



Science-Fiction Fanzine

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The Israeli Society for Science Fiction and Fantasy

פסטיבל אייקון 2008

אתר פסטיבל אייקון 2008 עלה, וניתן למצוא בו פרטים רבים על תכני הפסטיבל, על אורחי הכבוד ועוד. נושא הפסטיבל השנה יהיה "מהפכות", ויתארחו בו סופר הפנטסיה **סטיבן בראסט**, הקולנוען **מארק קארו**, הסופר והמדינאי **יוסי שריד** ועוד. בפסטיבל צפויים להיות תכנים עיוניים ברמה גבוהה בשיתוף עם אוניברסיטת תל-אביב, תכני חובבים רבים, פסטיבל קולנוע מרתק, משחקי תפקידים, אייקון צעיר, יריד דוכנים ואירועי חוצות. כמו כן תתקיים בו ההצבעה לפרס גפן 2008, יוכרזו הזוכים בפרס גפן ויחולקו הפרסים לזוכי תחרות הסיפורים על שם עינת פלג, פרס אייקון ופרס קרן מוריה.

אל תשכחו לפנות לכם את חג הסוכות: 14-18/10/2008 כתובת האתר: <http://www.icon.org.il>

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 שליד הבריכה). הכניסה לכל הפעילויות אינה כרוכה בתשלום. לפרטים נוספים, כתבו אל Sfir42@yahoo.com. אין פעילות בחופשה.

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

שנה טובה ומבורכת – Happy New Year

Letter to the Editor

Thanks **Aharon** for the August *CyberCozen* issue. I enjoyed this issue very much. I have not taken my kids to see the movie *WALL-E* BUT my friends have and got good reports from the kids. The *Star Trek* book *Burning Dreams* sounds interesting; I will try and get it. Thanks again for the re-runs of Miriam Ben-Loulu's poems, may she rest in peace.

Take care, **Elana Dror Rein**

Comments on Jack Cohen's Lecture, by Miriam Ben-Loulu (Part I)

(from *CyberCozen* March 1996)

Editor's Note: Biologist **Jack Cohen** is a good friend of many science fiction authors. He gives talks at science fiction conventions about what alien life might be like. His suggestions for strange alien life have been used by several science fiction authors, including Anne McCaffrey for the *Dragonriders of Pern*; Larry Niven, Jerry Pournelle and Steven Barnes for the terrifying alien in *Legacy of Heorot*; several works by Terry Pratchett; and David Gerrold with whom he helped design the *Chtorr* ecology. He and mathematician Ian Stewart wrote a wonderful book which every science fiction reader should read: *The Collapse of Chaos* (1994). In 1995-1996 Jack was Visiting Professor at the Weizmann Institute in Rehovot, and gave a talk in the Rehovot Science Fiction Club. Miriam Ben-Loulu commented below about his talk.

If you missed the January 1996 meeting, then you missed a lecture that was both interesting and stimulating, but most of all FUN. Dr. Jack Cohen is a scientist with a sense of humor. It is a pity that he cannot speak Hebrew and talk to pupils here. I think it would change their

idea of what science is really all about, and what scientists are like.

His lecture was primarily on how to design aliens. An alien should not be a human --- or any other Earth animal -- in makeup. It must have attributes that correspond to the conditions on the supposed planet of origin and not to those we are familiar with. He pointed out that even if the planet were similar to ours, evolution would not necessarily have taken the same path.

He divides characteristics into two basic groups. Those which are common solutions to general problems he calls "universal" solutions -- flight, for example. Those which "would be specific to one evolutionary line on one planet only" he calls "parochial". In discussing the design of aliens, he also had some interesting things to say about how humans are designed.

He said that asking questions is important, and indeed some of what he had to tell us raised at least as many questions as it answered. In the meantime perhaps some of you have answers, or even additional questions.

For example, he considered bone to be a "parochial". I am still bothered by what kind of internal support system large land animals could have if bone is eliminated as a possibility.

As for re-designing humans, I have been thinking about the possibilities and have run into several problems (aside from lacking an adequate knowledge of anatomy!):

1) Jack said, "You can see how ridiculous it is to have an air pipe [the nasal passages] that crosses the food pipe [the throat]. People are always choking themselves to death." As anyone who suffers from sinus allergies can tell you, the mouth is a fail-safe device for the nose. If you leave the mouth connected to the lungs you get people choking when the food goes the wrong way, but if you eliminate the connection you will have even more people literally choking (smothering?) to death whenever the nose is stopped up. So what do you do --- have a third orifice to take over the job as fail-safe? Where do you put it?

2) Four legs would provide greater stability and speed, but would lack grace and present difficulties on a crowded dance floor and when getting into a car.

3) Teachers definitely need eyes in the back of their heads, and mothers (and some fathers) need additional hands. But what would the rest of the humans do with these features (even today, men who are "all hands" are not especially appreciated)?

4) Humans definitely need a way to give birth that would be easier on both mother and baby. A tight birth canal just makes things difficult for both. How about a shutter type arrangement? Changing the position of the

exit would help, but would it have unfortunate side results? (I presume that the original position was developed so that gravity would help. Since most human women now give birth in a reclining, or semi-reclining, position this is no longer an important factor.)

Dr. Cohen also mentioned the human tendency to give animals human characteristics, and the fact that different cultures view certain animals differently. Here are a few more examples:

1) In most places women get very upset about lizards of any kind and size, especially in their homes, but in Hawaii women love to have them because they keep the roach population down.

2) "Lewd women" (from a drawing he showed us) aren't the only ones who like snakes. Aside from snakes being beautiful (color and pattern), they are pleasant to touch because they are so smooth. So why do most people consider them "slimy"?

3) As for the "wise old owl" of English prose and poetry, my Moroccan mother-in-law gets very upset if one flies over any of us. For her the owl is a sign of coming disease or even death. (I recently read a story called "Spirit Mirror" by Stephen Marley which is a fantasy taking place in ancient China. The sorceress hears an owl calling "who" and takes it as a question. Well, I have a question too. Is the word questioning identity the same in ancient Chinese as in modern English? Or does an owl hoot differently in Chinese so that its call resembles the Chinese word for the question of identity? This is barely possible as American dogs bark "bow-wow" and Israeli dogs bark "huv-huv".)

Elana Dror [Rein] asked a question concerning the ability of Anne McCaffrey's dragons to move things being affected by their desire to do so, which also started me thinking. The ability to produce unusual events through mental control of the body and the environment appears in many fantasy, and some science fiction, books. Sometimes it is called magic, sometimes it is supposed to be genetic or a result of some sort of enhancement. Sometimes it is supposed to be natural, sometimes learned (as in Oriental style cultures).

But very few writers have given these attributes to animals (two other examples are Andre Norton's telepathic animals, and Alan Dean Foster's minidrags which are empathetic telepaths). Why? If training is needed, many animals can be trained. If it is a matter of genetics or enhancement, why not animals? If the stories of super-human strength caused by adrenalin are actually true, why couldn't other super-human attributes be connected to

hormones? And if they could be, could animals be bred for these attributes? Then the only problem would be to make the hormone release dependent on conscious mental control. With this done ... PRESTO! ... we can have "magic" animals and the dragons really will be able to fly higher just by wanting to.

But what about aliens? Are hormones "universals" or "parochials"?

What are the chances that aliens would have parapsychological talents which few (if any -- depending on your beliefs) humans have? Wouldn't such abilities increase the chances of survival?

Dr. Cohen also mentioned the subject of alien intelligence and morals. Because I have a lot to say on this subject, I will leave it for next month's **CyberCozen**. In the meantime, what do the rest of you think --- how will we be able to evaluate the intelligence of any aliens we happen to meet? By the way, there are some interesting aliens in Sheri S. Tepper's **Raising the Stones**.

[To be concluded next month]

Advertisement

HI, I am a sci-fi collector and author, with a collection of over 2,000 books spanning a 59 yr period. I have just published a trilogy called **Hewa Trilogy** by Robert Smallman. It is listed in Amazon, Barnes and Noble, etc.
 I would be interested in talking with you either by e-mail or phone.
 I live in Zichron Yaakov and my number is 04 6 399603 ROBERT SMALLMAN
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Short Book Review by Aharon Sheer

Venus by Ben Bova (2000), 404 pages.

This might be considered a sequel to Bova's **Mars** (1992) (reviewed in December 2007), and **Return to Mars** (1999) (reviewed in April 2008). Just as **Return to Mars** had one character who appeared in **Mars**, so **Venus** has one character that appeared in **Return to Mars**. Just as Bova's two Mars books try to tell us what exploring Mars might be like, so **Venus** tries to tell us what exploring the planet Venus might be like. However, Venus is a vastly more hostile environment than Mars was.

Bova summarizes it as follows:

“As beautiful as Venus appears in our skies, the planet itself is the most hellish place in the solar system. The ground is hot enough to melt aluminium. The air pressure is so

high it has crushed spaceship landers as if they were flimsy cardboard cartons. The sky is perpetually covered from pole to pole with clouds of sulphuric acid. The atmosphere is a choking mixture of carbon dioxide and sulphurous gases....

“Venus is hot, with surface temperatures well above four hundred and fifty degrees Celsius.... It rotates so slowly that its ‘day’ is longer than its year....

“Venus’ atmosphere is so thick that atmospheric pressure at ground level is equal to the pressure of an Earth ocean about a mile below the surface....

“Imagine trying to walk on the surface of Venus! The very ground is red hot.” [p. 11-12]

And here is a tale of two simultaneous exploratory space ships that fly from Earth to Venus, enter its atmosphere, fly through it, and intend to land on the surface. Truly a science-based travelogue. Following the pattern of the two Mars books, Bova makes his story exciting in part by the principle “If anything can go wrong, it will.” Each of the two ships has to face the difficulties of navigating in a corrosive, hot, violently windy atmosphere. Each of them face problems of both the extreme difficulties of the environment, and the human conflicts that inevitably arise when tough, hard people live together in close quarters and have to deal with severe danger.

Bova adds to the best available scientific knowledge of Venus his own speculations on what conditions we might find on Venus. In particular, as in the two Mars books, he raises the question of whether and what kind of life might exist under the extreme conditions on Venus. Just as microscopic life on Earth has been found in volcanic vents at the bottom of the ocean, so microscopic life might be found high in the Venusian atmosphere.

So we get a very exciting and human story of exploration under the most difficult of conditions.

However, this book also has another story. Martin Humphries is one of the wealthiest and most cruel and vicious businessman on Earth and in space. In this future – a hundred years from now – not only do men live on the Moon, they also live, explore, and mine the Asteroid Belt for minerals. Humphries has used his wealth to forcibly take over the Asteroid

Belt industries. Almost everyone who lives and works in the Belt works for one of Humphries’ companies. Anyone who tries to live independently, to establish a competing company, has had his business destroyed by Humphries.

Martin Humphries had two sons. The older, Alex, led an exploratory trip to Venus, and his ship crashed on the surface of Venus. So Humphries has established a ten billion dollar prize to anyone who can go to Venus, land, recover Alex’s body, and return it to Earth. The funding for such a trip will come from speculators who will put up the money for the trip in hopes of getting that ten billion dollar prize (shared, of course, by the people who actually make the trip). And two people have found funding to make that trip: One is Humphries younger son Van, 25 years old, who was always very close to his beloved older brother Alex, and wants very much to know how and why Alex died. The other is an ex-competitor of Humphries, Lars Fuchs, whose business in the Belt was destroyed by Humphries and whose wife was stolen by Humphries to become Humphries’ fourth wife and the mother of Humphries’ younger son Van. Unlikely? Ridiculous?

With such a strange human background for the two competing simultaneous exploratory voyages to Venus, one wonders whether it is possible for the reader to take the story seriously. Nevertheless, the science and the scientific speculations, the battle with a searing environment, and the human conflicts, make the story exciting indeed. The book is a real page-turner. I had no problem ignoring the silly aspects of the story and enjoying the scientific and human adventures portrayed.

Recommended.

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