



Science-Fiction Fanzine

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### The Israeli Society for Science Fiction and Fantasy

כנס "עולמות 2007" יערך בחול המועד פסח, 3-5 באפריל במדיטק שבחולון.

#### הרצאה ומפגש עם סופר הפנטסיה הפולני אנדז'יי ספקובסקי

ספריו של ספקובסקי תורגמו לכמה שפות אירופאיות, ובכלל זה רוסית, אוקראינית, צ'כית, גרמנית, צרפתית, סלובקית ופורטוגלית. קוראי האנגלית יוכלו למצוא רק סיפורים בודדים פרי עטו, רובם בתרגומי חובבים. באתר האגודה ניתן יהיה לקרוא סקירה על אודותיו וקטע מתוך סיפורו "נרנטום" בתרגומה של ענת זיידמן. פרטים וקישורים נוספים ניתן למצוא ב- [http://www.sf-f.org.il/story\\_934](http://www.sf-f.org.il/story_934)  
**ביום ב', 19/2/2007**, בשעה 19:30, ירצה ספקובסקי על "מבוא למדע בדיוני ולפנטסיה בפולין".  
 ההרצאה, בחסות המכון הפולני בשגרירות פולין בישראל, מכון הספר בקרקוב והאגודה הישראלית למדע בדיוני ולפנטסיה, תתקיים בחנות הספרים "הנסיך הקטן" בתל-אביב, רחוב סמטה פלונית (פינת המלך ג'ורג' 16). ההרצאה תינתן בפולנית, עם תרגום לעברית. מנחה האירוע: ד"ר אהרון האופטמן. הכניסה אינה כרוכה בתשלום.

כמו כן יתקיים **ביום חמישי, 22/2/2007** בשעה 18:00 במסגרת היריד בבנייני האומה בירושלים מפגש "קפה ספרותי" בין ספקובסקי לבין הסופר, המשורר והעורך שמעון אדף. המפגש ילווה בתרגום לעברית. בשעה 19:30 יחתום ספקובסקי על ספריו בדוכן הפולני (מס' 531).

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

אסתריקון! מסיבת פורים בספ"ר

ספ"ר, תא המדע הבדיוני של רחובות, מזמין אתכם לאסתריקון, כנס ברוח היתולית. הכנס ייערך ביום חמישי 1/3/2007 במתנ"ס "עירונוער" ברחובות, החל מ-22:00 ועד הבוקר. (במקום ישנו מזנון שיהיה פתוח כל הלילה). בתוכנית, הרצאות היתוליות, הקרנות משעשעות, תחרות תחפשות נושאת פרסים ועוד. פרטים נוספים יפורסמו בקרוב בפורומים הקרובים למקלדתכם ובאתר האגודה. כולכם מוזמנים! למידע נוסף-

[sfir42@yahoo.com](mailto:sfir42@yahoo.com)

ימי א' בשעה 20:00 **בפקולטה לחקלאות ברחובות**, חדר 2, בבניין ליד הבריכה. הפעילויות ללא תשלום.

18.2 – הקרנת הסרט **סורק באפלה A Scanner Darkly**

25.2 – משחק תפקידים- "בגן הפרחים שאינם עוד" בהנחיית איתי גרייף

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

## Book Review by Sara Svetitsky

*River of Gods* by Ian MacDonald (2004), 587 pages.

*River of Gods* by Ian MacDonald was published in 2004 in Great Britain and was nominated for the 2005 Hugo, but appeared in the US only in 2006, which would have killed its chances for the Hugo even if it hadn't been competing with *Jonathon Strange and Mr. Norell*.

*River of Gods* is set in India in 2047, 100 years after independence. To be precise, it is set in Varanasi or Benares, capital of Bharat, one of the dozen states formed when the old India broke up. The Indian sub-continent has not been used often as a setting for speculative fiction and

MacDonald handles it beautifully. There are a LOT of characters to follow, and at least 5 separate stories that all turn out to overlap. Because of this, and obviously the Indian setting, it reminded me of *A Suitable Boy* by Vikram Seth. And like *A Suitable Boy*, the main or overarching or framing plot is actually less interesting and memorable than the little sub-stories and interesting minor characters. This is partly because the "main" plot is the only one centered on American characters, your basic over-sexed cosmologists, and they are just not as fresh as the Indian characters. The latter include a nasty street gangster with pretensions, a "Krishna Cop" who hunts down A.I.s that threaten to get too smart, a "nute" who has voluntarily undergone surgery to become a sexless sprite, a Indian comedian who is called back from his expatriate life in Scotland to take over the family company, and political leaders who are supposed to be dealing with a pending war. Each of their stories alone would be a gripping short novel.

The action takes place in a few hectic weeks and includes a war, political chicanery, breakthrough to other universes, riots, broken hearts, and other major crises. The "main" plot puts together aeais (A.I.s) of the feared, banned Generation Three, a space artifact, and entirely too much pseudo-physics. May I rant a little? Please, sf writers, resist the temptation to take catchy physics phrases from the New Scientist and put them into your books. It never works. The story will look ridiculous to the scientists of today and to everyone in the future. I refer you to the classic 1930's horror story "The Hounds of Tindalos"; excellent, but the author did not foresee that future readers would giggle at the climax when - drum roll -- "The Einstein Equation" is

the ultimate talisman against the evil hounds. In *River of Gods* M-space and Calabi-Yau theory are supposed to explain the space artifact. Giggle.

The sub-stories, on the other hand, are fascinating, and sometimes turn standard sf themes upside down. For instance, in the India of 2047 the male-female ratio is way, way high, especially in the higher castes. Bujold has a mild version of this in her Vorkorsigan books, where it is a completely positive phenomenon that liberalizes a feudal society. MacDonald goes into it much deeper, and shows what happens when a high-caste, sophisticated city man marries a simple, low-caste country girl, because there are 5 men for every woman. It's not a happy marriage. MacDonald also shows upper-caste women being, in effect, forced back into purdah because they are so rare; I don't think that would happen as he has described it but it is certainly thoughtful. Another "I've read that theme before" moment comes with the reader realizes that certain characters are actually aeais, and then realizes that the boundaries between aeais and "real people" are not obvious. William Gibson devoted a whole novel (*Idoru* -- see review below) to one case of an A.I. "passing for human"; in *River* it is part of the background. There are more nods to Gibson: the "Krishna Cops" who police aeais are like his Turing Police, and Shiv the street thug clearly wandered in from a cyber-punk novel. Finally, Vishram, the comedian who ends up trying to harness zero-point energy, is 'desi', of the Indian Diaspora (or possibly an Indian "yored"? I don't know enough about this culture to be sure of the parallels): He wandered in from a mainstream novel of "young man, heir to complex cultural assumptions, forced into maturity". Or he could wander

out into such a novel, it would be better than most that are written.

*River of Gods* has many excellent features, it just doesn't have a great over-all plot. It's not a book that holds the reader in the grip of suspense. It's a

crowded, busy landscape. I pick the book up frequently because I want to revisit a certain scene or character. If you like that kind of reading, and don't demand a straightforward plot, you will enjoy this book.

## Short Book Review by Aharon Sheer

*Idoru* by William Gibson (1996), 383 pages. Recommended by Bill Silverman.

Gibson is the author of *Neuromancer* (1984), one of the great early novels about man's interaction with computers. *Idoru* is a charming book which gives us a picture of a not too distant future, dominated by large media corporations, the Japanese, and the Russian drug mafia. Sound dreary? Yet it is unexpectedly not. There are two main characters, each getting alternate chapters.

One is a young man named Laney, who grew up as an orphan and we learn that he was experimented on as child with all kinds of strange drugs. He volunteered for these experiments, but there were benefits to an orphan in an institution to agreeing to be a subject. As a result of these drugs, Laney has an unexplained ability to link into computer data information and discover important information about people that they might not want others to know. His services are worth paying for.

The other hero is Chia, a 13 year old fan of singer Rez. Chia's mother says that she cannot understand how Chia can be a fan of a singer who is as old as Chia's mother! Why doesn't she run after singers her own age? Of course the secret is that each new generation of teenagers falls in love with the songs that were sung by 20-year old Rez. The much older Rez today is a celebrity, who, in the eyes of his generations of fans, can do no wrong.

What brings Laney and Chia together (although as I recall they never meet) is that they have both gone to Japan for the same reason: There are rumors that singer Rez is going to marry singer Rei Toei. Rei Toei is an "idoru", an "idol" (as "idol" is pronounced in Japanese) for Japanese teenagers, and her videos are wildly successful. What's the problem? Rei Toei is a *software construct*! She doesn't actually exist, except as a sophisticated computer program. (Shades of the wonderful Al Pacino sf movie, *Simone*.) How can Rez fall in love with a software construct? Chia flies to Japan as a representative of the Seattle Rez fan club, to find out for her fellow fans if the rumors are really true. Laney is sent to Japan by people who are connected to Rez who want him to look into the computer networks and try to find out what is actually going on. Author Gibson is fantastic at creating a dense, persuasive future world. His descriptions of Japan and the Japanese are fabulous – I spent eight months in Japan 35 years ago and the book is convincing. (Of course to the Westerner the Japanese is inevitably an amusing caricature -- human beings can't really be like that, can they?) The density of Gibson's descriptions of the future is illustrated by some quotes:

"The image [on the TV] had a peculiar flattened quality that he knew...: the smallest lapel cameras did that, the ones disguised as flecks of lint." [p. 124]

“... he hated the way consumer electronics were made, a couple of little chips and boards inside these plastic shells... So ... he'd make a solid bronze case for a minidisk unit, ebony inlays, carve the control surfaces out of fossil ivory, turquoise, rock crystal. It weighed more, sure, but it turned out a lot of people liked that, like they had their music or their memory, whatever, in something that felt like it was *there*.” [p. 179]

“He was ... smoking a cigarette. ... Chia watched the blue smoke.... There was cancer in that, and they'd arrest you in Seattle if you did it. [The] cigarette looked like it had been made in a factory: a perfect white tube.... Chia had seen those in old movies..., the only other cigarettes she'd seen were the twisted up paper ones they sold in the street in Seattle.” [p. 203]

“Urine... There's a product here [in Japan], a powder, looks like instant soup.... They sell it mainly to mothers with young kids. The kid has to pee, you can't get them to a toilet in time, they pee in a paper cup, an empty juice box. You drop in the contents of a handy, purse-sized sachet of this stuff, zap, it's a solid. Neutral, odorless, completely hygienic.... It's landfill.” [p. 214]

“Laney noticed something then that he knew from his encounters with celebs at Slitscan: that binary flicker in his mind between image and reality, between the mediated face and the face there in front of you.... (Someone at Slitscan had told him that it had been clinically proven that celebrity-recognition was handled by one particular area in the brain....)” [p. 217]

I enjoyed the book.

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### **Star Trek book review by Gary Roth:**

***Star Trek: The Fate of the Phoenix***, by Sondra Marshak and Myrna Culbreath, 262 pages, 1979.

What a difference between this book and the previous "Phoenix" novel I reviewed some time ago! The previous story was not enjoyable, whereas this one features non-stop, unpredictable action, including a surprise ending. Once again the main characters are: Omne, the man who died but reappears reborn thanks to special technology that he created; "Jim" and "James" Kirk -- one is the first recreation of the Kirk who previously died, and the other is a reborn version who agreed to become a husband/servant of the Romulan commander Di'on Charvan; Spock; and the aforementioned female commander. While there is a certain amount of fisticuffs, this time there is much more emphasis on quick thinking and dealing with a wide variety of cultures on different planets. Due to Omne (actually, two of them, who have competing agendas for taking over the universe), the Federation teeters on the edge of falling apart

while the Romulan Empire and Klingons stand ready to take advantage of the changing political situation. The mental links between the 2 Kirks and others come into play in this novel as well, although the links disappear at times.

Omne possesses a super-powerful transporter, and thus can cover a lot of galaxial territory in a short time. With his reincarnation invention, he manages to sway a key Federation official (Roblein) to modify his stand from non-interference (the Prime Directive) to actually questioning the policy of withholding scientific and medical advances to lesser-privileged civilizations. Roblein's wife had died in an accident shortly before Omne's visit, and the official had been prepared to resign his position due to his inability to cope with the tragedy. However, after his wife returned from the dead, obviously Roblein had a change of heart. This action paved the way

for Omne to become Lord Regent of the Hegemony, a large group of planets whose people banded together.

An interesting argument breaks out between two identical rulers, both named the Resident of Razar. Apparently the Omne device led to the duplicated redundant figure, but both individuals claimed to be the original and rightful royal person. The two end up killing each other soon after Kirk and Omne arrive on the scene.

Through an odd series of events, Kirk takes the *Enterprise* to the Lord Regent's installation ceremony, and serves as the ceremonial Federation Ambassador, not knowing in advance that he would be reunited with Omne. Things go awry, however, as the second Omne secretly sabotages the event and forces Kirk and the "real" Omne to form a flimsy alliance. Spock, who lost much of his self-control after the original Phoenix events, wishes revenge on the inventor, without success. Before leaving, however, Kirk and Omne engage in an organized debate about the Prime Directive, and the delegates in attendance go to contemplate the two opposite opinions while the two speakers agree to pursue the other Omne.

Meanwhile, the Romulan commander attempts to force the Thorvan Empire to pledge allegiance to her own Empire, by means of a most-unusual fight with the female ruler, the Doyen. The two ladies battle fiercely with one another in three stages: medieval weapons, hand-to-hand combat, and lastly -- mentally via mind link. While the woman ruler admirably puts forth much effort, the visitor emerges with the upper hand. The victor leaves with the "loan" of the loser's special male companion, Trevanian, who unfortunately does not survive the trials and

tribulations with the consequent encounters of the Omnes.

Eventually, Spock, Kirk and the first Omne travel to the hideout of the second Omne, while the Romulan commander holds off her threatening Commander-in-Chief, Rovon, who accuses her of treason. Simultaneously, the Doyen arrives on the scene to recollect her companion and reluctantly offers to lend her battlefleet as leverage against Rovon. Ultimately, Kirk feigns amnesia and tricks the second Omne into a final fate, while the original Omne transports the "other" Kirk to a lonely fate on an isolated world with himself. Also, Spock and Kirk have an opportunity to kill the first Omne en route to the hideout location, but keep their word to wake him from a self-repairing slumber on the shuttlecraft.

There are a number of themes that repeat themselves: Omne creates a duplicate Spock but with his own thoughts ruling the body, such that Kirk cannot tell that he is in contact with an imposter during a mindmeld. Distrust runs rampant also when the Doyen parts ways with Trevanian, despite the Romulan commander's vow to return him safely. Further, Omne and Kirk are at odds with each other for much of the duration, yet manage to maintain their wily cooperation based on mutual goals. The two Residents of Razar accept that neither can remain in the presence of the other, but neither agrees to leave the planet. Similarly, the two Omnes agree that there is room for only one of them in the galaxy (that the other must go to an alternative universe), but neither desires to be the one to exit!

In all, this book leaves the reader with much food for thought, and so I give it a "90" rating. Check it out!

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