



Science-Fiction Fanzine

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## The Israeli Society for Science Fiction and Fantasy

## מועדון הקריאה

מפגש חודש אוקטובר של מועדון הקריאה יוקדש לספרו של ריי ברדבורי, "פרנהייט 451" הוצאת אודיסאה . 2002, מועדון הקריאה בתל-אביב יתקיים ביום רביעי, 26.10.2011, בשעה 19:30 בבית הקפה "קפה קפה" (ברחוב אבן גבירול 38 (המקום כשר). מנחה: [דניאל פידלמן](#). מועדון הקריאה בבאר-שבע יתקיים ביום ראשון, 30.10.2011, בשעה 20:00 באוניברסיטת בן-גוריון, בניין 54 חדר(207) חדר הסמינרים של בניין פיזיקה, סמוך למרכז הספורט ולגשר המוביל לתחנת הרכבת.) מנחת המפגש: [דפנה קירש](#). לצורך היערכות למספר המשתתפים, מומלץ להירשם מראש דרך הדואל של המנחה. כמו כן רצוי להביא למפגש עותק של הספר. הכניסה חופשית ואינה כרוכה בתשלום, בחברות באגודה, או בהגעה למפגשים נוספים. מועדון חודש נובמבר יעסוק בספרם של טרי פראצ'ט וניל גיימן "בשורות טובות". מפגשי מועדון זה יתפרסמו בהמשך באתר האגודה. המעוניינים להנחות מועדוני קריאה בכל רחבי הארץ מוזמנים לפנות בדואל למרכזת הפרויקט, [דפנה קירש](mailto:isfsffbookclub@gmail.com). להצטרפות לרשימת התפוצה של מועדון הקריאה.

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

## Short Book Review by Aharon Sheer

*Humans* by Robert J. Sawyer (2003), 317 pages.

This is Book Two of Sawyer's *The Neanderthal Parallax* trilogy. Book One, *Hominids*, was reviewed in *CyberCozen* July 2011; it was the winner of the 2003 Hugo Award for Best Novel. (*Hybrids* is the third book in the trilogy.) There is a parallel world to Earth which is a world of intelligent scientifically advanced Neanderthals. The Neanderthals have found (accidentally) a way to travel between the two parallel worlds. The Neanderthal hero of the series is physicist Ponter Bondit, while the human hero is Canadian geneticist Mary Vaughn. Mary is the one who proved that Ponter really is a Neanderthal, after he arrived on Earth. Sawyer has an amusing description of the U.S. offer asking Mary to find a way to prove that Ponter is a Neanderthal and not a human:

"But, sure, I suppose I could search for a diagnostic marker."

"Can you do it? How fast can you do it?"

"Take it easy," said Mary. "We only have DNA from four prehistoric Neanderthals and one contemporary one. I'd really rather have a much larger sample base."

"But can you do it?"

"Possibly, but why?"

"How long would it take?"

"With my current facilities? And if I did nothing else? A few months, perhaps."

"What if we gave you all the equipment and all the support staff you could possibly need? What then? Money is no object, Professor Vaughn."

"Mary felt her heart pounding. As a Canadian academic, she had

never heard those words before. She'd had friends at university who had gone on to do postgraduate work in the States; they'd often reported back about big five- and six-figure research grants and state-of-the-art equipment. Mary's own first research grant had been for a paltry \$3,200 – and Canadian dollars, at that.

“Well, with, ah, with unlimited resources, I suppose I could do it fairly quickly. A matter of weeks, if we're lucky.” [p. 34]

She found that the major genetic difference between humans and Neanderthals is the number of chromosome pairs in the cell. Humans have 23 pairs, Neanderthals have 24. This makes them separate species.

*Humans* has several major threads related to sex. Comparing sex and sex lives between the two worlds is a topic of great interest. For example, Mary Vaughn was raped in the first book, on the campus of her university of York, in Toronto Canada. In this book Ponter wants to help her find the rapist. In this he is aided by his enormous nose. It seems that the Neanderthals have a superb sense of smell, perhaps even better than dogs. This makes them somewhat unhappy on our Earth, since our large cities stink from the fumes of gasoline exhaust. On their world they use other sources of energy, a matter simplified by their having a deliberately limited population – only a few hundred million. Most Neanderthals live in rural areas with plentiful wildlife and plants surrounding their homes. One sex thread in this book is how Ponter finds – and punishes – Mary's rapist.

Another thread is sex between Mary and Ponter. Humans and Neanderthals cannot breed, but they can have sex. There is a fascinating detailed description of Mary and Ponter having

sex. One cannot miss the fact that this is modern sf – not for children.

A third thread is a general discussion of the sex lives of male and female Neanderthals. Men and women Neanderthals live separately almost all the time. Women scientists work together without men, male scientists work together without women. This makes life easier and better for the women scientists since they do not have to deal with aggressive overbearing male colleagues while doing their scientific work.

Once a month, during the women's menstrual periods (all at the same time, synchronized by their superb sense of smell), men and women meet and have sex for four days (“When Two become One”, as they say). During that time, the women cannot get pregnant since they are menstruating. (Only once in ten years are they allowed to meet when not menstruating, in order to produce children.) The rest of the month each woman has a female sex partner, and each male has a male sex partner. Homosexual sex is the norm all the rest of the time. Ponter has taken Mary Vaughn as his woman-mate because his original woman-mate, the mother of his children, died of cancer. Mary feels pretty uncomfortable knowing that her new sex partner has most of his sexual relationships with his male partner (who is also a physicist and who also works with Ponter).

Besides sex, Sawyer enjoys comparing many aspects of the society of the Neanderthals with human society. For example, skin color. The Neanderthals, preferring cold weather, and living mostly in northern climes (like Canada), are blond and light skinned. But Ponter has seen many Canadians of different skin color. [Note: in the quote below, “Mare” is Mary Vaughn – the Neanderthals cannot pronounce a final “ee” sound.] However when Ponter visits the United Nations:

“Ponter was baffled at the mix of faces he saw. In Canada, he'd noted a range of skin colors and facial types, and, so far, his experience of the United States had been similar. Here, in this massive chamber, he saw the same wide variety of coloration, which Lurt had told him almost certainly had resulted from prolonged periods of geographic isolation for each color group, assuming, as Mare had asserted, that they were indeed cross-fertile.

“But here, all the representatives from each country were the same color -- even Canada and the United States had only light-skinned representatives at this United Nations.

“More: Ponter was used to seeing councils on his world consisting entirely of members of one gender, or councils with exactly equal numbers of males and females. But here there were perhaps ninety-five percent males, with only a smattering of females. Was it possible, wondered Ponter, that there was a hierarchy among the ‘races,’ as Mare had called them, with the light-skinned holding

the ultimate power? Likewise, was it conceivable that Gliksin females were accorded lesser status, and only rarely allowed into the most senior circles?

“Another thing that surprised Ponter was how young most of the diplomats were. Why, some were even younger than Ponter himself! Mare had once mentioned that she dyed her hair to hide its gray, a notion that was incredible to Ponter; to hide gray was to hide wisdom. Male Gliksins, he'd noticed, were less prone to coloring their hair -- perhaps their wisdom was more often in question. But, still, there were few gray hairs in the group he was now seeing.” [p. 118]

While there are many other topics discussed in this volume, including religion (which the Neanderthals do not have), creationism (the Neanderthals believe that the universe has existed forever and was never created), and of course the scientific bases of the existence of parallel worlds, I found that sex tied everything together in this book. It was nominated for a Hugo award, but did not get it.

**POEM:** Point of View by Miriam Ben-Loulu (April 1996)

If I were looking down like G-d...  
 or Creatures from another sun...  
 I wonder what my thoughts would be  
 on humankind's idea of fun.

I wonder if the wars make sense  
 to Beings far above,  
 Or do They find it hard to grasp  
 our need for human love?

But then - what's "up" and what is "down"?  
 Perhaps it's us, not Them.  
 That looking down, will find it hard  
 to understand Its whim.

## Book Review by Aharon Sheer

*Lando Calrissian and the Mindharp of Sharu* by L. Neil Smith (1983), 182 pages. Many authors have written in the *Star Wars* universe franchise. According to author Roger McBride Allen, it's much easier to write in the *Star Wars* universe than in the *Star Trek* universe because the franchise owner (George Lucas) is much less sticky about how the stories are played out and how the characters behave. This was a fun book which takes a character from one of the *Star Wars* movies, and makes an adventure with the character as the hero.

L. Neil Smith is a Libertarian science fiction writer. According to Wikipedia, "**Libertarianism** is the advocacy of individual liberty, especially freedom of thought and action. Roderick T. Long defines libertarianism as 'any political position that advocates a radical redistribution of power [either "total or merely substantial"] from the coercive state to voluntary associations of free individuals.'" I did not see much political thought in this novel however.

The character taken from *Star Wars* movies is Lando Calrissian, who is portrayed by Billy Dee Williams in both *Star Wars Episode V: The Empire Strikes Back* and *Star Wars Episode VI: Return of the Jedi*. He also appears frequently in the *Star Wars* "Expanded Universe" of novels, comic books and video games. L. Neil Smith has written three novels with Lando Calrissian as the hero. This book is the first of the three.

One of the nice characters in this novel is a friendly intelligent good-humored helpful robot. (Does this remind you of anyone?) Here is a selection from a conversation between Lando and his recently acquired robot, Vuffi Raa (a name I find impossible to remember):

"I know nothing about what's going on. I spent the entire night in the Confiscated Properties Room at Constabulary headquarters, sandwiched between bales of illicit vegetables and wire baskets overflowing with vibroknives, murder hatchets, and the like."

"At the thought, the little droid suffered an involuntary mechanical

shudder, which originated at its torso seams and rippled along all five tentacles to their slim-fingered extremities.

"Lando's bags bobbed up and down until the seizure passed.

"Do you know,' the robot offered in a subdued conciliatory voice, 'that most of the spouse killings in this system are accomplished with cast-titanium skillets?'

"Lando stopped suddenly, stared back at Vuffi Raa in anger. 'With a sharp blow to the cranium, or simply bad cooking?....'" [p. 50]

Lando has been given a task to do. To do it, he has to have someone find him. Which means going into a bar and being conspicuous.

"The Poly Pyramid was a working-beings establishment. On the walls lurid paintings alternated with sporting scenes from a dozen systems. On a less cosmopolitan planet, racy shots of unclad females would predominate, but, in places where one being's nude was another's nightmare, sensuality had given way before such items as incompetently taxidermized galactic fauna, which were nailed to the walls or suspended on wires from the ceiling: fur-bearing trout from Paulking XIV, for example, or a jackelope from Douglas III." [p. 54]

One of the peculiar characteristics of Rafa IV is that it is populated by humans – the Toka -- at a very low level of civilization. They wear nothing but a loin cloth in the most difficult weather

(although Rafa IV has mild warm weather over most of its surface), and do all the menial tasks for little money. While on other worlds robots would do much of the work, on Rafa IV all menial work is done by Toka. In contrast, Vuffi Raa is an astrogator – a highly sophisticated task.

Lando has been given the job of finding the extremely valuable Mindharp of Sharu. He has even been given a key which may open up the ruins of Sharu. But it seems that the ruins of Sharu are the largest known archeological ruins in the galaxy, and totally closed off. Enormously old, efforts to enter them have never succeeded. The advanced technology apparently required to build them is far beyond anything known in the galaxy today. Lando and his spaceship the *Falcon* land on Rafa V, where the ruins are found.

“Vuffi Raa brought the *Falcon* to a gentle leaflike landing in a space between several ancient constructs at the foot of the pyramid that dwarfed even them. There were no convenient words to describe the

building that now loomed over them. At least seven kilometers of it protruded above ground level. The *Falcon*'s various scanners had disclosed that it kept on going beneath the surface, but the depths exceeded the capabilities of her instruments. It was a literal mountain of smooth impervious plastic that served no discernible function.

“The pyramid had five facets (not counting the bottom – whatever that was), the angles between each of them not particularly uniform, giving the gigantic construct an eerie, dangerous, lopsided look. Each face was a different brilliant color: magenta, apricot, mustard, aquamarine, turquoise, lavender.

“Execrable taste, Lando thought, well deserving of cultural extinction.” [p. 85]

This is a novel of exploration and discovery, including learning more about the Toka, and the Sharu. I enjoyed it, and hope to read more by L. Neil Smith.

### Quote of the Month:

“The Woodstock Nation was not the first utopian dream to be shattered. The free-love communes of nineteenth-century America collapsed from sexual jealousy and the resentment of both sexes over the leaders' habit of accumulating young mistresses. The socialist utopias of the twentieth century became repressive empires led by men who collected Cadillacs and concubines. In anthropology, one South Sea island paradise after another has turned out to be nasty and brutish. Margaret Mead said that nonchalant sex made the Samoans satisfied and free of crime; it turned out that the boys tutored one another in rape techniques. She called the Arapesh "gentle"; they were headhunters. She said that the Tshambuli reversed our sex roles, the men wearing curls and makeup. In fact the men beat their wives, exterminated neighboring tribes, and treated homicide as a milestone in a young man's life which entitled him to wear the face paint that Mead thought was so effeminate.”

From *How the Mind Works* by Steven Pinker, 1997, p. 426

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