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The Israeli Society for Science Fiction and Fantasy

**פרס עינת**

נמשכת הגשת הסיפורים לפרס עינת. את הסיפורים יש לשלוח בדוא"ל בלבד, להנהלת התחרות. [pras.einat@gmail.com](mailto:pras.einat@gmail.com) המועד האחרון למשלוח סיפורים: יום חמישי, 17 בספטמבר 2009, בשעה 23:00. לפרטים נוספים: [http://www.sf-f.org.il/story\\_1120](http://www.sf-f.org.il/story_1120)

**קול קורא להגשת אירועים – פסטיבל אייקון 2009**

המהדורה 13 של הפסטיבל יצאה לדרך, ואנו שמחים להזמין אתכם לקרוא את הקול הקורא לאירועים בפסטיבל ( [http://www.icon.org.il/2008/he/2009\\_general\\_submissions](http://www.icon.org.il/2008/he/2009_general_submissions) ) נושא הפסטיבל השנה – מטרופוליס: עיר העתיד – נבחר כבר לפני מספר שנים כמחווה לחגיגות מאה השנים לעיר המארכת את הפסטיבל, תל-אביב. הקול הקורא מיועד בעיקר לאירועים עיוניים, אך אנו פתוחים לקבל פניות ולשמוע הצעות בנוגע לכל סוג של אירוע.

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

**Letter to the Editor****Dear Aharon,**

I just read, in July's issue, your review of *The Tenth Planet* by Dean Wesley Smith and Kristine Kathryn Rusch. You mentioned that it is more fantasy than SF. I agree. The whole concept is silly. If I were the Malmurians 12 million years ago, I would not just scoop a few tons of organic material. I would try to Malmur-form Earth to suit me. I won't presume to know exactly how methane-base biology works. I assume the authors mean they breathe methane. What I would do is first destroy most plant life on earth. (A few large asteroids hitting the earth and covering it with dust for a few years will probably do the trick). And then I will seed the earth with Malmurian plants and bacteria (which I suspect produce methane and not Nitrogen & Oxygen). Within a few dozen millennia, Earth will have a methane atmosphere. No need for hibernating and scooping every 2006 years.

**Gal Haimovich**

Gal – That's what happens when the Elders go to sleep and let the underlings run the show. Thanks for your comments.

**Aharon****Short Book Review by Aharon Sheer**

*Rivers of Time* by L. Sprague de Camp (1993), 258 pages.

A while back Eli Eshed wrote about the 20 years of *CyberCozen* (in his blog, in Hebrew). He speculated that the reason I review only old books (published prior to the year 2000) is that I don't care for the newer writers. Not true! The actual

reason is that I buy almost all my sf from the Paperback Gallery in Rehovot, a used paperback book store. Not surprisingly, most of their used books are relatively old (published prior to the year 2000).

Despite the fact that the owner of the store

says, “Nobody reads science fiction any more”, and “Nowadays people only read fantasy”, I rarely buy fantasy, and almost only buy sf. From their store. Although, if I find something I like, I might buy more by the same author, or in the same series, from Amazon.com. Take, for example, the trilogy I reviewed recently, *The Tenth Planet*. I bought the first book in the series from the Paperback Gallery, and the remaining two books from Amazon.com.

When I spotted this book at the Paperback Gallery, I was surprised. I remember reading stories by L. Sprague de Camp in the late 1940s. Here’s a new book published in 1993. Is he even still alive? Was he really writing new stories in the 1990s? Not only that, this is a work of science fiction, while I remember de Camp as mostly writing fantasy (although he also wrote historical fiction, and nonfiction). In sf stories of his that I remember from those days, there was a series in which he predicted that the dominant Earth power would eventually be Brazil, which would carry on extensive interstellar trade and exploration – a prediction which does not seem to be coming true.

De Camp was in fact born in 1907 in New York City. So in 1991 (when he wrote most stories in this book) he was 84 years old. He died in the year 2000, at age 93. During World War II, de Camp worked at the Philadelphia Naval Yard with fellow sf authors Isaac Asimov and Robert A. Heinlein – certainly an impressive group!

This book is great fun. If you are a dinosaur fan, or a fan of other pre- or post-dinosaur ancient Earth periods, you’ll find much fascinating description and speculation about landscape, flora, and fauna from periods as early as the Devonian (415 million years ago) to a period as recent as 100,000 years ago. What did the ground look like before grasses evolved? What kind of plants and animals walked and flew at various times?

How did they behave? What did they sound like? What colors were they? How did they walk? How did they gather? How did they fight, or flee? For each of the various periods described in this book, de Camp speculates convincingly about these questions.

So what does this have to do with science fiction? How did de Camp’s heroes get to these ancient times? Why, time travel of course. A university scientist in Missouri has invented a time machine which can send things and people far back in time. The limitations of this time travel are based in the structure of the Universe. You cannot travel back twice to the same time – if you try you will be instantly transferred back to the Present, and killed in the process. You cannot travel back in time to a period in which human beings (*Homo Sapiens*) already exist. The Universe protects against the paradoxes that might result if you changed the history of mankind -- you will be transferred back to the Present, and killed.

To prevent such conflicts, time travellers have divided the past into 5000 year periods – no two time traveller groups are allowed to go back to the same period. Shorter periods are problematical because of the inaccuracy of the time travel process. But there are many such periods over the millions of years. The small number of travellers combined with the enormous energy cost of each trip to the past limits the competition.

“...the dates of geological eras are more or less approximate. Likewise there are limits to the accuracy of the time-distorting machinery. Accuracy has greatly improved since [Professor] Prochaska began his project; but your arrival may still be off by hours or days or even months when you arrive. The farther back you go in time, the greater becomes the margin you have to allow for error.” [p. 156]

So where's the story? All but one story in this book was written a few years after the great success of the *Crocodile Dundee* movie series (1986) about an Australian who lives in the wilds of Australia, even fighting such wild animals as crocodiles. De Camp has made his hero, Reginald Rivers, an Australian, or as he describes himself, "a dinkum Aussie", and Rivers (or Reggie as the Americans call him) throws in a lot of Aussie slang. Rivers' job is taking people back on hunting safaris to the distant past. His customers are very wealthy people who want the challenge of hunting ancient wild animals, and bringing their heads back to hang on their living room walls. (Towards the end of the book they bring back live animals too – an idea used more recently in a TV series.) Shooting ancient animals can apparently not change human future, so the Universe allows that. Occasionally his customers are university people whose universities want them to explore the distant past and settle various scientific questions.

The biggest problem that Rivers has is that his wealthy customers are not people accustomed to taking orders, and they are also people who enjoy taking risks – especially risking the lives of people other than themselves. While Rivers is the expert and the leader of the safari, his customers have their own ideas. So the main entertainment of these stories is the strange and unexpected behavior not only of the ancient animals but also the modern humans.

There are nine short stories, the earliest published in 1956 and the basis for the whole idea ("A Gun for Dinosaur"), the rest written in the 1990s. Several were published in sf magazines but a few were written especially for this volume. Each story is self-contained, providing enough background to be read independently. In each of the stories, Rivers is the narrator, telling the story of one safari to an unknown listener (and to the readers, too).

One thread that runs through the book is why Rivers will not take women on his safaris. (He had some bad experiences.) Another thread is trigger-happy hunters. They take mules ("asses", or "jacks" – short for "jackasses") along to carry equipment from place to place during each safari, so there is a small crew to handle the mules. (Why not use vehicles? That too is a story.)

Sometimes the asses themselves are targets, as this incident from the Cretaceous describes:

"Headed for the staked asses at a shambling run came the biggest predator of that time and place, a hyaenodon of the largest species, *H. horridus*. It was about the size of a tiger, with similar stripes but with a longer skull, more like that of an oversized wolf or hyena, and an impressive set of canine fangs. Despite the name, it's really no horrider than any other big predator, programmed by its teeth and its instincts to eat other animals." [p. 134]

"One thing you must remember in going back to former eras is that the animals, never having seen human beings and never having been hunted by them, don't have the built-in fear of them that you find in areas of the present where wild animals are still wild. Instead of running away, as they're apt to do now, they may come sniffing around you to investigate those strange creatures at close quarters. That can be dangerous, even if you have no intention of killing anything." [p. 137]

In one amusing incident he has a Chinese scientist along on the trip. Each person on the safari is expected to wash his own clothes. (Other than the cook, and the mule handlers, there are no servants as there might be on an African safari.) The poor Chinese scientist has to confess to Rivers that he has never

washed clothes in his life, and would Rivers please teach him how to do it. I must admit I was puzzled as to who washed his clothes in China.

For readers who love speculation about long-gone times, this is fun. For readers who love speculation about the peccadilloes of human beings, this is even more fun. And all in an Aussie accent.

### Story: Escape by Marie Bursten

(written by Miriam Ben-Loulu when she was in the 12<sup>th</sup> grade; Bursten was her maiden name)

(May 1993)

The teacher's voice droned on, calling out each name with a quiet determination. Her well-groomed hair shone in the sunlight.

Issachar Flantzboigle slumped back in his chair, scowling at the fly that seemed suspended in mid-air before him. His name had already been called. The teacher had stammered and turned pink. The class had tittered until the teacher gave them a stern look and shook her head slightly. Even then there had been a few scattered giggles. It was always this way.

As long as he could remember he had been different from the other children. When the others were running and playing games outside, Issachar had been inside practicing on the grand piano or reading a book. Not that he ever envied them their tag and basketball games; books and music were quite enjoyable. But it was a shock that first day at the new school to discover their contempt for him when he said he didn't know how to play hide-and-seek or soccer.

At first he had tried to adjust himself to his new surroundings. But it didn't work. The games were so dreadfully simple, and every time he tried to enlarge and elaborate on the basic game he found himself alone. The others just weren't smart enough to follow him. From

then on he became very aware of the breach between him and the others. He was a genius. None of them were. He was superior. But none of them were smart enough to recognize his suggestions and ideas as superior. And he hated them for their smug stupidity.

The teacher had finished roll call and was laying a sheet of paper on each desk. Issachar picked his up sullenly and without looking began to tear it into pieces. Rip! That's for the teacher. Rip! That's Ruthie, Yossi, and Ze'ev. Rip! That's for the rest of the class, and for last year's class, and for the class before that. There. He had torn them all to pieces.

He looked down at his desk. The torn pieces lay there. They were still, dead. He had killed them all.

"Issachar!" The teacher was looming over him, staring, her voice shocked. "Put those pieces of paper in the trash can and take another sheet of paper. I expect you to stay after the recess bell to tell me what this is all about." The class giggled and whispered as Issachar truculently obeyed her.

So they weren't dead. He hadn't really torn them to pieces. It was just paper. They were still there to torment him. It didn't matter how many sheets of paper he tore up, they'd still be there.

He couldn't get rid of them. There was no escape from them.

The fly buzzed softly to a landing on his desk and sat there preening itself. Then it took off and rose upward in a gentle spiral, until Issachar could see it no longer. Just as if it had disappeared!

Disappear! That was the answer to his problem. It was the pathway to the escape he had thought impossible. He would disappear. Then he wouldn't have any troubles or emotional problems. If he didn't exist, he obviously couldn't feel insecure and emotionally unstable. No more exhausting tantrums to throw. No more self-important school psychologists sending him to confident psychiatrists who murmured blandly, "Umhum, yes, I see. Hmm."

But how to go about it? He mulled this over for a second, then brightened visibly as he remembered Descartes' principle: "I think, therefore I am." With the contented smile of one who has almost escaped, Issachar began to think he wasn't there. After a few minutes he had gained confidence in himself. Of course he wasn't there. What would he, Issachar Flantzboigle, be doing in a classroom of such ill-mannered plebeians? After all, he was a

genius. It wasn't logical that he would be with such a group. Therefore he wasn't.

The fly descended from the ceiling to the clock on the wall and began to climb slowly across its smooth surface. With a deafening noise the recess bell rang, sending the fly zooming across the room in anxious flight. The children rushed out the door. The teacher looked around for Issachar. He wasn't there. She locked the room with a determined frown. She would speak to him about this piece of impudence after recess. A playful breeze sent Issachar's unused paper spiraling to the floor. The fly landed on it and began to examine it carefully.

With a start Issachar heard his name called. He looked up quickly. The teacher's voice droned on calling out each name with a quiet determination. Her well-groomed tentacles shone in the star's light.

Issachar Flantzboigle slumped back in his chair, scowling. When the teacher had called his name, she had stammered and turned orange.

The class had gleeed until the teacher waved her tentacles warningly.

Even then there had been a few scattered twerps.

Escape? There was none.

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