



Science-Fiction Fanzine

Vol. XVIII, No. 3; March, 2006

The Israeli Society for Science Fiction and Fantasy

כנס עולמות 2006

הכנס יתקיים בחול המועד פסח, 16-18 באפריל, במדיטק בחולון. הכנס יכלול הרצאות על פנטסיה ועל מדע בדיוני, על ספרים ועל סרטים, פרקים מסדרות קלאסיות וחדשות, מרתון לילי, סדנאות כתיבה ועוד. אתר הכנס (www.olamot.org)
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נא שימו לב לשינוי מקום ההרצאות בסדרת ההרצאות ע"ש עמוס גפן המפגשים הבאים יתקיימו באוניברסיטת תל-אביב, בניין מקסיקו, חדר 120 בחודשים מרץ ואפריל לא יתקיימו הרצאות גפן.

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.

26.3- אוסף פרקי ליל כל הקדושים (Halloween) של הסימפסונים.
 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:
ygantman@yahoo.com בכתובת

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

Short Book Reviews by Aharon Sheer

Local Custom by Sharon Lee and Steve Miller (2000), 308 pages.

I enjoyed this book very much. It made me feel good. Each time I took it down to read a few more pages, I knew I was going to have a pleasant time. I know it's not SCIENCE fiction. There's no science in it, although a little linguistics is mentioned (the heroine is a linguist). It's really mainly a romantic comedy, and I enjoy romantic comedies, although I must admit much of what happens is not really funny. This is "a novel of the Liaden universe". And to give you a little idea of the flavor of this series, it has a very enthusiastic introduction by Anne McCaffrey. McCaffrey really likes it.

This takes place in a far future in which Terrans have been space-travelling for generations, and have numerous planets populated by them. And all of the peoples of all these worlds speak a common language (although they may speak a local dialect) called "Terran". And their various societies sound much like American / Western European / Australian societies. And at some point in the not-distant past, contact was established with a new group of human beings who have their own civilization, and their own

customs and practices. These human beings are the Liaden, an interstellar trading people. The Liaden have their own language, very different from Terran, and their own societies, quite different from American / Western European society. And of course this book – one of several books in the “Liaden universe” – is a story about love between a Terran woman and a Liaden man.

The hero, Er Thom yos’Galan, is a Liaden starship pilot, a member of the wealthy Galan family of starship pilots who fly Liaden trading ships. The heroine, Anne Davis, is a linguist whose area of expertise is Liaden. They met in the past when Er Thom yos’Galan came to University, on a Terran planet, filled with academics studying every conceivable subject, as a part of a visiting Liaden delegation. Er Thom yos’Galan and Anne Davis became good friends, very close friends.

But after some time he had to return to his Liaden life. And of course, his family would have to find a suitable woman pilot to be his bride, so that he could have a genetically suitable child to contribute to his starship pilot clan, Galan. This is an inevitable obligation of each Liaden: to provide a genetically suitable heir for his clan.

But Er Thom yos’Galan – even though he has been back at his trade of starship pilot for over two years – cannot forget Anne Davis. Knowing that Anne – although not a pilot herself – is the daughter of a starship pilot, there is the possibility that she and he could breed a child who is genetically suitable to be a pilot, thus satisfying his need to provide a pilot heir to his clan. But of course this is hardly going to be acceptable to his Liaden clan. Marry a Terran? Never!

Nevertheless Er Thom goes back to University, and looks up Anne Davis. This is not an easy task. Can you imagine how many women there are on University named Anne Davis? Can you imagine how many linguists there are on University? It took Er Thom many days to find *his* Anne Davis. And then, on their meeting, he is horrified to discover that she has a child. And that the child is named Shan yos’Galan. The child is his! She never told him. It seems that she, as a single and independent woman, wanted a child, and took advantage of Er Thom yos’Galan to provide her one without his knowledge. And then, without his permission, named the boy yos’Galan!

So Er Thom yos’Galan has an heir! What is he going to do about that? What is she going to do about that, having named the child after his father without realizing how this obligates Er Thom and his entire clan?

Chapters in this book often start (ala Asimov novels) with quotes from important books. Two examples:

“The best advice for any Terran with a yen to visit the beautiful planet of Liad is: Stay home.

“— From *A Terran’s Guide to Liad*” [p. 137]

“On average contract-marriages last eighteen Standard Months, and are negotiated between clan officials who decide, after painstaking perusal of gene maps, personality charts and intelligence grids, which of several possible nuptial arrangements are most advantageous to both clans.

“-- From *Marriage Customs of Liad*” [p. 215]

Hey, it's a great love story, with all kinds of wonderful cross-culture conflicts, made easier by Scholar Anne Davis (as the Liadens call her) and her deep knowledge (from reading Liaden novels, and meetings with Liadens on University, and email correspondence with Liaden scholars) of the Liaden language and society. Everyone objects to the proposed mating, but will love overcome? Of course it will, despite the painful obstacles. Hey, I really liked this book. If you are into romantic comedies with a cross-cultural background in a space opera world, this is for you too.

Wolfling by Gordon R. Dickson (1969), 157 pages.

Gordon Dickson (1923 - 2001) wrote several books in a which a lone human, by his intelligence and diligence, either foiled a possible future invasion of earth by technologically advanced aliens, or persuaded aliens who had already conquered earth to leave. It's nice to read a novel in which humans can outsmart the nasty aliens, and this novel was actually rereleased in hardback in 2002. In *Wolfling* the aliens are actually us. A hundred years in the future, when mankind finally develops an interstellar spaceship and flies to Alpha Centauri, we discover that humans are already there. It seems there is an ancient and great interstellar empire of human-dominated planets. Earth – like all the others – was seeded long ago by some unknown power with the whole series of monkeys and apes and humans. For reasons unknown, Earth was forgotten by the empire, declined into barbarity (no traces of its formerly advanced technology having survived). Unusually, for such forgotten human-settled planets, Earth managed to rise up again independently, and redevelop the technology to travel in space. What a disappointment to reach Alpha Centauri and discover that earth is just a backwater in a highly advanced empire.

What are these conquerors like? That's what Earth wants to find out. Going to visit Alpha Centauri is no problem, but the leaders of this empire live on the Throne World, and they are highly genetically modified humans, taller, faster, more intelligent than the humans or earth. Going to the Throne World is not simple. The Throne World has always been accessible to the best and smartest of the humans on the lesser worlds. In fact, over millions of years it has attracted the best, and improved them. Thus the Throne World's aristocratic citizens, called "High-Born", are superior to any human from any other planet. Indeed, the Throne World has armies of genetically modified servants and warriors who must do the bidding of any High-Born.

Still, a highly exceptional human from an inferior world might get invited to the Throne World. So after a complex selection process, Jim Keil has been chosen by Earth to be sent to the Throne World. How will Jim get an invitation to go there? His trainers have taught him bull-fighting, a sport unknown on the Throne World. They demonstrate this sport to High-Born visitors to Earth, in the hopes that Jim will be invited to visit the Throne World. It works! Jim is invited, with six (cryogenically frozen) bulls, to show off his special skills to the High-Born on the Throne World. But Jim's real job is as a trained anthropologist. He real purpose to to observe and learn, in order to bring back to Earth as much information as possible so that Earth might be able to learn of weaknesses and take advantage of them in future dealings. As one of his trainers tells Jim, it took "the work of thousands of people to train you and bring you here, to the point where you could get yourself invited to play bullfighter on the Throne World." [p. 10]

However, Jim is an independent type. He realizes that just observing may not be enough. He needs to get involved in Throne World life. Once on the Throne World he learns something else: He is considered little better than an animal. That's why the High-Born call him a "wolfling". And he will never be allowed to go back to Earth – unless one of the High-Born takes a serious liking to him, and finds him useful. That's made clear to him very early, by one of the High-Born. If he wants to go home, he must prove his loyalty and usefulness!

How unusual Earth people are is revealed in a conversation that Jim has with the Emperor and his friends, after his bullfighting display gets him an invitation to visit the Emperor.

The Emperor asks, "How did we happen to find your world, after having lost it so many centuries – or thousands of years — ago?"

"The Empire didn't find us," said Jim. "We found an outlying world of the Empire."

"There was a second's silence in the room, broken by a sudden half-snort, half-bray of laughter from the youngster Lorava.

"He's lying!" Lorava sputtered. "They found us? If they could find us, how did they ever get lost in the first place?" ...

"Are you telling us that your people, after forgetting about the Empire, and falling back into complete savagery, turned around and developed civilisation all over again – including a means of space travel?"

"Yes," said Jim economically." [p. 54]

But as Jim observes and gets involved, he discovers things very worrisome. High-Born society is an aristocratic society in which too many people have to little to do. They spend most of their time insulting one another, often coming close to physical violence but rarely crossing that line. As an anthropologist Jim compares the High-Born to apes. "[Anthropologist] Robert Ardrey identified ... a 'neighborhood of territorial proprietors bound together by a dear-enemy relationship.' The Callicebus monkey is an example.... Each Callicebus family spends its time, apart from eating and sleeping, in going to the borders of that territory which they had marked out for their own among the general treetops and engaging in screaming and threatening with the adjoining family of Callicebus, who have also come to their boundary so that the display of antagonism can take place. This, except for the fact that physical territory was replaced by 'position' and screaming and threats were replaced by intrigue to make the next person or group lose status among his fellows, exemplifies the ... situation existing among the High-Born on the Throne World." [p. 153]

Although we don't learn this until the end of the book, Jim realizes that the situation is very dangerous to Earth. In this decadent society any one of these technologically superpowerful High-Born, with their superpowerful genetically engineered soldier-armies and their superpowerful weapons (including anti-matter bombs), could do to Earth anything they wanted to do, just as part of their battles with one another. And Jim has to find a way to intervene for the benefit of Earth.

Need we tell you that he succeeds?

I found the book complex but fascinating. I could not put it down. It was an exciting and gripping read.

Quote of the Month:

“Imagine you had a machine, a helmet of sorts that you could simply put on your head and stimulate any small region of your brain without causing permanent damage. What would you use the device for?”

“This is not science fiction. Such a device, called a transcranial magnetic stimulator, already exists and is relatively easy to construct. When applied to the scalp, it shoots a rapidly fluctuating and extremely powerful magnetic field onto a small patch of brain tissue, thereby activating it and providing hints about its function. For example, if you were to stimulate certain parts of your motor cortex, different muscles would contract. Your finger might twitch or you’d feel a sudden involuntary, puppetlike shrugging of one shoulder....

“When the Canadian psychologist Dr. Michael Persinger got hold of a similar device a few years ago he chose instead to stimulate parts of his temporal lobes. And he found to his amazement that he experienced God for the first time in his life....

“Dr. Persinger’s observation was not a complete surprise as I’ve always suspected that the temporal lobes, especially the left lobe, are somehow involved in religious experience. Every medical student is taught that patients with epileptic seizures originating in this part of the brain can have intense, spiritual experiences during the seizures and sometimes become preoccupied with religious and moral issues during the seizure-free or interictal periods....

“...how do you explain the flights of intense religious ecstasy experienced by patients with temporal lobe seizures or their claim that God speaks directly to them? Many a patient has told me of a ‘divine light that illuminates all things’, or of an ‘ultimate truth that lies completely beyond the reach of ordinary minds who are too immersed in the hustle and bustle of daily life to notice the beauty and grandeur of it all’....

“God has vouchsafed for us ‘normal’ people only occasional glimpses of a deeper truth (for me they can occur when listening to some especially moving passage of music or when I look at Jupiter’s moon through a telescope), but these patients enjoy the unique privilege of gazing directly in God’s eyes every time they have a seizure. Who is to say whether such experiences are ‘genuine’ (whatever that might mean) or ‘pathological’? Would you, the physician, really want to medicate such a patient and deny visitation rights to the Almighty...?”

“[One patient] experienced a rapture beside which everything else paled. In the rapture was a clarity, an apprehension of the divine – no categories, no boundaries, just a Oneness with the creator....”

From *Phantoms in the Brain* (1998) by V.S. Ramachandran and Sandra Blakeslee, p. 174-181

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