



Science-Fiction Fanzine

Vol. XX, No. 1; January, 2008

The Israeli Society for Science Fiction and Fantasy

מועדון הקריאה

השתתפות במועדון הקריאה אינה כרוכה בתשלום או בהגעה למפגשים ופתוחה גם למי שאינם חברים באגודה. מומלץ להביא את הספר.
 ספר החודש של המועדון בחודש פברואר יהיה "עולם טבעת" מאת לארי ניבן (הוצאת מעריב), לקראת ביקורו של הסופר בארץ בחודש מרץ – פרטים יופיעו באתר האגודה לקראת סוף ינואר. לפרטים ולהצטרפות לרשימת התפוצה של מועדון הקריאה: http://www.sf-f.org.il/story_963

חוג מדע בדיוני ברחובות - SFIR - Rehovot Science Fiction Club

20.1 - משפחת אדמס (The Addams Family)

27.1 - מכסחי השדים (Ghostbusters)

כל פעילויות התא הרחובותי מתקיימות בימי א' בשעה 20:00 בפקולטה לחקלאות ברחובות, חדר 2 (הבניין שליח הברכה). הכניסה לכל הפעילויות אינה כרוכה בתשלום. לפרטים נוספים, כתבו אל Sfir42@yahoo.com.

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

Lavie Tidhar: *HebrewPunk*

[Press release]

Lavie Tidhar's latest book is out. *HebrewPunk* was described by Ellen Datlow as "a Judaic mystical alternative history" and by Kage Baker as "Hardboiled Kaballah". It is a collection of four linked stories taking place inside Jewish history, and includes stories that first appeared in *Chalomot Be'aspamia*, including "The Heist", "Transylvanian Mission" and "The Dope Fiend", with new novelette "Uganda", telling the story of the Zionist expedition to East Africa in 1905. The collection is available in paperback from Amazon or directly from Apex Publishing (apexbookcompany.com).

Book Review by Aharon Sheer

Time and Again by Jack Finney (1970), 399 pages.

This is a travelogue, a trip to New York of 1882. Of course many books of historical fiction have been written, and this is one of them. But what does that have to do with science fiction? Well, the author, Jack Finney (1911-1995), wrote many time travel stories, and here he provides a nice pseudo-science explanation of how one might travel in time. It is the story of a secret U.S. government project in 1970 that sent people back in time to a variety of times and places. The hero, Si Morley, is a young (28), divorced, commercial artist, who is marking time drawing soap

advertisements. The project has identified him as a good (but rare) candidate for their project, and they try to talk him into it.

How does one travel in time? Einstein (the book tells us), with his Unified Field Theory, has provided the method, and it is fitting that the head of the project is a physicist. It seems that all times exist simultaneously. As we live from day to day, we are like a person travelling down a river in a boat. We cannot see what is ahead of us, it is around the next bend in the river. Nor can we see what is behind us, it is behind the

last bend in the river. But both the past behind us and the future ahead of us are there, just as we are here. So what keeps us firmly fixed in our present time on the river? It is our brain, which knows when we are and where we are, what the world is like NOW, who are the important people, what buildings exist, what neighbors we have, what streets we can walk on, and so on. Our brain has a picture of the world as it is NOW, and that picture changes all the time as we move forward in time.

So it is fitting that other key people on the projects are psychologists. Their object is to develop ways to make a person FEEL that he is in a different time and place. An environment is created as much like some past time and place as is possible. The subject (and there few suitable to be such) learns as much as he or she can about that time and place. The subject is placed in the right physical location today, but provided with all the characteristics of that past time. He receives a daily newspaper (freshly printed) copied from a newspaper from that time. Food typical of that time is delivered to him daily by someone dressed as people dressed at that time. He uses money (newly minted) that is an exact copy of money of that time. People talk to him in the slang of that time. Self-hypnosis is taught to each subject so that he can place himself into the atmosphere of that time, and feel that he is there.

The project is a success. Several subjects find themselves back in the past, for minutes or hours. When the subject returns to the present he/she is debriefed – everything possible is learned about how it feels to be back in that earlier bend in the river. Historians want to know all about it. The psychologists want to know how it feels. After a day or two back in the present, the subject returns himself to the past for more exploration. Of course, there is the constant warning: Don't interfere! Be an observer, but do not change events!

Si's girl friend Kate gets involved in what Si is learning to do. Kate too learns all about the time Si is going to, she too learns self-hypnosis. Kate has a personal, family reason for wanting to go back, for her family history has an important event in 1882. The project even chooses the exact date Si is sent to so that he can explore Kate's past relatives and the past event. And he, without telling the project in advance, takes Kate with him on an early visit. But the director of the project says, "No more". It's too risky for two to go back together. So after that, Si has to go back alone.

And of course in 1882 there is also a girl that Si gets involved with, Julia, without intending. Si is being directed by historians who want to know about Kate's relative, who is of historical importance in his time. And it turns out that Julia's fiancée is involved with this person. So Si, in his trips to the past, spends a lot of time with Julia. (He might have preferred to be with Kate, but he has no choice.)

Author Jack Finney spends more time than I would have liked on details of New York City of 1882. In this book, he brings actual photographs and drawings from the same period. The drawings, of course, are credited to Si, since he is himself an artist. He is even credited with having taken the photographs, using a camera of that time. On the one hand, these drawings and photographs bring the book very much to life. On the other hand, do we really so obsessively want to know about the appearance of the streets and houses and people of New York City in the 1880s?

"And all around that living, moving square rolled the most glittering parade of carriages you could hope to see....

"And the horses *pranced*, slim and magnificent, their harnesses and curried bodies shining, heads reined high, manes braided, knees lifting to chests; a lot of them were in matched absolutely identical pairs: black, brown, gray, white. And inside those

carriages sat the most stylish, splendid, exciting-to-look-at women I'd ever seen. They were going shopping after a few turns around the square, Julia said – along the Ladies' Mile that stretched down Broadway to the south.

"We were closer now, and I grinned with pleasure to see that these weren't like the women who sit back, obscure and hidden, almost cowering into the deep corners of expensive, drably chauffeured automobiles; these ladies sat erect and far forward, smiling, showing themselves off behind the glittering glass, looking regal and utterly pleased with themselves. It was absurd, garish, a blatant open display of money and privilege; and it was so innocent it was charming, and I wanted to laugh out loud for joy in it." [p. 174]

There are some details not given that I would have liked to have. When Si takes a room in a boarding house in 1882, he's told that the bathroom, down the hall, is shared with the other roomers. But in the whole book, Si never takes a bath or a shower. And I wonder: where does the hot water come for such a bath? He tells us often of the gas-lights, which illuminate the room he stays in, and the other rooms, and the street-lights too are gas-lights. So maybe the house has hot water heated by gas (coal gas, I assume)? But he doesn't say. Si also never goes to a toilet. What were the toilets like? When Si spends an entire day hiking and riding around in New York City in 1882, where does he go to the toilet? I'd like to have heard about that!

"...I was looking for similarities in people's faces, and I'm obliged to say I found hardly any.

"I'm certain it wasn't a matter of clothes, of makeup or its absence, or of hair styles. *Today's faces are different*; they are much more alike and much less alive. On the streets of

the eighties I saw human misery, as you see it today; and depravity, hopelessness, and greed; and in the faces of small boys on the streets I saw the premature hardness you see now in the faces of boys from Harlem. But there was also an *excitement* in the streets of New York in 1882 that is gone.

"It was in the faces of women moving along the Ladies' Mile and into and out of those splendid lost stores. Their faces were animated, they were glad to be just where they were, alive in that moment and place.... And above all, they carried with them a sense of purpose. You could see that: They weren't *bored*, for God's sake! ...

"Faces don't have that look now; when alone they're blank, and closed in." [p. 218-19]

He gives us a little taste of what life was like for poor working people in 1882. He talks with the driver of a horse drawn streetcar. It's a cold winter day, and while the passengers are inside the car, protected from the wind, the driver of the streetcar is on an open platform at the front, in wind and snow. Si goes out to the open platform and talks to the driver:

"How long do you work?"

"Fourteen hours a day is my working time, and sometimes longer after the car is washed and everything attended to. Don't give a fellow much chance to see his family, does it?" I said no, it didn't, and he nodded, and said, 'How much do you think we make? ... A dollar and ninety cents a day.... You just think about supporting a wife and children on a dollar and ninety cents a day. Most of us work on Sundays; poor people can't afford to rest on the Sabbath in a great city like this. ... Nine tenths of the people in New York find scarcely a moment in their lives which they can call their own, and see mighty little but misery from one year's end to the other.'" [p. 251-52]

Although the surfeit of details at times makes the book drag, the story is gripping. We read with interest how things develop, wonder what will happen next, worry about how Si's actions will affect the future (OUR present). But of course, this is fiction. It never happened. It is not possible to travel to the past,

except in our mind. This book is one way to do that.

Alas, the novel never really finishes the story, despite a jumbled, confused and unlikely ending. It appears that Finney had a sequel in mind, and indeed he published such a sequel, *From Time to Time*, in 1995. Too bad.



Science Fiction Fan corners favorite author
(Drawing by Miriam Ben-Loulu) May 1990

Short Book Review by Aharon Sheer

The Sunborn by Gregory Benford (2005), 436 pages

Gergory 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 brought 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

For mail delivery of *CyberCozen*, please donate 30 shekels per YEAR; For airmail to US \$15; If Aharon Sheer can hand-deliver it, 15 shekels. For free email delivery write to asheer@netvision.net.il (specify XP Word format or PDF format).

Copyright © 2008

.All rights reserved to specified authors and artists
כל הזכויות שמורות למחברים וליוצרים, כפי שצוינו.