



Science-Fiction Fanzine

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The Israeli Society for Science Fiction and Fantasy

ICON2003 the Israeli convention for sf, fantasy and role playing will take place **October 14-16 (Hol HaMoed Succot)**, at the **Cinemateque in Tel Aviv**.

Guest of Honor will be **sf and fantasy author Orson Scott Card**

(author of *Ender's Game*, etc.). **ICON** will provide opportunities to hear the author lecture and participate in panels, to meet personally with the author, and to have him sign books.

Although the Guest of Honor will be an American who does not speak Hebrew, nevertheless the Society site does not (at present) supply any information in English about **ICON2003**.

As befits a convention which will take place at the **Cinemateque** in Tel Aviv much of the activity will be showing new as well as classic old **sf and fantasy films**. Some of the new and or classic films will **NEVER** be shown or have **NEVER** been shown in normal movie theaters in Israel (Israeli movie distributors have no taste in sf or fantasy), so just for that alone it's worth coming to **ICON**.

In addition there will be a variety of **lectures** on sf and fantasy subjects, as well as continuous **role playing games**, both board and **LIVE**.

Several **Israeli sf/fantasy authors** will also be guests at **ICON**: **Gal Amir, Aviv Or, Alon Rosenblum, Eli Herstein, and Vered Tochterman**. Don't miss them!

ICON2003 information is available (in Hebrew) at the **ICON** site: <http://www.icon.org.il/>

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

שנה טובה ומבורכת – Happy New Year

Quote of the Month:

"Science fiction is one of those literatures that haven't had all that much respect, yet it has a strange staying power. I was looking at issues of *Galaxy* from the early '50s, and in virtually every issue there was a story (and certainly an author) that's still in print. In Martha Foley's Best of the Year anthologies [e.g., *THE BEST AMERICAN SHORT STORIES 1955*] from the same period, except for the occasional Thomas Pynchon or J.D. Salinger story, these names are gone and these stories are forgotten. But the 35 cent pulp magazines have enormous staying power. We've understandably tried to shed some of the crudeness and vulgarity that's associated with the field, but I think it's a mistake to do that by stepping away from the core science fiction thing. We have to refrain from the temptation of being embarrassed by what we are, because that's futile and artistically unrewarding and unproductive. Yeah, we're big, strange, gaudy, often vulgar, and colorful – let's embrace that!"

Sf author Robert Charles Wilson, in an interview in *LOCUS*, April 2003.

Film Review by Yechiel Adar: *Terminator III* (2003), 108 minutes.

I saw all three *Terminator* films. The first one was great. The terminator idea was new and the action was great. The second one was also great - the new innovations in the robot were fantastic and the fight between the old model and the new was very good. In this latest film the new robot was technically inferior to the one in *Terminator II*. Sure, she has some built in weapon systems but she lacked the ability to reconstruct herself or flow around obstacles. The old robot really looks OLD. The plot is the same with the added twist that it explains how the war really started and how come Connor was the head of the resistance. The special effects are great. I give it 7 on a scale of 10. (Rated R for strong sci-fi violence and action, and for language and brief nudity.)

Film Review by Aharon Sheer: *Donnie Darko* (2001), 113 minutes

This is a teen sf fantasy cult movie. The director and script-writer, Richard Kelly, went to a Christian high school in suburban Virginia, and this film takes place in a Christian high school in suburban Virginia in 1988 (and includes a lot of popular music from that period). It seems likely that first-time director Kelly took the chance to get back at some of the bad things that went on in his high school. So we have a scene with two boys sniffing cocaine as they stand by their locker in the school hall during a break, and the high school principal goes by, sees them, and hasn't a clue as to what they are doing. The hero, 16-year old Donnie Darko, played by 20-year old Jake Gyllenhaal (pronounced Jill-en-hall), is twice threatened by a knife-wielding fellow student – but he will never report their terrifying actions to the authorities. One of the teachers persuades the school to introduce a moral program into the curriculum which contends that there are only two emotions: fear and love. According to this program, all bad things happen because of fear, and all good things happen because of love, and any action can be ranked on a linear scale going from fear to love, and anybody can learn to convert fear to love. When Donnie objects to this gross oversimplification of life, he is given a zero for the day by his teacher. Pupils in the school insult, ridicule, and physically and psychologically mistreat their fellow students – especially those who are somewhat different from the others – on a regular basis. All these events come from Richard Kelly's personal high school experiences. So that is the teen side of the movie, which will speak to anyone who ever went to high school, even in Israel.

The sf / fantasy side is weird. The boy hero has psychological problems, and

is being treated by a psychiatrist (because he recently burned down an abandoned house). The therapist treats him using both drugs and hypnotherapy. Donnie tells his therapist that he sees a giant rabbit that gives him advice, and has even saved his life. The therapist diagnoses him as having “daytime hallucinations”, and says that he is a “paranoid schizophrenic”. The viewer knows that Donnie is in fact really seeing the giant rabbit, although it turns out that the “rabbit” is actually Donnie's older sister's boy friend Frank, dressed up in a costume. Frank miraculously appeared to Donnie one night and saved his life by persuading Donnie to leave his house in the middle of the night, after which an airplane engine falls from the sky and destroys Donnie's bedroom. Had Donnie been in bed he would have been killed. From then on Donnie feels obligated to do whatever Frank tells him to do – and Frank has him doing weird things, including breaking a water main in his own school, causing a flood that closes the school down. Frank tells Donnie that in 28 days the world is going to come to an end. And Frank tells Donnie that he is a time traveler who knows what is going to happen. So Donnie is in a very frightening situation. To complicate matters, Donnie talks to his high school physics teacher who assures him that, theoretically, time travel is really possible (through wormholes), and refers him to Hawking's *A Brief History of Time*. In addition, it seems that a very old retired teacher from his school once wrote a book called *The Philosophy of Time Travel* (which Donnie reads), which describes visions that time travelers have, and Donnie in fact has been having experiences exactly like those visions. Donnie has seen this old senile ex-teacher, and she even speaks to him once, and

terrifies him with what she says to him.

This movie is fascinating, very strange, with a plot which (like most time travel paradox stories) is difficult to understand, and even more difficult to accept. (For example, where does the falling airplane engine come from? The Federal Aviation Administration – the FAA --does not know.) The DVD has commentary by the director who tries to explain some of the supernatural events of the movie, but it doesn't make the story more likely. In my opinion this is a movie worth seeing more than once, especially if you are interested in sf, fantasy, psychology or teenage high school life. (Yes, there is a love affair – and note that the film is “R” rated for “Language, Some Drug Use, and Violence”, but not sex – all they do is kiss, but Donnie can dream.) Jake's portrayal of a mixed-up high school boy is superb. Jake, by the way is son of Naomi Foner, a Hollywood

producer-writer, and with a name like that she is probably Jewish, making Jake Jewish too (halachically). Why else would his full name be Jacob Benjamin Gyllenhaal? His father is director Stephen Gyllenhaal (of Swedish descent). And Jake's older sister Maggie is also an actor, and she plays Jake's older sister in this movie. Several other excellent actors also appear in this movie, which was a flop financially but has become a cult movie.

(Donnie Darko Star Jake

Gyllenhaal was also the hero of the 1999 movie *October Sky* about a high school boy who persuades his friends to start building rockets after seeing the Russian Sputnik fly over his coal mining town in the mountains. The 1998 book *October Sky* on which that movie was based was reviewed in *CyberCozen* in November 2000.)

Star Trek Book Reviews by Gary Roth

Uhura's Song by Janet Kagan (1985), pp. 373

This is a totally different type of *Star Trek* story -- no enemies, except for a deadly, contagious disease that has affected an entire planet of intelligent cat-like beings, and can potentially spread elsewhere. The book begins with Starfleet medical personnel assisting the local feline hospital -- and then finding out that humans contract the illness as well. A medical starship arrives to help with research and quarantine, and to supply the *Enterprise* with an extra doctor to replace Leonard McCoy, who was in the thick of the search for a way to slow down the progress of the virus, if not to cure it.

Uhura holds the key to finding out more about the epidemic; she is a friend of one of the cats, who taught her secret folk songs containing feline history. The *Enterprise* crew rushes many light-years away to another planet with cat beings, from which her friend's ancestors had been exiled centuries before. Kirk, Spock, Uhura, Chekov, and the aforementioned doctor-on-

loan beam down in an attempt to coax some clues out of the local inhabitants, only to find that they are reluctant to even bring up the subject. Meanwhile, the locals are friendly enough to invite the newcomers to stay a few days, during which the various cultures are explained to one another. Many pages were devoted to describing foliage, tent-like building techniques, hunting strategies, cat personalities, and the relationship between Spock and the doctor, who is a feisty, talented, intelligent, and unpredictable lady. Eventually, after more than a week, a number of events lead to a cure and the epidemic is conquered, despite unbelievable odds from the outset. The style of the narrative is somewhat laidback, informal, and breezy, with numerous light, brief episodes of humor.

What bothered me most was the disturbing manner in which the lady physician rushes off Kirk's starship to take up a new assignment -- it leaves even Spock with more questions than answers. There was no need

for such an unexpected series of occurrences, and leaves the reader dissatisfied after enduring so much page turning and ink. This book would have been better suited for *The*

Next Generation officers -- not my type of sci-fi.

Rating: B- to C+.

Star Trek: The Next Generation - Perchance to Dream by Howard Weinstein (1991), 239 pages.

What a good book to read! This is not a story that would be made into a movie, but definitely something well-written, in a style that is light and moving, with a few brain teasers yet nothing too deep. I'm not a big fan of *TNG*; however, this novel kept me interested and entertained with its emphasis on dialogue, character interaction, frequent changes of scenery and focus, and unique presentation of aliens.

Wesley Crusher and 2 other young Academy candidates go on a geologic survey of a class M planet with Data and Troi on a shuttlecraft. All goes well until they attempt to rendezvous with the Enterprise -- a foreign spaceship traps them in a tractor beam and threatens to destroy the small crew. Just as Picard was about to negotiate for their release, the shuttlecraft disappears. Soon thereafter, the respective captains of the two spaceships find themselves suddenly transported to the planet's surface. It turns out that Crusher and company were transported to an underground cave inside the planet by an alien who appears only as a sparkle of light, and cannot communicate in any form known to man. The same well-meaning being arranged the new venue for the captains because it sensed danger.

The sparkling alien attempts to communicate by means of visual auras, and has the power to reshape a countryside, mountain range, etc. It has an argument with its fellow beings about the existence of other life forms outside of the planet, and must prove that the Starfleet personnel are real beings or else the humans would be destroyed. It manages to intermingle with Data and, well, you must read the book for the outcome!

Whorf, Riker, Dr. Crusher, the Ten Forward lady servant, Geordi, and others appear in useful roles during the story. The narrative switches back and forth between thoughts going through the teenagers' heads, as well as those in command. The reader learns a lot about the history of the foreigners who "attacked" the shuttlecraft, and pities the female commander and her aging crew with their overcrowded, dilapidated ship. Further, one gains insight into rearing a child on a spaceship, how former alcoholics continue to battle their former habits in outer space, how to fish and light a fire on an unfamiliar world without any tools, and other peculiarities.

Rating: A- to B+ .

Short Book Review by Aharon Sheer:

The Science of Discworld by Terry Pratchett, Ian Stewart and Jack Cohen (1999), 368 pages (with an index).

I expected this book to be what the title suggests: a discussion of the science of Discworld, Terry Pratchett's imaginary flat world, where water falls off the sides of the disk, and which rests on the back of a turtle. For example, on Discworld the speed of light is about the same as the speed of sound, so you wouldn't see lightning flash first and then hear the thunder later. I would expect that this fact about light on Discworld might have major effects on physics (you know, $E = mc^2$ where c is the speed of light?). But in fact the authors assure us that this has no effect at all.

"Discworld does not run on scientific lines. Why pretend that it might? Dragons don't breathe fire because they've got asbestos lungs – they breathe fire because everybody knows that's what dragons *do*." (p. 10)

So what they discuss is science on Roundworld – that's Earth. Sounds turtley to me.

Basically this is a book of popular science, which presents a five billion year tale of the earth from its formation to the present, with particular emphasis on the development of life. What especially interests the authors is how life forms have developed, and then died out, and then new life forms have developed, and died out, up to the present. They contend that within a *relatively* short time human beings (and their companions) presently on earth will also die out. These popular science legends are interspersed with short chapters that take place in Discworld. Part of the connection between the science chapters and the Discworld story chapters is that Discworld wizards have created a universe, which is (really) ours. In this new little created universe time runs a lot faster than in Discworld, so it's possible to follow the entire creation of our world in a few Discworld weeks. Furthermore, since size is relative, the newly created universe (ours), when you are in it, is quite large – but from a Discworld wizard's point of view, looking from outside, it's what? – half a meter in diameter? All this conceit gives the authors, **mathematician** Ian Stewart and **biologist** Jack Cohen (who are also the authors of the wonderful popular science book, *The Collapse of Chaos* (1994)), together with **humorist** writer Terry Pratchett, the opportunity to prove that there is no God, to explain how the galaxies developed, how life came about, why religion is utter nonsense, etc.

Here is a Quote from *The Science of Discworld*:

“In Brazil the rainforests of the Amazon are being destroyed at an alarming rate by bulldozing and burning. There are many excellent reasons to prevent this continuing – loss of habitat for organisms, production of carbon dioxide from burning trees, destruction of the culture of native Indian tribes, and so on. What is *not* a good reason, though, is the phrase that is almost inevitably trotted out, to the effect that the rainforests are ‘the lungs of the planet’. The image here is that the ‘civilized’ regions – that is, the industrialized ones – are net producers of carbon dioxide. The pristine rainforest, in contrast, produces a gentle, but enormous oxygen breeze, while absorbing the excess carbon dioxide produced by all those nasty people with cars. It *must* do, surely? A forest is full of plants, and plants produce oxygen.

“No, they don't. The net oxygen production of a rainforest is, on average, zero. Trees produce carbon dioxide at night, when they are not photosynthesizing. They lock up oxygen and carbon into sugars, yes – but when they die, they rot, and release carbon dioxide....

“If you want to reduce atmospheric carbon dioxide *permanently*, and not to just cut short-term emissions, the best bet is to build up a big library at home, locking carbon dioxide into paper, or put plenty of asphalt on roads. These don't sound like ‘green’ activities, but they are. You can cycle on the roads if it makes you feel better.”

From *The Science of Discworld* by Terry Pratchett, Ian Stewart and Jack Cohen, p. 153-154

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