



The Israeli Society for Science Fiction and Fantasy

השקת Television Sci-fi Music – ערוץ המוזיקה לחובבי מדע בדיוני ופנטזיה

אנו שמחים לבשר על השקת ערוץ מוזיקה אינטרנטי המוקדש כולו למדע בדיוני ולפנטזיה. בערוץ תוכלו לצפות במגוון רחב של קליפים באיכות גבוהה, להתעדכן בחדשות מדע בדיוני מהארץ ומחו"ל, להשתתף בחידות נושאות פרסים ולקחת חלק בבחירת השירים שישודרו בערוץ. את הערוץ תוכלו למצוא בכתובת scifimusic.tv, וניתן לצפות בו גם מטלפונים חכמים.

חידוש מסורת אורח הכבוד בפסטיבל "אייקון"

הסופר דריל גרגורי יהיה אורח הכבוד של פסטיבל "אייקון", שיערך בתאריכים 22 עד 24 בספטמבר 2013, ונושאו השנה יהיה "זהויות".

גרגורי פרסם עד היום שלושה ספרים באורך מלא (ספרו "פנדמוניום" יצא בעברית בהוצאת גרף), אסופת סיפורים אחת ושלושה ספרי קומיקס. פרטים נוספים וביקורות על ספריו ניתן למצוא [באתר האגודה](#).

מועדון הקריאה של חודש אפריל יעסוק בספרו של ניל גיימן "לעולם לא עולם"

[המועדון בירושלים](#) יתקיים ביום ראשון, 21.4.13, בשעה 19:00, בבית הקפה "קופי בין", רחוב יפו 34, ירושלים. מנחה: [מריה ציבלין](#).

[המועדון בתל אביב](#) יתקיים ביום חמישי, 25.4.13, בשעה 19:30, ב"קפה גרג", ויצמן 2, ת"א. 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.

מועדון חודש מאי יעסוק בספרה של דיאנה ווין ג'ונס "הבריון של ארצ'ר".

לקבלת עדכונים שוטפים על מפגשי מועדון הקריאה ברחבי הארץ ניתן להצטרף לרשימת התפוצה או לדף [האגודה בפייסבוק](#).

"הרועה האחרון" מגייס כספים

"הרועה האחרון", סרט מסע פנטסטי מבית היוצר של Evil Sun Productions ("משחקי קרוסאובר"), הוא סרט פנטזיה עלילתי באורך מלא שיוקרן בפסטיבל "אייקון". הסרט ממומן בשיטת מימון-המון, ומאפשר לכם להשקיע בו סכומי כסף שונים, ובתמורה לקבל מגוון רחב של הטבות, החל מחולצות ועותקי DVD של הסרט, ועד לתפקיד אורח בסרט ובכרטיסים להקרנת הבכורה.

להשקעה בסרט ולפרטים נוספים, בקרו [בעמוד הפרויקט של הסרט](#) באתר "מימונה".

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

Book Review by Aharon Sheer

Steel Beach by John Varley (1992), 565 pages.

This book by John Varley (b. 1947) is an epic tale of human life on the moon. In this future history, Earth has been taken over by aliens ("The Invasion"), but that is not the subject of this book.

Fortunately, before the Invasion, humans had already settled in outer space (the main thing Varley got wrong – humans

will never live in outer space as long as the current politicians have anything to say about it). Luckily the aliens ignored those humans not on Earth. So this book describes what future moon settlement and medical technology might be like.

One of Varley's themes is that in this future the technology exists to

change one's body shape and characteristics at will. This is a complex medical technique. Changing sex from time to time is common. Since medicine has advanced so much, death is almost unknown. But life gets boring. So some people change gender from time to time. Start out as a man, live a couple of decades that way, then try being a woman. Of course the new sex has the traditional biochemical characteristics, so not only body appearance changes, but also behavior.

The hero is a newsman named Hildy, who works for the *Daily Nipple*. So part of the fun is describing what news coverage is like in this future. Of course there are no printed newspapers, everything comes over the net. News is exciting for about one day, after which no one is interested.

Hildy is bored being a man, and decides to change that. Varley describes the process as Hildy converts to being a woman (after being a man for the last 20 years). Bobbie is the make-over artist, and one of the best:

“Unless you've chosen the most radical of body make-overs, very little of modern sex changing involves actual surgery. In my case, about all the cutting that was planned was the removal and storage of the male genitalia, and their replacement with a vagina, cervix, uterus, and set of fallopian tubes and ovaries which were even then being messengered over from the organ bank, where they'd reposed since my last Change. There would be a certain amount of body sculpting, but not much. Most of the myriad alterations I was about to undergo would be done by the potions being mixed in the prep room. Those brews contained two elements: a saline solution, and uncounted trillions of nanobots.

“Some of these cunning little machines were standard, made from

templates used in all male-to-female sex changes. Some were customized, cobbled together from parts stolen from microbes and viruses or from manufactured components, assembled by Bobbie and assigned a specific and often minute task, copyrighted, and given snippets of my own genetic code much like a bloodhound is given an old shoe to establish the scent. All of them were too small to be seen by the human eye. Some were barely visible in a good microscope. Many were smaller than that.

“They were assembled by other nanobots at chemical-reaction speeds, and produced in groups seldom smaller than one million units. Injected into the bloodstream, they responded to the conditions they found there, gravitated to their assigned working sites using the same processes whereby hormones and enzymes found their way through the corpus, identified the right spots by using jigsaw-like pieces of these same bodily regulators as both maps and grapplers, attached themselves, and began to boogie. The smaller ones penetrated the individual cell walls and entered the DNA itself, reading the amino acids like rosary beads, making carefully planned cuts and splices. The larger ones, the kind with actual motors and manipulators and transistors, screws, scrapers, memories, arms -- what used to be called microbots when they were first made with the same technologies that produced primitive integrated circuit chips -- these congregated at specified sites and performed grosser tasks. The microbots would each be handed a piece of my genetic code and another piece synthesized by Bobbie, which functioned like eccentric cams in making the tiny

machines do their particular job. Some would go to my nose, for instance, and start carving away here, building up there, using my own body and supplementary nutrients carried in by cargo microbots. Waste material was picked up in the same way and ferried out of the body. In this way one could gain or lose weight very quickly. I myself planned to emerge from the Change fifteen kilos lighter.

“The nanobots labored diligently to make the terrain fit the map. When it did, when my nose was the shape Bobbie had intended, they detached themselves and were flushed away, deprogrammed, and bottled to await the next customer.

“Nothing new or frightening about that. It was the same principle used in the over-the-counter pills you can buy to change the color of your eyes or the kinkiness of your hair while you sleep. The only difference was the nanobots in the pills were too cheap to salvage; when they'd done their work they simply turned themselves off in your kidneys and you pissed them away. Most of the technology was at least one hundred years old, some more ancient than that. The hazards were almost nil, very well-known, and completely in control.” [p. 163-165]

I've quoted from this extensively because I thought it was fascinating. The technology of converting your body! To think that this was written twenty years ago, long before sex changes were common!

Another aspect of this future life is that everything is controlled by the Central Computer (“CC”). CC knows everything that goes on, and is involved in it all. As people get older, their bodies would start to deteriorate. CC

makes sure this will not happen, by providing nanobots to fix the things that deteriorate (for example cancer). At the same time it also makes improvements. Bad breath when you wake up in the morning? CC will take care of it, if CC thinks about it. The suggestions may come from the humans, but CC will carry it out.

Curiously, despite CC's ability to fix any medical problem, it has not solved the problem of mental disease. People still become mentally ill. They even commit suicide. This is a problem CC is distressed by. For – it seems – even CC has a mental illness, which it cannot cure. It wants to know why humans develop mental illnesses, so that it can heal itself.

Fortunately there are certain controls. CC is not allowed to interfere in interactions between humans. It is required to preserve secrecy. CC does not tell people what to do, nor does it tell anyone what anyone else has done. Humans each live their own lives hardly aware that CC is watching them all the time. The hero discovers this after attempting suicide twice. CC interferes, gives him a year on a desert island to get away from his life a bit, and then talks to him. All this actually takes a microsecond, in real time, but our hero only knows this because CC told him. CC is worried by his attempting suicide and excuses its interference on those grounds. Hildy and CC have a conversation:

““What you have just experienced is a fairly recent capability of mine. It's not advertised, and I hope you don't plan to do a story on it in the Nipple. So far I've used it mostly on the insane. It's very effective on catatonics, for instance. Someone sits there all day, unmoving, not speaking, lost in a private world. I insert several years' worth of memories in a fraction of a second.

The subject then remembers waking from a bad dream and going about a comfortable, routine life for years. ’

“It sounds risky.’

“They can't get any worse. The cure rate has been good. Sometimes they can be left alone after that. There are subjects who have lived as many as ten years after treatment, and not reverted. Other times counseling is needed, to find the things that drove them to catatonia in the first place. A certain percentage, of course, simply drift back into oblivion in weeks or months. I'm not trying to tell you I've solved all the mysteries of the human mind.’

“You've solved enough of them to scare the hell out of me.’”
[p. 105]

One of the problems of living on the moon is the harsh environment. Not only is the surface either extremely hot, or extremely cold (day or night), but the cosmic rays filtered by the atmosphere on the Earth, are not filtered out on the moon. Hence humans have to live underground, so that the moon's surface will protect them. Great areas underground are constructed using nuclear explosions (would that really work?), thus hollowing out large and deep spaces that can later be used for living. One of the things developed on the moon are “Disneylands”, imitation earth environments on a large scale. Many different kinds of imitation Earth environments are represented on the moon. One place Hildy likes is Texas. Hildy decides to go and live in Texas (at least for a while), and build a cabin there. Hildy describes Texas at night:

“I always stayed awake for about an hour after the last light of day had faded. I have no way of comparing, of course, but it seemed to me the nightly display of starry

sky was probably pretty close to the real thing, what I'd see if I were transported to the real Texas, the real Earth, now that all man's pollution was gone. It was glorious. Nothing like a Lunar night, not nearly as many stars, but better in its own way. For one thing, you never see the Lunar night sky without at least one thickness of glass between you and the heavens. You never feel the cooling night breezes. For another, the Lunar sky is too hard. The stars glare unmercifully, unblinking, looking down without forgiveness on Man and all his endeavors. In Texas the stars at night do indeed burn big and bright, but they wink at you. They are in on the joke. I loved them for that. Stretched out on my bedroll, listening to the coyotes howling at the moon -- and I loved them for that, too, I wanted to howl with them.... I achieved the closest approximation of peace I had ever found, or am likely to find.

“I spent something like two months like that. There was no hurry on the cabin. I intended to do it right. Twice I tore down large portions of it when I learned a new method of doing something and was no longer satisfied with my earlier, shoddier work. I think I was afraid of having to think of something else to do when I finished it.” [p. 294]

One problem on the moon is water. Water is necessary for life, but there doesn't seem to be much water on the Moon. Hildy, living in the desert in West Texas, discusses this with a friend who says:

“Water comes out of a tap, that's all I know.’

“Don't pretend ignorance with me. Water comes from the rings of Saturn, is boosted in slow orbits in the form of big chunks of dirty ice

until we catch it here and melt it. Or it comes out of the air when we reprocess it, or the sewage when we filter it, then it's piped to your home, then it comes out of the tap. In my case, for the pipe substitute a man who comes by once a week and fills my barrels.'

"All I have to do with it is turning the tap.'

"I pointed to my tank sitting on the sink. 'So do I,' I said. I patted myself dry and started rubbing cream on my skin. 'I know you're dying to ask, so I'll tell you I bathe every third or fourth day at the hotel in town. All over; soap and

everything, And if what you've seen horrifies you, wait till you need to relieve yourself.'" [p.381-382]

I really enjoyed reading this book. Varley is a very good author although most of his best writing has been short stories and novelettes. Varley has won the Hugo Award three times, the Nebula Award twice, and the Locus Award ten times. He usually has fascinating ideas. And he's fun to read, too. This book is long and kept me busy for quite a while.

Actually it's too long. 565 pages! I got tired toward the end. But still, I recommend it.

Advice Column: Salacious Sal's Advice to the Love Lorn (From June 1993)

Salacious
Sal



Dear Sal: I just met this dreamy guy, and I'm madly in love with him. What I want to know is how many times should we date before I allow him to embrace me?

1st Love

P.S. I come from a light gravity planet and he comes from a heavy gravity planet, so I know my parents won't approve, but I don't care!

Dear 1st Love: You should care if you're thinking of any heavy dating with dream boat! The minute he crushes you to his manly chest you will find yourself carted away in an ambulance -- if you're lucky.

Haven't your parents ever explained the difference between prejudice and the facts of life?

S. Sal

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