



Science-Fiction Fanzine

Vol. XXI, No. 1; January, 2009

The Israeli Society for Science Fiction and Fantasy

כנס עולמות 2009

כנס "עולמות 2009" יתקיים השנה בתאריכים 11-13.4.2009 (שבת-שני) ויוקדש לנושא סוף העולם. בכנס יתקיימו הקרנות, פאנלים, הרצאות ושלא פועילויות שיעסקו בנושא. לקראת הכנס תתקיים תחרות סיפורים קצרים בנושא הכנס ותחרות "נולד לפילק" השלישית. פרטים נוספים על הכנס ועל שתי התחרויות ניתן למצוא באתר הכנס: <http://www.olamot-con.org>
דרושים מרצים לכנס: אנו שמחים לפנות אליכם ולהזמינכם להציע הרצאה לכנס. כמו-כן, נשמח להצעות לרעיונות נוספים לפעילויות, הרצאות ותכנים אחרים. המעוניינים להציע הרצאה או פעילות מוזמנים ליצור איתנו קשר בכתובת LecturesOlamot@gmail.com

מועדון הקריאה

במרכז דיוני מועדון הקריאה בחודש ינואר יעמוד הספר "פני מועדות לכוכבים" מאת אלפרד בסטר. 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', 28.1 בשעה 19:30, בבית הקפה רולדין (רח' אלנבי 46). מנחה: רותם ברוכין. מומלץ להירשם מראש באמצעות הדואר האלקטרוני אצל מנחת המפגש: rotem.baruchin@gmail.com
 המעוניינים להנחות מועדוני קריאה בכל רחבי הארץ מוזמנים לפנות במייל למרכזת הפרויקט לيات שחר: liat42@gmail.com
 בפברואר יוקדש מועדון הקריאה לספר "איגוד השוטרים היידיים" מאת מייקל שייבון. פרטים על מפגשי המועדון יתפרסמו באתר האגודה לקראת סוף החודש.

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

Letter to the Editor**Aharon,**

Great review of Richard Morgan's *Altered Carbon* in the December *CyberCozen*! I liked the review because, unlike so many poor reviews I see, it gives a thorough background to the plot. That is, many reviews talk about what goes on in the book and do not explain the full situation of the characters, so the synopsis makes little sense. Your review gives your reader a good sense of the situation in the book, so that your synopsis makes the plot come alive.

Sid Berger

Limericks by Miriam Ben-Loulu

(From *CyberCozen* February 1993)

The wife of a space merchant bold
 Discovered the cargo was gold
 She lured him with care
 To the airlock -- from there
 She left him out in the cold.

The rusty tin woodsman of Oz
 Was certainly upset because
 He was missing a part,
 (I've heard 'twas his heart)
 As well as the Robotic Laws.

There once was an ET quite blind
 Who said, "It is strange, but I find
 Most Earthlings accursed
 With a nature perverse --
 And yet they are sometimes quite kind."

A gourmet while dining in orbit
 Was given a serving of sorbet
 The ice in full sway
 Of null-grav flew away
 And the air filters had to adsorb it.

Two James White *Sector General* Books Reviewed by Aharon Sheer:

***Final Diagnosis* by James White (1997), 312 pages.**

Back in 1962, Northern Irish author James White (1928–1999) published the first *Sector General* book, *Hospital Station*. There are twelve volumes in the series. This is another one. The basic idea is an enormous space station which serves as a very expensive hospital for all kinds of aliens. Here are concentrated the galaxy's experts on alien medicine, the doctors and psychologists who find their own species too limiting, and are desirous of facing the medical challenges of treating an enormous variety of intelligent beings from planets all over, whether they breath oxygen or chlorine or methane,

have arms and legs (like humans) or tentacles, are as large as an elephant or as small as a bird. One might be skeptical as to whether such a variety of beings who are patients can really be treated by such a variety of beings who are doctors. But one must suspend one's disbelief. Of course in such a hospital each person on a ward must be supplied with a translating machine that will translate the language of any other being on the ward into a language that that being can understand. This makes the utterances of characters in this book sometimes a little stilted. We

readers must remember that everything is in translation.

The author writes with dry Irish humor, although even I sometimes laughed out loud. Let us start with an example of the experiences of a newly arrived patient, an Earth-human male named Hewlitt:

“Another extraterrestrial of a type he had never seen before was standing beside an antigravity litter and obviously awaiting their arrival. This one was very large, heavily built, and supported by six thick tentacles, one of which was encircled by a band bearing what was presumably the insignia of rank or identity of the wearer. It wore no other body covering and he was relieved to see it was hairless.... He could see two lidless, recessed eyes covered by a hard transparent material, but no other features apart from a fleshy membrane growing like a cock’s comb from the top of its head, and whose purpose was revealed as an organ of speech when the creature moved closer and vibrated it at him....”

When the gigantic nurse refers to him as an “it”, Hewlitt says,

“I am a human being, a ‘he’ or a ‘him’, not an ‘it’. You will kindly remember that in the future, Nurse.”

“For a long moment the other neither moved nor spoke. Then it said, ‘I know that you are human, just as all members of intelligent species think of themselves as being human. From my lectures on other-species anatomy I recognize you as an adult male of the DBDG Earth-human classification, but I must continue to refer to you as an ‘it’ unless some future clinical condition involving the reproductive organs or associated endocrinology requires me to be specific regarding your gender.

“‘Unfortunately,’ the nurse went on, ‘the identification of an entity’s sex is not always as easy as it is in your case, especially among beings like myself, who are able to change sex several times within a life span, or with species who

require more than two sexes for procreation. But it is a sensitive area, Patient Hewlitt, and often a wrong identification can be irritating or even, among some species, grossly insulting to the being wrongly identified. I believe that it will feel more comfortable and natural for you to think of me or any other being who is not of your own species as an ‘it’, just as we do with you.” [p. 2-3]

Once he is settled in a hospital bed, another nurse explains to him,

“‘When you are allowed out of bed ... you will be given a translator programmed for the languages used by the ward patients and medical staff.... Most of the patients will talk to you, if they are feeling sociable, and you need not worry about their outward appearance, because *all* of the patients here are ugly, gross, and visually repellent.

“‘Without exception.’” [p. 14]

Hewlitt has a curious medical problem. He is in perfect health. Yet on his first day in the ward, his heart stopped, for no apparent reason, and heart massage was immediately administered and his life saved. Yet he had no aftereffects whatsoever from this event. Nor was there any medical explanation.

Translators do not provide all the needed information. After the Hudlar nurse has saved his life, he says to her,

“‘Nurse,’ he said awkwardly, ‘I didn’t expect someone like you to be so, well, considerate toward me. I mean, you look like nothing on Earth...’

“‘I should hope so,’ said the Hudlar.

“‘I didn’t mean that to be taken literally,’ he said. ‘I just wanted to say thanks and, and your body makeup looks very smart.’

“The nurse made a small, untranslatable sound, and said, ‘Hudlars do not use body decoration, Patient Hewlitt. That is my lunch.’” [p. 29]

In the past Hewlitt has had sudden dangerous allergic reactions, and it is impossible to give him medication of any kind for fear that he will have such an

allergic reaction to it. Yet he always recovers from any such attack, and returns to perfect health. However, Hewlitt's most distressing problem is that he cannot have sexual contact with women. Although he reacts as a normal male, yet he cannot complete the act – instead his sperm is reabsorbed into his body, an event which causes great pain. Because of this, he must avoid all close contact with women, and remain, much to his dissatisfaction, totally celibate. Naturally, most doctors assume his problem is psychological.

The puzzle of Hewlitt's perfect health, combined with occasional distressing and terrifying incidents from which he always recovers, is the subject of this entire book. The complex history of his native planet (a multi-extraterrestrial-species planet) is involved in Hewlitt's history, and much has to be revealed before the surprising reason for Hewlitt's condition can be discovered, and, hopefully, treated.

I found the book fascinating, and better than any other Sector General novel that I have read to date.

***Star Healer* by James White (1984), 217 pages.**

This book reminded me of why I never got too enthusiastic about James White (1928–1999) and his *Sector General* series. I get distressed by the sight of blood. How I ever agreed to let the Army send me to a Haga [Civil Defense] Medic course is hard to believe, but what I got from that course is high blood pressure. Reading a detailed description of a series of bloody medical operations carried out to save the lives (if possible) of four Hudlar aliens who had been seriously injured in a space accident may have been fascinating, but it was not enjoyable. The Hudlars have six tentacles, and come from a planet with a strong gravity and a thick atmosphere. The Hudlars don't eat, they absorb nutrients directly from the atmosphere. Hudlar nurses working in the Sector General space station hospital are not in such an atmosphere. Instead, they are from time to time painted with a colorful nutrient solution, giving the impression they are wearing makeup. When the "makeup" begins to deteriorate, it's time to be coated (fed) again.

Each Hudlar has two hearts, and when one of the Hudlars is pregnant the fetus also has two hearts. Performing an operation on a huge being with two hearts, each of which must continue beating properly, is not simple. And what if you

have to perform a heart transplant, as happens here in one case? Or transplant tentacle-limbs from a recently dead Hudlar to one still alive who has lost some limbs? I got queasy from it all.

White's Hospital Station, with its myriad alien doctors and nurses, many wearing space suits while they work, and treating patients in a variety of atmospheres, varying from oxygen atmospheres like that of Earth, to freezing methane or warm chlorine, requires the suspension of disbelief, but if you are interested in possible future alien space medicine, fascinating.

"In its three hundred and eighty four levels were reproduced the environments of all the intelligent life-forms known to the Galactic Federation, a biological spectrum ranging from the ultra-frigid methane life-forms through the more common oxygen-breathing types up to the weird and wonderful beings who did not breathe, or even eat, but existed by the direct absorption of hard radiation." [p. 12]

He seems to be quite imaginative in thinking up a great variety of alien physiologies.

For example, "... a frigid-blooded methane-breather who is most comfortable in an environment at a few degrees above absolute zero, and who

evolved on the perpetually dark worlds which have been detached for their original solar systems and drift through interstellar space.... Physically they are quite small, ... averaging one-third of the body mass of a being like myself. But during contact with other species, the highly refrigerated life-support and sensory translation systems they are forced to wear are large and complex and require frequent power recharge...." [p. 7-8]

This book concentrates on the work of Senior Physician Conway, a human who has proven his ability to deal with a variety of pressing alien medical problems. One of the ways physicians on the Hospital Station are able to deal with so many different kinds of aliens is via the downloading of the knowledge and personality of an alien medical expert. Normally such a tape of knowledge is downloaded only for the period of time it is needed. A physician has to deal with an injured Hudlar, so it (the physician may be either male or female, or perhaps one of a species with half a dozen sexes, so they are all called "it") gets the tape of a Hudlar expert temporarily downloaded, works with it as long as needed, and then has it erased.

The next step up from Senior Physician is Diagnostician. A Diagnostician gets several tapes downloaded simultaneously, and enjoys

the benefits of the wide experience of several such experts. An alien point of view on an alien medical problem may give a Diagnostician ideas for treatment that the narrow view of the sick or injured patient's own species might not come up with.

Here is White's description of a meeting of Conway with such Diagnosticians:

"The Chief Psychologist stared back at him without expression. The features of the other Diagnosticians ranged around the room, sitting, crouching, hanging from or otherwise occupying the furniture designed for their bodily comfort, were likewise unreadable...." [p. 114]

Conway, having been invited to try for Diagnostician, is on probation. He has now got about six such tapes downloaded, and his experience trying to deal with such a multiplicity of points of view is the main tale of this book. Amusing are the reactions of disgust and horror of his brain-resident aliens as they deal with the strange shapes, life styles, and food tastes of the various patients. Not to mention how they react to Conway's tastes. They express their feelings freely, and Conway has to learn when to listen, and when to ignore.

Altogether I learned to enjoy this book, but it wasn't easy.

Interested readers might enjoy the outstanding Wikipedia article on the Sector

General series:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sector_General

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