the music of the television program *The X-Files*. Unfortunately, no aliens appeared. Interest in UFOs has fallen off since then.

Children's author Tamar Borenstein Lazar published a parody of the whole affair in one of the books of her *Kofiko* series, which was later made into a play.

UFO researcher Barry Chamish published an interesting book in English which surveyed the history of the phenomenon in Israel, *The Return of the Giants* (Blue Star Productions, 2000). Chamish is better known in Israel as a conspiracy theorist, especially for his contention that the murder of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin was organized by members of the government under the direction of Foreign Minister and sometime science fiction writer and futurist, Shimon Peres.

There are theories that the Old Testament contains the story of the landing of early alien visitors who created human beings. These theories have been very popular in Israel, and several science fiction books and short stories have been written around them.

An interesting book written from the point of view of a believer in these ideas summarizes the various theories. It is Uri Juda's *HaTanach HaAmiti [The True Bible]* (Gal 1999). In the same year Yehoshua Etzion published *Sefer HaK'fira [The Book of Heresy – An Interpretation of the Bible]* (Tag, 1999) on this same subject.

However, another book, which came out in parallel, represents the "other side", the skeptical side. This book presents an excellent, comprehensive summary of the negative scientific opinions with respect to the existence of life on other planets. It was written by well-known astronomer Hagai Netzer and popular science writer, Ami Ben-Bassat: *Masah el HaTvuna: HaHipus Ahar HaHaim ba'Yakum [Journey to Intelligence: The Search for Life in the Universe]* (Yediot Aharonot, 1999).

Recently the talented Moshe Yahalom, a writer of children's books, comics and popular science (who particularly likes to write about strange scientific phenomenon), published a book about UFOs. *Masah b'Ikvot HaAbamim [The Search for UFO's: In the Eye of Science]* (Hed Arzi, 2002) is a comprehensive survey from the skeptics' point of view, with particular emphasis on the Israeli aspects of this phenomenon. This is an expanded and updated version of a book which Yahalom published a few years ago.

Most UFO researchers in Israel simply report on events which they saw, or heard of here, or heard from reports abroad. The most important Israeli UFO researcher is Haim Mazar, who has published a series of important articles which analyze in a deep, original and serious way the possibility that we are indeed visited by aliens, using serious existing evidence. Unfortunately, Mr. Mazar's excellent articles have not yet been collected in a book.

Eli Eshed's series will be continued in following months.

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