



Science-Fiction Fanzine

Vol. XVI, No. 11; November, 2004

The Israeli Society for Science Fiction and Fantasy

הרצאת גפן: "זרעים של היינליין"

המפגש הבא בסדרת הרצאות גפן, ובו ירצה גל חיימוביץ, יתקיים ב-24.11, בשעה 20:00, בבית אריאלה שבשד' שאול המלך 25, ת"א. ההרצאה תתאר את ספרו הראשון והלא-מוכר של היינליין, אשר כתב-היד שלו התגלה רק לפני כשנה, ותראה כיצד ספר זה שופך אור חדש על יצירתו של אחד מחשובי סופרי המדע הבדיוני במאה העשרים. לפרטים נוספים על ההרצאה: http://www.sf-f.org.il/story_674

The first Gefen lecture this year will take place on 24/11, 20:00 at Beit Ariela, Shaul Ha'Melech Blvd 25, Tel-Aviv.

The lecture by Gal Haimovich (in Hebrew) will describe **Heinlein's** first novel, ***For Us, the Living***, which was discovered only last year. We will discuss how this book sheds light on Heinlein's later works.

For further details see http://www.sf-f.org.il/story_674

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

Reminder:

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Just send an email to asheer@netvision.net.il, or send a note to POB 84, Rehovot 76308, and I'll be *delighted* to remove your name from my list.

Aharon

Letters to the Editor

I would like to turn your attention to the new site of the **Israeli Space Society**

<http://www.space.org.il/>

Regards, **Amnon Stupp**

Aharon,

A short story of **Vernor Vinge** was published in July's issue of IEEE Spectrum, available on line at: <http://www.spectrum.ieee.org/WEBONLY/publicfeature/jul04/0704far.html>

Regards, **Edward Beili**

Short Book Review by Aharon Sheer

Imperial Earth by Arthur C. Clarke (1976), 272 pages.

I bought this one at Icon2004. I hadn't read a book by Arthur C. Clarke for years. I think the last one I read (2061) was awful, and I hadn't read anything since. Reading this book reminded me that Clarke has a sly sense of humor, and a remarkable ability to describe future technological developments. In this book, for example, the hero, Duncan Makenzie, has a Palm Pilot, and logs on every day to read his email. He even gets junk mail, including an ad for genuine Persian carpets, and several very explicit messages from Sex Clubs. He is hooked up to a larger nearby computer via ultraviolet communication. And Clarke wrote this in 1976! Of course he doesn't call it "Palm Pilot", nor does he call it "log on" or "email" or "junk mail". But the ideas are there! Clarke says, "The home communications console – or Comsole --- had reached its technological plateau in the early twenty-first century, and Duncan was prepared to bet that there were units on Earth that had given continuous service for over two hundred years." (p. 97) No more planned obsolescence either.

The story takes place in 2276, and Clarke assumes (as did we all in those days) that mankind is going to have major colonies on the Moon and Mars. However, Clarke writes,

“[By 1976] the first men had already reached the Moon, using techniques which today seem unbelievably primitive. Although all historians now agree that the Apollo Project marked the United States' supreme achievement, and its greatest moment of triumph, it was inspired by political motives that seem ludicrous – indeed, incomprehensible – to our modern minds. And it is no reflection on those first engineers and astronauts that their brilliant pioneering effort was a technological dead end, and that serious space travel did not begin for several decades, with much more advanced vehicles and propulsion systems.

“A century later, in 2076, all the tools needed to open up the planets were ready to hand.” p. 258

Let's hope that Clarke was right, and that we'll really start colonizing the other planets by 2076.

Duncan lives on Titan, a moon of Saturn, which justifies itself economically by selling atmospheric hydrogen to the Earth. The hydrogen is used to drive interplanetary space ships. Clarke attempts to write the novel as if the reader is reading it in about 2276. So he tells us about one group of young college students from Earth visiting Titan who did not follow the rules. “[The group] was very lucky, and suffered no more than a few searing whiffs of ammonia. Damage was so slight that the foolish adventurers required only routine lung transplants, but after this exploit there was no more serious trouble.” (p. 41) Clarke's concession to the fact that the reader is actually in the 20th century and not in the 23rd is the use of the word “routine”, which to a 23rd century reader would be unnecessary.

Besides technology, Clarke also attempts to describe what seems to be his idea of a future utopia. Earth has a low population, like a garden planet. Extensive areas have returned to nature. There are parks everywhere. (Although people do live in apartment buildings, many of them are underground with synthetic scenery seen through synthetic windows.) Food is no longer grown by agriculture, nor is meat eaten. Instead, all food is synthesized, and is, of course, delicious and healthy. All vehicle transportation is

computer controlled, so there are no automobile accidents. However, many people like to bicycle, and regrettably in this matter people still do sometimes run into one another – the bicycle has not been computerized. Religions still exist for those few that want them, but they have little relevance in most people’s lives. Clarke’s future is secular. Wars of course no longer occur, although there are still secret services whose job is to insure that this will always be the case.

Clarke describes one aspect of the social atmosphere of this future Earth:

“A world which had put a premium on tolerance and security and safe, well-organized excitement ... had no place for zealots. Though enthusiasm was not actually illegal, it was in somewhat bad taste; one should not take one’s hobbies and recreations too seriously.” p. 162

In his future, most people are a light brown in color as a result of racial intermixing. Duncan is exceptional in being quite black. “He was several shades darker than [his host], descendant of African kings.” (p. 96) And of course the U.S. President is a woman.

Another future aspect is population control. On Earth the population has been dramatically cut back. War and famine did it originally (at the end of the 20th century), but now zero population growth is voluntarily accepted by everyone on Earth. Population growth has stopped completely. “Thus the supposedly unshockable Terrans were genuinely horrified at encountering families [on Titan] with three – and even four! – children on Titan. The twentieth century’s millions of skeleton babies still haunted the conscience of the world.” But Titan’s population was still low. “Titan *really* needed to double its population every fifty years.” (p. 43)

Another major social change Clarke seems to favor is in the direction of sexual freedom. In this future world, in a normal sexual encounter, one has anywhere from one to five partners, of both sexes. When Duncan is 16 his twenty-one year old male friend Karl invites him to share his 21 year old girl friend in three way sex – “there were even times when [Karl] had scared Duncan into something approaching impotence. And to do *that* to a virile sixteen-year-old was no mean feat.” (p. 46) But don’t get me wrong. This is not a sex book, and there is no explicit sex. Everything is hinted at – there are few details. Nor is it a book about teenagers – the hero’s childhood is only discussed in the first few chapters.

But here is an exceptional passage, which shows that even in this future, not everything is acceptable:

“[Duncan] had just remembered – for the first time in years – a boy who had fallen in love with him in his late teens. It is hard to reject anyone who is devoted to you, but although Duncan had good-naturedly succumbed a few times to Nikki’s blandishments, he had eventually managed to discourage his admirer, despite torrents of tears. Pity is not a good basis for any relationship, and Duncan could never feel quite happy with someone whose affections were exclusively polarized toward one sex.” p. 189

As in almost everything else in this book, one has the strong feeling that the described future Earth is what Clarke really sees as Utopia – in almost every respect.

One thing is special about Duncan. His father is infertile. And so is his grandfather. So Duncan is something really rare in this future world. He is a clone of his father, who is a clone of *his* father. (One would think that this future world had solved

problems of infertility, but apparently in this case, no.) "...the silly question that laymen so often asked, and to which [Duncan] had long ago formulated an automatic reply: 'Of course I've got a navel – the best that money can buy.' The other common myth – that male clones must be abnormally virile 'because they had one father *twice*' – he had wisely left unchallenged. It had been useful to him on several occasions." (p. 85) So this provides part of the rationale for most of the book. Duncan goes back to Earth not only to participate in the fifth Centennial of the founding of the United States [1776 – 2276], but also to be cloned. It is important to be cloned on Earth, because only a person born on Earth can ever visit Earth, because of Earth's high gravity (five times that of Titan). People born on Titan must live all their lives on Titan; their bodies, even when they are young, cannot adapt to Earth gravity.

Duncan's dual-purpose visit to Earth constitutes the main portion of this book, allowing Clarke to have fun with a visitor from another world coming to see the Earth of the 23rd century. For example, after his first encounter with a horse, Duncan is able to say, "I've just met my first Monster from Outer Space. Thank God it was friendly." (p. 109)

All in all, not a great book, but one with some good humor and a jaundiced eye on our present world. Still, like the future Earth described, much of it is rather boring.

Quote of the Month:

[About a visit to the age of the dinosaurs...]

"'You've been interfering again, haven't you?' Ridcully went on. 'I saw you pushing some of the small lizards out of that tree.'

"'Well, you've got to admit that they *look* a bit like birds,' said the Dean.

"'And did they learn to fly?'

"'Not in so many words, no. Not horizontally.'

"'Eat, fight, mate and die,' said the Lecturer in Recent Runes. '... When they come to write the history of this world, this is the page everyone will skip. Terribly dull lizards, they'll be called. You mark my words.'"

From *The Science of Discworld* by Terry Pratchett, Ian Stewart and Jack Cohen, p. 261

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כל הזכויות שמורות למחברים וליוצרים, כפי שצוינו.

Still Another Short Book Review by Aharon Sheer

The War of the Worlds by H. G. Wells (1898), 180 pages.

Essayist Peter De Vries once wrote a book called *No, But I Read the Book*. We literary sf types often read an sf book, then when the movie comes out, wonder whether it's worth bothering to go and see the movie version. Indeed, most movie versions of good books are nowhere near as good as the book. The few good exceptions are usually radically different from the original novel. For example, *Blade Runner* is about one third based on about one third of Philip K. Dick's book *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep*, and its best parts have nothing to do with the book. So we often just avoid going to see the movie. That was my policy for dozens of years. If I hadn't become an sf movie buff in the last few years, I would never have bothered to see the 1953 movie *The War of the Worlds*. But that movie is really exceptional for me, because, in fact, until recently, *I had never read the book!* But, yes, I saw the movie (on video), and more than once. What I did not like about the movie was that the aliens were invincible. There was nothing that earth people could do to hurt them, not even dropping an atomic bomb on them. Every attack on the aliens in the movie failed. How depressing! Who wants to see a movie in which mankind has no hope, and nothing it can do will help. And in this respect (surprise!), the book is better. For in the book, the aliens go through a learning process. The 1890s Britishers do not have atomic bombs, but they do have guns and cannon. The alien Martians have heat rays, which are extremely dangerous. The aliens also soon build 30 meter tall metal walking tripods, controlled by a Martian sitting in the head, and ravage the countryside. But the earth people can hide cannon behind a hillock, and shoot and damage those giant robots. They do so, and kill a Martian (inside the 30 meter-tall metal walker). The Martians are NOT invincible! There is hope! The Martians have to come up with a solution, and they do: a ground-hugging poison gas which rapidly spreads over hill and field, and instantly kills gun crews on contact, thus eliminating the threat of damage from gunners. The Martians can be damaged, at first, but soon they learn to protect themselves. The movie would have been better if it had preserved this characteristic. Let the Martians be damaged by the first atomic bomb strike. But then have them develop a defense, or a counter-attack, which lets them survive. If you wanted make a movie of this book, you could follow the time of the book, and place the story in the 1890s. This is what was done in the movie versions of Well's book *The Time Machine* (1895). Both the 1960s movie version and the quite-good 2002 version of *The Time Machine* did that (that is, at the start of the movie, before the hero travels to the far future, the story takes place in the 1890s). So the film version of *The War of the Worlds* could have used the human technology of the 1890s, and followed the book precisely. If you want to bring it up to present time (as the 1953 film of the *The War of the Worlds* did), you have to preserve your viewers' hopes, as Wells did at the start of his book. Let them see that the Martians can be hurt. And then let them see how the Martians learn to defend themselves. Well, it is a deservedly good book, much better than the movie. And at last I can say, "I read the book!"