



Science-Fiction Fanzine

Vol. XXII, No. 4; April, 2010

### The Israeli Society for Science Fiction and Fantasy

Charles Stross - Author GoH at Icon 2010

צ'ארלס סטרוס – יהיה הסופר האורח באייקון 2010. 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. (בפברואר 2010, סייברקוזן פרסם בקורת על *Saturn's Children* by Charles Stross (2008) <http://www.icon.org.il/2009/CharlieStrossNews> פרטים נוספים עליו ועל יצירתו בקישור הבא:

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

### Book Review by Aharon Sheer

*Odyssey* by Jack McDevitt (2006), 423 pages.

As readers of *CyberCozen* know, I like Jack McDevitt. One of his weaknesses, and his strength, is that he creates a future world just like the present one. The main difference is the use of more advanced technology. Politics, philosophy, religion (in a mainly secular society), human relations, are pretty much as they are in the U.S. today, with good relations with scientists and technologists in Europe too. There is no hint of the Islamization of Europe or the decline of population in technologically advanced societies such as Japan. Just assume that things are roughly like today. So McDevitt has fun commenting on and ridiculing life in America as it is today. And this book also has a message relevant RIGHT NOW.

This book is in the series *The Academy Novels*, which take place about 200 hundred years from now, after the development of faster-than-light travel. The Academy of Science and Technology conducts an interstellar space exploration program. Priscilla Hutchins, formerly a spaceship pilot (and the hero of several earlier books in this Academy series), decided she wanted to get married and to

have a child – a difficult task when one is an interstellar spaceship pilot making faster-than-light trips that take months at a time. So now she's running the Academy's space exploration program, and living on Earth with her husband and child.

Naturally, the Academy faces the same problems NASA faces today. There are those who think money is better spent helping the poor. Exploration is a complete waste. This opinion has been supported by the discoveries that have shown that advanced alien races once traveled and built in many parts of the galaxy, but they are long gone. Their monuments still exist, there are even small groups of beings apparently descended from these advanced races, but they have fallen back into barbarism. Humans seem to be alone as intelligent explorers of space today. So should humans continue to explore interstellar space?

“To date we have not found a world with a high-tech functioning society. We have however, seen remnants of nine technological civilizations. At least one of these,

the so-called Monument-Makers, achieved interstellar flight. There is evidence of one other such species, the creatures who helped evacuate Maleiva III when it fell into a brutal ice age several thousand years ago. But we don't know where they came from, or where they went....

"Our most recent evidence indicates that many societies experience an industrial revolution, followed by exponential technological development, followed by rapid growth, followed by a general collapse. None that we know of, other than the Monument-Makers, seem to have lasted more than three hundred years beyond the development of the computer." [p. 168]

Well, there is one possible exception: the "moonriders". From time to time space travelers have seen signs that there may be other space travelers out there, watching, but no direct contact has been made. Are they real, or are they really like UFOs of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that some claimed to have seen, but serious studies found no solid proof.

In this book McDevitt seems to take the Large Hadron Collider (LHC) of our time (2010) as a major thread. There are physicists (a very few) who are worried that there may be dramatic unexpected effects of the LHC experiments. Might the LHC create a black hole that would swallow the Earth? No serious physicist thinks so, but there are some (obviously not serious if they think otherwise) who are worried.

From *NewScientist* February 17 2010: **"In various countries, plaintiffs have sought court orders to halt the operation of the Large Hadron Collider at CERN near Geneva, Switzerland, with the most extraordinary of allegations: that the experiment may create a black hole that will devour the Earth."**

Suppose that we calculate that there is only one chance in 100,000,000 that the LHC experiment, when it reaches its maximum energies, could actually destroy the Earth. Insignificant risk. No? When you are talking about the chance of destroying the Earth, maybe one chance in a million is too big a risk to take?

McDevitt has invented a future "Origins" project, a huge circular particle accelerator being built in space, twenty light years from Earth. When completed it will be thousands of kilometers in circumference, and will achieve particle speeds and energies never before possible. They want to find the "Blueprint" of the universe. Could anything go wrong?

Well, they may have received a warning message. A 15 year old girl said she had had a visitation from a moonrider, while wandering around a spaceship at 3 am in the morning after a visit to the Origins project. The visitation was in the form of a 3 meter tall Priscilla Hutchins, who warned her that the Blueprint project needed to be stopped, that it was a great danger. The moonriders warned that they were going to destroy the Origins project, because of Blueprint. They asked the girl to warn everyone working in Origins project to leave the area of the Origins project in order to save their lives.

Now, who is going to listen to a tale that a 15 year old girl tells who says she talked to a moonrider at 3 am? Still – Priscilla is worried. She sends a spaceship back to Origins, and arranges for several more to go there too, in case there is a need to try and get people off the project – just in case. When the first spaceship reaches Origins, the pilot, Valya, and a PR man named Eric Samuels, meet and talk with people on the project:

"They were in a lounge. There were probably a half dozen others present, and all conversations stopped when Eric asked whether there was any general danger attached to the project. 'There is a slight risk,'

Eastman conceded. He was young, not yet out of his twenties. 'But the odds are heavily against any kind of major mishap.' He smiled. Nothing to worry about.

"But it *is* possible there could be a problem?"

"Mr. Samuels, anything not prohibited is possible. Yes, of course there's a possibility. But so small that we really need not concern ourselves with it.'

"If this mishap were to occur, worst-case scenario, what would it entail? What could happen?"

"Worst case?" He looked around and they all grinned. 'Lights out, I guess.' He actually sounded enthusiastic at the prospect. Valya watched quietly. Talent did not always make people bright.

"Another young man stepped forward. Again, not much more than a kid. But she could see he had a high opinion of himself. 'Maybe I can help,' he said. 'My name is Rolly Clemens. I'm the project director for Blueprint.'

"Eric nodded. 'Glad to meet you, Professor.' He shook hands, but looked uncomfortable. Calling a kid 'professor' must have seemed out of order. 'Tell me about the possibility of catastrophe.'

"Eric,' he said, 'there isn't much that is *not* possible.' He adopted a tolerant expression. 'But I don't think you need worry.'

"You're sure?"

"Of course.'

"If the "lights out" thing were to happen—'

"It won't—'

"Indulge me. If it were to occur, it would also involve Earth, right?"

"Clemens was trying to be patient. They were talking nonsense. 'Yes,' he conceded. 'It would involve everything.'

"How long would it take before the effects were felt? At home?"

"A little more than twenty years.'

"Why so long?"

"Because,' he said, shifting to lecture mode for slow students, 'it would cause a rift, and the rift would travel at light speed.' He looked bored. Been through all this before.

"What the hell, you can't live forever.

"If you're really worried about it,' he continued, 'you needn't be. The chances of something like that occurring are so remote they defy imagination.'

"A woman stepped out of the crowd. Plain-looking, black hair, also in her twenties. 'I wouldn't be so sure,' she said. The comment earned her a glare. But she plunged on. 'Who's to say it can't happen. Who's calculating the odds? We're in unknown territory here.'

"Oh, come on, Barb,' said Clemens. 'How many times are we going to have this conversation?'

"In the end,' said Eastman, 'you can't be sure of anything. But what's life worth if we don't take an occasional chance?' He was trying to make a joke of it.

"She threw up her hands. 'You people know it all. No need for me to be concerned.'

"Doesn't it strike you,' said Eric, 'that if there's any chance at all of a catastrophe on this order, we shouldn't be doing the experiment?'

"It's the nature of experimentation,' said Clemens. Whatever that meant." [p. 365-367]

I enjoyed reading *Odyssey*. I wondered whether aliens would stop the LHC project if it just might destroy the Earth. On the other hand, if it might destroy the Universe...? For those of us who like McDevitt, it's a good read.

Advice Column:  
**More Advice to the Lovelorn from Salacious Sal**  
 (from April 1996)

# Salacious Sal



**Dear Sal,**

Please tell me what to do. I come from a planet where all sentients have geometrical shapes. I was born a circle with a pleasing radius and a nice circumference. Life went so smoothly that I was bored and joined a wild circle of friends. One cycle we went off ringing around The Rosie. The Rosie is our sister planet whose inhabitants are all solid

citizens. I fell in love with a handsome sphere with a lot of influence. But he thinks I am boring. He says I am too plane. Please help me!

**Circa**

**Dear Circa:**

A little silicon will give you the curves you desire and a good college can round out your education. But is this sphere worth it? If he doesn't appreciate you the way you are, perhaps he is too dense. I think you would be happier with someone of your own planet who can see things from other points of view, someone with many sides to his character. A pentagon might be too aggressive for you and a hexagon has a tendency to stop things before they get interesting. I suggest you look for a well-angled polygon.

**Sal**

**Unemployed? Out of sorts? Overintelligent? Write Salacious Sal for advice!**

**Commentary by Miriam Ben-Loulu (September 1997):**

Many science-fiction writers have based stories on sentient computers. Are computers already sentient? And will a sentient computer necessarily have **human** characteristics? In the following commentary I have suggested some of the possibilities.

**Man or Beast?**

To some people a computer is just "that damn machine" or "a very versatile invention". But if you have spent any amount of time with a computer you are probably aware that it can develop a certain personality.

My problem is that I haven't been able to decide whether my computer is a man or a beast. Many times it seems almost human. There are pleasant sounds when it is satisfied with what I am doing. It makes rude noises whenever I make a mistake. It also makes mistakes occasionally and is so embarrassed by them that it refuses to continue any action ("To err is human!!!!"). When it feels the work load is too heavy it slows down and takes it easy.

It can play chess or Backgammon with me.

On the other hand, it also reminds me of a member of the cat family. Like all cats it cooperates better with people who like it, yet it still retains an independence of action that can have even experts biting their fingernails. It insists on being treated gently and if it feels you are not behaving properly toward it, it will refuse to have anything to do with you. Definitely feline characteristics! Time is not important to it. When challenged to a game of wits (for example chess) it will play with you like a cat with a mouse allowing you to think that this time you might actually win.

Of course it might be some other type of animal. Some of the noises I have heard it make do not seem to be either human or feline. Could it be a stubborn mule, a rooting pig, or Tinker Bell? What do the rest of you computer users think?

**Quote of the Month:**

*"Women who seek to be equal to men lack ambition.*

- A popular bumper sticker

*"Cats exist as proof that not everything in nature has a function.*

"To say that women are just more complex than men isn't a sweeping sexist generalization – it's simply a biological observation. Just look at the chromosomes that dictate male or female development: the X and the Y. Not to knock the Y chromosome, but throughout evolution the chromosome has shrunk to the point it houses only about a hundred genes, albeit vital ones if you happen to be a guy. The X chromosome, on the other hand, hosts over a thousand genes that prove crucial to both men and women.

"Those genes are remarkably useful. They do things like clot blood, facilitate seeing colors, and mediating blood pressure, not to mention playing some role in deciding which males get to keep their hair."

From *When a Gene Makes You Smell Like a Fish* by Lisa Seachrist Chiu, p. 94

For Comments: 13 Pinsker St., Rehovot 76308. Email: [asheer@netvision.net.il](mailto: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](mailto:asheer@netvision.net.il) (PDF format).

Copyright © 2010

.All rights reserved to specified authors and artists

כל הזכויות שמורות למחברים וליוצרים, כפי שצוינו.