



Science-Fiction Fanzine

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The Israeli Society for Science Fiction and Fantasy

סדרת הרצאות בכפר ורדים

האגודה, בשיתוף ספריית כפר ורדים, שמחה להודיע על סדרה של שלוש הרצאות שתתקיימנה בימי חמישי בשעה 20:30, החל מה-4.11.04, בספריית כפר ורדים. מחיר ההשתתפות בסדרה – 120 ₪. להרשמה ולפרטים נוספים ניתן לפנות לספריית כפר ורדים בטל' 04-9972662 או להגית לב בכתובת levh@bgu.ac.il.

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

The 2004 Hugo Award Winners

- Best Novel - *Paladin of Souls* by **Lois McMaster Bujold**
- Best Novella - "The Cookie Monster" by **Vernor Vinge**
- Best Novelette - "Legions in Time" by **Michael Swanwick**
- Best Short Story - "A Study in Emerald" by **Neil Gaiman**

Icon 2004 – The Annual Convention of the Israeli Society for sf and Fantasy, plus Starbase 972 (the Star Trek fans), plus the Israeli Role Playing Association

-- a personal impression

By Amnon Stupp

Icon 2004, 3-5 October, during Succot was, in my view, very successful. **Icon** (<http://www.icon.org.il/>) is organized by the **Israeli Society for sf and Fantasy** (<http://www.sf-f.org.il/>), **Starbase972** (the **Star Trek** fans) (<http://www.starbase972.com/>), and the **Israeli Role Playing Association** (<http://roleplay.org.il/>). It takes place every year at the Tel-Aviv Cinemateque (<http://www.cinema.co.il/>) and the neighboring Eshkol-Pais building.

Icon this year even included sleeping arrangements. These, however, were only suitable for people prepared to spend the night in a sleeping bag on the floor of a school classroom, sharing the floor with many others.

I managed to point out some interesting talks to Aharon Sheer, so that he attended even though he was working. I hope he isn't sorry. (Ed. Note: He's not.)

I did have the impression there were more people on the 1st day, but I don't know what the ticket sales were so this doesn't mean much.

The **used book stalls** organized by the S.F. Association were split in two this year: A large stall for books only, and a separate location for merchandize, comics, DVDs, etc. My impression was that this was a success. Anyway, most of my books were sold. Of course, there were also stalls by booksellers, in Hebrew by **Opus** and **Odyssey** (www.odyssey4you.co.il), and in English. There were **comics** by **Comikasa** (http://www.comikaza.co.il), **Comics and Vegetables** (http://www.cnv.co.il), and others.

The event I enjoyed most was the question and answer session with **Guest of Honor Guy Gavriel Kay** (<http://www.brightweavings.com/>), one of 3 speaking events he participated in.

A young fellow asked a question close enough to what I wanted to ask that Kay gave the answer I was interested in. Kay said that most people who write historical fantasy, or historical fiction, agree it is impossible for us to really see the world through the eyes of people in the past. He also said that if we could somehow reproduce the worldview of, let's say, 12th century French peasants, the modern reader couldn't identify, and therefore the book would not be readable.

I enjoyed the Physics and Time Travel talk by Prof. Kirsch less, but perhaps because I already knew most all of what he said. Going by some questions in the audience Prof. Kirsch's talk was an eye opener to some in the audience. It also says something about Science Education in Israel when one questioner was so amazed to learn it would take 8 minutes for us to know if the Sun were to suddenly disappear.

Outside, at the square in front of the Cinemateque, the large fighting arena was also a success. The fights included staged fights by the Israeli role-playing association, and I believe I saw a Kendo demonstration. The stand around the arena seemed to be full, specifically with young females, to the delight of the young males showing their prowess in the arena.

Visiting Icon was a positive experience. I was happy to see how the Science Fiction community is growing in numbers, and apparently also financial influence. It was especially enjoyable to see all the young people at Icon. I am only sorry there were no such events when I was their age.

Book Review by Aharon Sheer

Chindi by Jack McDevitt (2002), 511 pages. *Chindi* was a 2003 Nebula Award Nominee. It is the third book in the four-novel cycle that began with *The Engines of God* (1994) and continued through *Deepsix* (2001), *Chindi* (2002) and ends with *Omega* (2003, not yet out in paperback).

The books of this four-novel cycle are all Priscilla "Hutch" Hutchins novels; that is, the heroine is tough but cautious starship pilot "Hutch" Hutchins. What is the "chindi" of the title? According to McDevitt the word is from a "Navajo taboo": "Do not use driftwood to make a fire because it may have been cast on the waters by a chindi, who will then track you by its light."

I'm very fond of Jack McDevitt's books. He writes space opera with interesting characters, and a strong turn for alien archeology. In this series, mankind has developed faster-than-light travel and has been spreading out into space. Some people hope to meet intelligent alien species with an advanced technology. But it seems that while such alien societies have appeared several times in the past, they died out for unknown reasons. So what mankind has found are sophisticated archeological ruins, but only the most primitive of intelligent beings (the Noks).

In this book Hutch has been sent out with a ship funded by the Contact Society, who are willing to spend a lot of money in the hopes of finding a currently existing advanced intelligent species. The reason for this trip is the discovery of a neutron star with what appears to be active communications equipment orbiting it. How old is this equipment? Do its makers still exist, or have they disappeared? The problem with the Contact Society is that they are not professionals in any way. They have no archeologists, no linguists, no scientists, and no anthropologists. One of them is the owner of a mortuary. Another is an actress and director. Another is an artist (who at least can paint pictures of the things they find.) Yet these are the people with the money who want to make first contact – if there is anything to contact. Here is a description of George, the leader of the Contact Society:

"Where he came from, nothing was impossible. It was a matter of will and ingenuity. There was no such thing as being unable to accomplish a specific task. George liked Hutch, but she gave up too easily. She'd never have made it, he knew, in the business world." p. 280-281.

Poor Hutch is a very cautious person. Because of that she is a good starship pilot, and because of that she has survived some very difficult starship situations in the past. But George, the head of the Contact Society who is funding this trip, is fearless. He's willing to go into anything. And Hutch is responsible for what happens.

A couple of examples: They decide to take apart a piece of active, working, communications equipment in order to take it back to earth for study. The only one who has doubts about this is Hutch's spaceship's artificial intelligence (AI), known as Bill. Bill is a simulated, highly intelligent (but not humanly intelligent – that could not be possible, could it?), and very knowledgeable AI, who can control all actions of the ship and its lander when asked to do so. So we get the following conversation between Bill and Hutch:

"'Are you sure you want to do this,' Bill asked.

"A red flag went up. 'What's your reservation, Bill?'

“‘Each change you make degrades the signal. We removed one unit from Point B. And parts of another. Now we propose to remove another one here. Whoever is on the receiving end of the transmission may resent what we are doing.’

“‘Whoever’s on the receiving end isn’t going to know about it for a long time.’

“‘*Then let me try it another way: Isn’t there an ethical issue involved?*’

“‘No, there’s no ethical issue. We lost people. We’re perfectly justified in doing what’s necessary to find out what happened. Anyway, they’re a thousand years old. Or more.’

“‘*But they’re working artifacts, Hutch. And I hope you won’t object if I point out that a thousand years is only relatively a long time.*’

“‘I’ll tell you what, Bill. We’ll get one for Kurt, which I have to do because I promised it, and that’s it. We won’t touch any more after this one. Okay?’

“The AI was silent.” p. 199-2000.

So Bill says that it isn’t right to take apart functioning equipment. Is that fair? he asks. Well, he’s just a machine, so naturally he’s concerned about machines. But human beings want to study this equipment. Well, says Bill, maybe the owners will be upset by this vandalistic act? But the humans do it anyway, with unpleasant consequences.

And another example of this is the first discovery of what appear to be an intelligent bird-like species on a planet. They build houses (but no roads – they don’t need them). They wear clothes and speak what seems to be a language. And they are beautiful - they look like angels from Christian mythology. The members of the Contact Society are not willing to wait until some real contact experts come. They want the glory of being the first. So they land their lander on the planet, come out and greet the natives. And the natives surround them, attack them, try to take control of the lander, and succeed in killing two of the Contact Society member. “Barbarians!” say the Contact Society members. “Monsters!” None of them propose a single reason why these obviously intelligent beings attacked them for no apparent reason. Well, I can think of one reason why these bird people might have attacked. Suppose – just speculation – this planet is visited from time to time by alien hunters, who love to swoop down and shoot bird people for sport. And the bird people see a chance to get back at them – maybe even take over their lander. Smart? But the characters in this Contact Society cannot even imagine a possible legitimate reason for the unprovoked attack.

The novel has repeated instances of fools with money rushing into very dangerous and exciting situations. As we read on, we say, “not again!” But, yes, again. The thing is that McDevitt’s characters are people with prejudices and emotions, people who do things out of pride or maybe out of spite. McDevitt’s characters are the kind of people we meet every day in ordinary life. They are very different from Heinlein’s or Niven’s highly intelligent, deeply logical superheroes. No wonder some people call McDevitt’s style “humane science fiction”.

Chindi creates a sense of wonder. I kept continuously interested in what the intrepid explorers would find next, and yes they find wonderful things. McDevitt describes the scenery and the situations with enthusiasm, and we feel the enthusiasm of the members of the Contact Society as we go with them from place to place. And what star systems they discover! And what archeology they discover! And what active artifacts! I enjoyed every minute (almost).

Ed. Note: Jack McDevitt is one of my favorite authors. We've reviewed a number of his books in *CyberCozen*. Gal Haimovich reviewed *Ancient Shores* (1996) and *The Engines of God* (1994) in Hebrew in October 1998. I reviewed *The Engines of God* and *Eternity Road* (1997) in December 1998, and *Ancient Shores* in December 1999. Avi Chami reviewed *The Engines of God* in January 1999. I reviewed *A Talent for War* (1989) and *MOONFALL* (1998) in December 2001, *Slow Lightning* (published in the U.S. as *Infinity Beach*) (2000) in April 2002, and *Deepsix* (2001) in June 2002.

Quote of the Month:

“... I met John McGrath, an arm amputee who telephoned me after he had seen a television news story on phantom limbs. An accomplished amateur athlete, John had lost his left arm just below the elbow three years earlier. ‘When I play tennis,’ he said, my phantom will do what it’s supposed to do. It’ll want to throw the ball up when I serve or it will try to give me balance in a hard shot. It’s always trying to grab the phone. It even waves for the check in restaurants,’ he said with a laugh.

“John had what is known as a telescoped phantom hand. It felt as if it were attached directly to his stump with no arm in between. However, if an object such as a teacup were placed a foot or two away from the stump, he could try to reach for it. When he did this, his phantom no longer remained attached to the stump but felt as if it were zooming out to grab the cup.

“On a whim I started thinking, What if I ask John to reach out and grab this cup but pull it away from him before he ‘touches’ it with his phantom? ...

“I placed a coffee cup in front of John and asked him to grab it. Just as he said he was reaching out, I yanked away the cup.

“‘Ow!’ he yelled. “‘Don’t do that!’

“‘What’s the matter?’

“‘Don’t do that,’ he repeated. ‘I had just got my fingers around the cup handle when you pulled it. That really hurts!’

“Hold on a minute. I wrench a real cup from phantom fingers and the person yells, ouch! The fingers were illusory, of course, but the pain was real – indeed so intense that I dared not repeat the experiment.”

From *Phantoms in the Brain* (1998) by V.S. Ramachandran and Sandra Blakeslee, p. 42-43

For Comments: POB 84, Rehovot 76108. Email: asheer@netvision.net.il. Tel: Aharon Sheer 08-947-1225

Editor: Aharon Sheer. Logo by: Miriam Ben-Loulu

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