



Science-Fiction Fanzine

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### The Israeli Society for Science Fiction and Fantasy

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הפסטיבל העשירי למדע בדיוני ולפנטסיה יתקיים בחוה"מ סוכות ויעמוד השנה בסימן חלומות. אורח הכבוד של הפסטיבל הוא סופר הפנטסיה ניל גיימן. בנוסף יתארחו בכנס מיטב היוצרים הישראלים בתחום. הכנס יכלול הרצאות ופאנלים בתחומי מדע, חובבות ויצירה מקורית, משחקי תפקידים מגוונים והקרנות סרטים במסגרת פסטיבל הסרטים הבינלאומי למדע בדיוני ופנטסיה. בין הפרסים שיוענקו בכנס ניתן למנות את פרס גפן ליצירות מקוריות ומתורגמות, וכן את פרס איקון בפסטיבל הסרטים.

לפרטים נוספים, בקרו באתר הפסטיבל: <http://www.icon.org.il>

#### 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>

#### 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.

לרגל סיום שנת הלימודים, התא יצא לפגרת קיץ. הפעילות צפויה להתחדש באוקטובר 2006.

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

#### דנת הכתיבה ברחובות

דנת הכתיבה הרחובותית מקיימת מפגשים; לפרטים נא לפנות ליולי גנטמן בכתובת [ygantman@yahoo.com](mailto:ygantman@yahoo.com)

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

## שנה טובה – Happy New Year

### Book Review by Aharon Sheer

*Miracle Visitors* by Ian Watson (1978), 239 pages.

This is only the second Ian Watson (1943-) novel I've read. The first was *The Martian Inca* (1977), reviewed by me in the January 2006 *CyberCozen*. That was a very strange book, and this one is too. For one thing, this book contains numerous long philosophical arguments which slow down the pace of the adventure part of the story very much.

The book cover calls it "The classic novel of Close Encounters". Indeed, it starts out with its first hero, Michael Peacocke, at that time a 16 year old boy, being picked up by a flying saucer, and losing several hours of his life, which he does not remember. His experiences on that flying saucer are recovered a few years later under hypnosis when he is an undergraduate university student. There he is taking courses from a psychologist, the second hero, John Deacon, who is studying ASC: **Altered States of Consciousness**.

Student Michael is exceptionally susceptible to hypnosis, and he can reach an ASC state “which can be explored *through* hypnosis, since it shares some of the same mental structures, but it can’t be controlled *by* hypnosis.” [p. 20]

“Each altered state of consciousness possessed its own internal logic, different to a greater or lesser degree from the logic of ordinary baseline consciousness. Each altered state had a rationality that was perfectly coherent, yet could be wholly alien to everyday reason. That was why it was so difficult for the traditionally ‘objective’ scientist to study these states. Here was a fundamental barrier to communication: an unreportability. Even the subject who experienced the altered state couldn’t necessarily explain it, even to himself....” [p. 25-26]

Or, to put it another way (and the book puts it quite a few other ways), meetings with aliens, or Ezekiel’s vision, or sex with a succubus, or witchcraft, or alchemy, or encounters with UFOs, are all ASCs, alternate realities, which humans have been experiencing for thousands of years.

Barry Shriver, the third major hero of this book, is a UFO expert, starting in 1952, when as a U.S. Air Force pilot his plane was followed by UFOs. Later on, he witnessed a UFO landing in which President Eisenhower was taken onto an alien spaceship at an Air Force base as Shriver watched. But of course the President didn’t remember a thing, nor did any of his associates. Shriver tells us,

“...the alien spaceship ... fits our current frame of reference – of moon flights, radio telescopes, and the hunt for life in the Universe. Do you realize, the very same messages, *verbatim*, have been picked up by ham radio buffs, by Ufo contactees *and* by psychics in trances who thought they were in touch with the dead.... But the very same *words*? The very same sentences? I tell you, something is broadcasting – on the waveband of the human mind, and on radios and telephones and any electrical gear, and right across the visible spectrum too. It even produces materializations – up to and including a whole menagerie of apparently living entities... It plays childish, and pretty complicated, games that quite often turn nasty – apparently with the main aim of discrediting itself!” [p. 35]

In one of his hypnotic trances Michael remembers the appearance of the control panel of the spaceship he rode, and draws it: a “schematic for the field-energies of a spacecraft powered by a bipolar gravity field”, as Shriver explains it. Much later on in the book the three heroes, student Michael, psychologist Deacon, and UFO expert Shriver, actually ride in such a spacecraft. Or do they? Maybe it’s just an ASC?

At this point the book jumps to Cairo Egypt, where a very brilliant Sufi Muslim, Sheikh Muradi, resides and teaches. Sheikh Muradi travels all over the world teaching about ASCs, and had two years before visited England and spoken to John Deacon’s psychology students, including Michael Peacocke, about his ideas. The Sheikh tells us,

“You can’t build a bridge with insufficient supports, any more than you can ride a camel with only three legs – it needs four. Well, the bridge of science is supported by ninety-nine legs, which is enough for almost perfect stability – for practical purposes. There should still be another leg.... Khidr is this other leg:

the miracle leg, which is outside explanation. He is the leg which actually balances all the others!...

“Scientists of the very large must leave out the very tiny. Scientists of the very tiny must leave out the force that holds the stars together, isn’t that so? This is necessary to reality. It isn’t a mere temporary shortcoming. If the whole world was known, it would cease to be.” [p. 87-88]

Michael again meets **aliens**. One of them explains their philosophy:

“Trees all seem to be separate things on a mundane time scale, yet the forest is really an evolving entity, in larger time. Cities evolve from villages and towns over centuries, like blobs of protoplasm growing towards something ever more complex. Cities are alive too, for they are the work of life as surely as an anthill or a honeycomb. They put out veins and nerves – roads, canals, telegraph, power lines. If you speed up the picture of a city’s growth over a millennium and compress it into minutes – then you will get the right idea!

“Yet individual beings within the system cannot really know this directly. For I speak of higher-order systems of organization: of higher-order patternings. Lower-order systems cannot fully grasp the Whole of which they are the parts. Logic forbids. It is a natural principle. Which is why, when the processes of the Whole do show themselves, it is as unidentified phenomena – as intrusions into your own knowledge that can be witnessed and experienced but not rationally known: neither analysed nor identified.” [p. 102]

Do the alien’s ideas sound familiar? It’s the same idea as Sheikh Muradi has expressed.

Psychologist John Deacon suddenly finds himself in Cairo. He has no idea how he got there. He has almost no money, no passport, no hotel room. So of course he calls Sheikh Muradi. One of Muradi’s young followers, Salim, meets Deacon, and explains that he is studying civil engineering. Salim says,

“‘Yet there is another science too! The threefold science – *of Man*. We say that it consists in a science of ordinary knowledge, then in a science of extraordinary knowledge: of unusual inner states. That’s your special work, isn’t it, Professor? That’s why you’re part of the miracle... *Sidi* Muradi explained your work just briefly before he sent me.’

“Deacon nodded.

“‘That’s right. Normal psychology – then the altered states of consciousness. What’s this third science?’

“‘Ah, that is the science of true reality, that lies beyond the other two. The other two are hollow without it. So the real work lies in seeing how all three sciences need one another. I think you’re verging on the third science too? The science beyond ordinary knowledge?’” [p. 123-124]

Deacon meets Muradi in Cairo:

“On the last occasion that Deacon had met him – in London two years earlier, at the time of the lecture series – the Sheikh had struck him as urbanely cosmopolitan, if personally austere. His urbanity was the politeness of soul of

some undisclosed, non-political prince. It had seemed like Renaissance *virtú*, belonging not to State but rather to states of mind....

“Deacon understood, as the Sheikh sat looking at him, that he was being seen ... as the real import of himself, the hidden substance that cast the shadows, which Deacon, being the shadow, could not see.” [p. 125-6]

Michael gets another lecture from an alien:

“Take your attitude to death.... Cells must die so that new ones are born. Older species must pass, that higher species may arrive. What does death signify to a Whole Life that stretches back a billion years? Not the constant, nagging anxiety that it conveys to you.... But your abject fear of death – ignorant as you are of the Whole Life system – imprints a virulent death programme upon the nervous system of Planet Life.... You are murderers! Killers and poisoners of beasts and forests and seas. Killers of yourselves.” [p. 142]

This book is an adventure story. There are indeed adventures, and there is a story. There is a plot and there are surprises. But a third of the book is didactic lecturing such as I have quoted above. If you like that kind of thing, read this book. It was exciting enough to me that I read it all the way through with no problem. But I’m sure that not everyone will enjoy this.

But what most bothered me about this book was the philosophy which seems to be praised by the British author. It is presented through the mouths of the admired aliens, and the admirable Muslim sheikh Muradi and his followers. Essentially it is a rejection of a basic part of Judeo-Christian religion: respect for each individual human being. In this admired philosophy individual humans have no value whatsoever. Does a single tree in a forest matter, compared to the forest as a whole? Trees die all the time, and new ones grow up. Does a single ant in an ant colony matter? Not at all, ants die all the time, and new ones are born. Does a single cell in the intestine of a human being matter? Not at all, cells die all the time, and new ones are formed. In the same way, Watson seems to be saying, the individual human has no importance whatsoever. I find this philosophy repugnant, the more so as it seems to be an admiring reflection of a similar approach among our Muslim neighbors. No wonder the British press hates the Jews, and fawns on the Muslim for whom only the Whole is of any importance, and the individual unimportant. Watson explains to me the approach of the BBC toward the current Middle East conflict, and the approach of Britain to the conflict between the Muslims and the Jews since Britain took on the Mandate for Palestine in the early 1920s. Watson presents this philosophy of the British intelligentsia in the mouths of admirable aliens and admirable Muslim sheikhs. Sorry if I say it is horrible.

Video Film Review by Aharon Sheer: *The Thirteenth Floor* (1999), directed by Josef Rusnak, writing credits Daniel F. Galouye (from novel *Simulacron-3*) and Josef Rusnak, 100 minutes. Rated R for violence and language. A joint German / USA production.

In America 13 is an unlucky number. Few people will agree to take a room on the 13<sup>th</sup> floor of a hotel. Few companies will agree to rent an office on the 13<sup>th</sup> floor of a building. For that reason, in America, buildings don’t have a 13<sup>th</sup> floor. Count them –

they go 1, 2, ..., 11, 12, 14, 15, .... A simple solution. In this movie the offices of the central company in the movie are on the 13<sup>th</sup> floor of the building. This should be a clue.

Imagine a very successful software company. Its founder and owner has made a lot of money and does not quite know what to do with it all. Instead of buying beautiful houses and expensive cars, he puts his money into a research project: creating a virtual world into which people can download themselves and experience another life. He has chosen to recreate the 1930s, with its nightclubs and dancing contests. Each character in this virtual world is represented by a sophisticated software module which creates his or her every thought and feeling. In addition, there is a realistically recreated 1930s environment – streets (with streetcars) and cars and buildings, which the character can move about in and travel in. When you download into this 1930s world, you take over the virtual body of one character, and interact with the other characters. It feels real! The other characters talk and act so realistically that you can easily imagine that you are really in the 1930s. A tremendous success!

The problem is that that this virtual world has hardly been tested. You lie down and are hooked up to the computer system. Your consciousness goes into this virtual world. You feel like you are actually there. But what about bugs? What if something goes wrong while you are unconscious? Isn't there danger? What if someone in this virtual world has done you physical harm? How will you react to this? Could you suffer from severe psychological effects? What if you see something terrible happen? Could you perhaps be left with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder? Should people casually go into this untested early version system? Yet the founder and owner of the company is doing just that, and repeatedly. So far, no one else has gone back to the virtual 1930s

At this point the film becomes a thriller. The founder and owner of the company is killed. He just rewrote his will, leaving the company to one of its key software engineers. The daughter of the owner shows up and wants her share. The police investigate. Other people get involved. What's happening? The solution is to download into the 1930s world and find out what happened there just before this disaster. And of course, the key software engineer, under suspicion for doing in his boss, has to do it.

The story goes on, and it has its twists and turns. We enjoy seeing Los Angeles of the 1930s (we grew up there in the 1940s). Here's Wilshire Boulevard – one of the wealthiest and most built up areas of Los Angeles today -- with only one or two large buildings. We drive down the streets and see the empty fields and the scattered houses. Here's the rich and expensive Wilshire Hotel, surrounded by empty fields. I remember when the area was filled with orange orchards (remember Rehovot only a few years ago?)

We see people dressed as in the 1930s, cars and streetcars (yes, the main form of transportation then was an extensive system of light rail lines – only today being reconstructed after everything was torn out in the 1950s and replaced by streets for the automobile that every family had to have). What memories this movie brings back!

Yes, there's some violence and danger. Yes little kids might get scared. But – it has a happy ending – sort of – in 2024. I enjoyed it.

*For Comments:* 13 Pinsky St., Rehovot 76308. Email: [asheer@netvision.net.il](mailto:asheer@netvision.net.il). Tel: Aharon Sheer 08-947-1225  
 Editor: Aharon Sheer. Logo by: Miriam Ben-Loulu  
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