



Science-Fiction Fanzine

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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".

מועדון הקריאה

מועדון הקריאה של חודש יולי יוקדש לספר "ראייה עיוורת" מאת פיטר וואטס. מועדון הקריאה בתל אביב יתקיים ביום חמישי, 28.7, בשעה 20:00 בבית הקפה קפה ברחוב אבן גבירול 38 (המקום כשר). מנחה המפגש: שי ברנשטיין. לצורך היערכות למספר המשתתפים, מומלץ להירשם מראש באמצעות **הדואל**, כמו כן רצוי להביא למפגש עותק של הספר. הכניסה חופשית ואינה כרוכה בתשלום, בחברות באגודה, או בהגעה למפגשים נוספים. פרטים על מפגשי המועדון הנוספים שיעסקו בספר זה התפרסמו באתר האגודה. פרטים על מפגשי המועדון הנוספים שיעסקו בספר זה יתפרסמו **באתר האגודה**. המעוניינים להנחות מועדוני קריאה בכל רחבי הארץ מוזמנים לפנות בדואל למרכזת הפרויקט, **ליאת שחר** liat42@gmail.com

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

Letter to the Editor**Aharon -**

Your review of the book *The Hercules Text* by Jack McDevitt in the May *CyberCozen* was very good. I don't agree with your view that technology couldn't leap forward very, very fast - even for the ancient Greeks, given knowledge and techniques - even in theory - of what we know today (or from the Alien tech).

Mark Twain did a similar thing in his *Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* - the difference being that his hero was transported from the late 1900s to King Arthur's time - and he himself carried out the 'modernization' + trained others to assist him.

All in all - something to contemplate.

By the way, the Greeks would obviously take a while to create laptops - but would probably have no trouble with the logic and mathematics of Turing machines, etc.

Leybl Botwinik**Leybl -**

I agree with your thought that the Greeks would "have no trouble with the logic and mathematics of Turing machines, etc."

Aharon

Book Review by Aharon Sheer

Hominids by Robert J. Sawyer (2002), 423 pages.

This book was the winner of the 2003 Hugo Award for Best Novel, and is the first book in Sawyer's *The Neanderthal Parallax* trilogy. It's a very readable book, and a book with a solid scientific basis overall, but presents a pseudo-scientific idea which I find so offensive that I cannot start my review without attacking it.

Essentially Sawyer seems to be enthusiastically supporting an idea which was widely held among scientists in the early years of the 1900s, and which was the basis for many of the horrifying things which the Nazis did in the 1930s and 1940s. The idea is that many human disorders are solely of genetic cause, and if we can wipe out the carriers of these genetic disorders, we can eliminate these disorders from the world. Low intelligence, major depression, schizophrenia, physical violence, Judaism, and many other illnesses of humanity are genetic, and can and must be removed from the world. Sawyer doesn't recommend carrying out these actions here on Earth. Instead he presents them as being part of the successful life of a parallel world of Neanderthals, where almost all societal troubles have been eliminated by a simple genetic means: sterilizing the parents, brothers and sisters, and children, of anyone who commits a crime or proves to be of low intelligence or mentally ill.

What's wrong with this genetic idea? Many things. Comparisons between identical twins (identical genetically) and fraternal twins show that various mental illness are between 30% genetic and 70% genetic. There are no mental illnesses which are 100% genetic.

Male schizophrenics almost never have children. The disorder appears in boys mostly in the late teens, and makes it almost impossible for them to establish

a successful relationship with the opposite sex. Researchers have often asked why it is that everywhere in the world between 1% and 2% of the population are schizophrenic (2% in cities, but only 1% in rural areas). How could such an impairing disorder be passed from generation to generation? Why hasn't it disappeared long ago? Might there be an advantage to it, which keeps it in circulation? One point noted is that there seems to be a relation between mathematical genius and schizophrenia. Isaac Newton was psychotic. Bertrand Russell had two close relatives who were psychotic. Albert Einstein had a schizophrenic son. Nobel Prize winning mathematician, John Nash, is schizophrenic, and he has a son who is a mathematician – and schizophrenic. If Sawyer is right, and if the Neanderthals had wiped out all genetic lines of the mentally ill, they probably no longer have any mathematicians or physicists. Those lines would have been eliminated.

Other abilities are also strongly correlated with mental disease. Numerous great musicians, writers and artists suffered or suffer from manic depression (bipolar disorder). The composer Schumann is one example. The painter Vincent Van Gogh is another. So were authors Ernest Hemingway and Jack London. And conductor Otto Klemperer. The list goes on and on. Kay Redfield Jamison, a psychologist and herself a sufferer from manic depression, wrote an entire book (*Touched with Fire*) in which she argued for a connection between bipolar disorder and artistic creativity. If Sawyer is right, not only would the Neanderthals have no physicists and mathematicians (Ludwig Boltzmann, physicist and mathematician, had manic depression; Georg Cantor, the mathematician did too), they would have no novelists,

artists or musicians. All those lines would have been wiped out.

Yet Sawyer presents his genetic theories as absolute fact (at least when it comes to Neanderthals), and highly desirable. Disgusting, but not surprising. He is a Canadian.

The parallel world to our Earth is a world of intelligent scientifically advanced Neanderthals. The creation of parallel worlds, according to a strange physical theory, occurs every time a decision is made. Every time a choice appears, parallel worlds are created, identical to each other in every respect except the result of the decision. In Sawyer's theory consciousness is required. Every time a conscious being is faced with a choice among possibilities, parallel world are created, one for each possible choice.

In the Earth's past there were both Homo sapiens and Neanderthals. On our Earth, Homo sapiens were more intelligent and wiped out the Neanderthals. But in a parallel world it was the Neanderthals that had the greater intelligence, and that world became theirs.

The two worlds meet when Neanderthal physicists, Ponter and Adikor, in a Neanderthal world, carry out a quantum calculation on a quantum computer, and for some reason Ponter is instantly transported to our Homo sapiens parallel world. In both worlds there is a deep underground mine in Canada which is used for scientific purposes. In our world, it is used for studying and measuring neutrinos, deep underground to minimize the effects of cosmic rays which interfere with measuring neutrinos. In the Neanderthal world, the research is done deep underground so that the quantum computer will not be affected by cosmic rays.

“Ponter and Adikor left the elevator and headed down the lengthy drift toward the quantum-

computing lab; naturally, it had been built in a part of the mine that had yielded no valuable ores. They walked in silence, the easy, companionable silence of two men who had known each other for ages.

“Finally, they reached the quantum-computing facility. It consisted of four rooms. The first was a tiny cubicle for eating; it wasn't worth taking the time to ride the elevator all the way back up to the surface for meals. The second was a dry toilet facility; there was no plumbing down here, so the waste had to be hauled out at the end of each day. The third was the control room, containing instrument clusters and worktables. And the fourth, the only large room, was the giant computing chamber, bigger than all the rooms combined in the house that Ponter and Adikor shared.” [p. 43]

Neanderthal physicist Ponter Boddit finds himself in a huge container of heavy water on our Earth. He is rescued by Earth physicists. Learning an Earth language is facilitated by a Neanderthal technological invention – a Companion, a highly intelligent computer embedded in Ponter's arm. This computer assists Ponter by learning English and translating from the Neanderthal language to English, and back.

In Ponter's world, everyone today has a Companion, which communicates directly to a huge database which contains everything that happens to everyone all the time. This is called an “alibi file”. Thus if a crime occurs on the Neanderthal world, all that is necessary is to use the alibi files to find out who has committed the crime. The criminal is then sterilized along with all those of his relatives who share 50% of his genes. Voila! No crime can be hidden or go unpunished!

Sawyer paints the Neanderthal world as being ecologically and population-wise well organized. Nature has been preserved – there are still mammoths and passenger pigeons in their parallel world as there were on Earth some thousands of years ago. The Neanderthal population is strictly controlled, breeding only being allowed once every ten years. So the entire Neanderthal world has only a few hundred million people. Everyone lives in natural surroundings, with forest and field protected from overutilization.

“[Ponter] opened the vacuum box and pulled out a large, meaty bison bone, saved from last night's dinner. He then set it on the floor - the moss overlain with glass sheets here to make cleanups easier - and Pabo [their dog] began to gnaw at it. Adikor joined Ponter in the kitchen and set about fixing breakfast. He took two slabs of elk meat out of the vacuum box and put them in the laser cooker, which filled with steam to remoisturize the meat. Ponter glanced over, looking through the cooker's window, watching the ruby beams crisscrossing in intricate patterns, perfectly grilling every part of the steaks. Adikor filled a bowl with pine nuts and set out mugs of diluted maple syrup, then fetched the now-done steaks.” [p. 39]

Indeed, many aspects of the Neanderthal world seem quite positive, and Sawyer takes advantage of the possibility of comparing our Earth's civilization with theirs.

To keep the story exciting, Sawyer transfers back and forth between the two worlds. And still not everything is so wonderful in the Neanderthal world. Ponter's physicist collaborator Adikor is accused of having murdered Ponter, who suddenly disappeared. No body was found, but it would be easy to hide a

body deep in the underground mine, and this crime could not be detected, for deep underground the Companion cannot communicate with the world network and transfer alibi information. The perfect crime! Adikor, if convicted, will be sterilized, along with all his immediate family.

Here Ponter tells an Earth person, the geneticist Mary, about their justice system:

““But what about your world? What happens to criminals there?”

“*Bleep.* [What Ponter's Companion says when it does not understand an English word.]

““People who break laws,” said Mary. ‘People who intentionally hurt others.’

““Ah,” said Ponter. ‘We have little problem with that anymore, having cleansed most bad genes from our pool generations ago.’

““*What?*” exclaimed Mary.

““Serious crimes were punished by sterilization of not just the offender but also anyone who shared fifty percent of the offender's genetic material: brothers and sisters, parents, offspring. The effect was twofold. First, it cleansed those bad genes from our society, and -‘

““How would nonagriculturalists stumble onto genetics? I mean, we figured it out through plant cultivation and animal husbandry.’

““We may not have bred animals or plants for food, but we did domesticate wolves to help us in hunting. I have a dog named Pabo that I am very fond of. Wolves were quite susceptible to controlled breeding; the results were obvious.’

“Mary nodded; that sounded reasonable enough. ‘You said the sterilization had a twofold effect on your society?’

"Oh, yes. Besides directly eliminating the faulty genes it gave families a strong incentive to make sure none of their own members ran seriously afoul of society."

"I suppose it would at that," said Mary.

"It did indeed," said Ponter. "You, as a geneticist, surely know that the only immortality that really exists is genetic. Life is driven by genes wanting to ensure their own reproduction, or to protect existing copies of themselves. So our justice was aimed at genes, not at people. Our society is mostly free of crime now because our justice system directly targeted that which really drives all life: not individuals, not circumstances, but *genes*. We made it so that the best survival strategy for genes is to obey the law." [p. 283]

One thing I liked about this book is that Sawyer does not ignore religion. In

most sf books there is no religious thought or activity at all. Almost all sf writers believe in a secular world, and reject the possibility that religion has any value of any kind. If religion comes up, it is only to be ridiculed (think of Asimov's phony future religious institutions). The Neanderthals -- who have no religion -- provide a basis for a serious discussion between two Catholic characters about a variety of religious ideas. Even if it's not my religion, I'm pleased that Sawyer sees religion as a part of life.

There is much in this book of great interest. Speculations about Neanderthals, especially. But also physics and society. The book ends with a five page list of recommended scientific reading.

And there are two more volumes in the trilogy to read. I bought all three, although it will take a while to review the remaining two.

Quote of the Month: Political Leapfrogging by Barbara R. Jasny

'Although there have been many discussions of the polarized nature of American politics, do the views of elected officials match the preferences of their electorate? Bafumi and Herron sought to answer this question by comparing a national opinion survey of American voters (the Cooperative Congressional Election Study; CCES) with legislator voting records of the 109th (2005–2006) and 110th (2007–2008) Congresses. In many cases, the CCES questions were similar to (or the same as) actual congressional roll call votes, which allowed for better comparison. By developing a linear scale bounded by representatives (or CCES respondents) who had taken consistently liberal or conservative positions, the authors found that members of Congress were more extreme than the voters they represented. The median member of the 109th House of Representatives was more conservative than the median American voter, but the median member of the 110th House of Representatives was more liberal. Thus, voting out one extremist usually led to replacement by someone equally extreme, but of the opposite party. The authors refer to this as "leapfrogging" because the moderate views of the median American voter are leapfrogged during the turnover. Although the turnover was similar in the Senate, overall it appeared to be more moderate.'

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