



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.

חוג מדע בדיוני ברחובות – SFIR - Rehovot Science Fiction Club

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

14.1 - הקרנת הסרט: מת על המתים (*Shaun of the Dead*).

21.1 - הרצאה: על גיבורים ונבלים באגדות ובסיפורי ילדים. מרצה: נדב אלמוג.

28.1 - הקרנת הסרט: ברזיל (*Brazil*).

אנימה לכל פועל: החל מה-2.1 תוקרן מדי יום שלישי ב-19:00 סדרת האנימה *Fullmetal Alchemist*.

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

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

Movie Review by Sara Svetitsky

Serenity (2005), directed by Joss Whedon, written by Joss Whedon.

Rated PG-13 for sequences of intense violence and action, and some sexual references. 119 minutes.

There's an excellent sf movie in the DVD stores of Rehovot now (and don't just take my word for it -- this movie won the Hugo for Best Dramatic Presentation last year). I recommend *Serenity* to all **CyberCozen** readers. Maybe you've heard of this movie as the movie made from the failed TV series *Firefly*, and think that since you never saw *Firefly* you won't like it. Don't worry: I never watched a minute of *Firefly*, and I enjoyed *Serenity* thoroughly. Please remember in the rest of the review that I don't know anything about the TV show, so if you HAVE seen the show and want to point out something I missed (Amnon Stupp, are you reading this?) feel free.

Serenity is set in the 25th century, and we still haven't figured out how to keep metal from rusting. The human race has expanded out from Earth. *Serenity* is set in another solar system, one with "dozens of planets and hundreds of moons", terraformed to be suitable for humans. The more advanced societies formed an Alliance, and some years before the movie starts there was a civil war which ended with the Alliance gaining authority over the entire system. The battle of

Serenity Valley was crucial in this victory. The spaceship "Serenity" is captained and crewed by people who were on the losing side in that battle. Rather like a Confederate veteran calling his ship "the Gettysburg", in my opinion. The "Serenity" crew are not heroic rebels against a tyranny -- the Alliance isn't particularly tyrannic, to be fair -- they are people trying to make a living and survive and retain some semblance of a moral code. So there are laws they will break, and others they won't; mainly they just want to survive. Their attempts at keeping a low profile are wrecked when the ship's doctor brings on board his little sister River (Summer Glau) whom he has rescued from a top-secret Alliance research facility. River is brilliant, mildly telepathic, highly psychotic, and a fantastically trained killing machine. Some of those features are natural, some are the result of Alliance programming; in any case, she is not a relaxing person to share a small space-ship with. The Alliance sends its best assassin, a man known only as the Operative (the chilling Chiwetel Ejiofor) after her. It is a tribute to the writing and acting that I found myself seriously wondering: if I were on the "Serenity", of whom would I be more afraid?

But both the Operative and River are sweet and friendly compared to the truly scary characters, the Reavers who haunt the outer edges of the system (and whose existence the Alliance denies). The Reavers are humans (there are no aliens in this movie) gone about as wrong as it is possible to go. As one of the Serenity crew, the archetypal tough-guy Jayne (Alex Baldwin) asks rhetorically: "Eating people alive -- when did that get to be fun?" River's madness leads them all to find where the Reavers came from.

I'm not going to talk more about the plot, so as not to ruin it for viewers, and also because this is an unusual sf movie in that the characters and writing are really more fun than the plot. The director is Joss Whedon, who created *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, and *Serenity* has the same mix of very sharp, witty dialog and genuine creepiness that made *Buffy* such a hit. The actors are all excellent. In particular they establish their characters very quickly, which is important for viewers who don't know the TV show. They play recognized types -- the tough guy, the engineer, the sweet-tempered pacifist, the hardened veteran -- but always with an unexpected spin. The engineer, for instance, is not only mad about engines, but is also a sweet, sexy girl barely out of her teens. Captain Mal Reynolds (Nathan Fillion) is an unassuming, non-heroic type, not at all like a Star Trek captain. They speak an English not

quite like the early 21st century. Some words are different, Chinese is mixed in (especially for cursing), and the accent is slightly twangy and drawly. In fact, it sounds like American Western English, and that puts it right in line with the Western feel of the movie. The movie is clearly built on the classic Western setting, as are the clothes; even the weapons are recognizable guns. At a crucial plot moment we hear the clink of a shell being ejected, not a laser humming. The analogy with the classic Western begins with Reynolds, the soldier defeated in a Civil War who takes to the frontier and to the edges of society; that's the back-story of Jesse James and who knows how many others.

If I talk any more about the writing and the characters I will start to quote the best lines, and that will take up the entire 'zine. So to cut it short, *Serenity* is highly recommended for anyone who likes action, good acting, and sharp writing. (And who is over 13 or 14; there are some scary images).

One season is all there was to the TV series *Firefly*. The network didn't want to make any more episodes, and (according to my "fen" friends in the US) also did dumb things like screen episodes out of order and cancel episodes with no warning. Which is why I call it "failed". Me, I hope they make a sequel to *Serenity*, I would be much rather see it than another *Star Wars* movie.

Star Wars Book review by Gary Roth: *The Mandalorian Armor (Star Wars: The Bounty Hunter Wars Serial, Book 1)* by K. W. Jeter (1998), 416 pages.

It's no mistake, dear *CyberCozen* readers -- after several years of writing only *Star Trek* book reviews, it's time for a brief change. However, I will make some comparisons between my beloved *Star Trek* novels and this newer genre along the way.

Like some *ST* stories, this *SW* book bounces back and forth between two different time periods, although in this case the end of the first almost merges with the beginning of the second into a continuum. However, a number of loose ends leave the reader hungering for closure; that is, several mysteries will undoubtedly be solved later in the *Bounty Hunters* series, which I have no intention of reading!

Unlike *ST*, *SW* concerns itself with small spacecraft and blasters (not huge warships and phasers), and instead of the noble pursuit of seeking out new lifeforms and going to new worlds, the characters are interested in pursuing physical pleasures, money, and killing. A few of the characters from the original *SW* movies are mentioned (Darth Vader, the Emperor, Luke Skywalker, and Princess Leia), but other names take up the bulk of the text. There are no real good guys in the story; just the innocent bystanders / victims and bad / worse / most evil or nasty. Even within the same family of two different lifeforms a parent is killed by his or her adult offspring. Secret security codes (that are kept

safe in the privacy of the owner's brain) for high tech machinery is a recurrent theme in two separate races, and two-faced, backstabbing, double-loyalty coalitions and collaborations also appear more than twice.

The "hero" of this novel is Boba Fett, the galaxy's most feared and successful bounty hunter, who collects enormous fees and always delivers the goods via ingenuity and expensive, innovative weapons. He wears a tarnished suit of armor, complete with a vast array of hand-held tools of destruction. His space ship contains holding cells for prisoners, and while travelling to a meeting with competitors he sends out a booby-trapped replica of the space vessel in advance, almost neutralizing another bounty hunter with revenge on his mind. The official summary of the plot is: As the rebellion gathers force, Prince Xizor proposes a cunning plan to the Emperor and Darth Vader: smash the power of the Bounty Hunters Guild by turning its members against each other. Only the strongest and most ruthless will survive, and can be used against the Rebellion. Fett, who vowed never to join the Guild and to remain always independent, becomes a member and surprisingly joins forces with the alien Bossk (who had tried to kill him) and a few others on a mission to rescue a female, who had supplied classified information, from the Shell Hutts. Fett recruits and an old friend, whose body had been partially transformed into a laser cannon, for the trip. A fierce battle ensues, and the visitors to the Hutts' planet manage to escape, except for the laser cannon-body, which perished. The female was put to death prior to the arrival of the rescuers by a high ranking Shell Hutt, to the dismay of the ruling head of the planet. However, the fat official died in the fierce battle, in spite of the efforts of hired mercenaries to silence the bounty hunters. Bossk eventually eliminates his father and starts an internal struggle of the Guild, which eventually disintegrates. Years later it seems that Fett perishes when Bossk succeeds in blowing up Fett's ship in space, but the reader is left with the impression that another death-defying feat might happen.

By the way, Prince Xizor leads a double role; not only does he hold a high position in the Empire, but he heads his own

underground organization that actually undermines the Empire (it is not, however, affiliated with the Rebels). Xizor walks a veritable tightrope -- he struggles to keep his dual identity hidden from the Emperor and Darth Vader, both of whom suspect some foul play. Unfortunately the reader is kept in suspense in this novel as to what eventually happens to the Black Sun underground network and its leader.

An intermediary involved in bounty hunters is a spider-like creature who lives in a mobile spider-web, which travels through space, Kud'ar Mub'at. She employs her nodes (children) in various tasks, including a welcoming committee for business partners and an accounting tabulator. She must be careful not to allow the tabulator to mature to the point that he will knock off his mother, in the same way that the mother took over from the grandmother. However, the motherly instinct seems to keep delaying any deadly action towards the young. Interesting is the way the members of the web communicate -- through the nerve-like threadlike net fibers. Kud'ar Mub'at finds herself thinking certain thoughts that she must hide from her offspring; she makes mental notes to keep things from escaping into the network.

Further characters fill out the rest of the pages : Kuat of Kuat (unclear if the planet was named after the person or vice versa) -- a smart wheeler-dealer who enjoys petting his cat; two robots programmed for medical work; Neelah -- a dancer of Jabba the Hutt who has a mysterious connection to Boba Fett and whose memory had been intentionally almost completely wiped out; Dengar -- a scavenger-type of bounty hunter who helps Fett survive the nasty acids of the underground monster Sarlacc's stomach on the planet Tatooine; Ob Fortuna -- a sort of double-crossing servant of the head of the Bounty Hunters Guild; and others.

This book was written in an easy-to-read fashion, but I find it irritating that it keeps promising and repeating certain things without delivering. Too, it contains non-essential personalities and details that were a waste of ink and paper. In short, for a change of pace this *Star Wars* series is a pleasant investment of time; however, I would not recommend pursuing more than one of the stories.

Short Book Review by Aharon Sheer

The Best of Henry Kuttner, 338 pages, with an introduction by Ray Bradbury (1974).

Henry Kuttner (1915-1958) was a very prolific sf and fantasy writer when I was a boy. The 17 short stories in this book were written between 1939 and 1953. I started reading sf in October, 1948, in the magazine *Astounding Science Fiction*. I read some of these stories when they were first published. Seven of the stories were published in *Astounding*, although some before 1948. Many were published subsequently in anthologies, and I read them there. Supposedly the 1940 World's SF convention voted Kuttner the **Best SF Writer in the World**, but that too was before my time.

Kuttner's stories were often humorous, although some had a message too. Are these stories, written between 1939 and 1953, dated? Some have a clear time, such "Nothing But Gingerbread Left", a story straight from the Second World War – we might call it humorous alternate history! Others take place in a future that never will be: like the story, "The Iron Standard", that takes place on Venus. In those days scientists thought that Venus would be much like Earth, but warmer, with a hot tropical climate, a rich plant life, and of course intelligent life. The fact that Venus was covered with clouds prevented seeing what the surface looked like, but suggested this image of life on Venus. The story, however, could have taken place in some other star system, on some other planet not yet discovered. All you have to do is change the name of the planet and the story still makes good humorous sense.

Other stories, such as "Mimsy Were the Borogoves", need only minor changes in details to make them fit right into the world of today. Children, and

child psychologists, haven't changed all that much.

Then there are two stories of the Hogben family, "Exit the Professor", and "Cold War". The Hogbens are an offshoot of the human race, superhumans, who hide out in the backwoods of the Ozarks. They are very long-lived: the youngest says, "I can hardly remember much further back than the great fire of London, when Charles II was king, with all them long curls a-hanging on their shoulders. On him, though, they looked good." Grandpaw speaks Chaucerian English, or Sanskrit, except when he gets upset, and then he talks Ozark. They can fly, they are telepathic, have two hearts and no appendix. One of their worries is having scientists get hold of them and start studying them. "Once them doctors and scientists find out about us we'll never know a moment's peace again as long as we live." They do not want to get caught. As the youngest (the hero) says, "We've got some pretty important plans for the future, when the rest of the world begins to catch up with us."

Then there's a Gallegher story, "The Proud Robot". Gallegher is an inventor (the author calls him a "scientist" for some reason) who makes astounding inventions, but only when he is drunk. The problem is that when he is sober he cannot remember what his invention is supposed to do. This story, published in 1943, deals humorously with what the author suggests might happen to the movie industry when television, invented a few years earlier but not yet in commercial use, becomes popular. First, Kuttner says, people will stop going to movies, and stay home and watch TV. But after a while they will realize that

there is something special about watching a movie with an audience, in a large hall, on a big screen. Then people will go back to going to movie theaters, for the “**audience appeal**”. It’s a pretty good prediction, having been made before the first widespread commercial TV broadcasts started.

Kuttner married science fiction writer Catherine Lucille Moore in 1940, and from then on almost everything he published was a collaboration with her. Some stories published under his name were written entirely by her, since his stories got paid a higher rate than hers. As Kuttner said, “Since our marriage, we have collaborated on almost everything we write.... It is almost impossible now to tell which of us wrote what part of any particular story.” Many of their stories were published under a variety of

pseudonyms, a common practice at that time (today too). I think that because at that time there were not so many science fiction writers, but the good ones were very prolific, and the only outlets for stories were a limited number of science fiction and fantasy magazines, it sometimes happened that an entire issue of a magazine was written by one writer, but each story was published with a different pseudonym. Together they used at least 16 names. One that I remember was “Lewis Padgett”, a name that often appeared on their humorous stories.

Tragically, Henry Kuttner died in 1958 of a heart attack. He was only 42 years old. Both Kuttners were actively engaged in radio scripting and screen-writing when Henry died. C. L. Moore continued alone, but she wrote no more science fiction.

Quote of the Month:

“Morphic Bounce Hypothesis...

“The debate ran like this: it was quite easy to turn someone into a frog, and fairly easy to turn them into, say, a white mouse. Strangely, considering the basic similarity of size and shape, turning someone into an orangutan took a vast amount of power.... Turning someone into a tree was much, much harder even than that, although turning a pumpkin into a coach was so easy that even a crazy old woman with a wand could do it. Was there some kind of framework into which all this fitted?

“The current hypothesis was that most Change spells unraveled the victim’s morphic field down to some very basic level and then ‘bounced’ them back. A frog was quite simple, so they wouldn’t have to bounce far. An ape, being quite human-like in many respects, would mean a very long return journey indeed. You couldn’t turn someone into a tree because there was no way to get there from here, but a pumpkin could be turned into a wooden coach because it was quite close in vegetable space.

“The wizards agreed that this all seemed to fit nicely, and was therefore true.”

From *The Science of Discworld* by Terry Pratchett, Ian Stewart and Jack Cohen, p. 199

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