



Science-Fiction Fanzine

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### The Israeli Society for Science Fiction and Fantasy

#### כנס בדיון 2012

כנס בדיון השנה יתמקד באחד המרכיבים העתיקים והמהותיים ביותר בתרבות - הדת. מהדתות העתיקות שמלוות אותנו אלפי שנים ועד לדתות שעוד עתידות להתפתח, מההשפעה של הדת על ספרות המדע הבדיוני והפנטסיה ועד היכולת של הסופרים לשזור דתות בעולמותיהם הספרותיים. הכנס יתחלק לשני מושבים, הראשון על דתות העבר, והשני על דתות העתיד, ויערך ביום א', ה-10 ליוני 2012, בשעה 19:00, בספריית בית אריאלה בתל-אביב.

מידע נוסף ניתן למצוא באתר הכנס, <http://bidyon.sf-f.org.il>

**מועדון הקריאה של חודש מאי** יוקדש לספרו של אריך קסטנר **שלושים וחמישה במאי** ויערך בשלושים וארבעה ובשלושים וחמישה במאי.

מועדון הקריאה בת"א יתקיים ביום שני, שלושים וחמישה במאי (ארבעה ביוני) בשעה 19:30, ב"קפה גידי", פרישמן 20 א', תל-אביב. מנחה: **עמי פומרנץ**. לצורך היערכות למספר המשתתפים, יש להירשם מראש דרך הדואל של המנחה ולציין לאיזה מפגש אתם מתכוונים להגיע. כמו כן רצוי להביא למפגש עותק של הספר. הכניסה חופשית ואינה כרוכה בתשלום, בחברות באגודה, או בהגעה למפגשים נוספים.

מועדון חודש יוני יעסוק בספר **הילד של המכשפה** מאת מייקל גרובר. מפגשי מועדון זה יתפרסמו בהמשך באתר האגודה.

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

### Book Reviews by Aharon Sheer

***Far-Seer*** by Robert J. Sawyer (1992), 313 pages. ***Book One of The Quintaglio Ascension.***

The nice thing about writing about a world which parallels our past is that we know what happened in the past. The writer can make changes as he wishes, but the overall thrust of the "history" is known. (It's a lot harder writing a novel about a future parallel world.) In this book the hero is a parallel to Galileo Galilee, named Afsan.

Where this book is different is in the race of non-humans who are the heroes of the book. In this case, they are intelligent dinosaurs. (Our dinosaurs -- although we don't know that yet -- living on another world,

called simply "Land".) The world of these dinosaurs turns out to be a moon of a gas giant in a distant solar system.

***Far-Seer*** is the first of a trilogy, ***The Quintaglio Ascension***. The intelligent dinosaurs are called Quintaglios. The second book in the series is called ***Fossil Hunter*** (1993), which is reviewed below. The third book is ***Foreigner*** (1994), which will be reviewed next month. I enjoyed ***Far-Seer*** very much.

Not long before the start of this novel, someone invented a telescope (far-seer). A small number of astrologers have looked through the

far-seer and seen remarkable things. The moons of other gas giants. Rings on another gas giant. But what causes trouble is that the dinosaur's planet (actually a moon) keeps one face always away from the gas giant. In order to see the gas giant, one has to sail a long way away from Land's one continent. The first person in history who sailed far enough to see that gas giant thought he was seeing the Face of God. That became a part of their religion, and seeing the Face of God a rite of passage. Only with the use of the far-seer can an astrologer know that the Face of God is just another planet like the others that can be seen from Land. This will have a dramatic effect on the dinosaur's religious leaders!

Robert Sawyer, as a child, wanted to be a dinosaur paleontologist. Only the discovery that there are very few jobs for such people led him to go into writing sf instead. In this series he can utilize his dinosaur knowledge. Unfortunately Sawyer wrote the first volume before it became common to think that dinosaurs were actually giant birds, and had feathers. Sawyer's intelligent dinosaurs are giant carnivorous lizards covered with scales.

Sawyer has great fun describing the social system of the dinosaurs. Going on a hunt to kill and eat giant plant-eaters is a rite of passage for a young dinosaur. Of course in daily city life there are butchers who provide meat. But much of their life is designed for the wild. Territoriality is an important part of their social life. Coming too close to another person could be dangerous.

Sawyer enjoys making up things that intelligent dinosaurs might think. For example, a description of an inferior person is one who would kill an animal – and then not eat it. His

descriptions of the social life of intelligent predators are convincing.

Afsan – the dinosaurs' Galileo -- travels east by ship, a voyage of weeks, to see the Face of God:

“Every morning, the sun emerged from behind the Face, a tiny blue point rising up into the sky, the Face illuminated only along its upper edge as the sun rose from it, as if from behind a vast round hill on the horizon.

“It was a glorious double dawn, the top of the Face lighting up as the sun rose over it. As the day progressed, illumination pulled downward over the Face like an iridescent eyelid sliding shut over a dark orb.

“Each day, dawn came a little later, the sun having to climb higher to clear the spreading dome of the Face of God. Afsan took advantage of the prolonged nights to do more observing.

“That the Face was not always fully lit fascinated Afsan. In the afternoon and at night, it was indeed a bright dome on the horizon, but every morning only its upper edge was illuminated, a thin line arching up from where the water met the sky, the part of the Face beneath the line dim and violet.

“And sometimes none of the Face was lit at all.

“It didn't take Afsan long to figure out what was happening, but the thought staggered him nonetheless.

“The Face of God, the very countenance of his creator, went through phases, just as the moons did, and, as he had seen through the far-seer, just as some of the planets did.

“Phases, waxing vertically from top to bottom. Part lit, part dark.

“Phases.” [p. 99-100]

Gradually Afsan realizes that the truth is different from what their religious leaders believed and taught. And he will soon have to face those

religious authorities. Parallel history indeed. A great book for a meat-lover. Note: Book Three ends with a 30 page concordance to Quintaglio history and terminology, telling in which of the three books the name or term appears.

***Fossil Hunter* by Robert J. Sawyer (1993), 299 pages. *Book Two of The Quintaglio Ascension.***

This is the second in the trilogy about dinosaurs brought from Earth 65 million years ago, and placed on a moon of a gas giant far from Earth. These dinosaurs have developed intelligence, and are now at level of technology similar to that of Earth not far in our past.

This book is not as good as the first in the series, *Far-Seer*. The main thing that bothered me is that Sawyer introduces God as an explanation of why this planet has dinosaurs. He doesn't call it God, but rather “the Watcher”. This “being” exists forever, from Big Bang to Big Bang to Big Bang. After each new universe is created, the Watcher looks for life. Every new big Bang brings in new physical rules. Some universes team with life, others find it rare. In our universe (the universe of this book) life was so rare that at first it developed only on Earth. The Watcher saw the first signs, and that that life was amino-acid based. There were both left-handed and right-handed amino acids. The Watcher knew that by random chance, only one of the two types would survive on Earth, so it scattered samples of both kinds on numerous planets, thus guaranteeing that both kinds would survive in different places. The Watcher encouraged variety.

As life on Earth began to be multi-cellular, the Watcher saw that there were many different body-plans. The Watcher knew that only a few body-plans would survive on Earth. So it scattered samples of each body-plan on

numerous planets, thus guaranteeing that different kinds would survive in different places by random processes.

Then the Watcher watched for intelligence and technology. It eventually found it in the Jijaki, a five-eyed six-fingered body-plan being. The Watcher communicated by messages written in the sky in the main Jijaki written language. The Jijaki could help the Watcher guarantee more variety. Once beings were large, the Watcher did not have the capability of moving them from place to place (at least not if it wanted them to survive). It needed help.

On Earth, the Watcher saw that the dinosaurs had the potential for developing intelligence and technology. But it also saw that there also were developing tiny mammals, which also had the capacity of developing intelligence and technology. But the mammals' chances were little because all the larger life niches were occupied by the dinosaurs. So the Watcher carried out a plan. With the Jijaki's help, a sampling of Earth life was carried by Jijaki space ships to a large moon circling a gas giant in another solar system. Once the basics of Earth life were established, the Jijaki moved a whole range of dinosaurs to that moon, thus making possible the future development of dinosaur intelligence and technology.

And then, the Watcher (who can do things vast, but only very slowly) nudged an asteroid into a path which would cause it to crash into Earth,

eventually killing almost all of the dinosaurs, and opening up Earth for the mammals. Thus our world and the dinosaur's moon came into being in their present form, thanks to the Watcher.

To my mind this back-story was totally unnecessary. But one of the things about a great sf writer is that he makes the reader want to argue with him. What I always liked about Robert Heinlein is that he made you mad. I always liked to argue with the ideas he presented in his books. Robert Sawyer has matured with the years, and he gets me arguing with him. That's good.

Now for the tale. The hero of this volume is Toroca, one of the sons of Afsan, the hero (and parallel of Galileo) of *Far-Seer*. Toroca is a paleontologist, studying the layers of ancient fossils. Life started at a certain level, and from then on developed rapidly. Later on Toroca visits a small land mass far away from Land, the main continent. This distant land mass has a large variety of land animals and fish, all of them without exception based only on the body-plan of Land's flying dinosaurs, called "wingfingers". No animal from Land could have gotten to this far distant island. But wingfingers could have flown there, millions of years ago. Toroca immediately develops the idea of Evolution, and Natural Selection. So Toroca is Land's Charles Darwin. Great!

Afsan, from the book *Far-Seer*, has convinced the scientists of Land, and the emperor too, that Land is doomed. Its orbit around The Face of God (the gas giant) has been decaying for millions of years, and now it is only a matter of a few hundred centuries before it will break up into numerous small pieces, and become another ring around The Face of God. One of the signs of the future break up of their

moon is constantly increasing frequency of earthquakes:

"The ship rolled far to starboard. Toroca, on the little stepladder just below deck, held on for his life, his claws digging into the wood. Little lizards went skittering across the floor -- he'd heard that the *Dasheter*, like most ships, had a degree of lizard infestation, but this was the first he'd seen of them. The ship's timbers groaned in agony. Toroca felt his stomach turning inside out. Down below, he could see Babnol, prone on the floor.

"The *Dasheter* continued to list, farther and farther. One of the boards making up the stepladder splintered in two. The ladder was almost horizontal now, the whole ship practically knocked on its side.

"And then --

"Swinging back the other way, rolling to port, back, back, farther, Toroca spraining his arm as he tried to hold on, the ship's lumber moaning under the stress.

"And then, at last, the ship stabilized.

"Captain Keenir was moving up and down the corridors. 'That should be it for a few moments,' he called in his gravelly voice. 'But get to your quarters and lie down on the floor. There'll likely be two or three more.'

"Toroca made his way down the rest of the stepladder.

"Babnol was also gaining her feet. 'What is it?' she called to Keenir as he passed. 'What's happening?'

"'Quake,' said the old mariner. 'You'll believe the world's coming to an end after you weather a few of those out here in open water. Quickly now, to your

cabin. Aftershocks coming!" [p. 195]

Afsan's solution is that they must fly to another planet. But while Land's scientists have developed the telescope, and ways of working metals, they have only just begun to develop heavier than air flight (gliders). Afsan thought that if they can learn to fly like wingfingers, they will be able to fly to another planet. But who knows what there is between planets?

Another thread of this book is the discovery of an ancient buried spaceship. During archeological excavation below the lowest level of life on Land, they find a small blue object, clearly manufactured, which is harder than diamond. It has been buried for untold time. Further excavations reveal an enormous blue object.

The Watcher tells us that one of the spaceships carrying dinosaur life  
**Book Three will be reviewed next month.**

from Earth to Land crashed there on Land. Trips between the Jijaki planet and Land took an enormous amount of time (presumably no faster-than-light travel), and while the Jijaki managed to send numerous ships and thus numerous animals to Land, in parallel the Jijaki destroyed their own civilization (as Earth intelligence is likely to do), and there are no longer Jijaki capable of coming to Land to rescue their downed spaceship. So happily that downed spaceship is sitting there, millions of years later.

Well the use of that blue impervious spaceship awaits Book Three. How they will get off Land, and where they will go, is coming next.

A good read, with many ingenious ideas.

Note: Book Three ends with a 30 page concordance to Quintaglio history and terminology, telling in which of the three books the name or term appears.

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### Drawing by Miriam Ben-Loulu (מ"ר)

