



Science-Fiction Fanzine

Vol. XXIII, No. 11; November, 2011

The Israeli Society for Science Fiction and Fantasy

מועדון הקריאה

מפגש חודש נובמבר של מועדון הקריאה יוקדש לספרם של טרי פראצ'ט וניל גיימן "בשורות טובות" (הוצאת "אופוס", 2006). מועדון הקריאה בתל-אביב יתקיים ביום חמישי, 24.11, בשעה 19:30 בבית הקפה "קפה קפה" ברחוב אבן גבירול 38 (המקום כשר). מנחה: [איתמר אולפניר](#). לצורך היערכות למספר המשתתפים, מומלץ להירשם מראש דרך הדואל של המנחה.

מועדון הקריאה בבאר-שבע יתקיים ביום ראשון, 27.11, בשעה 20:00, באוניברסיטת בן-גוריון, בניין 54, חדר 207 (חדר הסמינרים של בניין פיזיקה, סמוך למרכז הספורט ולגשר המוביל לתחנת הרכבת). מנחה: [אור רוט](#). הכניסה חופשית ואינה כרוכה בתשלום, בחברות באגודה, או בהגעה למפגשים נוספים. רצוי להביא למפגש עותק של הספר.

מועדון חודש דצמבר יעסוק בספר "פנדמוניום" מאת דריל גרגורי. מפגשי מועדון זה יתפרסמו בהמשך באתר האגודה. המעוניינים להנחות מועדוני קריאה בכל רחבי הארץ מוזמנים לפנות במייל למרכזת הפרויקט, isfsffbookclub@gmail.com – מועדון הקריאה – [דפנה קירט](mailto:isfsffbookclub@gmail.com).

בין מדע למדע בדיוני – עונה חדשה לסדרת ההרצאות בפקולטה לחקלאות ברחובות

סדרה ייחודית, המאפשרת היכרות מרתקת עם המדע תוך עימותו עם עולם המושגים הבדיוני. הקשרים בין עולם המדע האמיתי ל"אגדות אורבניות" ייבחנו בידי מומחים מובילים בתחום האסטרונומיה, הפיזיקה, התעופה, החלל, הננו-טכנולוגיה והמדע הבדיוני. ילקחו בחשבון משתנים, מחקרים, גילויים ומאויים. בסדרה תשעה מפגשים, שייערכו בימי א' בין התאריכים 4.12.2011–18.3.2012. המפגשים מתחילים בשעה 20:00. חברי האגודה זכאים להנחה של 10% על הסדרה כולה או הנחה של 5% מחיר הסדרה הוא 650 ש"ח. להרצאה בודדת, כלומר – 68 ש"ח במקום 72 ש"ח.

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

Two Book Reviews: *Star Rider* and *Mistwalker*

Reviewed by Miriam Ben-Loulu, published November 1999.

Most Science Fiction stories deal with radical changes in technology rather than physiological changes in people. It is interesting to note that in many stories the degree of technical advancement is not always consistent and we find FLT (faster-than-light travel) together with a description of computers like the ones used today (as opposed to the computers of the past or what computers might become in the future). But when it comes to

people it is almost always assumed that humans are going to be the same as they are today, although space travelers may have "deep space tans". However there are some books that try to predict how humans would mutate to suit the environments of other planets. Here and there you can even find a book where this mutation is a real part of the story and not just thrown in to provide ambience. Two books of this sort are *Star Rider* and *Mistwalker*:

Star Rider by Doris Piserchia (1983)

In *Star Rider* the human race has evolved both physically and mentally into a new race altogether. Humans have what amounts to a symbiotic relationship with dogs (also evolved physically and mentally) which allows them to hop around the universe. The problem is that these "jaks" ("Jakalowar") are the type of people who have always pushed back the frontiers -- and they are running out of frontiers. Challenges keep them alive as a race.

Challenge, change or both is necessary to prevent the race from dying out. The book is written from the viewpoint of a young heroine and has only a small amount of romantic interest. She is uneducated and her story-telling style reminds one of cowboys, Annie Oakley and various other stories of the Wild West. The book is full of action and humor, as well as having some interesting things to say about human societies.

Mistwalker, by Denise Lopes Heald (1994)

Mistwalker concerns the way humans have adapted and mutated to suit the environmental conditions of a specific planet. This story also reminds one of the Wild West. The inhabitants of the planet Ver Day live off of the land with little technology, very much as the pioneers in America lived. However, unlike the pioneers, this is voluntary in order not to ruin the native ecology. But people are moving out of the two overcrowded cities into the wilderness and, as in the Gold Rush days, they don't care about the environment. So change is coming to the frontier and more changes are needed in order to adjust to this fact.

The word "Green" is given several meanings: 1) the people where the heroine lives are like the political parties called "Green" that exist today because they are interested in saving the environment; 2) they are also green in color due to a local food. In addition to the environmental issues, this story concerns two sorts of prejudice. The green skinned people are prejudiced both against newcomers and against non-green people. This is directly connected to the environmental issues. The prejudice against non-green skinned people is the usual one of "we" and "them", especially when a non-"greenie" is usually from off planet. The prejudice against newcomers

includes the people from the two cities on the planet, and a newcomer may live in the wilderness for three years and still be a "newbie". A newcomer is disliked because most "newbies" aren't tough enough to measure up to the local standards. Since the "newbie" does not know how to behave in the difficult and often dangerous conditions in the wild parts of this jungle-like planet he may be a danger both to himself and to others. But they are especially disliked because it is emotionally dangerous to like (not to mention to love!) someone who will not survive long.

Again the story is told by an uneducated heroine -- this time a mature one. There is, of course, a young man, and the romance between them is an important part of the story. The heroine obviously has no intention of falling in love with a "newbie", no matter how good he seems to be at surviving. And the hero has some political problems of his own that he doesn't really want to saddle anyone else with. Add to this the mistwalkers themselves -- a native life form with a degree of intelligence that hasn't been investigated. The story has humor, action, romance and imagination. One of the interesting aspects of the ambience is the combination of foods we recognize with local

foods, and the language differences, especially slang terms, used by the local people compared with that used by the off planet people.

I recommend both books. Some of you may be asking yourselves,

"Yes, but what actually happens in these two stories?" I have no intention of spoiling your reading pleasure by telling you any more.

Book Review by Aharon Sheer

Flinx in Flux by Alan Dean Foster (1988), 324 pages.

I greatly enjoy the novels of Alan Dean Foster (b. 1946). His Flinx stories are mostly great fun (even when nasty things happen). The author has a sense of humor, and a great imagination. This book is a good introduction to Foster's universe. Perhaps borrowing from Larry Niven, at the end of this book there is a galactic chronology going back a billion years. But that is not relevant to this book.

First we are introduced to Flinx (Phillip Lynx), a genetically engineered human with unusual powers, at the time of in this book 19 years old. His most unusual power is that of sometimes being able to read the emotions of others, and sometimes to influence them too. Also we meet his pet, a Minidrag (a kind of very small dragon) named Pip, who is emotionally tied to Flinx, and provides both companionship (like a pet dog) and also protection, as Pip can not only fly but also can spit a venom which can quickly kill someone who tries to kill Flinx.

"The intruders had rehearsed certain possibilities, but small superfast hissing creatures had evidently not been figured into their various scenarios. The sudden appearance of a small flying snake half a meter from one's face would be enough to unsettle the most professional assassin." [p. 73]

In addition we meet three intelligent alien species. The first is the Thranx, a species of intelligent giant cockroaches who have developed space travel. They are described in detail in Foster's novel, *Nor Crystal Tears*. The thranx have

formed an alliance with human beings, so that the area in space that the humans and thranx jointly control is called humanx space. The second are underground blind cave dwellers living on an extreme hostile planet (Longtunnel), who communicate via emotions, making Flinx the only human being that can "talk" to them. And finally we meet the inhabitants of Ulru-Ujurr, who are capable of traveling (how is not known) instantly from any place in space to any other. They call Flinx "Teacher" because he introduced them to the great game of civilization.

However, this novel starts by introducing us to a group of animal rights terrorists, who (like our PETA) are ready to kill human beings to protect other less developed species. And with thousand of worlds in space, with thousands of alien species, there are many that need to be protected. These animal rights terrorists are planning a major attack on an evil installation.

"From now on the government and big corporations and ravaging exploiters would have to deal with the avenging angel of the emergent organization.

"And if some of them should die in the process? All had agreed long ago that the righteousness of their cause was well worth dying for. What mattered an individual life here and there when the sanctity of whole worlds was at stake?" [p. 4]

Then we meet Flinx as he takes some young Minidrags back to the jungle of the planet of Alaspin so they

can grow and develop there. He meets a young woman genetic engineer, named Clarity, who has escaped from the violent animal rights terrorists. The terrorists have decided to destroy the facilities of Clarity's employers, a genetic engineering company located on the hostile planet Longtunnel, whose temperate area has winds up to three or four hundred kph. Nobody can live on the surface – all life is underground, in an extensive system of tunnels. Clarity explains:

“Longtunnel is one big karstic formation, or so the geologists claim. The whole place was covered by shallow ocean for billions of years.’

“Flinx nodded, studying the exposed walls. ‘This is all limestone’.

“‘Most, but not all. Limestone, gypsum calcite – soft minerals. As

the oceans receded while Longtunnel cooled, the three continents were exposed to this wind and, more importantly, to constant rain. It's been chewing away at the limestone for millennia. The results are caves like the ones we're in now...” [p. 119]

Foster has fun creating weird environments, and weird aliens. In these constantly dark tunnels a wide variety of lifeforms have developed. Foster describes several. This novel contains plenty of that, as well as being a tale of adventure and violence, and scientific exploration. There are several crews of scientists studying Longtunnel, including a contingent of thranx. So we have a chance to make their acquaintance too. And even the Ulru-Ujurrians show up near the end.

I enjoyed the book.



Drawing by Miriam Ben-Loulu (self-portrait?):

Child Scientists by Melissa McCartney

What would happen if, instead of consulting previous literature, scientists asked children for advice on designing experiments? In the case of the Blackawton Bees, 8- to 10-year-old children capitalized on their own curiosity and observations to devise questions, propose a hypothesis, design experiments, and perform data analysis in an original study examining how bees perceive and remember their surroundings. Besides discovering that bees use both color and spatial analysis in deciding which color of flower to forage from, it served as an example of real science and engaged the students. This is evident in the published paper, written by the students, that contains

statements such as "Before doing these experiments we did not really think about bees," and "This experiment is important, because no one in history, including adults, has done this experiment before." In this way, science education became more of a process of contributing to asking questions and devising strategies to answer those questions instead of a passive classroom lesson. Afterward, the students came to the same conclusion that every scientist has come to at one point in their career: "Science is cool and fun because you get to do stuff that no one has ever done before."

Biol. Lett. 10.1098/rsbl.2010.1056 (2010).

Quote of the Month: Easy A by Melissa McCartney

Most students enter college aiming for a 4.0 GPA. Given that grading in American educational institutions is unregulated, how meaningful is a 4.0? Rojstaczer and Healy examined grade distributions from 200 American colleges and universities over the past 70 years. They report that movement away from the traditional bell-shaped grading curve began in the 1960s and 1970s in order to help students avoid the military draft. A continual rising of grades followed, without the accompaniment of increased student achievement. Graduation rates have

remained largely static for decades, the literacy of graduates has declined, and college entrance exam scores of applicants have fallen. America's educational institutions have gradually created an illusion where excellence is widespread and failure is rare. In fact, "A" is now the most common grade. Efforts at grade regulation are controversial, but without grading oversight, either on a school-by-school or national basis, it is unlikely that meaningful grades will return to American education.

Teach. Coll. Rec. **114** (2012).

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