



Science-Fiction Fanzine

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The Israeli Society for Science Fiction and Fantasy

מועדון הקריאה של חודש דצמבר יעסוק בספר זוכה פרס גפן לשנת 2012, **הרצל אמר** מאת יואב אבני (כנרת זמורה ביתן, 2011).

מועדון הקריאה יתקיים ביום ראשון, 30.12.12, בשעה 19:30 ב"קפה גרג", ויצמן 2 (פינת שאול המלך, מול בית המשפט) בתל-אביב. המקום כשר. מנחה: **איתי צור**. לצורך היערכות למספר המשתתפים, יש להירשם מראש דרך הדוא"ל של המנחה. כמו כן רצוי להביא למפגש עותק של הספר. הכניסה חופשית ואינה כרוכה בתשלום, בחברות באגודה, או בהגעה למפגשים נוספים.

מועדון חודש ינואר יעסוק בזוכה פרס גפן **תלקחות** מאת סוזן קולינס. המעוניינים להנחות מועדוני קריאה במרכז ו/או בכל רחבי הארץ, על ספרים לפי בחירתם, מוזמנים לפנות במייל למרכז הפרויקט, **דפנה קירש**. לקבלת עדכונים שוטפים על מפגשי מועדון הקריאה ברחבי הארץ ניתן להצטרף ל**רשימת התפוצה** של מועדון הקריאה בדואל, או לעשות "לייק" ל**דף האגודה בפייסבוק**. נשמח לראותכם!

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

HELP! Aren't you getting bored by a *CyberCozen* which contains almost only book reviews by Aharon Sheer?

Would you be willing to help? Couldn't you help? Write some book or movie reviews or commentary for *CyberCozen* which I will be delighted to publish no matter how good they are.

Book reviews by Aharon Sheer

Double Helix Fall by Neil Ferguson (1989), 272 pages.

This is a really strange book. Yet it kept me interested, or puzzled, all the way through. What is happening here? The title comes from people who fly giant kites, and one aspect of the sport is to have a pair of them interact in a double helix maneuver where precise coordination is needed to make the fall without anyone getting hurt. What does that have to do with anything?

In the future described, some scientific nut, Gottlieb Sollyheim, has decided that the fetus has a full and rich life in the womb, which it forgets when

it is born. So the life of the fetus in some sense dies at birth, with the result that after the baby's birth comes the baby's "afterlife". So when the baby is born, it is said to die, and the afterlife is not really real. Every father wants to be present when his child dies, and this is important to the mother too.

The government has taken this idea to its limit, and made the afterlife one of stultifying government control, where each person has his set level, and standard of style of life, and there is little or no contact between them. Total

government control of everyone's everyday life.

The scientist, Dr. Sollyheim, who came up with this idea of the life and death of the fetus, followed by the afterlife (which is not the REAL life), it turns out, says he has been deliberately misunderstood by certain powerful figures to make it possible to control everyone else. In fact the great scientist is supposedly himself long-gone, while he is in fact locked up in a penthouse with a life of luxury and a beautiful woman to care for him.

And what do kite flyers have to do with this? Some people have escaped government control. They are called Zappers. They live in the desert on their own, and entertain themselves not by watching government TV but by flying kites. And drinking in their own bars.

Then there's the detective, Rick Stator, who is hired out to investigate difficult problems. But actually Rick is a very sophisticated robot created by a brilliant computer man. This robot detective looks, talks and acts just like a real human being, only better. And the nice thing is that the robot does not know he is a robot; he thinks he is a real human being, although he has almost no memories of his childhood. Isn't that strange?

Outside of working hours people are supposed to be at home, watching TV. There is a curfew. But there is a great reality program on TV about the daily life of the American President and her family. And her daughter, and her boyfriends. Everybody in America knows all the details of the daily life of the President and her family. But the daughter is not so happy with this. In fact, she runs away, and Rick Stator the detective who nobody knows is actually a robot (except his maker) is hired to find her.

Here is a sample of Ferguson's style, and little taste of life in this world:

"The Emergency Wing of the Bethlehem Clinic was open throughout the night. It was not the only public service building to which citizens could gain access after curfew but it was probably the only one from which they would not be turned away. Some nights the foyer might be empty, other nights you could hardly move for bodies. Empty or full, it made no difference who you were to the Artificial Intelligences conducting the injured and sick from the landing bay into the emergency theatres. It made no difference to the AIs who they were themselves, of course. Wasn't that the great thing about them?

"Momentarily the Wing was quiet. This evening's squall of activity -- the consequence of a skirmish between the SkyPol and some Zapper kites -- had been and gone. In the lull the night clerk had one eye on an old movie on her monitor screen, the sound turned down low. Around the brightly-lit foyer exhausted and bewildered friends and next-of-kin tried to stay awake on the hard plastic furniture that had been specifically engineered to make sure they were successful in their endeavour. Some gazed vacantly with half-finished pieces of conversation on their lips. Others dozed, woke, stood up, sat down, unconscious that they were wearing combinations of clothing appropriate for discordant social situations. Bedroom shoes and a works uniform. A swimsuit. Odd socks. A girl in a Zapper's black leather jerkin drew on a cigarette, unaware that the cigarette was no longer alight or that the jerkin hung half-open, half-revealing her chest. The girl didn't care. She was wrapped inside her own private nightmare, like everyone else. An ancient street person with uncombed

white hair was trying to talk some sense into the coffee dispensing machine. When the machine finally released a cup the old man, still trying to figure out what had happened, ferried it to the bench opposite the bench occupied by the young Zapper girl. Neither the girl nor the old man made any sign of acknowledgement of the other's existence. Here no one acknowledged anyone. This was limbo, the ante-chamber to Hell." [p. 60-61]

Detective Rick Stator has tracked the President's runaway daughter to a Zapper bar. There he gets into a poker game. As Rick tells it:

"I realized a conversation was underway, one of those pointless pokerplayers' conversations. What was the correct attitude to be adopted by the participants in a Double Helix Fall? In this illegal maneuver the controls of two kites are hooked up to each other. The

crystal-grids inside the circuits of both sonar systems are coordinated, such that each pilot is in control of half of his own machine -- and, of course, half of his companion's. There was some disagreement on points of strategy. The proposition under discussion was that the beauty of the Double Helix relied on the harmony of two minds working together, any failure in empathy was measured on the short scale between life and death. This is the kind of talk that makes Zappers so different from other social groups. They toss around illegal terminology with the relish of outlaws chewing the King's venison." [p. 119]

The mention of the "King's venison" reminds us that the author is actually British, which may also explain his strange style of humor. Like I said, this strange book kept my interest right up to the end. Not a great novel, but a novel one nevertheless.

***Major Operation* by James White (1971), 183 pages.**

James White (1928-1999) was a Northern Ireland author and sf fan who got tired of sf books filled with battles and killing. He started to write stories with a positive point of view: an enormous multi-species hospital in space, Sector General, which treats beings of all types that are sick or injured. Here is how White described it:

"Far out on the Galactic Rim, where star systems were widely scattered and the darkness nearly absolute, the tremendous structure which was Sector Twelve General Hospital hung in space. Inside its three hundred and eighty-four levels were reproduced the environments of all the intelligent life-forms known to the Galactic Federation, a biological spectrum ranging from the ultrafrigid methane species

through the more normal oxygen- and chlorine-breathing types up to the exotic beings who existed by the direct conversion of hard radiation. In addition to the patients, whose number and physiological classification was a constant variable, there was a medical and maintenance staff who were composed of sixty-odd differing life-forms with sixty different sets of mannerisms, body odors and ways of looking at life." [p. 1]

White wrote 12 books in the Sector General series. This book is a collection of novelettes, but all dealing with the same planet. The hero is a human doctor, Dr. Conway:

"...the simple truth was that he had been so shy when he a first

joined the hospital, especially with nurses of his own species, that he had felt more comfortable in extraterrestrial company. He was no longer shy, but still he numbered more friends among the weird and wonderful denizens of Traltha, Illensa and a score of other systems than beings of his own species. This might be peculiar, Conway admitted, but to a doctor living in a multi-environment hospital it was also a distinct advantage.” [p. 4]

The strange planet, around which all the stories in this volume are concerned, has the peculiarity that most of the surface is covered by an enormous plant (or is it an animal?) In addition there are oceans. In the oceans there is a highly intelligent species of water-dwellers, who, strangely, have developed the technology for making atomic weapons. Since they are bothered by the continents covered by one giant plant, which is constantly trying to eat them, they decide to clear out the coastal areas, with their atom bombs. The result is that the most enormous species on the planet, the continental plant, is being gradually killed by the radiation. As the doctors gradually become aware of the source of the sickness of the main species on the planet, the question is what to do about it to save both the atomic bombers and their victims.

Part of the story includes an intrusion into the giant plant to see what it is like inside.

“It was shortly before midnight that they reached the area of the

subsurface depression, nosed over and bored in. Murchison stared through the direct-vision port beside her, occasionally making notes about the tracery of fine roots which ran through the damp, cork-like material which was the flesh of the strata creature. There was no indication of a conventional blood supply, nothing to show that the creature had ever been alive in the animal rather than the vegetable sense.

“Suddenly they broke through the roof of a stomach and drifted down between the great vegetable pillars which raised and lowered the roof, drawing food-bearing water from the sea and expelling, many days later, the waste material not already absorbed by specialist plants. The vegetable stalactites stretched away to the limits of the spotlight in all directions, each one covered with the other specialized growths whose secretions caused the pillars to stiffen when the stomach had been empty for too long and relax when it was full. Other caverns, smaller and spaced closer together than the stomachs, simply kept the water flowing in the system without performing any digestive function.” [p. 161]

In this series of stories, they learn who is intelligent, who is well and who is sick, and how to treat them. It doesn't all hang together, but as in all of White's books in this series, it is imaginative.

Quote of the Month:

The science quotes below are from the magazine *Science*, Editors' Choice: Highlights of the recent literature

Low Stress Leaders by [Barbara R. Jasny](#)

Conventional wisdom suggests that being a leader is stressful. But is that actually true? Sherman *et al.* addressed this question by measuring the amount of the stress hormone cortisol in the saliva of participants in an executive education program, which included corporate, government, and industry leaders. They also measured the anxiety levels of

participants using surveys. Leaders had lower amounts of cortisol and reported experiencing less anxiety than people not in leadership positions, and individuals further up the chain had less cortisol and anxiety than individuals in lower positions. The authors hypothesized that a greater sense of control by leaders may explain this difference and a second study in which leaders provided information about how many subordinates they had, how many directly reported to them, and how much decision-making autonomy and authority they had relative to the subordinates. Leaders who had more of a sense of control had lower cortisol levels and less anxiety. Sherman *et al.* were careful to note that their study was purely correlational and could not demonstrate which came first—the leadership or the lower levels of markers for stress.

Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. U.S.A. **109**, 17903 (2012).

Second Quote of the Month:

Hibernators Take It Slow by Sacha Vignieri

Hibernation is thought to have evolved as a strategy for avoiding extreme environmental conditions in seasonal climates. Hibernators, however, are also found in the tropics and will sometimes continue to hibernate after mild conditions, and plentiful food, return. Other forces, therefore, may act to make hibernation, which is present in nearly half of all mammalian orders, a common strategy. Hibernation lowers metabolism and conserves energy, but as animals enter hidden dens and burrows to hibernate, it also removes them from the external environment, perhaps affecting survival. Turbill *et al.* reviewed the published literature on 19 species of mammalian hibernators and found that, indeed, annual survival and total life span in hibernating mammals are greater than they are in nonhibernators of the same size. Hibernators also have a "slower pace of life," including a delay in maturity, lower annual reproductive output, and longer generation time. This analysis suggests that small hibernating mammals may trade high annual reproduction for a longer reproductive life, a successful life history strategy that is seen more often in large, long-lived mammals.

Proc. R. Soc. London Ser. B **278**, 10.1098/rspb.2011.0190 (2011).

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