



Science-Fiction Fanzine

Vol. XXI, No. 12; December, 2009

The Israeli Society for Science Fiction and Fantasy

מתחננים בקרוב?

לסדרה דוקומנטארית חדשה מבית מטר הפקות, הסוקרת זוגות בדרך לחתונה, דרושים זוגות חובבים המתכננים חתונה עם תימה ז'אנרית, המתכוונים להינשא בין ינואר לאפריל 2010. ההפקה מבקשת ללוות את בני הזוג בצמתים מרכזיים בדרך לחתונה, בחמישה ימי צילום מרוכזים בהם נכלל גם יום החתונה עצמו. לזוגות המשתתפים בתוכנית מובטח ירח דבש מפנק בחול על חשבון ההפקה. התוכנית תשודר בערוץ הוט 3 בכבלים.

המעוניינים מתבקשים לפנות לגלי מאיו, בטלפון 052-6141332 או בדואל hatuna2009@gmail.com

Charles Stross - Author GoH at Icon 2010

צ'ארלס סטרוס – יהיה הסופר האורח באייקון 2010

צ'ארלס דייוויד ג'ורג' סטרוס, או צ'ארלי סטרוס, סופר המד"ב הבריטי, יהיה הסופר האורח בפסטיבל אייקון 2010. סטרוס חי באדינבורו שבסקוטלנד ובין ספריו מדע-בדיוני, פנטסיה ואימה בסגנון ה. פ. לאבקרפט.

(בספטמבר 2009, סייברקוזן פרסם בקורת על *HaltinG StatE* by Charles Stross (2007).

פרטים נוספים עליו ועל יצירתו בקישור הבא: <http://www.icon.org.il/2009/CharlieStrossNews>

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

Letter to the Editor

Dear Aharon:

Congrats on **CyberCozen** achieving the 20 year mark! Your issue reflecting on the history of the Rehovot Sci-Fi Club and other items was most interesting, particularly the part about the rise of Fantasy (which I dislike) and the decline of Sci-Fi, probably due to the progress and success of modern science (fiction has become fact). That got me thinking about what influenced me sci-fi-wise through the years -- I grew up when Man first stepped foot on the moon, when microwave ovens were invented, and when citizen's band radios were a big craze.

My first recollection of sf literature was in elementary school -- ***A Wrinkle in Time*** (by Madeleine L'Engle), which was so good that I read it twice! The only other book that I read twice was ***Timescape*** (by Gregory Benford), during my high school or college days. Of course, TV and movies had a major impact: ***Star Trek***, ***Star Wars***, ***Close Encounters of the 3rd Kind***, ***Battlestar Galactica***, ***Lost in Space***, ***Dr. Who***, ***Back to the Future***, and some dumb SF spoof with that actor Benjamin someone-or-other delivering space garbage. In my early adulthood I enjoyed A. Clarke's ***2001; A Space Odyssey***, and ***2010***, as well as the then-new ***Isaac Asimov's SF Magazine***, and Asimov's various robotics stories, and of course, his famous ***Foundation Trilogy*** (might have read more than once!), plus a sequel. There was also M. Crichton's ***Andromeda Strain*** (later took out the movie from the local public library!), and his ***Terminal Man*** -- classic stuff!

I would encourage your readers to suggest materials for others to peruse, and similarly invite them to check out the above-mentioned classics, and perhaps to encourage potential future sf fans to get a taste of what they're missing until now, too!

Gary Roth

Film Reviews: *District 9* (2009), produced by Peter Jackson, directed by Neill Blomkamp, 112 minutes, rated R for bloody violence and pervasive language.

***District 9* reviewed by Daniel Klein**

This film has its fair share of killing and explosions. However, this is not another action film masquerading as sci-fi, a regrettably common occurrence these days in Hollywood films. The film features mostly unknown actors (fresh faces), which is usually a good thing. The most attractive credit on this film, and the one that's responsible for a lot of the hype around it, is Peter Jackson as one of the producers (he made *The Lord of the Rings* film trilogy). This is a true SF film, in that it explores the effects of a fictional event (or technology, or set of circumstances) on humanity: society, sub-groups and individuals. The film has several plot holes, but they can all be excused away for the sake of telling the story; whether this bothers you or not is a matter of personal taste. Warning: this film is very gritty and can be visually (and emotionally) unpleasant / disturbing.

I recommend this film; not to everyone, but certainly for sf aficionados. This film is also recommended to anyone interested in social politics (Apartheid), humanity's dark side, military-driven industries and ridiculously contrived circumstances (in this case, look for them in the script writing).

***District 9* reviewed by Steve Davis**

My main comment is how easily the formerly oppressed can so easily become the oppressor!

Book Review by Aharon Sheer

***Coyote* by Allen Steele (2002)**, 431 pages, plus a page and a half list of scientific sources.

The second half of this book could be called "Adventures on a Distant Planet, Book I". It's classic science fiction, describing what might be found by visitors to a planet circling a distant sun. Besides his listed sources, he credits conversations with such sf writers as Greg Bear, Gregory Benford and Hal Clement. He also talked with biologist and sf fan Dr. Jack Cohen, who obviously provided him with ideas for the lifecycles of various alien animals and plants – something Dr. Cohen has done for many other sf writers.

A while back I reviewed Steele's first sf novel about space exploration, *Orbital Decay* (see *CyberCozen*, May 2009).

Coyote – really a collection of novellas in the same future, almost all originally published separately – is much better. His characters are more convincing, his story line more convincing.

The book takes place in a future in which most of the U.S. has been taken

over by a dictatorship, resulting in three separate countries, California in the west, New England to the north, and the United Republic of America (URA) in the rest. The latter seems to be modeled in part on Communist China, with rehabilitation camps for Dissident Intellectuals (DIs). One of the Congressional leaders of the URA is enthusiastic about recent astronomic evidence that a large moon of a Jupiter-like planet circling a sun 46 light years from Earth might support life (47 Ursae Majoris B). He pushes for a massive NASA program to build a spaceship that could carry a hundred people to that moon, with the intention of settling there. Unfortunately, many of the scientists and engineers that should be working on this program are DIs, and end up being removed from the program and placed in camps. So perhaps the planning is not as well done as it could be, with so many of the best people removed.

Steele repeats a canard about the space program. He claims that the URA's spaceship program will impoverish the URA. This contradicts the history of the USA's moon program. When the USA's moon program was cancelled, five million Americans found themselves unemployed. Not only the people who worked directly on the moon program, but suppliers at all levels. If you build a rocket, it requires all kinds of manufacturing enterprises, from small to large, to supply the construction needs. Not only that, everyone directly employed by the moon program has basic needs which must be satisfied, such as for food, clothing, housing, transportation. The number of people indirectly employed by the USA moon program was exponentially greater than the number directly employed. There are those who say, "Why invest in a space program when we can just give the money to the poor?" But this ignores the principle that the best way to help a poor person is to provide a job. And the NASA moon program, directly or indirectly, employed millions of Americans, who found themselves unemployed when the moon program was cancelled. Giving money to a scientist or engineer or manufacturer in a space program is not like giving money to the CEO of Bank of America, who will use it to spend millions to buy an exemplar of 19th century art in an auction, which will then be placed in a safe-deposit box – an expense which does not benefit any of the poor.

So Steele's comment that the URA's building the spaceship took "Ten years and a hundred billion, and the government wrecked the economy to do that" [p. 384] is just nonsense. I'm surprised that Steele wrote something like the following sentence:

"Millions of people are living in shacks made of discarded junk and cooking squirrel stew over manure fires because so much of his country's resources have been

diverted to the construction of a starship." [p. 45]

The first section of the book tells how secret rebels against the URA, at high levels in the building of the spaceship *Alabama*, planned to seize it, replace loyal colonists with DIs, and fly off with it to the distant moon that the program's leaders called Coyote (using Native American names). This is an exciting and difficult story, but doesn't have much to do with sf.

The second section of the book is related to the question of how human beings can travel 46 light years from Earth, and survive. The trick is to put the people in biostasis – their bodies are asleep. While in deep sleep, the system maintains each body so that people do not age significantly. When the crew and replacement colonists will be awakened at the approach to Coyote, they will be in good health as if almost no time has passed. This on a voyage at a speed of 0.2C, driven by fusion engines using interstellar hydrogen as fuel (relativistic effects are small). The total trip will take over 200 years.

Tragically, Les Gillis is awakened after only three months. It seems the artificial intelligence operating the travelling ship has orders to awaken one specific person. The AI tells Les Gillis that, if the URA did not approve the sending of this trip (and it did not, as the ship was taken over by rebels), it is Les's job to destroy the ship and all those in it. Fortunately for all those in the ship, except for Les Gillis, he has been awakened by mistake. He is actually one of the rebels, and not one of the URA soldiers. He has no intention of destroying the ship. But now that he is awake, what can he do for the next 200 years? The AI refuses to put him back in biostasis. So Les Gillis can expect to spend the rest of his life in solitary confinement. But he would not die quickly:

“He wouldn’t asphyxiate or perish from lack of water. *Alabama*’s closed-loop life-support system would purge the carbon dioxide from the ship’s air and recirculate it as breathable oxygen-nitrogen, and his urine would be purified and recycled as potable water. Nor would he freeze to death in the dark; the fusion engines generated sufficient excess energy for him to be able to run the ship’s internal electrical systems without fear of exhausting its reserves. He wouldn’t have to worry about starvation; there were enough rations aboard to feed a crew of 104 passengers for twelve months, which meant that one person would have enough to eat for over a century.

“Yet there was little chance that he would last that long. Within their biostasis cells, the remaining crew members would be constantly rejuvenated, their natural aging processes held at bay through homeostatic stem-cell regeneration, telomerase enzyme therapy, and nanotechnical repair of vital organs, while infusion of somatic drugs would keep them in a coma-like condition....

“Not so for him. Now that he was removed from biostasis, he would continue to age normally.” [p. 105]

The USA today (2009) has the largest percent of its population in solitary confinement of any country in the world. The US prison systems have discovered that prisoners in solitary confinement do not riot, do not plan escapes, and do not waste resources. Mostly they just go crazy, spending their years in prison insane, and coming out totally unable to function in normal life. Good for the prisons, bad for the prisoners. So Steele tells us the story of how Les Gillis, who will spend the rest of his life on a spaceship without a single other living person to talk to (the AI will not wake

anyone else up), goes insane. And then (based on Steele’s reading the stories of US prisoners in solitary confinement) after years, eventually returns to sanity. The secret is to find something productive to do that one can do alone. Les Gillis eventually decides to write a novel of planetary exploration, and also to decorate the walls of the space ship with scenes from his novel. This keeps him busy – and sane – for the rest of his life.

In the next section of the book, the spaceship reaches 47 Ursae Majoris B, and using shuttles the travelers are able to land on the large moon. They set up a colony, and face many problems and conflicts. Here is where biologist Jack Cohen’s suggestions for alien plant and animal life come in. Figuring out how to use native plants and animals for their needs, in place of the irreplaceable technological devices brought from Earth, is important. Learning how to build canoes and small sail boats using local materials is important. Building houses and roads from local materials is essential. Growing food, both based on plants and animals brought from Earth, and plants and animals found locally, requires great effort. Learning how to protect the food from the depredations of local animals is also necessary.

They also learn about the life-cycles of local animals and plants. As winter approaches, they notice that swampers, a kind of small animal which is a nuisance but has a pellet which can be used to make shoes, disappears. Where did they go?

“Wendy noticed a family of swampers near the vicinity of a ball plant. Since so few swampers have been sighted lately, this aroused her curiosity, so she and Carlos watched from a discreet distance as the swampers climbed on top of the ball. One at a time, they squirmed through a narrow opening within its leaves until all of them had disappeared from view....

“...the ball hadn't completely sealed, so I gently peeled aside one of the leaves and peered inside.

“I counted eight swampers within the plant, curled up against each other, already half-asleep....

“My hypothesis: this may be a form of plant-animal symbiosis. The balls provide shelter for the swampers while they hibernate during Coyote's long winter. However, since one or two of the swampers inevitably perish during hibernation – the old and the sick, most likely – their corpses remain within the balls. In spring, the swampers emerge from the ball, leaving their dead behind to provide food for the plants.” [p. 231-232]

The above passage is almost certainly based on a biological idea from Jack Cohen.

The final sections are exciting tales of exploration that Steele brings. They are the actions of a group of teenagers (aged 13-16), mostly the children of DIs. While the adults are busy with the problems of surviving and developing an economic and social system that can last for many years, the teenagers are bored. On so, off they go on a big, but unapproved, exploratory adventure. Quite exciting indeed.

And at the end of the group adventure, one boy, Carlos, continues on the voyage of discovery alone. Carlos learns about living in the wilderness:

“He finished building his tree house, adding a ceiling and finally four walls, and hung the boid [a giant carnivorous flightless bird that Carlos managed to shoot and kill] skull from above the narrow door; it looked good there, and it also had the unexpected effect of scaring away the swoops [birds] who'd nested in the upper limbs. Within a

few days, the birds ceded the blackwood to him, and he slept undisturbed. Although he continued to hear boids at night, for some reason he never saw any within a couple of miles of camp. Like the swoops, they seemed to be keeping their distance....

“As a side project, he cut down a long, green branch of faux birch, and at night while squatting by the fire on the beach, he carved a hunting bow from it. He was running low on ammo, and he needed to conserve what few rounds he had left to defend himself should the boids return. A couple of days earlier, he had shot a creek cat; once he skinned its hide and used its flesh for fishing bait, he boiled its upper intestines, allowed it to cure, then cut a long, slender bowstring from it. Once he'd fashioned a dozen slender shafts from faux birch, he gathered some flinty stones and sharpened them into arrowheads; some swoop feathers he found on the ground beneath his tree made good fletches. When he wasn't doing anything else, he practiced archery, shooting at a small target he'd made of a piece of catskin lashed to the side of a tree. After a time he became proficient enough to take down a swamper he discovered scavenging in the garbage pit he'd dug near the beach.” [p. 347]

Pretty good for a seventeen year old. Living the life of a pioneer on a new planet makes boys grow up fast.

The last section of the book describes the arrival of more ships of exploration from Earth.

Steele provides a great deal of variety in this novel, and we are looking forward to the rest of the novels of exploration of Coyote in this series.

For Comments: 13 Pinsky St., Rehovot 76308. Email: asheer@netvision.net.il. Tel: Aharon Sheer 08-947-1225

Editor: Aharon Sheer. Logo by: Miriam Ben-Loulu

For **free email delivery** write to asheer@netvision.net.il (specify XP Word format or PDF format).

Copyright © 2009

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