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נא שימו לב לשינוי מקום ההרצאות בסדרת ההרצאות ע"ש עמוס גפן המפגש הבא יתקיים באוניברסיטת תל-אביב, בניין מקסיקו, חדר 120 החודש לא תתקיים הרצאת גפן. ההרצאה הבאה תתקיים בפורמט מורחב לציון פרישתו של אהרון האופטמן מניהול הרצאות גפן בתאריך 9 במרץ 2006. ההרצאה בשיתוף עם מועדון סטארבייס 972 ואגודת הסטודנטים באוניברסיטת תל אביב.

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

סדנת הכתיבה ברחובות

סדנת הכתיבה הרחובותית תקיים מפגשים בתאריכים הבאים:
 לפרטים נא לפנות ליולי גנטמן בכתובת ygantman@yahoo.com

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

Book Review by Aharon Sheer

Darwin's Children by Greg Bear (2003), 473 pages.

This is the sequel to Greg Bear's *Darwin's Radio* (1999) (reviewed both by me and by Gary Weisinger in *CyberCozen*, May 2001), which is one of the best sf books I've ever read.

Darwin's Radio imagined a near future change in human evolution, a change in the human genotype comparable to the change from Neanderthal man to Homo sapiens sapiens. But the human genotype didn't change all at once. There was a terrifying period of years of defective dead babies and deaths of mothers and strange changes in the bodies of both the mothers and the fathers of the new babies. In *Darwin's Radio* the world was frightened, and a series of concentration camps were set up to isolate the new human children – once they started being born alive -- from the rest of humanity, seeing the changes as a horrible disease that could infect and possibly wipe out all of mankind.

Darwin's Radio ended with the hero and heroine and their four-year old daughter still desperately but successfully running from and hiding from the government authorities, trying to keep their child with them.

The scientific underpinnings of *Darwin's Radio* are discussed there in a scientific appendix ten pages long.

And here's a passage from *Darwin's Radio* (p. 84) explaining how humans might cause themselves to evolve: "stress-related hormones can affect expression of genes. This evolutionary library of possible new forms responds to stress-produced hormones. If enough organisms are under stress, they exchange signals, reach a kind of quorum, and this triggers a genetic algorithm that compares sources of stress with a list of adaptations, evolutionary responses. Mutations that are grammatical, physiological statements that don't violate any important structural rules in an organism. Like heat-shock response in bacteria, or single-generation climate adaptation in fruit flies. ... the set-aside will only carry instructions for the small alterations that lead to a new species. The rest of the details remain encoded in the genome, standard instructions for everything below that level."

This sequel to *Darwin's Children* continues the hero family's desperate attempt to escape from the clutches of the obviously more and more insane government policy, which continues to force the remaining free children into concentration camps despite steadily clearer evidence that this is not a disease but a new evolutionary step. This book too, like its predecessor, is also a SCIENCE fiction sf book, and it too has a scientific appendix, this one fourteen pages long.

One of the things that I thought as I read Eli Eshed's recent article on Israeli sf (**Survey of Israeli SF & F in '04** in the July issue of *CyberCozen*), is that none of the new Israeli sf books had any SCIENCE in them. Fantasy, parallel history, alternative political futures, yes. But almost no interest at all in science. In the U.S. too most sf books have little or nothing to do with science. Greg Bear's books are a refreshing exception, and very exciting thrillers too!

How does Greg Bear imagine what new humans will be like? For one thing, they are born able to talk a little ("mama", "hello"). The newborns can soon focus their eyes, and quickly learn to recognize faces and voices – like a six-month old Homo sapiens. The babies display shifting patterns of colors on their faces, but so do the new fathers and mothers, who during pregnancy had skin masks on their faces. After the baby's birth, the parents' masks come off, and they to seem to communicate emotion by shifting colors on their faces. The recently born babies can sing melodically. For another thing, quite surprising, the babies make heavy use of pheromones, smelly chemicals used by most lower animals for non-verbal communication (for example, in mating), and used much less by Homo sapiens (and then not very smelly – more subconscious).

There is evidence that when women live together (for example, in college dormitories) their menstrual cycles become synchronized via mutual pheromones. Given free choice, men usually prefer to sit in seats where women sat before (without having seen who sat there before), and women will prefer to sit in seats where men sat before. Shimon Peres has very powerful pheromones, which is why he is so charming and convincing in personal contact, and so unconvincing on television [this statement has not been verified scientifically]. But the new children consciously release smelly

pheromones as a major part of their emotion-communicating system, in addition to speech.

More amazingly, the new children can carry on two spoken conversations simultaneously – their tongues are divided down the middle – although how the two hemispheres of the brain (only the left of which is involved in speech in homo sapiens sapiens) handle this is not explained.

Like the first book, this is exciting but not so cheerful. Tragic things happen to heroes we have grown to love. And like the first book much of the tragedy is man-made. Other humans are the heroes' enemies. They are not only fighting against an evolutionary change, they are fighting the fear and terror of other, very powerful human beings.

In the first book, author Greg Bear created two scientist heroes whom we grew to like very much. Both continue as heroes in this book. Mitch Rafelson is an archeologist, and we see him at work in this book too. His wife Kaye Lang is a biologist. While there is a moderate amount of biology in this book too (as indicated by the appendix), we see Kaye more involved in scientific politics than in scientific research.

At the start of the book, Mitch and Kaye and their "new human" daughter Stella are still on the run. Every time they feel that the authorities might catch up to them, they have to move. At one point they are living in a pleasant small house in Virginia. One morning Kaye finds that Stella has left the house. Stella, now age 11, desperately wants to spend time with other children like herself. Kaye fears that Stella has gone looking for such.

"Calling the police was not wise. Five years ago Virginia had reluctantly acquiesced to Emergency Action [the federal government agency in charge of imprisoning the new children] and had begun rounding up the new children and sending them to camps in Iowa, Nebraska, and Ohio. Years ago Kate and Mitch had withdrawn from parent support groups after a rash of FBI infiltrations." [p. 32]

One of the threats they face is a technological step forward: Flying video spy devices the size of a fly that can buzz around and be used to by Emergency Action to search for new children (and their parents). Emergency Action also pays good money – bounty -- to people who kidnap new children – an act illegal in the state of Virginia.

After Stella disappears Kaye and Mitch get a call from a man who claims to know where Stella is. They go to his house, getting there just as two Virginia state troopers get there.

"Are you holding children on these premises?' [the younger state trooper] asked the man in shorts.

"We are,' the man said. 'Strays and runaways. We protect them until the truck comes and takes them to where they can be taken care of. Where they belong.'

"Mitch looked at the trooper.... 'Our daughter is not a runaway. She was kidnapped.'

"The big trooper approached with Kaye.... 'Where are the children?' he asked.

“... Something whickered over their heads like a big insect. They all looked up.

“‘Damn,’ the younger trooper said, flinching and dropping his shoulders. ‘Sounds like federal surveillance.’” [p. 68]

Fortunately, in this case, the big trooper had had his own son taken away four years before, and he helps Kaye and Mitch escape with Stella.

Some people in the Federal system feel discomfort with what they are doing.

“The last thing Mark Augustine had ever imagined he would be doing was running a network of concentration camps. Despite the educational amenities and the lack of death houses, that was precisely what the schools were: isolated camps used to park a generation at high expense, with no in or out privileges.” [p. 76]

So part of the tension of the book is the differences of opinion between those who accept that each wave of births of new children in place of ordinary humans is part of the inevitable future of the human race, and those who still see this as the result of a horrible disease virus that must be stopped. By the end of the book there have been three waves of births of new humans, while in-between only ordinary humans were born.

One day Stella gets sick.

“Stella had never been sick, not with colds or flu; she had never even had a bacterial infection. Kaye had thought the new children might have improved immune systems.” [p. 81]

But when Stella gets sick, what doctor can Mitch and Kaye go to? Any one might turn them in to the Feds.

It turns out that the children can be infected by a disease that ordinary humans carry, but which does not make them sick. Only the new children get sick. Give them proper medical care, and they recover. But, what kind of medical care can they get in this new world? The fact that the new children are finally getting sick, proves to the paranoids that their worst fears are true. Demonstrators wave “signs denouncing ‘Virus Abominations’ genetically engineered by corporate mad scientists.” [p. 88]

“Americans by and large believed they were safer with the virus children put away. Sealed up, out of sight. Out of range of contagion.” [p. 89]

When Stella is aged 14, the family is finally caught, and she is taken away from her parents.

Kaye visits Washington, still trying to persuade people of the correct biological view of what is happening. But things are really bad there.

“The capital was losing the last of its self-respect. On some streets garbage pickups had been delayed for weeks without explanation. National guard and regular army troops walked around the streets in trios, firearms slung and clips loaded....

“The capital even smelled sick. Washington had become a city of long, sad lines, drawn faces, rumpled clothing. Everyone feared people in long coats, delivery trucks, boxes left on streets, and posters taped to walls demanding

obscure justice and hiding thin, nasty bombs beneath to blow up those who would try to take them down.” [p. 190]

In scenes from the schools we get more of an idea of what the new children are like. The girls’ physical education teacher tries to teach them competitive basketball. But the new children don’t understand why they should compete. If they cooperate, they can make lots more baskets. Why should they try to prevent other people from making baskets? What’s the point in that? “‘It hurts to make other others fail,’ Stella said.” [p. 204]

The children can use their pheromones to communicate with one another. But they can also use them to persuade normal human beings to do things.

“Stella knew that her natural smell was not offensive to humans. What concerned the camp counselors and captains was persuasion.” [p. 241]

So the camp surrounds the children when artificial smells intended to prevent the effectiveness of the pheromones. And all the humans wear nose plugs.

One day a new boy is brought to the school. It’s Will, a boy Stella had met at age 11, when she had been kidnapped. He too had escaped then.

“‘They caught me a week ago,’ Will said. ‘I’ve lived on my own and with runaways and street kids. Covered my cheeks with henna tattoos. Neck, too. Some human kids mark their faces to look like us, but everyone knows. They also claim to read thoughts and have better brains. Like they think we do. They say it’s cool, but their freckles don’t move.’ [The moving freckles are a part of the new humans more advanced powers of interpersonal communication.]

“‘Stella could see some brown still staining the raw patches on Will’s face. ‘How many of us are outside?’

“‘Not many,’ Will said. ‘I got turned in by a human for a pack of cigarettes, even after I saved him from getting beat up.’ He shook his head slowly. ‘It’s awful out there.’” [p. 287]

This is a book that is hard to put down. The reader is involved in the lives of the characters. We can understand why people are frightened, and watch as people’s ideas and understanding change as things happen to them.

We are fascinated both by the new humans and the old ones, and wish the best for all of them.

If Greg Bear ever writes another book in this series, telling us what adult new human society will be like, as it mixes and intermixes with old human society, and the expected on-going bitter battles about how society can continue with such divisions, I will want to read it.

For Comments: 13 Pinsker St., Rehovot 76308. Email: asheer@netvision.net.il. Tel: Aharon Sheer 08-947-1225

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

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