

Science-Fiction Fanzine

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### The Israeli Society for Science Fiction and Fantasy

#### מועדון הקריאה.

**מועדון הקריאה של חודש מרץ** יוקדש לזוכה פרס גפן לשנת 2011 בקטגוריית המקור, "מסופוטמיה: שתיקת הכוכבים", מאת יהודה ישראלי ודור רווח (עם עובד, 2010). מועדון הקריאה יתקיים ביום חמישי, 22.3.12 בשעה 19:30, ב"קפה גידי", פרישמן 20 א', תל-אביב. מנחה: [דפנה קירש](#). 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. בחודש אפריל יעסוק המועדון בספר "צד שמאל של החושך" מאת אורסולה לה-גוויין. מפגשי מועדון זה יתפרסמו בהמשך באתר האגודה.

מקווים לראותכם!

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

### חג פסח כשר ושמח

### Have a Kosher and Happy Pesah

*Micro* by Michael Crichton and Richard Preston (2011), 424 pages.

"At the time of his death in 2008, Crichton was well into the writing of *Micro*; Richard Preston was selected to complete the novel."

"Honey I shrunk the kids" is the theme of this novel. Seven graduate students at a major university in Cambridge MA are asked to come to Honolulu Hawaii to consider joining a remarkable new biology project. But when they get there – for reasons which were obscure to me -- all of them are involuntarily shrunk down to a height of about one centimeter each, and placed in a rain forest. The science of this is interesting: What is like being so small? How does one deal with the threats of insects, poisonous plants, birds, and all the other characteristics of a rain forest environment, when you are so small? This is the only interesting part of this novel. But it is indeed fascinating, if

you like such things. The daily challengers of living and working and surviving in such an environment are gripping. It would help if I knew more about the small natural world surrounding us, but I don't. This book gives a picture of that, which is convincing.

Alas, there is a lot of junk going on. It seems that in the project that shrunk them are military men who are being shrunk along with their armored vehicles and weapons, and sent to kill the biologists. Nasty. The whole back story is worthless, in my eyes.

Suffice to say that at least one of the biologists is fascinated and excited by studying the rain forest from a minute size. When they finally get back to their normal size, she would like to go back to being tiny to do further study.

For some reason I think the whole idea is absurd. One centimeter high humans? But it does give an excuse

for exposing the reader to some characteristics of nature in the small. Crichton quotes biologist E. O. Wilson as saying: "Minute creatures swarm around us... A lifetime can be spent in

a Magellanic voyage around the trunk of a tree."

If this excites you, read the book – but be prepared for a lot of garbage as well.

***Hybrids*** by Robert J. Sawyer (2003), 394 pages.

This book is the last book in Sawyer's ***The Neanderthal Parallax*** trilogy. Once again the Neanderthal parallel world is a center of interest. It has the same main characters: the Neanderthal physicist Ponter Boddit, and the human geneticist, Mary Vaughan, who are in love. The interesting part is the contrast between the Neanderthal world, where population is kept down in a strange way (men meet women only four days a month, and can only have sex once every ten years), so everyone lives in an idyllic natural landscape, compared to Earth with its continually more and more crowded big cities.

The first book in the trilogy, ***Hominids***, was reviewed in the July 2011 ***CyberCozen***, the second book, ***Humans***, in October 2011. Here I am only going to give you a few quotes from ***Hybrids*** to remind you of what it is about.

Mary tries to persuade Ponter to stay with her on Earth, while Ponter would take her to his world:

"But I love you so much, Ponter. To be limited to seeing you just four days a month ..."

"Adikor very much loves Lurt, and that is all he sees of her. I very much loved Klast, but that was all I saw of her."

"His face was impassive. 'It is our way.'

"I know. I was just thinking."

"And there are other problems. Your cities smell horribly. I doubt I could take that permanently. "

"We could live out in the country. Somewhere away from the cities, away from the cars. Somewhere where the air is clean' It wouldn't matter to me where we were, so long as we are together."

"I cannot abandon my culture," said Ponter. "Or my family." [p. 51]

The alternative is for Mary to move to Ponter's world. She discusses this with Lurt:

"If you're to spend much time in this world, you must have your own home."

"Mary frowned. 'I have no idea how to do that. And I'll have to talk to Ponter. It's one thing to have his account debited for my incidentals, but if I'm going to buy a house –'

"Lurt laughed, but it wasn't derisive. 'You don't buy a house. You select one that's vacant and occupy it. Your contribution is unquestioned; you have brought much new knowledge to us. You are certainly entitled to a house.'

"You mean houses aren't privately owned?"

"No. Why would they be? Ah, I think I see. Remember, we have a stable population size. There is no need for new houses, except to replace those trees that ultimately die. And trees for houses are planted and tended by the government, since, after all, it's a long time before they're big enough to be occupied. But there are always some surplus ones, to accommodate temporary visitors

to Saldak. We can find you one of those. I know an excellent carpenter who can make furniture for you - I rather suspect she would enjoy the challenge of accommodating your particular needs.' Lurt paused for a moment.

'Of course, you would be living alone.'" [p. 134]

The fun is in Sawyer's comparing the imaginary Neanderthal way of life with Earth human life. All in all, a good finish to the trilogy, despite the nasty villain.

***Bright Messengers* by Gentry Lee (1995), 445 pages.**

This infuriated me. Gentry Lee is an engineer who was involved in the U.S. space program. Among other things he was involved in NASA's Viking mission to Mars. Part of the book takes place on Mars. He's also a good writer. His main characters are interesting and persuasive. I read the whole book and it pulled me forward.

But then I get to the end, and was does it say? "This story will collude in ***Double Full Moon Night***". There's no indication, not on the front cover, not on the back cover, that this is Book 1 of two. Well, I won't read the second book.

Lee's heroes are a British woman named Beatrice (Sister Beatrice) who is a sort of saint, a follower of a Christian teacher named Michael, who has taken vows of chastity to help the poor and suffering. In this future the world economy has collapsed, large number are poor and hungry. She and her fellow followers of Michael dedicate their lives to setting up communities to help the poor. Later she is sent to Mars to help the poor there. Mars also is suffering from economic problems

The second hero is Johann, a German engineer. He too goes to Mars, in his case to help deal with technical problems of living and working there.

The villain is an Arab Muslim named Yasin. Raised in Saudi Arabia, he is a highly intelligent extremely capable engineer, whose contributions to technical problem on Mars are

essential for the success of Johann's working group on Mars. The problem with Yasin is that he considers that women have only one function: to serve men. Women provide sex and assistance to men. No matter how intelligent or capable, they have no other purpose, Yasin has 5 times been convicted of attack or rape on women on Mars. Why has Johann taken him out of Mars prison to go to work? Because Yasin is so technically superb. Because his abilities are essential.

Gentry Lee sometimes surprises with his ignorance. To prove that Yasin is a serious Muslim, he tells us that Yasin refused to work on the Muslim Sabbath. But in fact there is no Muslim Sabbath. Friday is the day for going to the mosque to pray. After prayers they go back to work. Muslims work seven days a week, like people in most countries around the world. Even in Israel there are Jews who work 10 hours a day seven days a week. (It's officially illegal, but if the worker needs the money, he does it.)

Toward the end of the book Yasin becomes a real vicious villain. He forces Beatrice to become his slave. When Johann tries to help her, Yasin locks him up with no food or water. After ten days Johann is really hungry. But in fact, a human cannot live more than about seven days without water. After ten days Johann should be dead. But he's not.

Nitpicking? I guess so. But I expect better from a scientific expert.

Beatrice and Johann (and others) have both had encounters with something alien, first on Earth. They have seen a vision of bright shiny lights (bright messengers) floating in the air in front of them, showing remarkable shapes and forms. On Mars as the book goes on, these visions direct them to what turns out to be a spaceship. With a huge sandstorm coming – one which might wipe out an entire Mars colony – the spaceship is a rescue craft. As they go up, they can see the whole area of their work covered in sand. But they have survived.

The spaceship provides them with all the water they need, and food which while unlike anything on Earth, is edible and nutritious. Up goes the spaceship. Johann and Beatrice (only) are led to a higher and higher part of

the space ship, and eventually landed on some kind of fake world. There they are exposed to horrifying experiences from human history. The Holocaust, the bombing of Hiroshima.

But the worst is yet to come: with the two of them living on a little island, evil Yasin shows up to make their lives really miserable. How will it all end? There are horrifying experiences with Yasin's mistreatment of Beatrice. Eventually, after a bitter battle, Johann kills Yasin. But Beatrice is pregnant with Yasin's child. After the birth she dies, but the alien spaceship provides human mother's milk to Johann to feed the baby.

What a sickening, repulsive ending. Now what? Well, just have to read Book 2.

No thanks.

## Quote of the Month: Going Ape

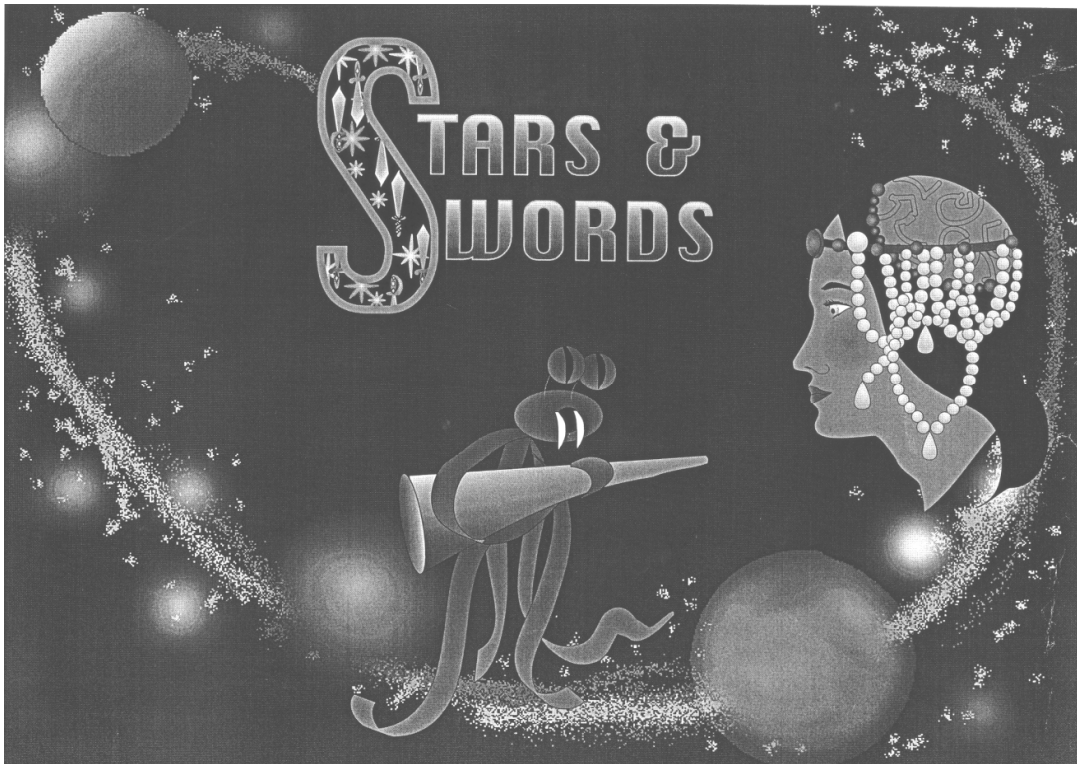
“The mention of apes in print dates back to occasional references in the twelfth century, but it is not until the beginning of the twentieth century that they emerged as subjects of popular novels like *Tarzan of the Apes* by Edgar Rice Burroughs, the legendary 1914 story of a boy lost in the jungle and raised by apes. Four years after its successful publication, the silent movie version of the story starring Elmo Lincoln appeared in theaters to standing ovations, opening the door to the ape movies of the future. The 1933 film *King Kong* began with the words of an Arabian proverb: “And lo the beast looked upon the face of beauty. And it stayed its hand from killing. And from that day it was as one dead.” In what became one of the most popular movies ever made, the fifty-foot tall [fifteen meter] gorilla King Kong introduced movies goes an ape personality that at one moment was savage and at the next tender and

protective. It became time for monkey business in show business. After the immense success of *King Kong*, Hollywood went ape-crazy, producing an average of a monkey movie every two years or so. From the 1949 *Mighty Joe Young*, in which a ten-foot tall [three meters] gorilla becomes the pet and protector of an orphan girl, to the 1951 *Bedtime for Bonzo*, which starred U.S. president-to-be Ronald Reagan, apes were and continue to be profitable endeavors; the second major remake of *King Kong* appeared in theaters in 2005....

“It was the 1988 *Gorillas in the Mist*, however, starring Sigourney Weaver as Dian Fossey, the real-life pioneer of an up-close-and-personal style of gorilla research, that gave our primate cousins some form of redemption on the big screen. It was perhaps this film that stimulated public awareness of the plight of gorillas and their disappearing habitat, and initiated a deeper appreciation for the

similarities between humans and gorillas.”  
From *Beautiful Minds* by Maddalena Bearzi and Craig Stanford, 2008, p. 40-41

Miriam Ben-Loulu's first Computer Graphics for *CyberCozen* (April 1997):



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