



Science-Fiction Fanzine

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שנה טובה ומבורכת – Happy New Year

The Israeli Society for Science Fiction and Fantasy

אייקון 2007 בפתח!

במהלך חג סוכות, בין 28 בספטמבר ל-4 לאוקטובר יתקיים אייקון, בסינמטק בתל-אביב, הפסטיבל השנתי למדע בדיוני פנטזיה ומשחקי תפקידים.

אורחי הכבוד של הפסטיבל השנה יהיו סופרת הפנטסיה האמריקאית קרול ברג, ומפיקי הסרט "חותכי ורידים: סיפור אהבה" (עפ"י אתגר קרת) גורן דוקיץ' ומיקל לזרב. פרטים על אודותיהם ניתן למצוא באתר הפסטיבל.

יתקיים באייקון פסטיבל סרטים בינלאומי. בין הסרטים הבולטים בו ראויים לציון סרט הפתיחה "אבק כוכבים", על פי ספרו של ניל גיימן, "Hogfather" שנעשה בהשראת טרי פראצ'ט, "28 שבועות אחרי", חגיגות 20 שנה ל"נסיכה הקסומה", סרט האנימציה "שנת הדג" והסרט הבוליוודי *Krrish*.

בפסטיבל צפויות שלל אטרקציות נוספות, ובהן המחזמר "המוזיקאים מברמן", חגיגות 30 שנה ל"מלחמת הכוכבים", חגיגות עשור ל"סטארגייט", השקת הספר "דרקון הוד מלכותו" מאת נעמי נוביק, הענקת פרסי גפן, הקרנת סרטי אנימציה, תחרות סרטים קצרים, תיאטרון בובות למבוגרים, פסטיבל סרטים מקסיקני, מגוון הרצאות איכותיות ועוד! לפרטים נוספים: <http://www.icon.org.il>.

מועדון הקריאה

מועדון הקריאה בחודש ספטמבר יתמקד בספר "מלחמת האדם הזקן" מאת ג'ון סקאלזי (הוצאת ינשוף). פרטים על מיקום המפגשים ומועדיהם יפורסמו בקרוב באתר האגודה.

ספרי החודש של המועדון לחודש אוקטובר יהיו "הקיטנה של קנלר" מאת אתגר קרת, ו"עריסת חתול" מאת קורט וונגוט (שניהם בהוצאת זמורה ביתן). מפגשי מועדון הקריאה לחודש אוקטובר יתקיימו במהלך פסטיבל אייקון 2007. פרטים נוספים בהמשך.

השתתפות במועדון הקריאה אינה כרוכה בתשלום או בהגעה למפגשים נוספים ופתוחה גם למי שאינם חברים באגודה. מומלץ להביא את הספר. לפרטים נוספים ניתן לפנות לאתר האגודה ול"מכונת הזמן": <http://sffevents.mad-logic.com/calendar.php>.

לפרטים ולהצטרפות לרשימת התפוצה של מועדון הקריאה: http://www.sf-f.org.il/story_963.

חוג מדע בדיוני ברחובות – Rehovot Science Fiction Club - SFIR

התא הרחובותי יצא לפגרה ויחזור לפעילות בחודש אוקטובר. להצטרפות לרשימת התפוצה: sfir42@yahoo.com.

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

Letter to the Editor

Hi, Aharon:

Will you please publish in *CyberCozen* my sincere thanks to Shmuel Kahn for his review of *Roma Eterna* (August 2007). I, too, am an avid Robert Silverberg fan and I'm glad he warned me so I won't waste money, or more important, valuable reading time on a book so, to put it weakly, disappointing! Thank you, Mr. Kahn.

Clara Rimón

Book Review by Sara Beck

The System of the World, Neal Stephenson (2004), 912p.

In the past few years I wrote for this respected publication on the books of Neal Stephenson. More books by this author have appeared since those reviews were published and here are brief updates.

Neal Stephenson wrote *Cryptonomicon*, reviewed in these pages (*CyberCozen*, February 2002), about the 20th-century adventures of people named Shaftoe, Waterhouse, Dengo and Root, along with others like Turing and Macarthur who are easier to find in history books. He then wrote the **Baroque Cycle**, three long novels, about their late 17th and early 18th century ancestors. The Baroque Cycle is in three long volumes called *Quicksilver*, *The Confusion*, and *The System of the World*. (Be warned that the long volumes have been split up and re-issued under new names by unscrupulous publishers). I reviewed *Quicksilver* and *The Confusion* already (*CyberCozen*, September 2004). I liked *Quicksilver*, raved about *The Confusion*, and expressed some concern that the yet-to-be-written third volume would suffer from the weakness of conclusion that several Stephenson books show. Earlier Stephenson books tend to break down in the last 50 pages; typically there are outbreaks of violence, the characters are lost and confused, and the story ends abruptly, but doesn't really finish. In *The System of the World* Stephenson avoids the breakdown. The book is a satisfying conclusion to the trilogy. We understand who was doing what, and largely why, and we can imagine how the characters will continue with their lives after we close the book. This may be due to the framework of the historical novel; the book has to join onto what we know as historical reality. So we know that slavery doesn't become established in the British Isles, that Caroline does become Queen of England, that Leibniz

goes to Russia -- and because we read *Cryptonomicon* we also know that a Shaftoe makes it to America and that Enoch Root is still around in 1999. In other words, this book ties up the threads.

The System of the World doesn't anywhere reach the level of inspiration of the Cairo scene or the trek through India in *The Confusion* -- maybe because it has to fit into our recognized history -- but it is lively, full of action, informative and witty. The setting is Britain and Europe, leaving the Dengos, de la Cruz, and others on their own until the 20th century. It concentrates on the struggle between Isaac Newton, Master of the Mint, and Jack the Coiner, Jack Shaftoe in his new persona. Newton is also after Jack because Newton is a working alchemist and he thinks Jack has got the Solomonic Gold, the Philosopher's stone. Eliza is trying to abolish slavery. Jack is undermining the English currency and planting bombs in London, while pining for Eliza. Waterhouse is trying to reconcile Newton and Leibniz, and invent a steam engine. Actually, Waterhouse is trying to start the Industrial Revolution, but he doesn't know how to say it. He also invents punched cards, a form of information storage my younger readers may never have seen; some of his cards show up in *Cryptonomicon*. Enoch Root is watching the whole affair and dropping hints. Stephenson rather staggily inserts a reading of the section of Genesis that explains that the original Enoch didn't die. This shows how knowledge of the Bible has fallen off in our day; I would have thought that was obvious. Although I first met Enoch in *Cryptonomicon*, which was written of, by and for computer geeks, and a person called Root in a computer-hackers book is also pretty obvious.

But *The System of the World* isn't meant to be a novel on its own, so this review should really look at the entire **Baroque Cycle**. And the verdict is yes, it is worth

the investment of time, money, thought, and all the paper you use sketching out family trees to figure out who everyone is. I wonder what Stephenson can possibly do next?

POEM: Science Fiction Writers
 by Miriam Ben-Loulu
 Drawing by Miriam Ben-Loulu
 (June 1991)

They call us dreamers and prophets.
 They say that we give men ideas --
 The submarine, airplane and rocket;
 the robot; and men on the moon....

They think that we tell the world's fortune
 Like a gypsy with silver-crossed palm --
 "Man will fly"; "Man will conquer the oceans";
 And "man will visit the stars"....

How can we tell and convince them
 That fortune and fate aren't our thing?
 Most of our dreams are pure moonshine --
 Things we know never could be.

Some of our plots come from others --
 For we take and give without fee --
 We clothe them in shapes of our fancy,
 Then change and reshape without end.

We write for the fun of creation.
 We revel in working with words.
 If money can be made by playing,
 Why labor at getting ahead?

The "past" is good for the teacher.
 The "present" will do for the mass.
 But WE take the stuff of the "future"
 And mold it to fit our desires.

A dash of the "past" and the "present" --
 Enough to give our work style --
 But the "future" gives us wide freedom
 And our limit lies beyond stars.



DVD Review by Clara Caren Rimon

Robot Stories (2003), Directed by Greg Pak, Writing credits Greg Pak, 85 min.

Robot Stories is four short stories. I'll review each of the four in turn:

My Robot Baby: I didn't think this mother would meet the requirements for being allowed to have a baby. Imagine taking a broom to a robot baby? But at the end, she showed such tenderness, this viewer guesses maybe they do get to have the baby after all.

Robot Fixer: I didn't care for this one at all. It had little to say and was tedious about saying it.

Ed. Note: *Robot Stories* was reviewed by Aharon Sheer in *CyberCozen* May 2007.

Robot Love: This was fun! And it was a pleasure just to look at Greg Pak as a robot office worker – and look and look ... He's what women call 'drop-dead gorgeous'!

Clay: Very moving and sad. And beautifully performed.

In fact the acting was superb in all of them.

Quote of the Month:

“A tension exists in neurology between those who believe that the most valuable lessons about the brain can be learned from statistical analyses involving large numbers of patients and those who believe that doing the right kind of experiments on the right patients – even a single patient – can yield much more useful information. ... By way of analogy, imagine that I cart a pig into your living room and tell you that it can talk. You might say, ‘Oh, really? Show me.’ I then wave my hand and the pig starts talking. You might respond, ‘My God! That’s amazing!’ You are not likely to say ‘Ah, but that’s just one pig. Show me a few more and then I might believe you.’ Yet this is precisely the attitude of many people in my field [of neurology].

“I think it’s fair to say that, in

neurology, most of the major discoveries that have withstood the test of time were, in fact, based initially on single-case studies and demonstrations. More was learned about memory from a few days of studying a patient called H.M. than was gleaned from previous decades of research averaging data on many subjects. The same can be said about hemispheric specialization (the organization of the brain into a left brain and a right brain, which are specialized for different functions) and the experiments carried out on two patients with so-called split brains (in whom the left and right hemispheres were disconnected by cutting the fibers between them). More was learned from these two individuals than from the previous fifty years of studies on normal people.”

From *Phantoms in the Brain* (1998) by V.S. Ramachandran and Sandra Blakeslee, p. xiii

Short Book Review by Aharon Sheer

The Sunborn by Gregory Benford (2005), 436 pages

Gregory Benford (b. 1941) is a professional physicist on the faculty at the University of California, Irvine, doing research in both astrophysics and plasma physics, and his science fiction novels have a solid scientific base. On the other hand, he has big, cosmic ideas, which are wild speculations about things that might be going on in the universe. This book combines both.

The Sunborn is the sequel to *The Martian Race* (1999), a novel about a race to be the first humans to land on Mars. In the earlier novel, the astronauts find life on Mars deep underground, life which seems to be quite primitive but nevertheless is responsive to the invasion of humans into the underground environment. In *The Sunborn* Benford starts out by continuing the exploration of Mars, and having the astronaut scientists discover that Martian life is a lot more sophisticated than they thought at first. But then Benford decides to take his researchers to Pluto to see what is out there. It turns out that very low-temperature Pluto also has life, but this time all the signs are that this life is not originally native to Pluto – it has been planted there. The story gets more cosmic as the astronauts are attacked by great clouds of electromagnetic gases, an idea that I think Benford has used elsewhere, in *Great Sky River* (1987), among others – in his *Galactic Center*

Series, and this is where I got unhappy with this book.

One of the reasons American readers don't like the books of Stanislaw Lem is that Lem's aliens are alien – too alien to be understood by mere human beings. The infuriating thing about Benford's weird aliens is that their psychology sounds like that of Benford's competing physicist from down the hall, or one of those unpleasant people living next-door in his neighborhood. Could clouds of gas be so unalien? Frankly, I just stop suspending disbelief. To Benford's credit I did finish the book, but I was unconvinced by all of his characters, both human and superhuman.

Benford's scientists even have a computer program which can learn any language, and manages to communicate both with the aliens on Pluto, and the alien gas clouds. The program then translates the alien thoughts into English. I found this – shall we say – unlikely.

There's a lot of physicist cosmic speculation here which might interest the physicist reader, but for me, this book was a disappointment. I preferred Benford's books showing scientists from the physical laboratory, such as *Timescape* (1980), and *Cosm* (1998), and how they interact and how they work on a day-to-day basis. At least they were humans interacting with other humans, and they didn't have cosmic alien nasty next-door neighbors.

For Comments: 13 Pinsker St., Rehovot 76308. Email: asheer@netvision.net.il. Tel: Aharon Sheer 08-947-1225

Editor: Aharon Sheer. Logo by: Miriam Ben-Loulu

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