



Science-Fiction Fanzine

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המפגש יתקיים בבית-אריאלה מרכז תרבות, שד' שאול המלך 25, תל-אביב, ביום רביעי 29.5.2002, בשעה 20:00 הכניסה חופשית

הנושא: מדדלוס ועד "אנטרפרייז" -- מסע אל חלליות העתיד במדע ובמדע בדיוני

ההרצאה תעסוק בחלליות שתוארו ביצירות המדע הבדיוני, החל מהמאה התשע עשרה ועד ימינו. ביניהן ספינות החלל של ז'ול ורן, פלאש גורדון, מסע בין כוכבים, מלחמת הכוכבים, אודיסיאה בחלל ועוד. כמו כן נעמת את התכנונים הבדיוניים עם עולם המציאות, ונצפה בתוכניות מעשיות של חלליות עתידיות.

המרצה, מר טל ענבר, הוא בעל תואר שני בלימודי ביטחון, אסטרונם חובב, ומומחה להיסטוריה של תוכניות החלל והשימושים הצבאיים של החלל. שימש כיועץ מדעי לתוכניות טלוויזיה שונות, פרסם מאמרים בכתבי עת, והוא מרצה אורח במסגרות שונות, בהן חיל האוויר והאגודה הישראלית לאסטרונמיה.

Book Reviews by Aharon Sheer

Time by Stephen Baxter (1999), 456 pages.

Recommended by Shmuel Kahn. I found this book very depressing. Here we have a great tale of a brave American entrepreneur trying to take the world back into space. Against enormous odds he builds a space ship for a visit to a passing asteroid, and goes there. So what's depressing? NASA and the whole of the American government are against him. They fight him tooth and nail, and when it seems that he has succeeded, they send a warship out to the asteroid to smash him. Except for this one swashbuckling hero and his friends, every decent, right-thinking hero in this book is against him. Baxter has one warm, fine hero, a woman who is a member of the U.S. House of Representatives, who carefully considers all sides of each decision, thoughtfully and intelligently, and then, in every case, makes a decision which Baxter obviously is trying to tell us is completely wrong. Baxter, born in 1957, is an Englishman, and clearly a left-winger, who was a teenager during the time of the Vietnam War, when every right-thinking European was opposed to American actions in Vietnam. Remember the Vietnamese town of Hue, which the Americans destroyed totally because it was taken over by the North Vietnamese enemy? Remember the American Army officer who so greatly said, "We had to destroy Hue in order to save it"? These are the kind of Americans who mean "America" to Baxter, and their every act in this book reminds me of the American destruction of Hue in order to "save it".

Baxter does not spare us his hatred of NASA either (although here I can only agree with him). Here is a cheery quote:

"NASA has kept complete control over space. But since 1970 NASA has produced paper, not spaceships. This was the agency, remember, which destroyed the Saturn V rather than allow it to launch cheap-and-cheerful Skylabs which would have threatened its bloated Space Station program.... NASA won its turf wars. We lost access to space." (p. 237)

Time is filled with speculations about the future of the universe. These are all based on the work of professional scientists, whose books and papers Baxter takes very seriously. [They are listed in a short "Afterword" at the end of the book.] The earth, he tells us, will self-destruct in about 200 years. The current foreknowledge of this disaster results in massive social upheavals, suicides, and economic failures. Our universe will die too, eventually, a thought which also contributes to worldwide depression. It is an obvious fact to me that mankind has been living with wars, famine, earthquakes, typhoons, volcanic explosions, etc., for as long as man has been on earth, yet people continue to carry out their daily lives without thinking too much about the long-term future. Yet Baxter wants us to believe that mankind will be so different from its present self that in ten or fifteen years the knowledge that the universe will eventually die (in a few hundred trillion years) will drive them nuts.

Baxter's view of human beings (especially of Americans) is so unrealistically negative that I found myself suicidal reading this book. If mankind is so awful, what's the point of anyone continuing to live? Yet the truth is, it's not that mankind is so awful. What's awful is the British! And further proof of that is the depressing book *Supertoys Last All Summer Long* by that British author Brian Aldiss, a book that I reviewed in *CyberCozen* March 2002.

This is a fascinating book, a page-turner. It contains many fabulous ideas. There is a visit

to a real asteroid. There are genetically engineered super-intelligent squid living in a water environment which is ideal for the accelerations of space travel. There are visits to other universes, and to alternate universes, and to the far future of our universe. There are messages from the future. There are super-intelligent children, as in Greg Bear's 1999 book *Darwin's Radio*, and, as in that book, the children are rounded up and put in camps in Iowa. But the overall orientation of this book is horrifying. Read it yourself, and see what you think

***Orbital Resonance* by John Barnes (1991), 218 pages.**

Recommended by Shmuel Kahn. In some ways this is a really stupid book. It could be called "Teenage Space Romance". It's got a lot of space sports in it. Of course I'm not interested in 1 g sports, so why should 0.05 g sports interest me? The teenage characters have spent their entire lives hypnotized. I wasn't at all clear how they get themselves un hypnotized. The characters in this book live (in 2025) on a captured asteroid which goes back and forth between the orbits of Earth and Mars, doing heavy industry for Earth.

Earth is a disaster world. Plagues (including a mutated form of AIDS) and ecological disasters have decimated its population and returned it to a Middle Ages society. No more tractors; farming is done with animals pulling plows. Although Earth now has a plentiful energy supply, there are few people left to build, distribute, and maintain tractors. Recreating technological society is just too hard, so Earth people find it easier to do things by hand.

Life on the asteroid is old Earth's replacement: hi-tech all the way. In this created world the children are astoundingly smart. They have been bred and engineered and programmed (hypnotized) by the adult society to live in a New World Order: one of extreme competition and extreme cooperation. Nothing like it has ever been seen in history, so the adults have had to make it all up as they go along. Did the Israeli kibbutzim make any mistakes in creating their

new society? Did these people make any mistakes? The difference is that this is all there is. Earth is finished; the future is this fabulous super space society.

All of this told by a brilliant 13-year-old girl, born and raised on the asteroid. She is worried about all the same kinds of things 13 year old girls are worried about in teenage romances today, plus a few new things that only hypnotized super-children need to worry about. (Of course at first they don't know they are hypnotized....) Let's face it, I couldn't put it down. It's fast paced, and filled with surprises. There are lots of highly technical space sports for those teenage readers who want to know what kind of games kids on asteroids will play in very low gravity – both physical games and teenage relationship games.

This is also a modern book. The "author" tells us about her sexual thoughts and activities at age twelve, and about those of her brother who was age fourteen. I mention these things because if you are thinking of giving this book to a 12 year old, remember that 1991 authors can't keep their hands off their private parts.

Do I recommend it? While I was reading it, I was hypnotized. But after recovering, I had second thoughts. However, there is no question that I will be reading other books by John Barnes (this was my first). Watch this fanzine.

***How do you go To the Bathroom in Space?* by William R. Pogue, Astronaut (1999), 223 pages, with some photographs.**

The author spent 84 continuous days in the NASA **Skylab space station** in 1973-74. In this book he tells about himself, about Skylab, and about living in microgravity in a space station for a long period of time (almost three months). The book is written in a question and answer format, based on numerous questions that he has been asked in the ensuing

years, mostly by children curious about the NASA space program. While the format of the book makes it particularly suitable for children and teenagers, adults can read it for pleasure too.

Here are some of the questions and answer that I found interesting:

Did you get homesick? The three astronauts were kept too busy to be homesick, but when there were hints toward the end of the mission that their stay in Skylab might be extended by two weeks, they reacted very negatively. They really wanted to see more than just two other faces. (p. 90)

What would you do if another guy went crazy? “This is not a silly question.... Isolation and confinement can cause severe mental stress in some people.... Our crew had talked with an individual who had witnessed one such derangement in an Arctic situation....” (p. 94)

Were you prepared to take care of medical problems? “We could cope with non-serious problems, but in the case of serious injury or illness, we would have given the person emergency treatment and returned to earth. ... For a Mars mission, it will be essential to have at least one physician with a backup (physician or paramedic); someone with dental training will also be needed.” (p. 97)

What color is the earth? What colors do you see? Most colors are brown or charcoal. Greens are usually dark. The ocean is usually dark blue, although sometimes marine organisms may make it green. Here and there are small spots of color. “The sands of the Sahara and Arabian deserts have the most beautiful colors on the face of the earth... varying shades of black, brown, tan, red maroon and orange. Much of the interior of Australia is a rusty-brown color that is uniform over wide areas. We found Australia very easy to recognize after a week in orbit and referred to it as the ‘red continent.’” (p. 108)

Did we really go to the moon? I’ve heard that space exploration is all a hoax and is staged out in the desert for television transmission. “Yes, we went to the moon.... A man I knew for many years went to his grave believing that I had never been in space. He must have believed I was part of this ‘hoax.’.... [People like this] are reminiscent of the Flat Earth Society in Britain that insist the earth is really flat and not a sphere.” (p. 124)

Did you have any difficulty in adjusting to gravity again? “We were able to walk but were a bit unsteady at first. I involuntarily turned to the right even though I was looking straight ahead and trying to walk straight. I also drove off the right shoulder of the road twice during my first week back. ... I was a bit upset because I didn’t understand what was happening, and after I drove off the road the second time, I was very careful. This ‘right turn’ tendency went away after the first week. I didn’t tell the doctors for fear that they might ground me or use me as a guinea pig for more medical test.” (p. 155) Good thing he wasn’t driving in England.

There is an **APPENDIX**, which among other things lists some of the curious physiological effects in space. One of the most interesting is “Inverse ‘deja vu’; surroundings appear unfamiliar when viewed from unusual perspective; immediately corrected by assuming a familiar body (head-eye) position relative to the physical environment (work area).” (p. 184) I think we are all familiar with this phenomenon when we look at someone’s face when it is upside down.

The book also has an **Index**, so it is easy to refind material that you have previously read.

Man Plus by Frederik Pohl (1976), 246 pages.

If you want to send a team of explorers to Mars, here is one way to do it. Remake one of the explorers so he can live and work on Mars outside of a space suit. Mechanize and modify his body so that he can stand the cold, and breathe the air, and get energy directly from cosmic rays. The rest of the team may have to be protected by space suits and dome environments, but this one man – “Man Plus” – will be the real explorer. All the rest are just there to help. Add to this some Frederik Pohl people games – the leader of the team is sleeping with the wife of “Man Plus” – and we get some nasty tricks played. This is a book about astronauts who are going to Mars. We

are told what kind of people astronauts really are, what their wives are like, what their bosses are like, what the U.S. President thinks about all this (the future of mankind depends on the success of this mission). What does Man Plus think about when he is on Mars? Does he like it? Has his rebuilding been a success? Does he feel he *belongs* on Mars? Will mankind be able to live like this on Mars? Will it want to? There are complications in this book too. There is an unlikely surprise at the end. I wish I could say that the book was convincing. It was not. The ending was really flat. Ah, well. Not Frederik Pohl at his best.

Quote of the Month:

“According to Hindu legend, the Earth rides on the back of four elephants, which ride on a turtle. But what supports the turtle? In Discworld, Great A’Tuin needs no support, swimming through the universe unperturbed by any thought about what holds it up. That’s magic in action: world-carrying turtles are *like that*. But according to the old lady who espoused the Hindu cosmology, and was asked the same question by a learned astronomer, there is a different answer: ‘It’s turtles all the way down!’” The image of an infinite pile of turtles is instantly ludicrous, and very few people find it a satisfying explanation. Indeed very few people find it a satisfying *kind* of

explanation, if only because it doesn’t explain what supports the infinite pile of turtles. However, most of us are quite content to explain the origins of time as ‘it’s always been there’. Seldom do we examine this statement closely enough to realize that what it really says is ‘It’s time all the way back.’ Now replace ‘time’ by ‘turtle’ and ‘back’ by ‘down’... Each instant of time is ‘supported’, that is, a causal consequence of, the previous instant of time. Fine, but that doesn’t explain why time exists. What caused that infinite expanse of time? What holds up the whole pile?”

From *The Science of Discworld* by Terry Pratchett, Ian Stewart and Jack Cohen, p. 52

Star Trek Book Review by Gary Roth

Star Trek: Invasion! First Strike by Diane Carey (1996), 289 pages.

This is a well-written, lengthy yet action-packed thriller that is apparently the first of a four-part series, which spans all four of the TV series’ crews (Enterprise = “1st Strike”; The Next Generation = “The Soldiers of Fear”; Deep Space 9 = “Time’s Enemy”; Voyager = “The Final Fury”). There were plenty of surprises and a few questions that went unanswered (why did Uhura suddenly disappear from the book, and how is it that McCoy was able to fill in at the communications console?). The narrative

depicts battles, and the reader is caught up in the moment from close-up range. With plenty of futuristic high-tech, and scientific food for thought, the writer also brings up amusing and entertaining items from our past -- Boston Celtics (Keltics, actually), Jerusalem and "Gehenna", etc. At the same time, however, a bit of fantasy is woven into the fabric of the story and, although I dislike witchcraft and demonry in sf novels, this was a nice added touch (not overkill). Final Grade: A.

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