



Science-Fiction Fanzine

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### The Israeli Society for Science Fiction and Fantasy

**מועדון הקריאה של חודש אוקטובר** יעסוק, בהמשך לרצועה לזכרה של אן מקאפרי באייקון, בספרה "שירת הגבישים" (כנרת זמורה ביתן, 1998). מועדון הקריאה יתקיים ביום חמישי, 25.10.12, בשעה 19:30, ב"קפה גרג" ברחוב ויצמן 2 (פינת שאול המלך, מול בית המשפט) בתל-אביב. המקום כשר. מנחות: **דפנה קירש** ושלי שחף. לצורך היערכות למספר המשתתפים, יש להירשם מראש דרך כתובת הדוא"ל של המנחה. כמו כן, רצוי להביא למפגש עותק של הספר. הכניסה חופשית ואינה כרוכה בתשלום, בחברות באגודה, או בהגעה למפגשים נוספים. המעוניינים להנחות מועדוני קריאה במרכז 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 בדוא"ל, או לעשות לייק ל**דף האגודה בפייסבוק**.

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

*Shades of Grey* by Jasper Fforde (2010), 432 pages.

Jasper Fforde (which sounds like a fake name, but isn't) is a British novelist born in 1961. (What kind of background gives one an "Ff" at the start of one's name? Perhaps Welsh?) This makes him pretty young for an sf author. Nowadays young people write fantasy. He didn't start writing sf novels until 2001, when he was already 40 years old.

This is a very very strange book. The future world described had fabulously developed technology until late in the 2000s when it was decided that all this technology was not making life better for people but worse. Hence they decided to have a Leapback, which is going back to simpler days when people were presumably simpler and happier. Only a small number of advanced technology devices were allowed to survive. But as the generations went on, they had more and more Leapbacks, and each time other things got eliminated. For example, not long ago, they had gone back to the Ford Model T, which was now the most advanced automobile still allowed. However, they were no longer manufactured, so maintaining the few that had survived was difficult.

One technological change as part of a Leapback is that everyone is colorblind. Some see no colors: Greys. Other see only certain colors, say Blues, or Yellows.

The hero is a Red, Eddie Russet (family names reflect the color one sees). He is the narrator of the book. The color one sees determines social status and function. As Eddie points out:

“The Green woman’s bossy attitude was not untypical. But although lower in the Order, we were still Prime within the long-established Red-Yellow-Blue Colour Model, and a Red would always have a place on the village Council, something the Greens with their bastard Blue-Yellow status could never do. It irritated them wonderfully. Unlike the dopey Oranges, who accepted their lot with a cheery, self-effacing good humour, Greens never managed to rise above the feeling that no one took them seriously enough. The reason for this was simple: they had the colour of the natural world almost exclusively to themselves, and felt that the scope of their sight gift should reflect their importance within the Collective. Only the Blues could even begin to compete with this uneven share of the Spectrum as they owned the sky, but this was a claim based mainly on surface area rather than a variety of shades, and when it was overcast, they didn't even have that...” [p. 3-4]

Eddie is with some friends. One is a Green, Jabez:

“I didn't really know what to say in trying to make conversation with a Green, so said the first thing that came into my head.

“What's it like seeing green?”

“Jabez lowered his voice.

“It's quite simply ... the best. The grass, the leaves, the shoots, the trees -- all ours. And do you know, the subtle variations in shade are almost without number -- in leaves, from the brightest, freshest hue when unfurling, to the dark green in late summer before they turn and we lose them -- thousands of shades, if not millions. Sometimes I just sit in the forest and stare.” [p. 113]

Another technological change is that people have no night vision. The pupils remain small always, and cannot expand enough to allow seeing things in the dark. At night, people see no stars, not even the moon. There are lightglobes (advanced technology remaining which is still permitted) which can illuminate things at night. But they are rare. Before the gas lights on the streets are turned off at night, people are warned to go home, and they stay there until morning. In fact, there is supposedly a form of night madness. If a person walks off in the dark at night, the person will inevitably die – or so everyone believes. On the other hand, during the day, a system of heliostats follows the sun, and directs the first sunlight into houses, public places, etc. So sunlight is conserved.

What’s it like with no night vision?

“I was awake before dawn. Unable to go back to sleep, I leaned on an elbow and stared into the darkness. I couldn't even tell whether my eyes were open or shut, and the darkness swirled about me like charcoal maggots in a coal cellar. I touched the hands on the bedside clock to confirm that it was near dawn, then heard the faint buzz of the first heliostat on auto-align towards the rising sun. Another started up, and then a third, and soon the air was full of the cheery buzz of the clockwork chorus. This was joined by the birds, who started to whistle and chirrup to greet the new day and, before long, as I stared into the inky blackness, the faintest glimmer of red punctured the curtain of darkness. It soon became a distinctive thin crescent, then a semicircle, and very slowly sightfulness returned to my room. First the door frame bathed in the dim glow of deep red, then the

room itself, reassembling itself as the rays of the new day slowly crept about my small chamber, banishing the blackness.” [p. 139]

Religions and religious books have been replaced by the Word of Munsell. When the Great Leapback was first done, the great leader Munsell wrote an enormous book describing in detail the permitted behavior of people. All must follow the details of permitted behavior of people in any situation. What clothes to wear and when, what work to do, what words are permitted to be spoken, how children are to be raised. Failing to follow the Munsell rules will result in a fine of demerits. Many aspects of life are distinguished by a system of demerits.

However, doing various deeds may result in earning merits. Thus one may cancel the demerits. If a person has too large a negative total of demerits, they are sent to Reboot. Supposedly this means being sent elsewhere to be reeducated, and never to return. Nasty.

Here is a quote from the Word of Munsell:

“2.1.01.05.002: All children are to attend school until the age of sixteen or until they have learned everything, whichever be sooner.” [p. 206]

“Everything” means all of the Word of Munsell. In addition, after finishing school, people do learn professions, such as being Colourmen, in an apprentice-style system.

A strange book indeed, fantasy sf one might say, but also social satire. Two more books will be added to the *Shades of Grey* series. I think I would read another.

***Moonrise* by Ben Bova (1996), 417 pages.**

Ben Bova is a science-knowledgeable sf writer (b. 1932), one of the old-timers writing science-based science fiction. He’s written about Mars, Venus and in this book about the Moon. In his two Mars books, he seemed to take the point of view of “whatever can go wrong, it will”. It was nevertheless a good way to display the problems of humans living on Mars, and how these problems might be solved. With respect to Venus there is no hope of living there, but the problems of visiting there were displayed. However with respect to Venus he added some melodrama, with a conflict between a Venus explorer and his rich father.

In this book the melodrama is too much. The Masterson Corporation has put a colony on the moon, Moonbase, with the hope of making it an economically successful colony. This is not going so well.

The founder of the company died of old age, and his son Gregory Masterson took over. The Mastersons wanted the company to be run by someone from the family. But the son was much less competent than his father, and with many personal problems, has difficulties running the company.

The grandson, Greg Masterson II, a very brilliant young man, expects to take over the family business when his father dies. Greg has no interest in the Moon and would just as soon close down Moonbase. But with his father ill, he decides to hasten things, and helps his father to kill himself.

However, Greg’s mother Joanna, is not happy with Greg’s personality, nor was she happy with Greg’s father’s philandering. As a wealthy man, he had women in every town.

Before her husband’s death, Joanna Masterson had taken a lover, a

half-black astronaut Paul Stavenger, a highly intelligent man who really wants Moonbase to succeed. With her husband dead, Joanne decided to marry Paul, and then proposes that the company choose Paul as the new manager (stays in the family).

The appointment of Joanna's new husband to head up the company, angers her son Greg. She soon also has a son by her husband, Doug, who will one day grow up and fall in love with the Moon.

Now brilliant but erratic Greg is involved in nanotechnology. With the help of an unscrupulous employee at Moonbase, Greg arranges for the killing (using nanotechnology) of his mother's new husband Paul. Well, Joanna figures it all out, but she loves her paranoid schizophrenic murderous son, and would never turn him in to the police for his two murders (Greg's father and Paul). So Joanna arranges for psychological treatment for Greg, including hypnotherapy. Is that a bad joke? Nothing she does can cure a murderous paranoid schizophrenic – certainly not hypnotherapy. Greg is chosen to head the Masterson Corporation's nanotechnology division. He does a good job of that.

In the meantime, her younger son Doug reaches age 18 and goes to the Moon, following in his father's footsteps. Loving mother Joanna insists that her two sons, Greg and Doug, work together. She wants them to be friends. She sends Greg to the Moon, to be the director of Moonbase. Of course Greg just wants to get rid of Doug, and Moonbase too.

When Doug goes outside on the Moon, what does he see?

“Magnificent desolation,” he murmured. The barren plain was empty, not a sign that a human being had ever set foot on it, except for the faint glow of a handful of red beacons that

marked the sites of the old temporary shelters marching off to the sudden horizon.

“If Greg looked out there, Doug thought, he'd see nothing but barren wilderness. But I see beauty. I see freedom. I see the opportunity to explore and learn and grow and build the future. How can I make Greg see it the way I do?” [p. 316]

And what does Doug see for the future:

“Okay, Doug said to himself. Do you see the future? Are you so dead certain that you know what's right?

“He answered himself almost immediately. Yes, I know what we've got to do. I can see the path the human race has to take. Grow or die. It's that simple, that stark. If we don't grow beyond the confines of Earth, we're going to sink into an overcrowded, overpolluted fishbowl of a world, without freedom, without hope, a world of poverty and despair and global dictatorship.” [p. 340]

I think this vision is what I liked about the book.

Despite all this melodrama in the background, Ben Bova does give us a presentation of the characteristics of the Moon, what a Moon colony might be like, and how a Moon colony might eventually become self-supporting. The beauty of the Moon entrances Doug (although I would hate it). He very much wants to follow in his father's footsteps (although he never knew him) and to stay on the Moon for the rest of his life. The problems of a Moon colony, both human and physical, are presented. Boredom being one aspect for many of the workers there. One Moonbase rule seems to be that every worker must

return to Earth from time to time to protect his health and his ability to return to Earth in the future. Presumably there will be health problems on Earth for people living on the moon because of the low gravity (one-sixth of the Earth's) which might make return to Earth a problem if one stays on the moon too long.

As usual if anything can go wrong it will. Solar flares can be deadly, and many other things can go wrong. But in truth Bova does not really give a feeling of how hostile an environment the Moon is. You are seconds away from death at any time, if you are outside on the surface in a spacesuit. Even in a surface vehicle things can go wrong which would be instantly deadly. Bova does not well describe those problems.

Doug comes up with some ideas for making Moonbase both self-sufficient and profitable. Of course Greg objects, and Joanna has to choose which of her two sons to support in the battle between them.

One theme of this book is that mankind needs to settle places off the Earth. As the Earth gets more crowded, and more polluted, new

challenges are needed to revitalize human beings:

“He looked up and saw the Earth, a glowing crescent of blue and white, its night side clear to see against the starry sky. Warm and filled with life, Doug knew. And yet he felt no longing, no desire to return to the world of his birth. The human race will die there, he knew, unless we help them to expand beyond Earth's confines....

“He saw Moonbase as it would be. A thriving city built underground but large enough for trees and flowering bushes and maybe even a stream of real water meandering through a grassy expanse....

“He saw the human race growing, learning, facing the frontier and the future with hope and brimming desire...

“There's a lot of work to do, he realized. A lifetime of work, and then some. Generations of work.” [p. 417]

Melodrama. There's a lot more but you might as well read it yourselves. But overall I enjoyed it.

### Quote of the Month:

“One of the fondest beliefs of many intellectuals is that there are cultures out there where everyone shares freely. Marx and Engels thought that preliterate peoples represented a first stage in the evolution of civilization called primitive communism, whose rule was ‘From each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs.’ Indeed, people in foraging societies do share food and risk. But in many of them, people interact mainly with their kin, so in the biologist's sense they are sharing with extensions of themselves. Many cultures also have an ideal of sharing, but that means little. Of course I will proclaim how great it is for *you* to share; the question is, will *I* share when my turn comes?”

From *How the Mind Works* by Steven Pinker, 1997, p. 504

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