



Science-Fiction Fanzine

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### The Israeli Society for Science Fiction and Fantasy

#### תחרות סיפורים שנתית – פרס עינת

האגודה שמחה להודיע על פתיחת תחרות סיפורי המקור על שם עינת פלג ז"ל. זוכי התחרות, המתקיימת ביוזמת משפחתה של עינת והאגודה, יוכרזו בפסטיבל אייקון ויזכו בפרסים כספיים נאים. נושא התחרות השנה הוא "אגדות". את הסיפורים יש לשלוח לא יאוחר מ-1 בספטמבר 2007.  
לתקנון הפרס ולפרטים נוספים: [http://www.sf-f.org.il/story\\_962](http://www.sf-f.org.il/story_962).

#### "מותה וחייה של קרתגו... בחול או "כי עפר את ואל עפר תשובי... קרתגו!"

במסגרת יום כיף על חוף הים, תיערך ביום חמישי, 30 באוגוסט, תחרות לבניית קרתגו בחול ולהחברתה. פרטים יתפרסמו בהקדם באתר האגודה. כולכם מוזמנים! Carthago delnda est.  
המעוניינים להתנדב מתבקשים לפנות אל קרן אמבר בדואל [embarkeren@yahoo.com](mailto:embarkeren@yahoo.com).

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

התא הרחובותי יצא לפגרה ויחזור לפעילות בחודש אוקטובר. להצטרפות לרשימת התפוצה:  
[sfir42@yahoo.com](mailto:sfir42@yahoo.com)

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

## Short Book Review by Shmuel Kahn

*Roma Eterna* by Robert Silverberg (2003), 449 pages

Going back all the way to King Solomon with his *Ecclesiastes*, it seems to be human nature that, after a certain age, people get cranky and terminally pessimistic, all the more so when they are authors of extraordinary vision. Heinlein had *Job: A Comedy of Justice*, Asimov had *Forward the Foundation* and now Silverberg has *Roma Eterna*. This fix-up is an alternate history that diverges from ours in that the Biblical *Exodus* failed, and later the Roman Empire did not collapse under its own bloated weight. Lasting, in fact until present time (the last story placed less than forty years ago). Of course it goes through repeating cycles of expansion, decadence, collapse and regrouping, becoming ever more cynical and disillusioned. This is addressed directly in the final short story, conveniently told from the perspective of a Hebrew (i.e. Jewish) historian - sadly reflecting that there is no real difference

between the Empire and the Republic that replaced it. The Empire is dead on its feet, but too heavy to even know this, or even affect a serious change in its posthumous corpulence.

"For twenty centuries Roma has strangled mankind in its benign growth. The civilization that it has constructed is hollow, the life that most of us lead is a meaningless trek that had neither values nor purpose. By its shrewd acceptance and absorption of the alien gods and alien ways of the peoples it had conquered, the Empire had flattened everything into shapelessness. The grand and useless temples of the Sacred Way, where all gods were equal and equally insignificant, were the best symbol of that. By worshiping everyone indiscriminately, the rulers of the Imperium had turned the sacred into a mere instrument of

governance. And ultimately their cynicism had come to pervade everything: the relationship between man and the Divine was destroyed, so that we had nothing left to venerate except the status quo itself, the holy stability of the world government.” (page 438)

Despite the great potential such a story-line could have had, and the often deeply introspective looks at human culture throughout, the book is in my opinion a dismal failure. It is 449 pages worth of an extremely boring and repetitive story, so completely lacking in any of the usual qualities of Silverberg’s superb work that it should never have been printed. Yes, it really is that bad. It is completely lacking in the majesty of *Kingdoms of the Wall* (1992), or the vibrant vision of *Hot Sky at Midnight* (1994). Not only that, but the

pessimism is spread so heavily through the book you'll want to throw it at the wall. Even the supposedly hopeful final story, in which the Hebrews, led by the Second Moshe (and his siblings Miriam and Eleazar), in wanting to break away from the Roma controlled world, embark on a new final Exodus, into space, ends in fiery failure. If that wasn't bad enough, on the death of Moshe, Silverberg had to toss in the Jesus gambit, "He was the Son of God, and God has called him home". Give us a break! How low can a Grand Master like Silverberg sink?? Pretty much the only bit in the book worth reading is the quote brought above (p. 438). So having just read it, you can avoid this book altogether. You'll be happier that way. Trust me. (This coming from an avid Silverberg fan.)

## POEM: On Reading Science Fiction (1982)

By Miriam Ben-Loulu

(From *CyberCozen* April 1991)

The bug-eyed monster's got the girl!  
(I bite my nails in consternation.)  
And now the poison gases swirl;  
The hero leads an insurrection.

And then my heart beats faster still,  
I grip the book in fascination.  
The robots now provide the thrill  
As humans watch in resignation.

But S.F.'s phantoms fade to gray  
As Phantoms speed in close formation.  
The roar of Sky Hawks rends away  
All thought of peaceful contemplation.

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כל הזכויות שמורות למחברים וליוצרים, כפי שצוינו.

## **Star Trek reviews by Gary Roth: Two book reviews with Spock as the protagonist:**

**Star Trek: *Legacy*** by Michael Jan Friedman (1991), 280 pages.

It's time for Spock to bask in the limelight! Kirk leads a landing party to Alpha Octavius where he and a few others become trapped underground following a series of earthquakes caused by the movements of huge aliens. It turns out that these aliens inject "victims" with a chemical that dangerously speeds up the body's metabolism, and that a subsequent "sting" from a second alien in a different location neutralizes the original side effects. Spock suffers such an "attack", whose purpose is analogous to a bee being used to pollinate flowers!

The *Enterprise* gets called away before Scotty's rescue team can find Kirk and company. The mining colony of Beta Cabrini is attacked by a Marauder named Dreen and the men from his three space ships. Acquistor Hamesaad Dreen was defeated years before by Captain Christopher Pike, Spock's previous commander, due to a witty trick. Spock struggles to maintain control over his compromised metabolism as he deals with Dreen, which is no easy feat as the latter, bent on revenge, decides to hunt the former on the planet's surface with his two prized *mesirii* (snake-like creatures). Meanwhile Spock manages to signal the local Federation officer via a two-word coded phrase, based on an occurrence when they had both served under Capt. Pike. This former StarFleet officer secretly puts together a surprise for the attackers -- a knockout gas transported together with the metal ores that they were stealing. Naturally, the bad guys become paralyzed on board their ships long enough for *Enterprise* personnel to take control of the intruders. Of course,

the good guys make it back to Kirk in time to rescue the above-mentioned landing party.

Pike is mentioned quite a few times in this book, which is sometimes relevant and often not. It's interesting to hear of the various episodes that took place when he was aboard the *Enterprise*, but too much print was wasted on his time on the beach with his female companion on an alien planet. It's good to know that Spock thought about the former captain from time to time, and vice versa, and to know how much the crew valued him. The reader is also told about the time that Spock found a novel way to comfort a crew member who had lost a relative, as well as the time that Spock saved a fellow officer from certain death as they abandoned a doomed planet at the last second. Also, we learn about an episode in which Spock was too timid to carry out a certain mission and eventually was saved by a brave female member of the crew.

Kirk still plays a significant role in the story. He leads the stranded Starfleeters to the planet's surface and shows off his rockclimbing skills. He's torn between duty and his personal life when he finds himself alone with a pleasant female officer during the mission, and afterwards entertains her in his quarters aboard the ship.

The bottom line -- this book is worth reading, and generates enough excitement to rate a "B". It is not a novel that keeps the reader riveted to the edge of his pants, so to speak, however.

**Star Trek: *Mind Meld***, by John Vornholt (1997), 274 pages.

This story takes place shortly after the movie **Star Trek: *The Undiscovered Country***. Teska, a Vulcan child raised on Earth, is used in an experiment in reunifying the Vulcan and Romulan peoples. Her uncle Spock is selected for escorting her to Vulcan for her betrothal to a Romulan male, both only

seven years of age! The first chapter chronicles the escape of the boy from Romulus via the sewer, in which his father (a doctor with a laser scalpel) murders a Civil Guard who was alerted by the sewage alarm. Soon thereafter proconsul Pardek takes the boy for transport from the doctor's

shuttlecraft, and after the boy arrived safely to the Galactic Guard, the proconsul kills Doctor Wislok with his own scalpel after telling him that the instrument used to do away with Civil Guard back on Romulus must be discarded into space!

Teska proves to be a true Vulcan, despite initially demonstrating childish and uncontrolled behavior on Earth. While in space she learns about mind melding, and practices on Spock. Soon thereafter, on the planet Rigel, she mindmelds unexpectedly with Ambassador Denker, who was stabbed and left to die outside. This due to a plot by a powerful businesswoman named Madame Vitra and her henchmen. Of course, her testimony at the judicial murder hearing was largely ignored; in most of the universe mindmeld-obtained information would be accepted (somewhat akin to hypnosis-derived info), but not on this backwards place! The young girl and Spock find themselves on the run and must exercise their superior intellects in order to escape and survive. However, Teska decides to stay on Rigel with the family of some friends, while Spock continues to insist that she fulfill her destiny on Vulcan. Naturally she runs away with some derelict children but gets caught by Mondral, a muscular employee of Madame Vitra. Thanks to some quick thinking and memories

from a mindmeld, Teska obtains a local shuttlecraft and pilots it to safety on another part of the planet.

Spock becomes injured during an exchange of phaserfire at an overnight stay at an inn, and little Teska must bring him in a casket to her friends' family on the far side of the planet. On the way the reader learns of the strange customs of the Rigelians: their emphasis on having many children and their obsession with numerology and harmony (like odd vs. even numbers for various things, like an assassination party!), as well as their "holy" guidebook and female clergy. In the end, the good guys put an end to the evil Vitra and Teska reconsiders her earlier decision to remain.

The book ends some years later as the Romulan marries the Vulcan on Vulcan with Spock and Pardek in attendance. We're also told that Kirk died some time before. It seemed out of character that the Vulcan priestess recalled Kirk verbally to those attending the wedding, just like it seems stretched that we're told about the ideal number of people for an assassination posse! Nonetheless, this novel contained enough new concepts to warrant a "B" rating from this reviewer -- a story that could be put down (physically, that is) without losing sleep but yet kept me interested.

## Short Book Review by Aharon Sheer

*The Stonehenge Gate* by Jack Williamson (2005), 313 pages.

Author Jack Williamson has been publishing sf since before I was born – and I'm 70 years old. He published his first sf story in 1928. What I liked about this novel was its sense of wonder. It's a description of an odyssey. The characters get excited about what they see and find, and so did I. Old-fashioned? Yes. But I enjoyed it.

The story starts out at Eastern New Mexico University, in Portales, New Mexico, where Williamson taught for many years and is still emeritus professor. The four main characters are a diverse group of faculty members of the school, an archeologist, a linguist, a physicist, and an English lit teacher, all good friends. The weird idea is that satellite photos (using ground penetration radar) have suggested that there are some strange objects buried under the sand in the Sahara Desert. The archeologist (Lupe)

suggests that the four of them make a Christmas vacation trek to the Sahara to dig down in the sand and see what's there. This part is a little unlikely – an English lit teacher going to the Sahara? His name is "Will", and he tells the story in the first person. Is "Will" short for something? And Derek teaches physics and astronomy. And a linguist? But they are all adventuresome!

The linguist is Ram, a black man from East Africa, whose talents were discovered by Lupe, the head of the dig. Ram says,

“She found me shoveling dirt at Koobi Fora. She helped get me to college on the track scholarship. She brought me back to Africa to work with her on two more summer digs. [p. 35]

Ram is crucial to this story, for he has a striking birthmark on his forehead, and an amulet given to him by his great-grandmother,

who taught him as a child the language she had learned as a child. She was picked up by nomads in the desert, sold several times as a slave, and ended up in Kenya, where Ram was born.

When they get to the Sahara and start digging, they find some giant stones in a circle (like Stonehenge, hence the book's name), half buried in the sand. Walking around them soon sends them to other planets! The remarkable thing is that they are hardly surprised. They realize at once that they have found a gateway to other worlds. This seems to me more than a little remarkable. If you suddenly found yourself on another planet, would you just say, we've found a way to visit other planets! Truly they are a remarkable four academicians. So this requires a little suspension of disbelief.

The stones are part of a network of an ancient interstellar transportation, and Ram's great-grandmother's amulet is the key to operating this transportation system. But they have no control as to where they go. Nor can they go backward – the system only sends them on. Each new step in the transportation system brings new challenges, and new surprises.

Most of the planets they visit have no living human beings. There are machines, massive technological works (moving roads, bridges), and endless scenery. And also destruction. There are clear signs that massive wars have taken place in the past, possibly destroying all living humans. Derek has his digital camera with him, and takes an unending series of photographs with great enthusiasm. His camera can hold all the pictures taken day after day, and never runs out of power. Wait till we get back to Earth, he enthuses, what a story we'll be able to tell.

Finally they get to a planet which has living human beings. The people here speak the language that Ram's great-grandmother taught him. And as Ram's great-grandmother had told him, it is a terrible place, for the blacks are slaves in a society controlled by whites from another continent. Even stranger, there are ancient giant statues

of a black man who looks just like Ram, including the mark on his forehead, and his white female partner. According to the black legends, long ago the white woman destroyed the advanced and sophisticated black society as vengeance for the black man's falling in love with another woman. So today the blacks either live a primitive life in the jungle, or are enslaved by the whites in the coastal areas in a society that sounds much worse than apartheid South Africa, or America during slavery times. For example, if a woman slave in the Deep South were to have a baby by a white man, the baby would just become another slave. But on this world, such mixed-breed babies in the white colonies are automatically put to death, forcing the woman to flee with her child to the jungle.

The whites have technology on the level of our 19<sup>th</sup> century steam technology. Obviously these whites are not the people who built this interstellar transportation system. The blacks have found ancient electronic books in the jungle written in characters that no one can read, that can still display visions of remarkable things.

Ram was shown some of these by blacks in the jungle, and he says,

“He showed me a shelf of e-books like the one he gave me, and a chest made of something still as bright as stainless steel. It was lined with gold and filled with little crystal rods. Magic sticks, he called them, their magic long forgotten. Transparent as glass, they flashed with colored lights and made musical notes when he rubbed them. Books or records, I imagine, ...” [p. 162]

We never find out all the secrets of this strange, ancient system of transportation, although the heroes connect it with the ancient history of humanity on Earth. There's enough here for a series of novels, if Williamson wants to write them. Not a great book, but it kept up my interest.