



Science-Fiction Fanzine

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נושא הכנס, אשר נערך השנה ע"י האגודה בשיתוף עם מועדון סטארבייס 972, שגרירות סאנידייל בישראל ועמותת טולקין הישראלית ובחסות כתב העת "גלייאר", הוא "מיתולוגיה". הכנס השנה גדול מתמיד, והתוכנייה שלו כוללת עשרות הרצאות; מגוון פרקים של סדרות טלוויזיה כגון *מסע בין כוכבים*, *באפי*, *בבילון 5*; הקרנות סרטים ועוד.

אתם מוזמנים לבקר באתר הכנס (<http://come.to/olamot>).

כמו בכל כנס, גם הפעם עיקר המלאכה תבוצע על ידי מתנדבים אשר יתפעלו את הקופות והדוכנים השונים, יעזרו במלאכת הקמת הכנס ופירוקו, ויתפסו שלל עמדות מפתח. כמובן שכל המתנדבים יתוגמלו בכרטיסים לארועים השונים. אנו קוראים לכל המעוניינים להתנדב בכנס, להכנס למדור המתאים באתר הכנס ולהרשם למערכת מתנדבים.נסי!

חוג מדע בדיוני ברחובות – SFIR - Rehovot Science Fiction Club

פעילויות התא מתקיימות בימי א' בשעה 20:00 בפקולטה לחקלאות ברחובות, חדר 2, בבניין ליד הבריכה. הפעילויות ללא תשלום.

17.4, 24.4 – חופשת פסח, אין פעילות

מידע נוסף ניתן לקבל באתר התא (<http://sfir.tk/>) או בדוא"ל sfir42@yahoo.com.

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

פסח כשר ושמח ! A Happy and Kosher Pesah

Book review by Aharon Sheer

Manifold: Origin by Stephen Baxter (2002), 518 pages.

This is the third of three parallel near future (about 2015) novels with the same main characters: Reid Malenfant and his girl friend Emma Stoney. The previous two were *Manifold: Time* (reviewed in *CyberCozen* in May 2002, where it is simply called *Time*), and *Manifold: Space* (reviewed in *CyberCozen* in March 2004, where it is called *Space – Manifold 2*). Except for the common characters, and the interest in NASA and the space program (Baxter has some very negative views of NASA), the three books are completely different. This book is, in a way, about human evolution, and it's no doubt important that Baxter has another book called *Evolution* (2002, which I have not read), which is no doubt connected in content to this one.

The great start-up trick in this book is the replacement of our familiar moon with a new one, much larger, and with life on it. The result of replacing our little dead moon with a bigger live one is, among other things, massive destruction on the earth, where new and much larger tides wipe out all coastal areas all over the world, including eliminating all of the Japanese in Japan. Since it's obvious this moon's replacing ours could not have happened by accident, this seems to be an answer to the Fermi Paradox: "If the aliens existed, they would be here." Presumably, aliens did it. One thing that gets washed-out NASA astronaut Reid Malenfant upset about is that at the same time as the moon appeared, a big blue circle appeared in the sky, dumping living creatures out into

the air, and picking up Malenfant's wife Emma Stoney, who has bailed out of Malenfant's plane – the bailout necessitated by the turbulence caused by the big blue circle. The blue circle has presumably transported Emma to the new moon, and Reid succeeds in persuading NASA and the U.S. government to send him and a smart Japanese scientist to the new moon to see if he can find his wife – a very romantic appeal to the public and hence to the people who control the money.

On this new live moon we have a tremendous weird story. It seems that the moon not only has life, it has proto-humans such as Australopithecus, Homo erectus, and Neanderthals, and others that I can't identify, as well as beings who are Homo sapiens (that's us). Gradually it appears that there are numerous parallel earths (more different from one another than Baxter's parallel futures in this series) and this moon has been picking up living creatures by going from earth to earth and sending out its blue circle. As a result, several different kinds of proto-men and early men have been picked up from various versions of Earth in which evolution worked at a different rate, and forced to live and survive together on this jaunting moon.

And now poor Emma (and much later on Reid, who joins her) has to learn how to survive in a world where there are several stages between apes and men, all living together. Baxter is very inventive in this, describing in detail the daily lives of each of these primitive human pre-cursors (as well as real humans from alternative Earths). Much of this is interesting speculation based on primate studies.

In one area Baxter probably strays from accepted science in that all his proto-humans can talk. (And they talk English, having been taught English by a group of tailed almost-“Homo Sapiens” who have been on the moon for a very long time.) I always thought that it was accepted that Neanderthals do not have a mouth throat structure that would enable them to speak. Baxter has all of them speaking, at different levels, from the lowest level of the Australopithecines who use isolated words, to the Neanderthals who can converse ad nauseum about who is having sex with whom, but have not developed any music or art or song of any kind.

Of Homo Erectus (whom he calls “Runners”), he says, “They didn't even have language; their verbless chatter conveyed basic emotions – anger, fear, demands – but little information. They only ‘talked’ anyhow in social encounters, mating or grooming or fighting, never when they were working, making tools or hunting or even eating.” (p. 112)

And the Runners stay away from the forest where the Australopithecines (which he calls “Elf-Folk”) live. They are only three feet high, with faces like apes, but they walk upright and have feet like humans. The Elf-Folk have captured a Runner child.

“They had the Runner child spread-eagled against a bare patch of ground. His eyes were wide and staring. Elf teeth closed on the boy's upper thigh, and came away bloody, huge ape lips wrapped around a handful of meat.

“The boy thrashed. Emma saw how his eyes turned white. And he screamed, and screamed, and screamed.

“After that – as Emma watched, frozen in place by her fear of detection – the boy was steadily dismembered: the drinking of blood, the biting-off of genitals, the startlingly efficient twisting-off of an arm. And through all of this the boy was still alive, still screaming.

“...They had pulled open the boy’s rib cage, and the child gave a final, exhausted moan as his heart was torn out.” (p. 176-177)

In case you think this is excessively brutal, remember that Judaism forbids eating meat directly from living animals, and this presumably because people in this area of the world still did that when the Torah was written. And human sacrifice (including dismembering living humans) was common among the Aztecs when Cortez conquered the land of Mexico from the local natives, and forbade such practices.

As for the Neanderthals, Baxter says,

“They were humans of a sort, but humans who made a living about the hardest way she could imagine. Their favorite hunting technique, for example, even for the largest prey, was to wrestle it to the ground. It was like living with a troupe of rodeo riders.

“But they cared for their children, and for their ill and elderly.

“And they spoke English...” (p. 200)

Baxter’s ill natured attitude toward human beings is illustrated by the following quote comparing Neanderthals with *Homo sapiens sapiens* (that’s us). A group of Neanderthals have found a good place on this new moon. Baxter has Emma say:

“The [Neanderthals] worked hard, of course. But it struck her how happy they all seemed – or if not that, content. Evidently the game was bountiful here, the living easy; all these guys had to do was sit around and wait for the meat to come wandering past, season after season. They even had fresh running water, day and night, right outside the cave. She remembered fantasies as a child of finding Candyland, where all the trees were chocolate and the streams lemonade, where you didn’t have to work for anything, where you could take as much as you liked, just by reaching out. Was the way these people lived so different from that?

“But what would humans do, she mused, if they stumbled on a situation like this?

“Well, they wouldn’t be satisfied with the generosity of Candyland. They’d breed until the caves were overflowing. The hunters would start ranging farther until all the animals in the area were eaten or driven away. Then agriculture would start, with everybody forced to bend their bodies to back-breaking toil, day after day. As the population exploded the forests would be cut back, the animals decimated.

“Then would come the famines and the wars.

“So much for Candyland. Maybe these [Neanderthals] weren’t just as smart as humans, she mused; maybe they were actually smarter.” (p. 451-452)

And so much for all of civilization, literature, and science. It seems that Candyland would be preferable, in Baxter’s eyes.

Well, there are many other things on this moon, including highly intelligent beings descended from Australopithecines, from another alternate Earth, bigger than humans, and who look like giant apes but are far faster-thinking than *Homo Sapiens*. And it is by our Earth’s humans working together with these strange parallel Earth super-humans that the mystery of this travelling moon will have to be solved.

An interesting book, but often not at all pleasant to read – like many of Baxter’s recent books.

Book review by **Lavie Tidhar**

The Human Front by Ken Macleod (2001), 107 pages. Introduction by Iain M. Banks. PS Publishing 2001.

The jury is still out on Ken Macleod. He is a serious writer, tackling serious issues – the interplay of society and technology, the future of political systems, the different flavors of libertarianism and socialism and capitalism. Yet at the full-length of a novel it often feels as if story turns to didacticism, the plot becomes a lecture, and from the cheap seats at the back the reader’s mind, sometimes, wanders off. Yet Macleod manages to write convincing, often compelling tales which, as Iain Banks points out in his introduction, are both contemporary and futuristic. He is equally at home in the 1970s political radicalism of Scottish university students as he is in far-future, exotic environments, where human and machine merge and aliens roam.

The Human Front was a delightful surprise. Macleod excels himself at novella-length, writing one of the most-enjoyable tales so far from that stable of excellence, PS Publishing. For once un-didactic, sometimes light-hearted, but with the issues important to him still very much on the surface.

“Like most people of my generation, I remember exactly where I was on March 17, 1963, the day Stalin died.” From that very first sentence, we are inexorably drawn into a parallel time-line, similar yet different to our own. Macleod expertly sows those vital differences into a story that we feel is of our time, so that they shock us all the

more when discovered. It is the story of that changed world, and of a young man named John Matheson who, as a child, experiences something strange when a disc-shaped bomber crash-lands near his home....

Yes – those strange flying saucers are back, and they’re not mutilating cows! I was very surprised to find myself comparing this to an earlier PS title, *The Vaccinator* by Michael Marshall Smith. Two very different authors both take on the pulp conventions of today’s alien-mania, only to subvert those conventions, and eventually give meaning to the collective unconscious that gave rise to them.

Matheson, it should be noted, is not the most sympathetic character (he grows up to become a guerrilla fighter who may mourn the loss of his men, yet has no compunction about killing “enemies of the cause”, as it were) yet he is believable, and, eventually, we begin to recognize ourselves in him.

To give away any more would be, simply, a sin. It’s a fantastic read from the first line to the last, engaging and exciting – and like all of Macleod’s work, thought-provoking. This is worth trying to get hold of – there was a signed and limited edition from PS Publishing that sold out from the publisher (but could be found at ABE), and a reprint Gollancz paperback is still available from Amazon UK.

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Book review by **Eitan Chaimovich**

By the Light of the Moon by Dean Koontz (2003)

The story begins as a thriller when Dylan O'Conner and Jillian Jackson are overpowered by a stranger who injects them with an unknown substance later named simply as 'Stuff'. The stranger told Dylan that he was injecting him with his life's work, it was impossible to say what it would do exactly and that the stuff was 'Psychotropic'. Shortly after the injection and before leaving, the stranger warned Dylan and Jilly that people would be looking for them real soon and that they should run away, if they want to stay alive, before the 'bad guys' force everybody in the area to take blood tests. Not taking any chances, Dylan, Jilly and Shepherd, Dylan's younger autistic brother, start their escape on a hot Arizona night. As they drive out of their hotel they witness the stranger's death in a car explosion, which makes them much more eager to flee.

Now that they are on the road, the golden stuff that was circulating in their blood starts its affect on both Dylan and Jilly. Soon Jilly begins to 'see' things that may or may not be connected to their future. Dylan also gets some kind of sensations that makes him compelled to

cross some roads he normally dares not cross. And as the night passes they begin to learn about their new 'skills'.

Dean Koontz did a wonderful job shifting the story step by step from a 'mere thriller' story to a sf story. In particular I enjoyed the shift when Dylan and Jilly discover that Shep was also injected with the 'Stuff' and that his new ability was opening gateways, 'here there' as he calls it.

Most of the fun I had reading the book was from all the action that suddenly fell out of the sky on the heads of Dylan and Jilly, and the twists in the plot, so I will not to tell everything that happened during their escape. The sf aspect in the book, another thing that I liked, was not obvious from the start, but fear not 'cause Dean Koontz thought about it thoroughly, to my content. The end of the book was also very satisfying and did not leave me with open questions but with wishes for my own injection. I will not reveal the sf idea behind the 'Stuff', 'cause it might ruin the fun of the book, so I guess my bottom line is this: just go and read it yourselves, it's worth it.

Quote of the Month:

“Modern experimental science really began with Galileo. It astonishes me when I sometimes hear developmental psychologists assert that babies are ‘born scientists,’ because it is perfectly clear to me that even *adults* are not. If the experimental method is completely natural to the human mind – as they assert – why did we have to wait so many thousands of years for Galileo and the birth of the experimental method? Every one believed that big, heavy objects fall much faster than light ones, and all it took was a five-minute experiment to disprove it. (In fact, the experimental method is so alien to the human mind that many of Galileo’s colleagues dismissed his experiments on falling bodies even after seeing them with their own eyes!) And even to this day, three hundred years after the scientific revolution began, people have great difficulty in understanding the need for a ‘control experiment’ or ‘double-blind’ studies. (A common fallacy is, I got better after I took pill A, therefore I got better because I took pill A.)”

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