

Science-Fiction Fanzine

Vol. XX, No. 11; November, 2008

The Israeli Society for Science Fiction and Fantasy

קול קורא לסיפורים: שמיים וארץ

אתר "בלי פאניקה" ואתר האגודה שמחים להודיע על פרויקט סיפורים משותף: שמיים וארץ. אנו מזמינים אתכם לתרום סיפורים על השמיים ועל הארץ. הפרויקט יתנהל במקביל בשני כתבי העת. אנו מזמינים אתכם לכתוב סיפורים לשתי הזרועות של הפרויקט. בזרוע אחת, "שמיים": סיפורי מדע בדיוני המתרחשים מחוץ לכדור הארץ וליתר כוכבי הלכת – בחלל, בעולמות רחוקים, בספינות הנעות בין הכוכבים וכדומה. בשניה, "ארץ": סיפורי מדע בדיוני המתרחשים ברחבי כדור הארץ, בתוכו ובמרחבים בתוליים שעדיין לא נחקרו, מתחת לפני הקרקע, בתחתיות הים, בשוליים הלא מיושבים של מדבריות החול והקרח וכו'. את הסיפורים יש להגיש בהתאם לכללי ההגשה הרגילים של כתבי העת. סיפורי "שמיים" יתפרסמו ב"בלי פאניקה". סיפורי "ארץ" – באתר האגודה. מועד אחרון להגשה: 1 בינואר 2009. לפרטים נוספים: http://www.sf-f.org.il/story_1059

חוג מדע בדיוני ברחובות – SFIR - Rehovot Science Fiction Club

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).
16.11.08: היום השלישי.
23.11.08: הלבוי 2.
30.11.08: ספיידרמן 3.

מועדון הקריאה – נובמבר

במרכז דיוני מועדון הקריאה בחודש נובמבר יעמוד הספר זוכה פרס גפן "אני האגדה" מאת ריצ'רד מתיסון (הוצאת ינשוף). פרטים לגבי מפגשי מועדון הקריאה העוסקים בספר זה יתפרסמו באתר האגודה. השתתפות במועדון הקריאה אינה כרוכה בתשלום או בהגעה למפגשים נוספים, ופתוחה גם למי שאינם חברי אגודה.
מועדון הקריאה בתל אביב יתקיים ביום ד', 26/11 בשעה 19:30, בבית הקפה רולדין (רח' אלנבי 46). מנחה: קרן לנדסמן. מומלץ להירשם מראש באמצעות הדואר האלקטרוני אצל מנחת המפגש: elodea.weed@gmail.com.
המעוניינים להנחות מועדוני קריאה בכל רחבי הארץ מוזמנים לפנות במייל למרכזת הפרויקט ליאת שחר: liat42@gmail.com
בדצמבר יוקדש מועדון הקריאה לספר זוכה פרס גפן "בני החורין הקטנים" מאת טרי פראצ'ט. פרטים על מפגשים המועדון יתפרסמו באתר האגודה לקראת סוף החודש.
בינואר יוקדש מועדון הקריאה לספר "פני מועדות לכוכבים" מאת אלפרד בסטר.

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

ANATHEM by Neal Stephenson — pub. William Morris, 2008, 960 p.

A review, and some comments on other reviews — by Sara Svetitsky

I think I am the first person in Israel to have a copy of this book, Stephenson's first since *The System of the World*. So I will start by announcing to the sf community: **ANATHEM** is NOT A

Canticle for Leibowitz. It is NOTHING LIKE A *Canticle for Leibowitz*. So when you read it you will be able to get into the story right away without taking the first 30 pages to recognize that, even though

the cover has a picture of a monk, *ANATHEM* is not a post-apocalypse story and we are on Arbre, not Earth. My next announcement: *ANATHEM* is real, undisputable, sf. Stephenson's last 4 thick books (*Cryptonomicon* [reviewed in *CyberCozen*, February 2002, and in April 2202] and *The Baroque Cycle* [reviewed in *CyberCozen*, September 2004 and September 2007], reviewed in these pages by your humble scribe) were marketed as sf but contained exactly one sf-nal element, the Philosophic Mercury, important but marginal. *ANATHEM* more than restores Stephenson's sf-nal credentials by being set on another world, in another universe, with different laws of nature. *ANATHEM* is, in spite of being 960 pages long, a fast read, with a definite plot that advances at a good pace. But it has the typical Stephenson characters, with very highly developed intellects and less advanced emotions, and the Stephenson discourses, those chunks of educational material dropped in with a “thunk”. In *ANATHEM* the topic is philosophy and the book is a fairly painless introduction to epistemology, ontological nominalism, empiricism, and a few more -isms.

The narrator of *ANATHEM* is Fraa Erasmus, an avout (monk) in a Decenarian Math. (Stephenson has created a language, which is usually annoying, but the neologisms are close enough to English to be understood without referring to the glossary in the back). So he lives in a concent, an enclave like a coed monastery; not celibate, but not allowed to have children. He devotes his life to study, and can go outside the concent once in 10 years. He joined when he was around 8 and at the time the book starts 10 years have passed, it is Apert (the period when the walls are opened) and he is about to venture outside. The concent also has Maths whose members go outside every year (unarians), every 100 years (centenarians) or every 1000 years (millenarians). When he goes into the

city—which is at the technological and social level of modern suburban America, with cellphones, television and GPS units under other names — he makes contact with his older half-sister Cord, one of Stephenson's capable and independant-minded women (e.g. Amy Shaftoe). As he shows her around the concent he shows us, the readers, what his world is all about. Erasmus shows Cord a solar-powered clock and explains that “Even in a nuclear winter, when it can be cloudy for a hundred years, it keeps time”. The concent keeps bees and Erasmus explains “When conditions outside are stable we sell the honey, when conditions are post-apocalyptic we eat it ourselves”. We see that Arbre has had a long and active history of booms, busts, wars, climate change, etc, all while the Fraas and Suurs have stayed behind the concent walls studying. But only studying 'theorics', pure theory; 'praxis', technology of all kinds, is kept outside the walls. The Fraas and Suurs live at a roughly medieval level, but with a few baffling exceptions. It seems that the concents in the past dealt in “newmatter”, genetic engineering, and who knows what else, but that these praxis were banned, with only some items of clothing and food still allowed (I love the library grapes).

The whole first section is “get to know Arbre”; the plot only gets moving at the end of Apert. Erasmus' mentor, Fra Corolo, is a cosmographer who does astronomical observations with one of the only bits of scientific equipment allowed the avout. As Erasmus is dealing with his first exposure to the outside world, Corolo is finding something in the sky. But Corolo is expelled from the concent without warning or explanation. Erasmus and friends try to retrace Corolo's research, and find that something new has entered orbit around Arbre; just as they do, the Secular Power that rules Arbre, but usually leaves the avout alone, calls Erasmus and other avout out of the

concent. They are needed to craft Arbre's response to the appearance of the aliens.

In their trek across Arbre, Erasmus is thrown in with non-avout; not just Cord and her boyfriend, but Samman, an Ita from the concent, and Gnel, adherent of a church that is helping them — all people an avout would never normally befriend. Ita are a special caste of people that work in the concent but are not avout and avout are taught to look down on them and to have as little as possible to do with them. But Erasmus realizes, to his discomfort, that the despised Ira are the computer experts of Arbre and that Samman has been working with Corolo all along. Finally, and most importantly, there is Fra Jad, a millenarian avout from the Math whose members live on a isolated crag and interact with the rest of the world only once in a thousand years. Any Millenarian is a fascinating figure to the rest of Arbre, and Fra Jad is a pretty weird Millenarian. There are stories of Millenarians' strange powers; Raz starts wondering if they are true.

In due time and after some adventures they join other avout and seculars at the emergency meeting, and settle down for long dinner-table discussions of idealist philosophy and the many-worlds picture of quantum mechanics. Yes, this is a Stephenson novel. Action returns after about 50 pages and Raz and his friends get to the alien ship. Without going into detail for fear of spoilers, I can say that the aliens of *ANATHEM* are surprising, well thought out, and paradoxical; they are about as alien as it is possible to be. Their ship is also well-thought out and is described at length in a section engineers will love. And the climax of the book makes the best use of the many-worlds picture in sf that I know.

But in spite of the truly cosmic nature of the ship and the aliens, what Erasmus finds out about his own world is most interesting. Erasmus is fundamentally like the Waterhouses of *Baroque Cycle* / *Crptynomicon*; very intelligent, yet not

the great genius of the time, and by no means a revolutionary. His role is to observe the genius from a safe distance, report on the revolution, and share his understanding with the reader. In the upheaval of the crisis he finds out why the concents were set up and by whom, what the Millenarians are capable of, what is really the relation between the Secular Power and the Maths, and what other power, older than the concents, is in play. He also changes as a person, from a very young man who has led a very sheltered life and has done little questioning of the system under which he lives, to someone who is setting out on a new path, with hopes of creating a new relation between the Secular Power and the Mathic world.

Raz changes notably in his relation to the Ita -- at the beginning of the book he relates to them as an Indian of the last century would relate to an Untouchable — and to religion. At the beginning he has no exposure at all to religion. At the end things are different. And here I have to complain, or express polite confusion, about some of the published reviews of *ANATHEM*. Quite a few reviewers decided that the book is about an inevitable conflict between religion and science, presents religious people as idiots, and is actually a parable of George Bush's America. I have read the book twice and don't see this aspect at all. It's true that there is a Secular Power called the Warden of Heaven who is sort of a semi-religious figure and not very bright, but he never appears in person and is used only to advance the plot. It is also true that Raz has a run-in with a nasty religious gang, but the whole scene serves mainly to introduce some ninja avout, who are fun but frankly derivative. Both these scenes play out in the first 300 pages. I suspect that the reviewers didn't read much past that. If they had, they would have at least mentioned the philosophy seminar of the middle third of the book; Plato's world of Ideals is more important to the plot, and more unusual to

find in a novel, than this alleged attack on religion. Stephenson actually, in my reading, treats religion with serious respect. When someone close to Raz becomes religious he understands why, and why the world-view that has worked for him (Raz) isn't for everyone. When the avout mobilize to face the aliens, the transportation, clothes, food etc are provided by the churches ('arks" in Arbre-speak) because they are, at that time and place, the best organized to do so. Near the end of the book Raz describes a priest "uncorking one of his typical exasperating sermons, full of intelligence and upshot and timeless human truths, all fettered to a cosmography that was blown out of the water four thousand years ago". Raz remains a convinced agnostic, but his eyes have been opened.

I enjoyed *ANATHEM* very much but as of now it is not my favorite Stephenson. His other recent books had the unusual effect of resonating in my

thoughts: I found myself thinking about things differently after reading them. (Especially *Cryptonomicon*; "what would Randy Waterhouse do?" is now my personal guideline for in many problems). *ANATHEM* hasn't — yet -- affected me so strongly. This is at least partly because Arbre is not Earth; the same imaginative setting that makes Erasmus' concent so interesting, and makes *ANATHEM* 'real sf', also makes it more remote. I also found myself picking holes in Stephenson's world-building, focusing on things in the Secular-Mathic relation that just wouldn't work as they are supposed to have worked for thousands of years. I don't usually do this to worlds created for sf but Arbre is so like Earth I can't resist. So Arbre is both too Earthlike, and not Earthlike enough. But not-my-favorite Stephenson is still the best sf book I have read this year, and I expect to see *ANATHEM* on the Hugo ballot.

Science Fiction and Fantasy Go Together
by Miriam Ben-Loulu
(January 1995)

This is a kind of game I play with myself -- trying to combine titles so that they make sense.

1. Night Mare Nightwatch
2. My Best Decision at Doona
3. Star Gate Out of the Silent Planet
4. This Immortal Raphael
5. The War of the Worlds Hospital Station
6. The Warlock in Spite of Himself Beyond the Farthest Star
7. The Warlock is Missing The Water of the Wondrous Isles
8. The Demon Breed Gremlins
9. Unicorn and Dragon Coils
10. The Veils of Azloroc Stardance
11. Glory Road Roadmarks
12. Forty Thousand in Gehenna Expecting Someone Taller
13. The Warlock Unlocked The Door into Summer
14. Fire Time Sundiver
15. The End of the Matter Slipt
16. The Outcasts of Heaven Belt To Die in Italbar
17. Chaining the Lady Agent of Vega
18. The Hand of Oberon Raising the Stones

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1. David Starr Space Ranger: The Ultimate Enemy
2. Gladiator at Law: The Last Defender of Camelot
3. The Dreamstone: Silmarillion
4. Eye of Cat - Catseye
5. Crystal Singer, Crystal Witness - No Crystal Tears
6. Brother Assassin: The Warlock Heretical
7. Citizen of the Galaxy: The Postman

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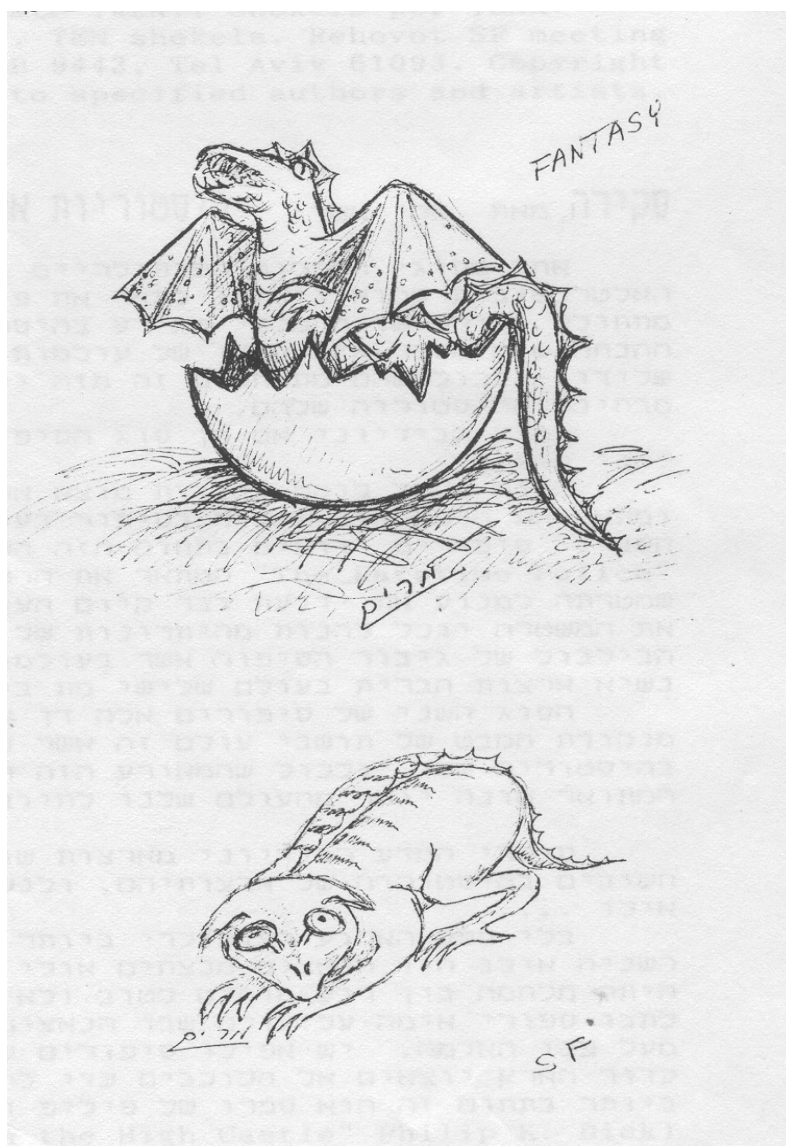
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כל הזכויות שמורות למחברים וליוצרים, כפי שצוינו.



Drawings by Miriam Ben-Loulu  
(January 1995)