



Science-Fiction Fanzine

Vol. XXIII, No. 8; August, 2011

The Israeli Society for Science Fiction and Fantasy

אייקון 2011 יוצא לדרך!**הנושא השנה: התחדשות**

הפסטיבל השנתי של האגודה יוצא לדרך זו השנה ה-15. פסטיבל "אייקון 2011" – החגיגה השנתית של מדע בדיוני, פנטזיה ומשחקי תפקידים יתקיים גם השנה בחול המועד סוכות, בתאריכים 16-18 באוקטובר 2011. הכנס מופק על ידי שני הארגונים המובילים בארץ בתחום המדע הבדיוני והפנטזיה: **אגודה ישראלית למדע בדיוני ולפנטזיה** וה**עמותה למשחקי תפקידים בישראל**. נושא הפסטיבל השנה הוא "התחדשות".

כאמ"י 2011

אמא", ארגון הבת של האגודה, שמח להכריז על כנס הקיץ "כאמ"י 2011"! הכנס יתקיים ביום ה', 25 באוגוסט, בהיכל התרבות בראשון לציון. "כאמ"י" הוא כנס בנושאי אנימציה וקומיקס יפניים (אנימה ומנגה), תרבות יפן פופולרית וגיימינג (קונסולות ומשחקי לוח יפנים). הכנס יארח פעילויות רבות ומגוונות: מחזמר, משחקי לוח יפניים, תחרות קוספליי, משחקי קונסולות, דוכני יוצרים עצמאיים ומסחריים, סדנאות, פאנלים, הקרנות סרטים ועוד. פרטים נוספים ניתן למצוא באתר הכנס: <http://www.anime.org.il/aug11> מצפים לראותכם!

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

Movie Review by Aharon Sheer

Rise of the Planet of the Apes (2011). Director: Rupert Wyatt; Writers: Pierre Boulle, Rick Jaffa, and Amanda Silver; Stars: James Franco, Andy Serkis and Freida Pinto. Now playing in Israel. Rated PG-13 for intense and frightening sequences of action and violence. 105 minutes.

A scientifically-based story of the creation of the intelligent apes who will be the villains of the great classic sf movie, ***Planet of the Apes*** (1968). The original movie told us that the intelligent apes were the creation of a mad scientist. This movie introduces us to this good looking, friendly mad scientist, and his sexy girl friend (but no sex in this movie).

Scientist Will Rodman (played by James Franco) works in genetic engineering for a large company, Gen-Sys, which is trying to develop new

drugs. They have found a medication which makes rats smarter, and are now testing it on apes. The medication works by passing a retrovirus into the brain, which infects the brain but instead of making the animal sick, it improves brain functioning. The potential is that this chemical may provide help for Alzheimer patients whose mental functioning has deteriorated (like Will Rodman's father).

A large number of experimental apes have been given this medication, and shown remarkable improvements in

their intelligence. Will illegally takes some of this medication home and tries it on his Alzheimer-stricken father, whose mental functioning greatly improves. Unfortunately, the medication has a horrible side-effect on the experimental apes – some apes taking it become violent. And since they are very smart, they do great damage. Gen-Sys decides to close down the study. Will urges them to continue, having seen the improvements in his father (about which he cannot tell them).

But the study is closed down, and all the apes put to death. However, one of the apes was pregnant and had just given birth to a baby ape. Will, illegally, takes the baby home intending to pass it on to a primate center, but soon realizes that this baby ape has inherited his mother's high intelligence, and has a charming personality. Naming the baby ape Caesar, Will and his girlfriend (played by Frieda Pinto), decide to keep Caesar.

Caesar was played by Andy Serkis, who also played the giant ape King Kong in the 2005 remake, using motion-capture software to record facial expressions and body language. In this movie, the apes were created digitally by Weta Digital using motion capture. New advances in the technology allowed the use of motion capture in an exterior environment, affording the film-makers the freedom to shoot much of the film on location with multiple performers.

Will wants to raise Caesar at home as long as possible. And Caesar is

smart, much smarter than a human baby of the same age. Caesar cannot speak verbally, but they teach him sign language and he can communicate. Unfortunately, as chimpanzees get older they also get much stronger, and can easily kill a human being, even by accident. And, with a poorly developed sense of right and wrong, Caesar eventually behaves badly (from the point of view of the police), gets picked up and put in an ape prison. Nasty place, modeled after the typical California prison, except that the apes are not kept in solitary confinement but are in sight and hearing of other apes.

The end of the story is that other apes are also infected by this virus and also become highly intelligent, while humans who get the virus die after a period of time. Thus the intelligent apes will eventually take over the world from humans, and provide us the back-story for the world of the original movie *Planet of the Apes* in which the apes rule the world.

My wife and I enjoyed the movie, although there are numerous scientific defects in the tale. No point in going into them – you can find them for yourselves. A fun movie, especially if you enjoy nasty humans being killed by kind, loving, intelligent apes. Sort of like the movie *Avatar* (2009) (whose aliens were also created by motion-control in a similar way as the apes in this movie), where we also cheered the aliens killing the humans.

Quote of the Month

“[Jane] Goodall immersed herself in the life of the forest and persisted through months of watching the rear ends of the apes fleeing her approach. Goodall's months turned into years and as her subjects became accustomed to her presence, she painted a portrait of chimpanzee society that has given us a whole new view of what it means to be human. Hunting, meat-eating, and tool use were all traits thought to be uniquely human until Goodall's discoveries in the early 1960s. Then in the 1970s, Goodall and her growing legions of students and field assistants reported infanticide, cannibalism, and warfare – a dark side of the apes that reflected so well the dark side of ourselves.”

From *Beautiful Minds* by Maddalena Bearzi and Craig Stanford, 2008, p. 40-41

Book Review by Aharon Sheer

Beggars in Spain by Nancy Kress (1993), 438 pages.

The first part of this book (called Book I) is an sf novella which won both the Hugo Award (1992) and the Nebula Award (1991) for Best Novella. (A “novella” is a story of between 17,500 and 40,000 words.) Nancy Kress was born in 1948, and began writing in 1976.

The remaining three parts of this book (called Books II, III, and IV) are continuations of the novella, each part taking place two or more decades after the previous part, but all with the same main character, Leisha Camden. There are two main “scientific” ideas in this work. One is the invention of “cold fusion” which provides unlimited cheap energy in small packages. It’s called “Y-energy” after its inventor Yagaii. Every home, every car, every motor scooter, is powered by Y-energy.

The second “scientific” idea is that of sleeplessness. It seems that (for a lot of money) you can have your future progeny modified so that they will never have to sleep. Today we know that sleep is essential for the maintenance of memory in the brain. Also, every cell in the body has a circadian rhythm of roughly 24 hours. But Kress gives a pseudo-scientific explanation of how a human can live without sleep. The “Sleepless”, besides having a more productive life by not having to sleep one third of their life (wouldn’t have worked in the distant past without artificial lighting), are also more intelligent than the “Sleepers”, meaning the rest of mankind. Not only are the Sleepless more intelligent, they have a sunnier disposition than most of mankind. And then it turns out that they do not get old. How long they will live is unknown, but it could be for hundreds of years.

Kress several times briefly compares the Sleepless to Jews. Harder working, more intelligent, better human beings, the Sleepless are hated by the

vast majority of Sleepers. Most of them become doctors and lawyers and scientists, and eventually they take over most of the creative work of the world. The number of Sleepless never becomes too large. Gradually laws are passed making the creation of more Sleepless illegal. Jobs are denied to them as being unfair competition to normal human beings. Genetic modification is permitted for the purpose of making people better looking, but not for making them Sleepless. Nevertheless after decades a few hundred thousand Sleepless control 28% of the U.S. economy (the whole book takes place in the U.S. and the rest of the world is ignored – this was written in the early 1990s, remember).

Later on most Sleepless lock themselves up in a closed community, and have little contact with the Sleepers. Eventually (remember this book goes on for decades) most Sleepless settle in an orbiting space station, which they call “Sanctuary”. The U.S. government is just looking for an excuse to close Sanctuary down and destroy all the Sleepless.

It’s very rare that I cannot finish a book of sf. But this book just goes on and on. I didn’t like the characters (neither the Sleepers nor the Sleepless), I didn’t like the pseudo-science, I didn’t like the atmosphere of the book (a whole nation hating those who are better than them). Although I enjoyed parts of the Book I (the original novella which won both the Hugo and Nebula Awards), the continuation gets more and more boring. The amazing thing is that Kress wrote and sold two more books in the series, *Beggars and Choosers* (1994) and *Beggars Ride* (1996).

I’ll give some examples of the style from the earlier, better part of the book. Leisha has just arrived to study at Harvard, where she is studying pre-law:

“SHE LOVED IT.

“From the first sight of Massachusetts Hall, older than the United States by a half century, Leisha felt something that had been missing in Chicago: Age. Roots. Tradition. She touched the bricks of Widener Library, the glass cases in the Peabody Museum, as if they were the grail. She had never been particularly sensitive to myth or drama; the anguish of Juliet seemed to her artificial, that of Willy Loman merely wasteful. Only King Arthur, struggling to create a better social order, had interested her. But now, walking under the huge autumn trees, she suddenly caught a glimpse of a force that could span generations, fortunes left to endow learning and achievement the benefactors would never see, individual effort spanning and shaping centuries to come. She stopped, and looked at the sky through the leaves, at the buildings solid with purpose. At such moments she thought of Camden [her father], bending the will of an entire genetic research institute to create her in the image he wanted. “Within a month, she had forgotten all such mega-musings.” [p. 47]

Here is Leisha arguing with her **Sleeper** fellow pre-law friend Stewart:

““There have always been haters, Stewart. Hate Jews, hate Blacks, hate immigrants, hate Yagaiists who have more initiative and dignity than you do. I'm just the latest object of hatred. It's not new, it's not remarkable. It doesn't mean any basic kind of schism between the Sleepless and Sleepers.’
“Stewart sat up in bed and reached for the sandwiches on the night stand. ‘Doesn't it? Leisha, you're a different kind of person

entirely. More evolutionarily fit, not only to survive but to prevail. Those other objects of hatred you cite -- they were all powerless in their societies. They occupied inferior positions. You on the other hand -- all three Sleepless in Harvard Law are on the Law Review. All of them. Kevin Baker, your oldest, has already founded a successful bio-interface software firm and is making money, a lot of it. Every Sleepless is making superb grades, none have psychological problems, all are healthy, and most of you aren't even adults yet. How much hatred do you think you're going to encounter once you hit the high-stakes world of finance and business and scarce endowed chairs and national politics.” [p. 51]

But Leisha also talks to her **Sleepless** friend Richard:

“When Leisha went home for Thanksgiving, she told Richard about Stewart. He listened tight-lipped.

“‘A Sleeper.’

“‘A person,’ Leisha said. ‘A good, intelligent, achieving person!’

“‘Do you know what your good intelligent achieving Sleepers have done, Leisha? Jeanine has been barred from Olympic skating. ‘Genetic alteration, analogous to steroid abuse to create an unsportsmanlike advantage.’ Chris Devereaux has left Stanford. They trashed his laboratory, destroyed two years' work in memory-formation proteins. Kevin Baker's software company is fighting a nasty advertising campaign, all underground of course, about kids using software designed by nonhuman minds. Corruption, mental slavery, satanic influences: the whole bag of witch-hunt tricks. Wake up, Leisha!’

“They both heard his words. Minutes dragged by. Richard stood like

a boxer, forward on the balls of his feet, teeth clenched. Finally he said, very quietly, 'Do you love him?'

"Yes,' Leisha said. 'I'm sorry.'

"Your choice,' Richard said coldly. 'What do you do while he's asleep? Watch?'

"You make it sound like a Perversion.'

"Richard said nothing. Leisha drew a deep breath. She spoke rapidly but calmly, a controlled rush: 'While Stewart is asleep I work. The same as you do. Richard - don't do this. I didn't mean to hurt you. And I don't want to lose the group. I believe the Sleepers are the same species as we are. Are you going to punish me for that? Are you going to add to the hatred? Are you going to tell me that I can't belong to a wider world that includes all honest, worthwhile people whether they sleep or not? Are you going to tell me that the most important division is by genetics and not by economic spirituality? Are you going to force me into an artificial choice, us or them?'

"Richard picked up a bracelet. Leisha recognized it; she had given it to him in the summer. His voice was quiet. 'No. It's not a choice.' He played with the gold links a minute, then looked at her. 'Not yet.'" [p. 53]

The first part of this book is very good – the original novella. Eventually I forced myself to finish the book. To my surprise the last third of the book (Books III and IV) was quite interesting, although still unconvincing. What Kress does there is to raise numerous moral questions, and to provide mixed answers to those questions. If a person on the Sleepless-operated orbital, Sanctuary, is injured and becomes a vegetable, what

should be done? Most people there have signed agreements asking to be put to death in such a situation. But what about a person who did not sign such an agreement? Should Sanctuary care for such a helpless person 24 hours a day, perhaps forever (knowing that Sleepless do not get old)?

Future genetic modifications developed on Sanctuary make it possible to create a new subrace of the Sleepless, children more intelligent than their parents, called Superbrights. How will the old generation on Sanctuary deal with these children? How will Sanctuary deal with them? How will the children respond to their parents and the other Normal adults?

The U.S. – the ostensible home of Sanctuary, which is incorporated in the U.S. – begins applying vicious and unfair taxation or other restrictions on Sanctuary (taxation without representation, since Sleepless are not allowed to serve in Sleeper legislatures). Does Sanctuary have the right to declare independence? If Sanctuary declares independence, what if the U.S. threatens to annihilate Sanctuary with nuclear weapons? Does Sanctuary have the right to counter-attack?

Many ideas are raised, many speculations made, some new and unusual characters are created and attract our attention (even if these characters are absurd, they have our sympathy). Despite the overall goodness of the Sleepless, some are cruel and vicious, some are dishonest and dictatorial. Doesn't that remind us of the Jews (even though Nancy Kress never makes this explicit comparison)?

In the end, I read the whole book, but I would not read a sequel.

For Comments: 13 Pinsker 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 (PDF format).

Copyright © 2011

.All rights reserved to specified authors and artists

כל הזכויות שמורות למחברים וליוצרים, כפי שצוינו.