

Cyber Cozen

Science-Fiction Fanzine

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The Israeli Society for Science Fiction and Fantasy

כנס פנטסיה קון חוזר!

כנס הפנטסיה האהוב של האגודה מחדש ימים קודם! הכנס יתקיים השנה בתאריכים 25-26 ביולי במרכז רוזין שברמת אביב ג' (רחוב דרזנר 2, קרוב למרכז שוסטר). נושא הכנס – חלום ליל קיץ. בכנס יתקיימו הרצאות, הקרנות ופעילויות קהילתיות מגוונות. כמו כן תועלה בו לראשונה הפקת המקור "חלום ליל קיץ" – עיבוד קהילתי לפנטסיה הרומנטית של שייקספיר, פרי עטן של ורד טוכטרמן ורותם ברוכין.

התעדכנו בקרוב באתר הכנס: <http://fantasy.sf-f.org.il>

חוג מדע בדיוני ברחובות – SFIR - Rehovot Science Fiction Club

ימי א' בשעה 20:00 בפולסה לחקלאות ברחובות, חדר 2, בבניין ליד הבריכה. הפעילויות ללא תשלום.
15.7 – הקרנת הסרט "מה זה השטויות האלו, באפי ציידת הערפדים" באדיבות שגרירות סאנידייל בישראל.
22.7 – הרצאה: להרוג את סופרמן. מרצים: איתי מאיר והלל רוזנברג.
29.7 – מפגש סיכום שנה, ופעילות בבחירת הקהל.

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

משחקי תפקידים

העמותה לקידום משחקי תפקידים מקיימת הקיץ שני כנסי משחקי תפקידים: גריפון 6, שיתקיים בתאריך ה-19.7 בירושלים, וכנס קרא-קון שיתקיים בתאריכים 2-3.8, בתל אביב.

לפרטים נוספים פנו לאתר העמותה: <http://www.roleplay.org.il>

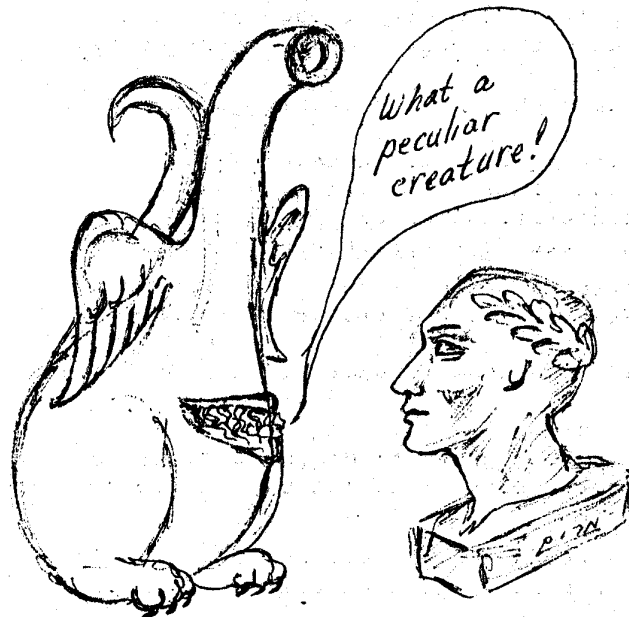
More Society information is available (in Hebrew) at the Society's site: <http://www.sf-f.org.il>

Letter to the Editor

Aharon,

I'm sorry to hear of the passing of Miriam Ben-Loulu. I have enjoyed her many pieces in *CyberCozen*. I never had the fortune to meet her, but I am sure she will be missed by many.

Mordechai Housman



Drawing by Miriam Ben-Loulu (February 1991)

There Are No Idioms in English By Mordechai Housman

In the June 2007 issue of *CyberCozen*, I read that Professor Sydney Berger believes that English is full of idioms, and that one cannot fully understand the language without knowing the figurative intent of the idioms.

Well, I was floored. He actually expects us to swallow this gum-beating!

Sorry, I don't buy it. What is this business with words in a language having hidden or double meanings, as if it were incog and hush-hush? I intend to take Prof. Berger to task about this claim of his. I'm really teed off about it, too. In my opinion, he dropped the ball on this one. I think it's just a hang-up of his. There's no real meat in this issue. It's an open and shut case. He's just whistling Dixie.

Let's hash it out together right here and now.

Prof. Berger claims that people might say words that actually turn out to mean something else. Or that the actual meanings of words often have no direct bearing on the intended meaning of the phrase. I say: hogwash! There are no such words in English, no way, no how.

This is not only half-baked, it is totally fried, not to mention flaky, nuts, fruity, batty, and screwed up. It's bananas.

It's a load of crock. It's horse-manure, it's baloney, garbage, a fish story. There's no such animal.

I won't go into it too deeply. If I do, I might just lose my cool. I don't want to fly off the handle, but it's as plain as the nose on my face that understanding English is a snap. It's easy as pie. It's a piece of cake. It's no sweat, it's a pushover, a picnic, a walkover, child's play, a cinch, a peach, a free ride.

There are no ifs ands or buts about it.

The bottom line is that the nitty-gritty of English, the nuts and bolts, the nature of the beast, the heart of the matter, the kicker, is that words in English have just one meaning, and everyone gets it. I grok it, you got a handle on it, we all get the picture.

Prof Berger should get it down pat, he should get the drift, catch on, latch on to it, pick up on it, get it down cold, wake up and smell the coffee, and wise up, now that I've spelled it out for him and laid it out for him, as well as made it clear, got it across to him, put him straight, and made him see the light.

Movie Review by Sara Beck: *Deja Vu*, 2006. Director: Tony Scott. 128 min. Rated PG-13 for standard action-movie violence

I don't think this movie ever played in theaters in Israel; I saw it on a plane. It has just come out on DVD. *Deja Vu* got mixed, although on the whole positive, reviews. I think that the reason for the lukewarm reception was the movie's crossing of genres. It starts out as an action film, with the reliable plot of "Federal Agents trying to find the terrorist responsible for a dreadful atrocity" (namely, blowing up the New Orleans ferry). It follows this plot fairly predictably, with a few odd things but nothing that screams "science fiction!", until a top-secret government research lab offers the agent Doug Carlin (Denzel Washington) some very special surveillance tapes of the New Orleans region, with a garbled explanation that

they can only produce the images after 4.3 days because the processing takes so long. Because this is obviously bogus, and because the title of the movie is *Deja Vu*, the viewer figures out some time before Carlin does that this project sees the past, but only at a lag of 4.3 days. Carlin uses this to find and arrest the terrorist; there is a first-rate car-chase with Carlin racing down the roads of New Orleans following the terrorist's truck -- on the route it took 4.3 days ago. He (and the viewer) see the video from the past and the traffic of the present simultaneously, a very original and disorienting scene.

So the terrorist is caught and justice

served, all in the first 45 minutes. At which the film goes totally to science fiction; Carlin decides that instead of just solving crimes, for once he is going to prevent a crime. Since the movie poster has the line "what would you do if you could change the past", I don't think it is a spoiler to say that Carlin manages first to leave messages and then to insert himself into the past. And then we are into that staple of classic science fiction, time travel.

I have always had problems with time travel stories. In real time travel stories -- not the lighthearted Star Trek-style romps -- there is the headache-inducing problem of keeping all the loops straight, and the more profound feeling of unease and mental dizziness that comes when cause and effect are mixed. This movie is the best treatment of time travel I know. First, the loops all close elegantly, explaining the odd things mentioned; there are many "oh THAT'S why" moments. Second, the weirdness of it all comes through. Carlin in the past is a desperate figure, afraid above all of "meeting himself". This is real science fiction.

And it is probably that "real science fiction" quality which I like so much that confused the mainstream critics. They were looking for an action movie, and while there is action it is not the movie's point. And I suspect the other-worldly

films of *Star Wars*, *LOTR* and the rest may have spoiled them so they can't appreciate a story in "our world-what if" format.

In short, I liked the movie very much. It has solid science fiction, the unusual setting of New Orleans post-Katrina, and adequate acting. I especially liked the scientists on the time-viewing project; they are cute young nerds, and as someone who is familiar with cute young nerds, I can say they were well portrayed. Their explanation to Carlin of time travel reminded me irresistibly of great scenes in other stories going back to *A Wrinkle in Time*. The other agents and the terrorist are not so vivid, maybe because they have to compete for air with Denzel Washington. Personally, I would pay the DVD rental fee to watch Denzel Washington read the phone book for two hours, and I believe this view is shared by a large fraction of the population. Another large fraction of the population wants to know, what about the girl? Isn't there a girl? Yes there is, who becomes a hostage (no spoiler warning; anyone old enough to read this knows that the pretty girl in a movie like this is going to be a hostage). She is Claire, played by Paula Patton, who is quite good in a rather standard part; what fraction of the rental fee would be covered by her scene in the shower is a question I am not qualified to answer.

Short Book Review by Aharon Sheer

The Immortality Option by James P. Hogan (1995), 321 pages.

James P. Hogan (b. 1941) is an sf author new to me, but he's hardly a young man. He started writing in 1977 as a bet, and by 1979 was able to support himself by writing. Quite remarkable. The book is the second in a series about space travellers from Earth who have discovered intelligent life on Saturn's moon Titan. What is remarkable about life on Titan is that it is all artificial -- robots that have become, over a period of tens of thousands of years -- perhaps from long before there was intelligent life on Earth -- self-aware. Hogan has consulted with the famous Hans Moravec of the Robotics Institute of Carnegie-Mellon University on minds and machines, so he tries to provide a scientific basis to his robots self-awareness.

Earthmen have named these robots "Taloids". Who created the Taloids, and

how and why did they get to Titan, are questions which are answered in this book, no doubt questions which were raised in the first volume (which I have not read), *Code of the Lifemaker* (1983). Hogan's style is humorous, and has emphasis on the human characteristics of his heroes. Regrettably, this includes making his Titan robot heroes all too human. Titanian robot life is reminiscent of Earth's Middle Ages, with farms and inns and rivers and streams and feudal leaders and religious coercion and conflicts between the scientists and the true believers. The "Lifemaker" is the mythical God of these Taloids, and Earthmen are aware that there really must have been a creator at some time in the distant past, but they would not agree to call that creator God.

The humans' base on Titan is "an oasis of light, warmth and companionship in the minus-180°C cold of Titan's cloud-covered darkness 800 million miles from Earth..." [p. 17]

The Taloids call the Earthmen "Lumians", after the bright luminous sun from whose area they come. Taloid scientists try to puzzle out these creatures. Thirg and Brongyd are two of those scientists. Thirg is accompanied by Rex, his mecanine, who "sat on its haunches a few feet away, sniffing the breeze and occasionally twitching one of its collector horns." [p. 33]

"Allegedly, the Lumians were composed of glowing jelly that needed to be bathed constantly in hot, corrosive gases inside their flexible casings. Such gases formed the natural atmosphere of the Lumians' home world, which had oceans of liquid ice and was hot enough to melt mercury.

"But the Lumians are formed from organics, even though they be of a kind unknown to us,' [Brongyd] finally said. 'If there were no machines on Lumia originally, Thirg, then what form of intelligence grew the first Lumians?'

"It was the same question, turned upside down, the generations of robing thinkers had asked themselves when they pondered on what had built the first machine." [p. 34]

The Taloid scientists' discussion is interrupted by the arrival of armed riders.

"The riders wore cloaks of laminate mail or heavy woven wire over body armor made of acid-resistant and heat-absorbing organics. Their expressions were harsh, and they ignored the shouts from villagers on either side. At their head was a thick-bodied figure with a red beard of accumulated cupric plating and a grim set to his cooling louvers.... Halfway along the column of

horserobs was a six-legged cart being drawn by a pair of spring-wheeled tractors...." [p. 36]

We also learn about the original creators of the Taloid, a million years ago. These are the Borijans, who are descended from birds on their planet.

"Most Borijan architecture reflected the theme of upward-branching arboreal forms, and Borijan tastes in everything were toward generous ornamentation. The cities that resulted rose like forests of colorful cacti, splaying out from broad, conoidal trunks into groupings of variously designed columns and spires forming clusters at different levels. The upper parts of these structures often overlapped and merged via connecting bridges and terraces to turn the upper regions into a vast artificial canopy where most of the day-to-day living and business took place. [p. 96]

So we have three alien species in this book: The Taloids, the Borijans, and the humans. These beings and their societies and planets are described, as necessary.

Some Borijans visit a "mammal park".

"They stopped at the elgiloit enclosure to watch the hairy, round-headed creatures screeching and chattering as they brachiated with elongated midlimbs in the trees, while others squatted on the ground scratching and delousing each other with their prehensile forehands....

"Many people believed that elgiloits had the potential to become intelligent, and certainly some of their mannerisms and the expressions on their mobile faces did little to dispel such a notion. However, their ground-based life kept them partly dependent on smell as a primary sense and deprived them of the stimulation to mental dexterity and vision that

came from winged ancestry. Experts were agreed that flight was an essential forerunner to the emergence of intelligence.” [p. 11]

Back on Titan, Thirg and Brongyd are trying to hide from the religious extremists who are enraged at the new ideas brought by the Lumians. They find a familiar area:

“[Thirg] pointed at a sluggish collection of roller conveyors and chutes lazily sending oddments down toward the river and almost obscured by a mostly defunct cable-spinning line. ‘[Mordran] used to live by that brook. There should be a clearing just past the wall beyond it here. It used to be the side of a motor pit that existed here long ago.’

“‘Let’s hope he’s still there,’ Brongyd said. ‘My feet could use a plate, Thirg. And I can feel the dust in the joints that a cool Michelube would to wonders for.’

“Ahead of them, Rex stiffened suddenly and looked up, coolant vanes bristling and collector horns pricked....” [p. 165]

But soon the owner, Mordran, recognizes them and welcomes them into his house.

“The house was modest in size but neatly trimmed and of a healthy color.... There was a garden of plating salt depositors, coolant and solvent stills, and bearing bush presses, along with a fenced paddock at the rear, in which a mixed herd of rare-metals concentrators were grazing on a pile of scrap....

“Thirg and Brongyd sat down gratefully in front of the waterplace, while Mordran set two rechargers and began preparing solvent and plating solutions....

“Thirg sat forward and rubbed his hands together in the warm glow from the flickering fountain of liquid ice in the waterplace.” [p. 168]

The interactions of reactionary Earth economics and politics, of Earth scientists’ on Titan and their own goals, of the Taloids Middle Ages life and conflicts, all mixed with the descendents of the Borijans (as represented by computer simulacra), keeps the story moving. As readers we are intended to side with the few scientific-minded Taloids and their Earth scientist supporters, and are left wondering how the book is going to end. Fun.

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