



Science-Fiction Fanzine

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The Israeli Society for Science Fiction and Fantasy

מועדון הקריאה

במרכז דיוני מועדון הקריאה בחודש יולי יעמוד הספר "קוסם היונים" מאת מייגן לינדלהולם. פרטים על מפגשי מועדון הקריאה העוסקים בספר זה יתפרסמו באתר האגודה. ההשתתפות במועדון הקריאה אינה כרוכה בתשלום, אינה מותנית בהגעה למפגשים נוספים ופתוחה גם למי שאינם חברי אגודה. מועדון הקריאה בתל אביב יתקיים ביום ראשון, 25 ביולי 2010, בבית הקפה "קפה קפה" ברחוב חשמונאים 95, בשעה 19:00. המנחה: רותם ברוכין. מומלץ להירשם מראש באמצעות הדואר, בכתובת rotem.baruchin@gmail.com. אנו ממליצים לכם להביא למפגש עותק של הספר. בחודש אוגוסט יוקדש מועדון הקריאה לספר "בנות הדרקון" מאת מרית בן ישראל. פרטים על מפגשי המועדון העוסקים בספר זה יתפרסמו באתר האגודה ובמכתב החודשי. המעוניינים להנחות מועדוני קריאה בכל רחבי הארץ מוזמנים לפנות בדואר למרכזת הפרויקט, ליאת שחר: liat42@gmail.com.

כנס רובוטריקון

כנס הרובוטריקים הישראלי השנתי יתקיים השנה ביום חמישי, 5 באוגוסט, בשעות 12:00-22:00 בבית דורון שברמת גן. כבכל שנה יכלול הכנס תערוכת דמויות גדולה ושלל הרצאות מעניינות מאת אלון טריטמן, חיליק חיימוביץ' ואחרים. השנה יכלול הכנס גם סדנת ציור של דמויות רובוטריקים, סדנת קיטבוש, הקראת תסריט מול קהל, תחרות לעיצוב דמותו של "רובוטריקון", ועוד. כמו כן יופעלו דוכן יד שנייה למוצרי רובוטריקים ועמדות משחק של סוני עם המשחק War for Cybertron. שיצא לשוק לאחרונה. המשחק יוצע למכירה לבאי הכנס בהנחה גדולה, בצד משחקים קודמים בסדרה. פרטים נוספים ראו באתר הכנס: www.robotricon.com או פנו לדואר robotricon@gmail.com.

מיתופיה 2010 -- הספרייה המרכזית, מודיעין - 19 באוגוסט 2010

כנס מיתופיה, בארגון של קהילת טולקין הישראלית וקהילת הארי פוטר לבוגרים, הוא כנס שנתי המוקדש לספרות הפנטסיה, אשר מתמקד ביצירותיהם של ג'ר.ר. טולקין וג'ק רולינג. השנה ייערך הכנס בספרייה המרכזית של מודיעין. כחלק משיתוף הפעולה בין הארגונים יהיו חברי האגודה הישראלית למדע בדיוני ולפנטסיה זכאים לקבל כרטיס חינם לאירוע באולם הגדול, בקניית שני כרטיסים לאירועים נוספים באותו אולם. המארגנים ממליצים להירשם מראש באתר הכנס או בפייסבוק לצורך קבלת עדכונים. בין הנרשמים מראש יוגרל כרטיס כניסה יומי. פרטים נוספים באתר הכנס: www.mythopia.org, או [בדף הפייסבוק של הכנס](http://www.facebook.com/mythopia).

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) 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>

Short Book Reviews by Aharon Sheer

Singularity Sky by Charles Stross

(2003), 337 pages.

This is Charles Stross' first novel; previously he published short stories and novellas. This is a complex and often

unclear book, but filled with an edgy humor and a variety of unbelievable ideas. Mankind has spread through the galaxy and populated numerous planets. At some time in the past (21st century?) it developed a very intelligent artificial intelligence, vastly smarter than human beings, the "Eschaton". The Eschaton sits quietly and watches, and when it sees humans doing something it doesn't like, makes them stop. In its early days, a thousand years ago, in the 22nd century, humans who did things the Eschaton didn't like simply disappeared – but reappeared on many other distant planets. The Eschaton scattered mankind all over.

One of the things the Eschaton doesn't like is causality violation. The claim Stross makes is that traveling faster than the speed of light can make it possible to travel back in time. Since light particles travel forever, if an event happens, the vision of that event travels out in space forever. If a human is a long way away and observes something that happened in the past, all the human has to do is travel faster than light, arrive at the place where the event took place before the light rays from that event left the event, and then just prevent that event from happening. But that would violate causality. To prevent that, the Eschaton will act first.

This idea of the effect of traveling faster than the speed of light always bothered me. If you could travel faster than the speed of sound, couldn't you travel back to before the great speech was given, and prevent it from being given? The reason why that won't work seems to me to be because traveling faster than sound makes so much noise that the noise will prevent you from getting there before the speech can be given. Wouldn't traveling faster than the speed of light make too much noise (figuratively)?

In the early days the Eschaton took harsh action when someone violated causality. Nowadays (in the time of this novel) the Eschaton prefers just to quietly

interfere so that the violation will never take place.

Another aspect of this novel is a solar system of worlds (the "New Republic") which insist on living in the past. Almost all modern technology has been rejected. "Machines were upper-class and forbidden, guarded by the grim faces and gray uniforms of authority." [p. 1] People in this solar system live as did people in the first half of the 20th century. Brutal repression, and strict old fashioned rules of living, prevent the average person from getting uppity and trying to have what the top people in society have.

All this changes with the arrival of the Festival. The Festival is a non-human space-travelling civilization which delights in giving beings whatever they ask for, in exchange for information. "The Festival fleet had dismantled a gas giant moon and three comets, begun work on a second moon, and was preparing to rain telephones from orbit before the Imperial Traffic Control Bureau noticed that anything was amiss." [p. 3] Thus the Festival gets its raw materials locally, and in exchange for being entertained (tell them an interesting story via the telephone they just dropped from the sky), and it will use nanotechnology to give you anything you want. Food, clothing, housing, new bodies, whatever. What this does to the local economy is distressing to the local rulers, all of whom seem to have Russian names.

The only acceptance of modern technology in the New Republic is a fleet of spaceships, which enable travel (at faster-than-light speed) between the various planets in the system. This travel system has been purchased from other solar systems where science and scientific research and modern technology are not forbidden. (Paid for, I suppose, with raw materials.) The destruction by the Festival of the New Republic's brutal system of repression is not taken lightly by the rulers. They decide to attack the Festival fleet and destroy it, thus allowing

the return of life to the old, familiar ways. They have all that powerful purchased technology to use against the Festival. Will they be able to defeat it?

One of the book's heroes is Martin, a technician sent by the sellers of the New Republic's space fleet to provide advanced upgrades of their engines. Martin is accustomed to visiting different societies:

"He had become sufficiently accustomed to local customs that, rather than letting them irritate him, he was able to absorb each new affront with quiet resignation. The way the concierge stared down his patrician nose at him, or stiff-collared chambermaids scurried by with downcast eyes, had become merely individual pieces in the complex jigsaw puzzle of Republican mores. The smell of wax polish and chlorine bleach, coal smoke from the boiler room, and leather seats in the dining room, were all alien, the odors of a society that hadn't adapted to the age of plastic." [p. 21]

Martin gets on the spaceship, *Lord Vanek*, where he is to do his maintenance work.

***Thunder Rift* by Matthew Farrell (2001), 394 pages.**

"**Stephen W. Leigh** (born 1951) is an American science fiction and fantasy writer, artist, and musician. He also works as an assistant professor at Northern Kentucky University, teaching creative writing." - from Wikipedia. For some reason, Leigh wrote this novel under the penname of Matthew Farrell, perhaps because most of his writing is fantasy, and this book is definitely sf. In fact, I enjoyed reading this sf book more than anything I've read for several years. My first reaction was, "Let's buy some more books by Matthew Farrell". Alas, this is impossible. There aren't any.

Leigh has also written several books under the pen-name of S.L. Farrell, which may suggest something, but from his site <http://www.farrellworlds.com> I could not figure out what.

"*Lord Vanek* was, in interstellar terms, a simple beast: ninety thousand tonnes of warship and a thousand crew held in tight orbit around an electron-sized black hole as massive as a mountain range. The hole – the drive kernel – spun on its axis so rapidly that its event horizon was permeable; the drive used it to tug the ship about by tickling the singularity in a variety of ways. At non-relativistic speeds, *Lord Vanek* maneuvered by dumping mass into the kernel; complex quantum tunneling interactions – jiggery-pokery within the ergosphere – transformed it into raw momentum. At higher speeds, energy pumped into the kernel could be used to generate a jump field, collapsing the quantum well between the ship and a point some distance away." [p. 81]

Singularity Sky keeps the reader busy, although it was not always comprehensible, and Stross enjoys his pseudo-philosophizing too much. But over all it is amusing.

His main human character is a fascinating woman, Taria Spears, with a mixture of Maori (her grandmother), American and Chinese (her father studied and speaks Chinese) sentiments. She started learning Chinese as a small child, and as an adult speaks it fluently.

His aliens are dramatically different from human beings. They have almost no sense of vision, but they have a fabulous sense of hearing. They generate sounds from very deep booming to high-pitched squeaks, and they use sounds partly the way bats do, as a way of sensing the physical world around them. In addition, touch is a very important sensation, and they constantly touch one another as they move about. Their biology is reminiscent of that of a hive of intelligent bees. They have multiple languages, each used for

different purposes (command, intimacy, casual meetings, etc.)

Thirty years before the main events of this novel, an alien artifact appeared in space out near Jupiter. Earth people called this object Thunder. Thunder constantly generates electromagnetic noise, and this noise totally destroyed the electromagnetic foundations of human civilization. Suddenly there were no functioning computers on Earth, no working cars, no working refrigerators, no microwave ovens, none of the vast variety of devices which have embedded computers. On such devices modern Earth civilization is based.

“The invisible storm wrecked global communications, destroying the eyes and ears of every satellite in the sky, taking out radio, television, and networked communications, destroying most computerized safeguards on equipment and systems, causing any device with an embedded computer chip (which was, as the anachronists grumpily declared, damned near everything) to immediately fail.” [p. 4]

The interlocking world economy collapsed. It took many years for technology to recover, as mankind gradually learned how to shield all computer circuits from Thunder’s interference. Eventually it was discovered that Thunder provided a wormhole to somewhere else, and Taria’s whole education was dominated by her desire to go on the first manned exploratory trip to whatever was on the other side of that wormhole. The novel is both flashbacks to the story of Taria’s life, and Taria’s experiences as the main representative of human beings to an alien planet’s intelligent life.

Mankind explores Thunder by first sending unmanned probes through the wormhole, discovering that on the other side there is a sun with planets circling it. One of the planets is a gas giant, and one moon circling the gas giant, which the Earth people call “Little Sister”, has

intelligent life on it. The assumption must be that Little Sister is the home of the beings that created Thunder.

The exploratory team is built of both military people and ExoAnthropologists. The wormhole of Thunder is assumed to be an invitation to come visit. But perhaps it is also a threat – having already done enormous damage to life on Earth, perhaps it will be a path for an invasion, once the builders of Thunder realize that there is intelligent life on Earth. So the military control the delegation. Taria is, of course, one of the non-military people, an ExoAnthropologist. However, one of her closest friends is military, Kyung, with whom she speaks in Mandarin Chinese.

On arrival, studies of the inhabited planet are an immediate disappointment. The beings have a technological level like that of ancient Greece. Quite respectable – few societies on Earth achieved such a high level – but far below the technology required to build a wormhole! However, surely these beings must be in contact with the builders of Thunder. So an effort must be made to communicate with them.

While it turns out that the natives can barely see, to humans they are fabulously colored, with a predominance of blue. Hence they are nicknamed “Blues”. One of them is a sort of priest, a “Baraaki”.

“The Baraaki’s head-crest, studded with twin lines of earlet holes, rose to display its splotched orange and red markings, as if an alien Jackson Pollack had splattered her ridged flesh with paint from a dripping brush. The rest of her skin, before it plunged into the stained off-white windings of cloth around most of her body, was the blue of the deep ocean seen at the horizon. The flame colors of the head-crest shimmered against the background of cool azure, and the translucent eyestrip circling her head under the wide, lipless mouth glittered. Muscles in the wide neck pulsed around the prominent larynx.” [p. 74]

Humans cannot learn the Blues' language – the range of sounds is too great for a human to produce. But the Blues turn out to be quick learners, and some soon are able to speak Shiplish (the version of English adopted by the multi-national crew for common communication). After meeting with several of the ship's crew, the Blues ask for one person, Taria, to come down to the planet and live with them. This choice seems to have been made because Taria, different from the other humans, expressed only one desire: to understand. The Blues call her "Taria-Who-Wants-to-Understand". Taria accepts the invitation, despite the obvious risks. This is what she studied for; this is what she wants to do.

Among the Blues, Taria must learn to use her ears to guide herself. At one point she finds herself in total darkness:

"Taria concentrated on her hearing, closing her eyes so she wouldn't have to confront the darkness around her. Concentrating, she found she *could* hear, that she could determine the directions of the sounds and tell, to some extent, how far away they were. The rows of chimes hung along the walls were like an acoustic

channel, leading off in the distance ahead of her." [p. 217]

The story of the gradual realization of what the Blues are, how they live and interact, how their lives and activities and biology are carried out, is fascinating. The military naturally have the most difficulty, always seeing threats where there are not threats but natural problems, and always looking for the strong, military solution (the Blues have no technology, how can they be a threat to us? We'll just overpower them.), rather than looking for communication and negotiation. There are painful surprises in store for them.

Near the end of the book there is an Appendix in which the author discusses "The Blue's Languages", "A Blue Vocabulary", "Blue Physiology and Psychology", "The Blue Religion", "Little Sister", and "Little Sister Flora and Fauna". I suspect the book would be more understandable if one first read the Appendix, and only after that, the rest of the book.

I found the book fascinating, and as I said, I wish Stephen Leigh had written some more like it.

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כל הזכויות שמורות למחברים וליוצרים, כפי שצוינו.

**Artwork by Miriam
Ben-Loulu (August
1993)**

