



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 "מגדל הזכוכית", מאת רוברט סילברברג (מובי דיק, 2012).

המועדון יתכנס ביום חמישי, 19.12, בשעה 20:00, ב"קפה גרג", ויעמך 2, תל אביב. **מנחה: דפנה קירש** לצורך היערכות למספר המשתתפים מומלץ להירשם מראש בדוא"ל של המנחה. רצוי להביא למפגש עותק של הספר.

הכניסה חופשית ואינה כרוכה בתשלום, בחברות באגודה, או בהגעה למפגשים נוספים. מועדון חודש ינואר יעסוק בספר זוכה פרס גפן "עורבני חקיין", מאת סוזן קולינס.

לקבלת עדכונים שוטפים על מפגשי מועדון הקריאה ברחבי הארץ ניתן להצטרף לרשימת התפוצה או לדף האגודה בפייסבוק.

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

Sf Movie Review by Aharon Sheer

Gravity (2013), PG-13, 1 hr 31 min, starring Sandra Bullock, George Clooney, directed by Alfonso Cuarón.

Now playing in Israel. Its title comes from the fact that almost all the film takes place in orbit around the Earth, under micro-gravity (almost zero gravity). My wife Miriam, who saw the film with me, said, "It's a good film, but frightening."

The space shuttle Explorer is sent up to make a repair to the Hubble Space telescope. As Dr. Ryan Stone (Sandra Bullock) tries to make the repair on a space walk, under the supervision of commander Matt Kowalski (George Clooney) word is received from Mission Control in Houston that a disaster has happened. A Russian missile strike on a defunct Russian satellite has released debris which is now in orbit around the Earth, and this debris is likely to later endanger the space shuttle and its crew. They are advised to get out of the way.

Ryan is determined to finish the Hubble repair, which is almost finished, and delays too long. As a result the shuttle is hit by debris. When Ryan and

Matt get back into the shuttle, they find the entire crew is dead from loss of air.

After that, their job is to try and get back to Earth, first by going to the International Space Station (ISS), which they find abandoned by its crew, who has taken one of the two Soyuz modules to get back to Earth. Another Soyuz module is still available, but its parachute has been accidentally deployed, making it useless for getting back to Earth. After doing a space walk to disconnect the parachute from the module, Ryan uses the module to try and get to a Chinese space station, Tiangong, where there is another Soyuz module, but she doesn't have enough fuel. She uses a fire extinguisher as a makeshift thruster to travel to Tiangong.

As in many such movies, if anything can go wrong, it will.

Where the film excels is in its realistic display of working in space. On the space walk, on getting around in micro-gravity in the shuttle, getting

around in micro-gravity in the ISS, and finally, getting back to Earth using the Soyuz module. All this is said to be very scientifically accurate.

It's to be noted that since the U.S. space shuttle has been retired, and there is no alternative on the way, this is a distant future in which a new space

shuttle has been developed. Supporting the view that this is some years in the future is that fact that the Chinese have their own space station. I think the Chinese are a long way from that. Currently they are talking about 2020, but that's just to get started.

Sf Movie review by Sara Beck

ENDER'S GAME --USA 2013, 114 minutes

This movie is based on the 1985 novel by Orson Scott Card, which was one of the most popular and highly regarded SF novels of the 20th century and won both the Hugo and Nebula awards. I am sure that many readers of this esteemed 'zine have read the book and know the basic plot, but this is written assuming that the reader does NOT know the book and does not want spoilers.

The movie starts with a voice-over setting the scene: 50 years earlier the Earth barely survived an attack by an insect-like alien race. Now Earth is devoting great effort to preparing for the next attack, and the military has decided to train youngsters, who learn and react more quickly than adults, for planetary defense. And so we meet Andrew Wiggin, nicknamed "Ender", about 10 years old at the start, a cadet in this program who is greatly, even scarily, gifted at tactics. The movie is the story of the merciless training Ender goes through, to become Earth's great hope in the final confrontation with the aliens.

The word 'merciless' was carefully chosen: the people in charge of the program (played by Harrison Ford and Ben Kingsley) have no mercy. Back in 1985 I gave the book to a friend who does not usually read SF,

and his reaction was very simple: "this is about child abuse". He was right. The training program is a carefully calculated application of child abuse. Ender is not physically tortured, but the adults in charge (who are old enough to be his grandfathers) traumatize him psychologically so they can manipulate him into what they need. A military psychologist (played by Viola Davis) has the role of telling the Colonel in charge--and thus the audience--exactly what kind of damage they are inflicting on the boy, but they persist. In a chilling line of the Colonel: 'Ender has to learn that no one will ever help him'. And yet we see the Colonel as one of the 'good guys', mistreating the children only because he is desperate to save the Earth! The moral ambiguity gives the story a great emotional weight.

The previous paragraph may sound like the movie is a depressing psychological study but don't worry, it's also an entertaining SF blockbuster. The psychological manipulation is in small snippets; for most of the training program the kids are playing war games, and the war games are fabulous to see. The cadets fly and shoot in a huge zero-gravity sphere which is one of the most gorgeous things I've ever seen on the screen. The effects

throughout are beautiful. The acting is mostly competent. Asa Butterfield gives an excellent performance as Ender. He is always tense and always thinking and never, never relaxed. It is upsetting to see a child so clearly on the defensive, and shows how Ender has been mistreated. The writing is not great,

but not really awful. There are some flaws in the pacing and the ending feels a little awkward (the ending actually has a bit of one of the later books in the Ender Series glued on), but on the whole this movie is a good treatment of a great book and well worth seeing.

Commentary: Invented Names (From February 2005)

By Miriam Ben-Loulu

Lately I have been re-reading one of the *Lensmen* series books, by E.E. “Doc” Smith. The book was written 55 years ago, and I first read it some fifty years ago. It has reminded me of something I have noticed in many books of science fiction and fantasy, and to some extent in TV or movie versions. Writers tend to mix their own innovations with whatever is popular at the time. This is true of many aspects of the story but does not interfere because it concerns usually unimportant details.

Take clothes, for example. Most fantasy books tend to mix various historic periods and invent the names of furs and sometimes of cloth. Science-fiction books tend to use modern clothes with invented methods of fastening them, and invented types of cloth. On TV the fashion of unisex clothes is now prevalent, but I remember that in the *Buck Rogers* series in the 1950’s the villainess wore a long black sequined, form fitting gown. Their space ship must not have had any ladders because she certainly couldn’t have gone up, much less down, a ladder with that dress! One of the most interesting series, so far as clothes go, is Poul Anderson’s *Polesotechnic League* books, with his main character usually in a sarong.

One thing I find does bother me is the futuristic detective or business man wearing a tie. Why men should feel a need to put something constricting around their necks I have no idea. But

most periods of history have had something – a ruffle, a cravat, a bow tie, a neck tie – but the long straight tie used today is relatively recent and one would think that a science fiction writer could come up with something more creative for the future.

Then there is nature. Both fantasy and science-fiction books tend to put in common animals and add some exotics to them with explanations like the fact that the place was ages and ages ago colonized by people from earth who added their own animals to the existing ones. This is not very convincing because one would think that over those ages mutations would have changed the earth animals. Some don’t even bother with explanations. But even more than animals is what happens with plant life. Trees especially tend to have the names of common species on earth. A tree usually has an invented name only if the author uses it to provide something for his characters, like a fruit, or shelter for tree dwellers.

And plant life leads us to food. Food is a very interesting subject because some characters never eat, and others spend a great deal of time in eating. Fruit, meat, and vegetable names are often invented, along with their special characteristics, like color and taste. Milk products tend to remain milk and cheese, but I don’t remember ice-cream being included! But drinks are another matter. Alcoholic and juice drinks are usually inventive. Carbonated

drinks are almost non-existent. However, the books seem to split between letting their characters drink tea and coffee, and insisting on their drinking substitutes with similar names, like “kaf”. Very few books have other types of drinks without some sort of tea or coffee mentioned.

One of the things found in a great number of science-fiction books is the common cigarette. This is especially true of books written before the connection of smoking with cancer was so publicized. The funny thing is that cigarettes, cigars, and pipes remain pretty much as they are today in most books. One of the classic authors (Robert Heinlein) did have a story where the cigarette lit itself when waved in the air. Imagine a person talking while making gestures with his hands. As his hand with an unlit cigarette passes under your nose the cigarette end suddenly flares up! But at least it made it more suitable for a story about the future. E.E. “Doc” Smith’s characters, by the way, enjoy smoking cigarettes which don’t seem to have changed in any way from the time in which he wrote (I doubt that they even have filters).

Then there are the technological details. One interesting observation is that in the days when many of the classic science fiction stories were written the gasoline stations were far apart and a young man wanting some time alone with his girlfriend would pretend to have “run out of gas”. But in the science fiction stories of the same time, while space ships once in a while ran out of fuel, you never read of a young man trying to explain to his girlfriend that they stopped in the middle of nowhere because “We’ve run out of fuel.” On the other hand some things seem determined to reflect the time when they were written.

The *Lensmen* series was written in the days when a computer took up a huge room and cost so much that only

institutes of higher education and the government could afford them. Naturally the characters in the *Lensmen* books do not pull out their pocket calculators to help them figure the mathematical solution to a problem.... They pull out their trusty “slip stick”, the then popular name for a slide rule. When I was in high school we used slide rules in chemistry lessons. I once showed mine to my kids and they were shocked. One wonders how many modern readers have to go to the dictionary to find out what kind of rule can be pulled out of a pocket, not to mention readers whose native language is *not* English!

Most of today’s stories have some form of computer, and one wonders, considering how much computers have changed in my lifetime, why the authors should expect the computers of the future to be so very much like the PCs of today. It is true that a few have attempted to make changes here and there, but generally speaking the authors don’t seem to be able to invent differences on this as easily as they do on methods of transportation. One would think that at least they would have smell transmitted since that has already actually been done, from what I’ve seen on TV. Another similar problem is some sort of telephone. Some have visual as well as audio features, but basically a phone is a phone. TV has been more successful with a great many variations, and I hope to live long enough to be able to see some of those actually exist!

My last comment is concerning take off of space craft. In the *Lensmen* books, and on the old *Buck Rogers* series, when a space ship took off the countdown went: 10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1.... BLAST OFF!!!! (Always shouted!) When the first actual space craft went up, someone apparently felt too self conscious to say this, and the countdown ended with a very quiet and unemotional “lift off.” Modern books

seem to prefer a lift off to a blast off. And more and more the countdown is omitted. But why haven't the authors come up with some more original method of verbally sending the craft off into the heavens?

In fantasy books these details are sometimes what make the difference between a story that can seem real and one that seems like a series of action

shots. In science-fiction, these details are what can date a book. The more details from the author's own time are considered as basic (like the slide rule), the more the story dates as real life technology rushes ahead with innovations. Peculiarly enough, this "dating" can actually make it more fun to read.

Quote of the Month

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

[Governance by the People](#) by *Barbara R. Jasny*

Real-world challenges in how to manage public resources have frequently been met by bottom-up collective action. One area in which researchers have yet to reach consensus is the relation of group size to collective action and resource outcomes. Yang *et al.* use data gathered over many years from the Wolong Nature Reserve in Sichuan Province, China. Within the reserve, the administrative bureau of the National Forest Conservation Program had assigned forest parcels to groups composed of 1 to 16 households. Each group decided on a strategy for monitoring illegal activity, such as logging, and the bureau conducted assessments of how much activity had occurred. Group size had a U-shaped relation to the monitoring efforts per household and on increasing forest cover. Intermediate group sizes of 8 or 9 households were optimal in balancing between two opposing factors: free-riding (the tendency to let others in the group do the work) and within-group enforcement. These findings, as well as the demonstration that stronger social relationships within the groups and with local leaders promoted collective action, suggest strategies for effective governance.

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