



Science-Fiction Fanzine

Vol. XX, No. 3; March, 2008

The Israeli Society for Science Fiction and Fantasy

**אירועים בהשתתפות לארי ניבן**

סופר המד"ב הידוע לארי ניבן יבקר (Larry Niven) בישראל באמצע חודש מרס 2008, וישתתף בשני כנסים:

א. הכנס "פנטסיה ומציאות – עבר, הווה ועתיד" המאורגן במשותף ע"י אוניברסיטאות בר אילן

וחיפה, והאגודה. ניבן יתארח בחלק הכנס שיתקיים בבר אילן. הכנס ייערך בימים 18-19/3

באולם וואהל שליד אונ' בר אילן. אתר הכנס: <http://www.biu.ac.il/HU/events/fantasy/fantasy.htm>

ב. "כנס המרחב המוכר" מאורגן ע"י האגודה, באירוחו הנדיב של מכון ויצמן, ביום 20/3, באולם

וויקס. פרטים באתר [/http://k-space.sf-f.org.il](http://k-space.sf-f.org.il)

בשני הכנסים יתקיימו אירועי חתימה על ספרים.

**מועדון הקריאה**

במרכז דיון מועדון הקריאה בחודש מרץ יעמוד הספר "ג'ונתן סטריינג ומר נורל" של סוזנה קלארק (בהוצאת ינשוף).

מועדון הקריאה בתל אביב יתקיים בתאריך ה- 26/3, יום ד', בשעה 19:30, בבית הקפה "קפה ג'ו" בבוגרשוב 87, בהנחייתה של רותם ברוכין.

**חוג מדע בדיוני ברחובות – SFIR - Rehovot Science Fiction Club**

23.3.08 - 7 לייז

כל פעילויות התא הרחובותי מתקיימות בימי א' בשעה 20:00 בפקולטה לחקלאות ברחובות, חדר 2 (הבניין שליד הבריכה). הכניסה לכל הפעילויות אינה כרוכה בתשלום. לפרטים נוספים, כתבו אל ([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>

**Short Book Review by Clara Caren Rimon**

*A Fire Upon the Deep* by Vernor Vinge (1992), 624 pages.

The author's name is pronounced VIN-gee. This book won the Hugo Award in 1993. I struggled through this book. I would have liked the book to be about half the length, 600+ pages! It was too much for me. Most of it I found totally incomprehensible. Author Jack McDevitt (see review of *Seeker*, in *CyberCozen*, October 2007) set some of his books 9,000 years in the future. Vinge goes him one better: distances are measured in thousands of light years, time in thousands of centuries!

The galaxy is populated by myriads of civilizations, human and alien, and there are constant wars that wipe out entire civilizations. The story begins with a human world destroyed, from which one family manages to escape. Their spaceship crashlands, is attacked by aliens, and the parents are immediately killed. The teen-age daughter, Johanna, is rescued by good aliens. When confronted by what she thinks are monsters, she attacks them (in self-defense) to try to escape. By their gentleness and soothing ways, she finally grasps that they mean

her no harm. Her eight year old brother Jefri is captured by the “baddies” who pretend they are protecting him, as bait to ambush the good aliens. I was interested mainly in what happens to the humans because neither knows what’s become of the other, whether he’s dead or alive.

The only thing that really impressed me about the book was the originality of the aliens. Many sf writers have at one time or another imagined an alien and tried to describe it to the reader. I remember one book by Ray Bradbury (he was one of my favorite authors at the time) in which he “cheated”; he didn’t describe his aliens *at all* but left them to the imagination of the reader!!

These aliens of Vinge’s are intelligent dog-like beings, with jaws and claws, which form packs. A pack is made up of

five, or more, or less, beings, each being complete in itself. The members of a pack coordinate their thoughts via high-frequency sound. A single one is about as smart as a clever dog; two to three can think as well as a young human child; four to six is the standard and possess human or greater intelligence and self-awareness and personalities. They can separate and come back together. If one member of a pack is killed, he can be replaced – the pack thereby becoming almost indestructible. I found this the most fascinating alien I’ve ever read about anywhere. It was the best part of the book.

But I most certainly won’t want to read another book by Vinge. His books may be prize-winners, but they are way over my head! And too long!!

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

**Star Trek: Memory Prime**, by Gar and Judith Reeves-Stevens (1988), 309 pages.

A most intriguing piece of science fiction, indeed! Warning: once you start reading, you won't be able to put the novel down until it's finished! Spock is suspected and later accused of plotting to murder at least one of the greatest visiting scientists in the Federation, who have gathered for an awards ceremony at a planet called Memory Prime. This planet contains an enormous depository of information, guarded in a top-security facility, and was essentially established following a hostile alien takeover of a similar facility that contained no security. The real assassin manages to impersonate his target, and thus penetrates the Enterprise undetected. Captain Kirk's command is superseded by a superior officer due to the emergency, and only by violating all of the rules do the familiar StarFleet save the guest scientists, the planet, and Spock.

The book opens with a chapter introducing us to a warrior-for-hire, who looks like a Vulcan but, as we learn later, is really a descendant who is considered Romulan. His race rejected the Vulcan control of emotion, instead

opting for terror and violent tactics to accomplish goals. En route to being hired, the sly undercover fighter worms his way out of a potential bar brawl on an "outlaw" planet. Soon thereafter, while being interviewed for the hit job, this Starn character shoots his potential employer, unleashing blue "blood" -- robot coolant! Only at the end of the book are we told that the entity to be murdered is not a body, but rather a self-consciousness called a Pathfinder. These beings are accessible only through a machine link on the Memory Prime, and we are told of only 12 in existence. They process huge amounts of data in just a few nanoseconds, and come up with their own theories as part of a game amongst themselves. However, something goes awry -- read the book to find out!

Anyone wishing to communicate with a Pathfinder must do so via an interface humanoid, who are semi-bald and have long metal fingernails for inserting into the link. Oddly enough at the end, Spock stops this bad Romulan/scientist imposter from completing his mission, only to realize that, despite the evil

intentions, it was the right thing to do! Somewhat surprisingly, Spock finishes the job off, following a tough battle in both the physical sense, as well as in the mind-link arena.

The reader is treated to a number of scientific inventions, some of which have no apparent practical value. One is a device that "creates a force shield which extends forward in time to contain the temporal distortion of the accelerator field and keep it from trying to occupy the same future space as the 4th-dimensional arms of the ship's dilithium crystals". This causes consternation from the transporter chief and leads to a most amusing series of technical arguments between Scottie and the Professor. Later, the aforementioned Starn attempts to blow up the Enterprise by introducing bacteria that will eat away at the invention, causing an enormous explosion in its wake. However, Scottie distrusts the Professor and his theories, and took the dilithium crystals off line (they are only needed for above Warp Factor 4 power), so the expected big bang turned into only a moderate emergency.

Besides high-powered scientific lingo, the reader is also exposed to the bureaucracies of running a large institution, as well as the politics involved. One verbal interchange involves director Salman Nensi (a native of our moon?) trading threats with personality-less mechanical robots on wheels. Several lines of prose incorporate discussions with Andorians, too.

The only survivor of the Memory Alpha alien invasion (see above), a woman much older than Scottie, is the chief engineer on Memory Prime. The two engineers have high respect for one

another professionally, and have an attraction for each other emotionally as well (dating back to a previous encounter). The two are very happy to be reunited, even under such stressful conditions. This Mira Romaine has an uncanny, intuitive knack for figuring out the Pathfinder's underlying intentions, despite the monotone computer translations between humans and self-consciousnesses. Eventually she is allowed to enter the world of the Pathfinders, as a sign of trust and in acknowledgement of her exceptional brainpower.

Intelligent schemes are frequent throughout the story. Spock, for example, is confined to a kind of prison cell with a force field, yet manages to fool the security system via a library reader, which is not even a full-fledged integrated computer! In the same vein, the real assassin selectively jams communications between the Enterprise and the Federation, and then fabricates an audiovisual interchange from a seemingly authentic command center, complete with orders for the Commander who sat in Kirk's seat on the bridge. Further, Kirk, who always finds a way out of a jam, ingeniously yanks out a bunch of wires from an attacking library mechanical drone/"assistant". In addition, McCoy/Uhura and other good guys transfer messages to and from Spock by way of an interesting code language.

These two authors are excellent, in my humble opinion. They created an exciting, moving novel that opens up new galaxies of thoughts and ideas, with numerous surprises along the way. In conclusion, the Reeves-Stevens team weaved a tale of sci-fi that will take its place among the classics, so don't miss it!

## Book Review by Aharon Sheer

***The Billion Dollar Boy*** by Charles Sheffield (1997), 255 pages.

Charles Sheffield (1935 – 2002) was a physicist who didn't start writing science fiction until 1978, when he was past age 40. His stated purpose was to encourage young people to study science and technology, by getting them excited

about scientific ideas through the reading of science fiction. After discovering him, I reviewed several of his sf books in *CyberCozen*: in November 2000, *Cold as Ice*; in July 2001, *The Web Between the Worlds*; in January 2002, *The Compleat*

*McAndrew*; and in November 2002, *The Spheres of Heaven*.

This book was deliberately aimed at a teenage audience. The hero, Shelby Cheever, is the 15 year old son of one of the wealthiest people on Earth. In this future, there are 14 billion people on Earth, most of them living in poverty. The numerous servants, cooks, gardeners, cleaners, etc., working for the Cheevers, are lucky to have a job, even if it means serving the spoiled brat only son of a very wealthy man. In contrast to Earth, there are people living and working in space, mining asteroids for minerals. Not only that, but a system of nodes enables interstellar transportation, and people live and mine space far away from Earth, and ship back to Earth what they find as a way of making their living.

Shelby Cheever has received an education of sorts: He has learned the social graces dictated by the needs of his socialite mother. He can do social dancing with girls from his social class. He has been taught how to do “small talk”, to chat with his mother’s socialite friends in a pleasant and acceptable manner. He knows how to dress properly, to walk, to smile, to sit. But he does not know how to talk to people who are below him. And what of his father? Shelby’s father comes by once a month for few hours to visit his family. He is a distant and rare figure for his son, too busy with his many businesses and economic activities to pay much attention to his son.

Things change dramatically for Shelby when he talks his mother into taking a vacation in space. They go to a luxury station in space for a social vacation. What is there of interest for a bright but bored 15 year old to do? Well, for one thing, he can put on a space suit and go to the nearest node and travel to the Kuiper Belt, the asteroid belt beyond the farthest planets in the Solar System. Without asking permission (it’s a paid part of the tour) and without following any safety rules (nobody tells *him* what to

do), off he goes – and finds himself floating in space in the Messina Cloud, light years from Earth.

Luckily he’s picked up by miners. What do they mine? It seems that millions of years ago (apparently) an advanced, no longer existent, alien race learned how to make stable transuranic elements. On Earth such elements have half-lives measured in microseconds. But *these* engineered elements are stable, and enormously valuable. And these miners follow clouds of interstellar gas looking for such elements.

Shelby’s claim of being the son of a very rich man makes no impression on the miners who rescued him. They have a job to do, and they expect him to work too. He’s never done any labor in his life. Not only that, but he’s expected to clean up after himself, prepare food for himself, worry about his clothes, and all the things that normal people have to do. After three months of travelling with these miners, learning from them and trying to understand them, Shelby is becoming a new boy.

They get to the Confluence, the regular meeting place of all the ships that spend most of their time looking for transuranics. It’s the big social event, the chance to exchange materials and goods that some have and others need, the chance for boys to meet girls. This is Shelby’s introduction to teenage life as the miners lead it – completely different from the formal relations of his mother’s social circle. Yet Shelby can feel right at home:

“For the first time since arriving at the Messina Cloud, Shelby felt confident of his abilities. In the social stratum occupied by Constance Cheever [his mother], platitude training preceded potty-training....

“He listened carefully to everyone’s name and tried to use it, allowed others to set the direction of the conversation, and restricted his own contributions to occasional harmless comments.” [p. 149]

One of the things typical of Sheffield's novels is the weird collection of people he describes. Few of Sheffield's heroes are conventional people in any sense of the word. And this is also true of the adults in this world of miners. They are very strange people! Perhaps the only normal ones in the book are the teenagers, perhaps because Sheffield wanted teenage characters that his

presumed teenage readers could identify with.

Over all, this is a fun book, and I enjoyed it. I don't know how much science a teenage reader will learn (this is a very imaginary universe – stable transuranics!), but he will probably enjoy the book as much as I did. A pretty good read.

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Drawing by Miriam Ben-Loulou (April 1991)