



Science-Fiction Fanzine

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### The Israeli Society for Science Fiction and Fantasy

אגודה הישראלית למדע בדיוני ולפנטסיה, בשיתוף עם בית אריאלה מרכז תרבות, שמחה להזמין למפגש הבא בסדרת ההרצאות ע"ש עמוס גפן. המפגש יתקיים בבית-אריאלה מרכז תרבות, שד' שאול המלך 25, תל-אביב, ביום רביעי 23.2.2005 בשעה 20:00 הכניסה חופשית

### נושא ההרצאה: המראה, הטבעת ורציף תשע ושלושה רבעים

מה הם מאפייניה של ספרות המעבר הפנטסטית, זו המעבירה גיבורים מעולמנו שלנו אל עולמות קסומים ומקבילים? כיצד השתנה תת-ז'אנר זה מאז ימיה של אליס? האם העולמות הקסומים התקרבו אלינו או שמא אנחנו התקרבו אליהם? מדוע קל יותר להגיע אליהם היום מבעבר וכיצד משתנה הגיאוגרפיה המכושפת של עולמנו

**המרצה: נועה מנהיים** - עד לאחרונה הייתה נועה מנהיים מבקרת ספרות בעיתון "ידיעות אחרונות". כיום היא עורכת ספרות מקור בהוצאת כנרת, זמורה-ביתן, דביר ומנהלת את פורום המד"ב הפנטסיה של YNET.

### חוג מדע בדיוני ברחובות – SFIR - Rehovot Science Fiction Club

פעילויות התא מתקיימות בימי א' בשעה 20:00 בפקולטה לחקלאות ברחובות, בניין בוטניקה, חדר 104. מידע נוסף ניתן לקבל באתר התא ( <http://sfir.tk/> ) או בדוא"ל [sfir42@yahoo.com](mailto:sfir42@yahoo.com).  
דוגמאות של פעילויות:

20.02.05 - פרקים נבחרים של Futurama.

27.02.05 - סרט: חולית (דייוויד לינץ').

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

## Commentary: Invented Names

By Miriam Ben-Loulu

Lately I have been re-reading one of the *Lensmen* series books, by E.E. "Doc" Smith. The book was written 55 years ago, and I first read it some fifty years ago. It has reminded me of something I have noticed in many books of science fiction and fantasy, and to some extent in TV or movie versions. Writers tend to mix their own innovations with whatever is popular at the time. This is true of many aspects of the story but does not interfere because it concerns usually unimportant details.

Take clothes, for example. Most fantasy books tend to mix various historic periods and invent the names of furs and sometimes of cloth. Science-fiction books tend to use modern clothes with invented methods of fastening them, and invented types of cloth. On TV the fashion of unisex clothes is now prevalent, but I remember that in the *Buck Rogers* series in the 1950's the villainess wore a long black sequined, form fitting gown. Their space ship must not have had any ladders because she certainly couldn't have gone up, much less down, a ladder with that dress! One of the most interesting

series, so far as clothes go, is Poul Anderson's *Polesotechnic League* books, with his main character usually in a sarong.

One thing I find does bother me is the futuristic detective or business man wearing a tie. Why men should feel a need to put something constricting around their necks I have no idea. But most periods of history have had something – a ruffle, a cravat, a bow tie, a neck tie – but the long straight tie used today is relatively recent and one would think that a science fiction writer could come up with something more creative for the future.

Then there is nature. Both fantasy and science-fiction books tend to put in common animals and add some exotics to them with explanations like the fact that the place was ages and ages ago colonized by people from earth who added their own animals to the existing ones. This is not very convincing because one would think that over those ages mutations would have changed the earth animals. Some don't even bother with explanations. But even more than animals is what happens with plant life. Trees especially tend to have the names of common species on earth. A tree usually has an invented name only if the author uses it to provide something for his characters, like a fruit, or shelter for tree dwellers.

And plant life leads us to food. Food is a very interesting subject because some characters never eat, and others spend a great deal of time in eating. Fruit, meat, and vegetable names are often invented, along with their special characteristics, like color and taste. Milk products tend to remain milk and cheese, but I don't remember ice-cream being included! But drinks are another matter. Alcoholic and juice drinks are usually inventive. Carbonated drinks are almost non-existent. However, the books seem to split between letting their characters drink tea and coffee, and insisting on their drinking substitutes with similar names, like "kaf". Very few books have other types of drinks without some sort of tea or coffee mentioned.

One of the things found in a great number of science-fiction books is the common cigarette. This is especially true of books written before the connection of smoking with cancer was so publicized. The funny thing is that cigarettes, cigars, and pipes remain pretty much as they are today in most books. One of the classic authors did have a story where the cigarette lit itself when waved in the air. Imagine a person talking while making gestures with his hands. As his hand with an unlit cigarette passes under your nose the cigarette end suddenly flares up! But at least it made it more suitable for a story about the future. E.E. "Doc" Smith's characters, by the way, enjoy smoking cigarettes which don't seem to have changed in any way from the time in which he wrote (I doubt that they even have filters).

Then there are the technological details. One interesting observation is that in the days when many of the classic science fiction stories were written the gasoline stations were far apart and a young man wanting some time alone with his girlfriend would pretend to have "run out of gas". But in the science fiction stories of the same time, while space ships once in a while ran out of fuel, you never read of a young man trying to explain to his girlfriend that they stopped in the middle of nowhere because "We've run out of fuel." On the other hand some things seem determined to reflect the time when they were written.

The *Lensmen* series was written in the days when a computer took up a huge room and cost so much that only institutes of higher education and the government could

afford them. Naturally the characters in the *Lensmen* books do not pull out their pocket calculators to help them figure the mathematical solution to a problem.... They pull out their trusty "slip stick", the then popular name for a slide rule. When I was in high school we used slide rules in chemistry lessons. I once showed mine to my kids and they were shocked. One wonders how many modern readers have to go to the dictionary to find out what kind of rule can be pulled out of a pocket, not to mention readers whose native language is *not* English!

Most of today's stories have some form of computer, and one wonders, considering how much computers have changed in my lifetime, why the authors should expect the computers of the future to be so very much like the PCs of today. It is true that a few have attempted to make changes here and there, but generally speaking the authors don't seem to be able to invent differences on this as easily as they do on methods of transportation. One would think that at least they would have smell transmitted since that has already actually been done, from what I've seen on TV. Another similar problem is some sort of telephone. Some have visual as well as audio features, but basically a phone is a phone. TV has been more successful with a great many variations, and I hope to live long enough to be able to see some of those actually exist!

My last comment is concerning take off of space craft. In the *Lensmen* books, and on the old *Buck Rogers* series, when a space ship took off the countdown went: 10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1.... BLAST OFF!!!! (Always shouted!) When the first actual space craft went up, someone apparently felt too self conscious to say this, and the count down ended with a very quiet and unemotional "lift off." Modern books seem to prefer a lift off to a blast off. And more and more the countdown is omitted. But why haven't the authors come up with some more original method of verbally sending the craft off into the heavens?

In fantasy books these details are sometimes what make the difference between a story that can seem real and one that seems like a series of action shots. In science-fiction, these details are what can date a book. The more details from the author's own time are considered as basic (like the slide rule), the more the story dates as real life technology rushes ahead with innovations. Peculiarly enough, this "dating" can actually make it more fun to read.

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כל הזכויות שמורות למחברים וליוצרים, כפי שצוינו.

## Short Book Review by Aharon Sheer

*For Love and Glory* by Poul Anderson (2003), 293 pages. Poul Anderson passed away in 2001, so this was published posthumously. Regular readers of *CyberCozen* know that I am fond of Poul's work. Many of his books are light and pleasant reading, with some conventional ideas just well done. And a few are based on a really exceptional idea, extremely well done.

This book is in the former class: a pleasure to read which leaves you with a good feeling when you are done. One of the nice things about Poul's work is that it is scientifically sound. Poul enjoyed planet-building (see my review of Poul's *The Man Who Counts* in the September 2004 *CyberCozen*) and there is some of that here too. Poul liked the original *Star Trek* series (he was one of those who fought to keep it on the air when the studio wanted to discontinue it after the first year). This novel has a *Star Trek* characteristic in that several alien races work together with Earth people to explore new worlds. The difference here being that the aliens behave somewhat more alienly than do the aliens in *Star Trek*, and the worlds visited are more scientifically sensible than many in the *Star Trek* series. (Need I remind you of the episode from the first year of the *Star Trek "Enterprise"* series recently shown on Israeli TV – for the second time – in which they landed a lander on a small comet, 10 km in diameter, and one of the characters fell down into a three meter deep crevasse, injuring himself badly from the fall at – what? – 0.0001G? You won't find such nonsense in a Poul Anderson novel.)

There are several curious aspects to this novel, which takes place perhaps nine hundred years in our future. Earth has sent out into space numerous travelers, who have settled on numerous planets. So humans are still the adventurous risk-taking people they always were, looking for new challenges.

But on Earth itself, things have changed completely. Earth people have developed some kind of over-mind, some kind of subtle but unclear way in which people are able to gather together the power of many minds in order to solve problems never understood before. For example, two centuries ago, Earth put up a strange object in the asteroid belt. Questions from outsiders (whether human or alien) about this object receive a strange reply. As one character explains:

“This was an instrumentality for fundamental research. That alone had, at first, been startling enough. Weren't the basic equations of physics written down several hundred years ago? Well, maybe there really was more to be discovered. Unfortunately, ... the principles behind this thing were not explainable, in any meaningful sense of the word, to any organic brain – including unreinforced Earth-human – or any artificial intelligence developed on any other planet.” (p. 40)

Another human visitor to Earth from a distant planet tells us about this future Earth:

“The human population of Earth is down to only about 50 million....

“Consciousness on Earth – human, parahuman, quantum-net – is not joined in one entity. Relationships are more subtle and changeable than that....

“Earth poses no threat to us. The life on it, including the synthetic and machine life, has passed us by. It has other interests than spreading out into a material universe....” (p. 43-45)

So Earth is not a major player in the adventures of this novel. It's just there in the background. Visiting Earth is something that few humans do these days. The planet is mostly like an enormous wilderness nature reserve, and there are plenty of nature reserves on other planets. Humans have at least learned to be careful ecologically, wherever they have settled.

Another important background item in this novel is rejuvenation. Humans are rejuvenated from time to time, restoring their youth. One of the heroes, Torsten Hebo, was born in Denmark on Earth almost a thousand years before. While Denmark is mostly just an unpopulated land covered by beech forests at the time of this novel, Hebo is an interstellar adventurer and traveler, who makes his living trying to do new things. (His side-kick, by the way, is a kind of fierce feline alien.) One of the problems with rejuvenation: there is a limit to how much a person can remember. Each time you rejuvenate, you have to give up some of your memories. You decide, and they are stored offline, to be examined at leisure. But these memories are no longer active in your brain. You have to voluntarily put aside whole areas of your past, to make room for new experiences. Another aspect of longevity is how you deal with the survivors of your past. For example, Hebo says that by chance he met his 400 year old son by his first wife, but "they discovered they had practically nothing to say to one another." And very few marriages ever last more than two or three cycles of rejuvenation. "Maybe nothing human could be forever."

One of the major scientific events of this novel is two black holes on a collision course. While all races, human or otherwise, would find this event of interest, one race has discovered that this is to take place, and hope that they will learn new facts of physics which might enable them to develop new weapons, more powerful than those of other races. But humans find out about it, and come to observe too. So we have a double conflict: Can the observers observe these great forces, and survive to report what they have discovered? Can the two races do this without shooting each other out of space?

Both the scientific speculation and the emotional conflict are well-done. At least – not being a physicist – so it seems to me. This is one of the major events of the book, and the general scientific discussion goes on for pages. It would be interesting to hear what a physicist thinks about it.

Another aspect of this novel are the "Forerunners", an unknown and perhaps no longer existing ancient interstellar race, which has left highly technologically advanced artifacts scattered around to be occasionally found, and that provide hints of how to improve current human and alien technology, and tantalizing insights into what these unknown beings may have been. No one knows if any Forerunners still exist. Perhaps they have taken the same path as people on Earth have taken.

None of the ideas in *For Love and Glory* are new, but all of them are done in an intelligent fashion. Pleasant reading.

[NOTE: The following information was provided by Daniel Klein: On the surface of a ball – for example, an ice **comet** -- with the density of water and a 5 km radius; gravitational acceleration would be "a":

$a = G * M / R^2 = 1.4 * 10^{-3} \text{ [m/s}^2\text{]}$  Dividing this by earth's gravity (around 9.8 [m/s<sup>2</sup>]) will get you:  $1.42 * 10^{-4}$ , that is to say, finally: about one seventh of a thousandth {1/7,000} of earth's gravity; i.e.: not at all likely to hold you down, let alone injure you after a three meter drop (which would take a bit more than three minutes, and give you a downward velocity of one tenth of a km/h).]