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The Israeli Society for Science Fiction and Fantasy

מכונת הזמן – לוח אירועי מד"ב ופנטסיה

האתר "מכונת הזמן" הוא יוזמה עצמאית של יעל פורמן ואור ביאליק, שמטרתה לרכז את כל אירועי המד"ב, הפנטסיה, הקומיקס ומשחקי התפקידים המתקיימים לאורך השנה. הגולשים מוזמנים לעדכן את הלוח באירועים חדשים לפי קטגוריות. לפרטים נוספים, ראו: <http://sfevents.mad-logic.com/calendar.php>

Rehovot Science Fiction Club - SFIR – חוג מדע בדיוני ברחובות

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

פעילויות בנובמבר: 19.11 - המסע המופלא של ביל וטד (Bill & Ted's Bogus Journey).
26.11 - מסכת המראה (MirrorMask).

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

סדנת הכתיבה ברחובות

סדנת הכתיבה הרחובותית מקיימת מפגשים; 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>

Two Post-Global Warming Novels, reviewed by Aharon Sheer

Michael Crichton may be skeptical (see *CyberCozen* October 2006), but sf writers have long predicted disaster from **Global Warming**. The planet Venus is supposedly hot because of the Greenhouse Effect, the result of too much carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. Could that happen to Earth, as we pump carbon dioxide into the air from our vehicles and industry? One of these two books was published in 1964, the other in 1998. Yet they both share a common premise: Global Warming will bring disaster to America in the future. Sea levels will rise, wiping out coastal communities; temperate areas will become tropical; much of the population will be forced to move north. Both books tell the tale mainly of one person. In both books the Christian Church plays an important but not positive role. But there are many differences.

Davy (1964) takes place hundreds of years in the future, in a world massively destroyed by nuclear war, with the loss of modern technology, and a deliberate Church prohibition on anything which might lead to technological recovery and future repetition of nuclear war. This book is bawdy and cheerful, despite its society's collapse to a Middle Ages world.

Parable of the Talents (1998) takes place only decades (2030s) in the future. The collapse of civilization is not the result of war but simply because more and more poor and ignorant people are unable to support themselves honestly, and turn to violence and crime to take from others what they want for themselves. Computer networks still exist, war vehicles are highly sophisticated. Somebody is still inventing new and more powerful technology. This book is cruel and depressing, but Politically Correct. The author and her heroine are Black, but the other players are of all human races.

Davy by Edgar Pangborn (1964), 265 pages.

This book takes place in the Northeast U.S. – no longer part of a single country but a collection of independent states, which occasionally war with each other. No more snow in winter! (Winter is the rainy season.) The weather is warm enough that one can sleep outdoors all year round. It's best not to do that, however, at least not alone, both because of bandits, and because of wild animals. Black wolves are dangerous. The brown tiger, fifteen feet (5 meters) from nose to tail-tip, may even attack a town.

“A passage in the Book of John Barth mentions a certain wild-eyed crank who, when the last Old-Time war was in the last phases of threatening, visited the zoos in several cities and turned loose some of the beasts at night, choosing only the most dangerous: cobras, African buffalo, Manchurian tigers. He ... was finally killed himself, Barth says, by a gorilla he was releasing.” [p. 92]

The hero, Davy, as an adult, is writing his autobiography, which we read as it is written. We see him as a mature adult, but he tells the story of his childhood and growth. His story starts when he is 15 years old. Davy was born and raised in a brothel, and not a very good one, in Moha, north of the Katskil Mountains. He wears a special colored slave loincloth. He must, as a slave, in the course of some years, repay the people who raised him and fed him and housed him since he was born. Eventually he will be freed from his slavery. Freed men are the only ones allowed to wear a white loincloth.

The population is so low that the Church is desirable of increasing it. (The presence of wild animals near civilized towns is a sign of this low population.) The Church does not object to brothels, such as those in which Davy was born. Nor does it object to sex outside of marriage. Some of the babies born are severely deformed, presumably because of damage to chromosomes as a result of radioactivity from the nuclear wars, and perhaps from the plagues that accompanied those wars. The Church says that such deformed babies are the result of the mating of a woman with a demon, and says that these mutants must immediately be killed. So the Church encourages people to have free sex often, but culls the mutant (“mue”) babies.

“The Church and its captive secular governments naturally wished the population might increase; with so many marriages sterile, mue-births coming nearly one in five, it's an empty world. But the Church is also committed to the belief – I don't understand its origins – that all pleasure is suspect and only the joyless can be virtuous. Therefore the authorities do their best to encourage breeding while solemnly looking the other way.” [p. 23-24]

The Church does have one positive objective: to prevent the development anew of powerful weapons.

“Gunpowder is forbidden by law and religion, and this may be just as well, since guns to make use of it are forbidden also by lack of steel, lack of a technology capable of designing and making them, and nowadays by a lack of belief that such instruments ever existed. Since a vast amount of fiction was produced in Old Time, it is wonderful how the Church today can explain away anything unwelcome in the surviving fragments of the old literature by calling it fiction.” [p. 152]

Davy's story starts shortly before he runs away – a criminal offense as he is a slave. He joins some other travelers who want to go north, to Vairmant perhaps, to find a better life. Thanks to the war, Davy and one of his new friends are able to obtain freed

men's loincloths from the bodies of dead soldiers, and after that they travel as freemen. Not so easy, as one must know how to talk like a freeman. Fortunately his older new friend can fake it, and Davy is a quick learner.

The book describes life on the road, and the variety of different size villages.

"The general pattern [of a village] is much the same in all the nations. Wherever you find them, such villages are designed for one fundamental purpose, to give a small human community a bit of safety in a world where our breed is no longer numerous, not rich and sleek as in Old Time, not wise, and not very brave.

"They are usually laid out in a square, in some location where a stream crosses fairly level ground. The drinking water comes from the upstream end, and the rest of the stream is regarded as a sewer – saves digging. ... Often a green occupies the center of the village facing Main Street, with the usual equipment – bandstand, whipping post, stocks, pillory, and maybe a nice wading pool for the children." [p. 161]

Davy gets acquainted with villages by joining a group of travelling musicians (Davy has a talent for music, and he has stolen an Old Time saxophone), and in general gets acquainted with life in this future world. He travels with them for four years.

Davy later even gets into politics, when he becomes an adult, but having joined the wrong side, he and his friends have to leave in a hurry. It seems they tried to run an honest administration, but this made a lot of people angry. They sail to the east. No one will follow them, since the Church teaches that the earth is flat, and that the ocean goes on, completely empty, forever. They find, and settle, on one of the Azores Islands, now with animal life but no human life.

The author has even made up a future version of spoken English, similar enough to what we speak today that we can easily understand it, but with its own expressions and way of talking, which is charming. And happily, the author preserves proper English spelling, having been taught by educated people.

The tale is told back and forth, from present on the Azores to Davy's younger days, thus maintaining variety. Much of it is repetitive but it keeps its interest, overall. The book ends with this poetic passage:

"I went down to the beach last night, because I heard the wind, and the ocean was long-voiced on the sand, and the stars were out....

"I gave words to the breakers last night, a game I have often played, a harmless way of aiding the mind to speak to itself....

"I asked whether the generations could some day restore the good of Old Time without the evil, and the ocean that was a voice in my mind suggested: Maybe soon, maybe only another thousand years." [p. 265]

Edgar Pangborn wrote a number of short stories, and one or two additional novels, that took place in this same future world.

Parable of the Talents by Octavia E. Butler (1998), 365 pages.

This book takes place in California in the 2030s. Global warming, plus a refusal to deal with the problems of poverty and poor education, have made much of America very poor. The heroine is Lauren Oya Olamina Bankole, a highly educated Black woman, whom everyone calls Olamina. Originally from Los Angeles, the disastrous collapse of society in that part of California, including the deaths of some family

members, led her to walk to Northern California. Olamina tries to establish a utopian agrarian community, self-sufficient and educated, which trades peacefully with other communities and towns in the area.

“But people are beginning to adapt. There’s less cholera for instance, and less hepatitis. There are fewer of all the diseases that result from bad sanitation, spoiled food, or malnutrition. People boil the water they drink in cities where there’s a problem and in squatter settlements with their open sewers – ditches. There are more gardens, and old-fashioned skills in food preservation are being revived. People barter for goods and services where cash is rare. They use hand tools and draft animals where there is no money for fuel or no power equipment left.” [p. 79]

Education is maintained by using computer links to a worldwide satellite network from which one can download information just as one can today by wire links. Since much of civilization seems to have collapsed dramatically, it’s not at all clear who maintains these satellite networks so important for educating the children.

Her husband, Bankole, decades older than her, is a Black M.D. who has told her how hard it was for a Black to study medicine in the 1990s. Bankole is unusual as a doctor in that out of love for his young wife he is willing to live in a small community.

“...almost all young physicians – those under 50 – were working in privatized or foreign-owned cities, towns, or huge farms. There, they could earn enough to give their families good lives and the company police would keep them safe from marauding thugs or desperate poor people.” [p. 160]

Although her father had been a Christian preacher, Olamina teaches her friends and community a new religion she has created, called **Earthseed**, in which Change is God, or God is Change. One of the long-term goals of this new religion is to establish human colonies on planets other than earth – hence the name. Since this goal requires a highly sophisticated technology, it is unclear who maintains the capability to establish colonies in space. It certainly doesn’t seem to be Olamina’s utopian agrarian community.

Technology has led to a highly sophisticated form of slavery. A “collar” has been developed. Once this collar has been placed around a slave’s neck, the slave is almost helpless against his/her owner. The slave cannot go too far away from the owner’s controlling belt, because if the slave tries that, the collar will begin choking the slave to death. Should the slave not return to the proper distance he/she will die. The slave cannot attack the owner as long as the owner wears the controlling belt.

“They’re programmed to resist being removed or destroyed by delivering jolts of pain severe enough to cause unconsciousness.” [p. 80]

Slave collars are the basis for an extensive system of male and female prostitution. Stealing free people and converting them into sex slaves (and all other kinds of slaves) is perhaps illegal but is widespread. The slave owner can also torture his slave – “lashing” the slave – by pushing a button which causes the slave terrible pain and suffering. Repeated lashings can cause permanent brain damage – since the collar attacks the brain, not the body. Some owners lash for fun. Others only do it when the slave does not immediately do what he/she is told to do. Slaves soon learn to want to do anything their owners request, and will try to make their owners happy.

Again there is the question: Who developed this sophisticated slave collar technology and who manufactures it and repairs and maintains it?

Olamina’s community uses the best ecological techniques for maintaining a high technology life in a low-technology world. They know what to grow, how to improve the land, maintain their water supplies and dispose of their refuse without harming their environment. They have solar power and batteries for their computer systems. They succeed in getting a solar-powered truck which is a substantial addition to their defensive technology because it can be sealed up and the person inside in control can detect intruders and shoot at them, both by day and by night, yet is well-protected by the truck’s defenses. The truck stores up energy during days when the sun is shining, so fuel is rarely a problem. The truck, along with a network of fences, some biological (plants with razor-sharp thorns that can stop intruders), provides a good defense against casual raiders, but as they find out there are other groups with more powerful trucks and weapons.

The Christian America church becomes more powerful as a new U.S. President is elected on a populist platform blaming all of America’s problems on non-Christians (heathens). The new president also starts a popular war against both Canada and Alaska (Alaska – now much warmer -- having declared independence from the U.S.). One of the consequences of the new President’s policies is the establishment of Christian America Reeducation Slave-Labor camps. This part of the book is the most horrifying.

Olamina’s heathen utopian agricultural community is taken over by Christian America, all of its members collared, some killed (including Dr. Bankole), and its members converted into agricultural slaves by day, and sex slaves by night. All of the children are taken away to be given to devout Christian America families, who will keep them away from the heathen Earthseed religion – including Olamina’s small infant daughter. It doesn’t help the newly collared slaves much to know that these vicious Christian groups are illegal, and not officially authorized by the new U.S. government. These groups have a noble goal: to make everyone into a loyal Christian American. And the new Christian America president of the U.S. knows all about it.

After 17 months, a fortuitous mud landslide destroys the collar control system, and the slaves are able to escape and scatter.

The rest of the book is Olamina’s attempt to find her daughter, and to reestablish Earthseed without risking another attack by Christian American supporters.

So we see that Octavia Butler is not fond of Christianity.

Since I ended my review of *Davy* with a bit of poetry, here is a poem about Earthseed written by Olamina:

<i>“All that you touch</i>	<i>“The only lasting truth</i>
<i>“You Change.</i>	<i>“Is Change.</i>
<i>“All that you Change</i>	<i>“God</i>
<i>“Changes you.</i>	<i>“Is Change.” [p. 8]</i>

Not a pleasant read.

Parable of the Talents received the Nebula Award for Best Novel in 1999.

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