

**The Israeli Society for Science Fiction and Fantasy****ערוץ המוזיקה של האגודה מתעדכן**

בימים האחרונים עלה לאוויר שידור חדש בערוץ המוזיקה "Music Television Sci-Fi" – הלהיטים הגדולים מהסרטים הגדולים: "באטמן", "אווטאר", "מכסחי השדים", "גברים בשחור 3", "הנוקמים", "אקס-מן", "אירו-מן" ועוד. וגם – חידה נושאת פרסים המוקדשת לסדרת "מסע בין כוכבים", עדכונים על הכנסים הבאים בתחום המד"ב, הפנטזיה ומשחקי התפקידים וחדשות חמות מהוליווד ומתעשיית הטלוויזיה. בקרו ב-www.scifimusic.tv וצפו!

מועדון הקריאה של חודש יולי יעסוק בספרו של ג'ורג' ר"ר מרטין "חלום קדחת".
המועדון בתל-אביב יתקיים ביום חמישי, 25.7.13, בשעה 19:30 ב"קפה גרג", ויצמן 2 תל-אביב. מנחת המפגש: [חן עידן](#).

המועדון בירושלים יתקיים ביום שלישי, 30.7.13, בשעה 19:30 ב"קופי בין", רחוב יפו 34 ירושלים. מנחת המפגש: [מריה](#).
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 אוגוסט יעסוק בספרו של יואב בלום "מצרפי המקרים". 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>

From Bill Silverman (bill@wisdom.weizmann.ac.il):

I picked up *A Tall Tail* by [Charles Stross](#) from Amazon - highly enjoyable, and it led me to:

http://pipeline.corante.com/archives/2010/02/23/things_i_wont_work_with_dioxygen_difluoride.php

A very amusing article in a (sort of) blog for chemists at:

http://pipeline.corante.com/archives/things_i_wont_work_with/

On another topic, I have a collection of over 5000 SF eBooks in PDF. I've transformed a lot of them into mobi format (for Kindle). If anyone would like to pick up individual novels or collections by (almost) any SF author, let me know, and I'll send you a link to download them. Here's Robert A Heinlein, for example:

<https://dl.dropboxusercontent.com/u/36262548/Heinlein%20%20Robert%20A.zip>

You'll need a decompression app. On any PC running Microsoft systems, just double-click the link and extract the folder. On Unix/Linux systems, gzip works well.

The .zip file (for Heinlein) is 26 megabytes; the extracted folder (and contents) is 48 MB. The link will remain active for 2 weeks.

Book review by Aharon Sheer

Blindsight by Peter Watts (2006), 384 pages.

This was a Hugo Award finalist. The author is a marine biologist and the book has a strong biological basis. At the end of the book is a scientific appendix, 17 pages, with over a hundred scientific references. The story takes place late in the 21st century. One of the problems in reading this book is that the author seems to have created a modified version of English as she is spoke at the end of the 21st century. Figuring out what people are talking about can be puzzling at times.

An alien object passes through our solar system. A space ship is sent from earth to inspect this artificial object, and try to explore it. The crew is a collection of strange people. In this future, human beings can be modified with various accessories, giving the people communications abilities or exploratory abilities not found in unadapted humans.

The leader of the expedition is a vampire. It seems that vampires existed tens of thousands of years ago on Earth. They were forced to feed on normal human beings because they lacked a crucial chemical which humans can synthesize but vampires cannot. Although there were only a small number of vampires compared to vast numbers of humans, they eventually died out. However ancient vampire DNA has been found, and vampires have been reconstructed. They are vastly more intelligent than humans.

The hero of the book, Siri, the narrator, is a Synthesist. What is that? Chelsea modifies people's brains. She speaks first.

“So. A Synthesist. Explaining the Incomprehensible to the Indifferent.”

“I smiled on cue. ‘More like bridging the gap between the people who make the breakthroughs and the people who take the credit for them.’

“She smiled back. ‘So how do you do it? All those optimized frontal lobes and refits -- I mean, if they're incomprehensible, how do you comprehend them?’

“‘It helps to find pretty much everyone else incomprehensible, too. Provides experience.’ There. That should force a bit of distance.

“It didn't. She thought I was joking. I could see her lining up to push for more details, to ask questions about what I did, which would lead to questions about me, which would lead --

“‘Tell me what it's like,’ I said smoothly, ‘rewiring people's heads for a living.’

“Chelsea grimaced; the butterfly on her cheek fluttered nervously at the motion, wings brightening. ‘God, you make it sound like we turn them into zombies or something. They're just tweaks, mainly. Changing taste in music or cuisine, you know, optimizing mate compatibility. It's all completely reversible.’” [p. 66]

They've named the alien artifact *Rorschach* (don't know why). ConSensus is their computer. Here is a description:

“Their vision failed over time -- mirrors fell away along their respective vectors, lines of sight degraded with each passing second -- but ConSensus filled with things learned in the meantime. *Rorschach* massed 1.8×10^{10} kilograms within a total volume of 2.3×10^8 cubic meters. Its magnetic field, judging by radio squeals and its Plage effect, was thousands of times stronger than the sun's. Astonishingly, parts of

the composite image were clear enough to discern fine spiral grooves twined around the structure. ('Fibonacci sequence,' Szpindel reported, one jiggling eye fixing me for a moment. 'At least they're not completely alien.')

Spheroid protuberances disfigured the tips of at least three of *Rorschach's* innumerable spines; the grooves were more widely spaced in those areas, like skin grown tight and swollen with infection. Just before one vital mirror sailed out of range it glimpsed another spine, split a third of the way along its length. Torn material floated flaccid and unmoving in vacuum." [p. 109]

They call their spaceship *Theseus*. *Rorschach* talks to them in English. "You really wouldn't like it here."

They answer back: "*Theseus* to *Rorschach*. Open to requests for information."

And *Rorschach* answers: "Cultural exchange. That works for me."

Theseus: "We don't all have parents or cousins. Some never did. Some come from vats."

And *Rorschach* answers: "I see. That's sad. Vats sound so dehumanizing."

Theseus tries to carry on this "conversation" without giving away any information about where it is from, and what is inside the ship.

"Tell me more about your cousins," *Rorschach* sent.

Theseus: "Our cousins lie about the family tree... with nieces and nephews and Neanderthals. We do not like annoying cousins."

Theseus: "We'd like to know more about this tree."

...

Rorschach: "We usually find our nephews with telescopes. They are as hard as Hobblinites."

More calculated ambiguity. And *Hobblinites* wasn't even a word."

...

"You haven't mentioned your father at all," *Rorschach* remarked. [p. 112-113]

And now we get some serious science:

"That's true, *Rorschach*," *Sascha* admitted softly, taking a breath –

"and stepping forward.

"So why don't you just *suck my big fat hairy dick?*"

"The drum fell instantly silent. *Bates* and *Szpindel* stared, open-mouthed.

Sascha killed the channel and turned to face us, grinning so widely I thought the top of her head would fall off.

"*Sascha*," *Bates* breathed. 'Are you crazy?'

"So what if I am? Doesn't matter to that thing. It doesn't have a clue what I'm saying.'

"What?'

"It doesn't even have a clue what it's saying back,' she added.

"Wait a minute. You said -- *Susan* said they weren't parrots. They knew the rules.'

"And there *Susan* was, melting to the fore: 'I did, and they do. But pattern-matching doesn't equal comprehension.'

Bates shook her head. 'You're saying whatever we're talking to -- it's not even intelligent?'

"Oh, it could be intelligent, certainly. But we're not *talking to* it in any meaningful sense.'

"So what is it? Voice mail?'

“‘Actually,’ Szpindel said slowly, ‘I think they call it a *Chinese Room*...’
‘About *bloody time*, I thought.

“I knew all about Chinese Rooms. I was one. I didn't even keep it a secret, I told anyone who was interested enough to ask.

“In hindsight, sometimes that was a mistake.

“‘How can you possibly tell the rest of us what your bleeding edge is up to if you don't understand it yourself?’ Chelsea demanded back when things were good between us. Before she got to know me.

“I shrugged. ‘It's not my *job* to understand them. If I could, they wouldn't be very bleeding edge in the first place. I'm just a, you know, a conduit.’

“‘Yeah, but how can you translate something if you don't understand it?’

“‘A common cry, outside the field. People simply can't accept that patterns carry their own intelligence, quite apart from the semantic content that clings to their surfaces; if you manipulate the topology correctly, that content just comes along for the ride.

“‘You ever hear of the Chinese Room?’ I asked.

“‘She shook her head. ‘Only vaguely. Really old, right?’

“‘Hundred years at least. It's a fallacy really, it's an argument that supposedly puts the lie to Turing tests. You stick some guy in a closed room. Sheets with strange squiggles come in through a slot in the wall. He's got access to this huge database of squiggles just like it, and a bunch of rules to tell him how to put those squiggles together.’

“‘Grammar,’ Chelsea said. ‘Syntax.’

“I nodded. ‘The point is, though, he doesn't have any idea what the squiggles *are*, or what information they might contain. He only knows that when he encounters squiggle *delta*, say, he's supposed to extract the fifth and sixth squiggles from file *theta* and put them together with another squiggle from *gamma*. So he builds this response string, puts it on the sheet, slides it back out the slot and takes a nap until the next iteration. Repeat until the remains of the horse are well and thoroughly beaten.’

“‘So he's carrying on a conversation,’ Chelsea said. ‘In Chinese, I assume, or they would have called it the Spanish Inquisition.’

“‘Exactly. Point being you can use basic pattern-matching algorithms to participate in a conversation *without having any idea what you're saying*. Depending on how good your rules are, you can pass a Turing test. You can be a wit and raconteur in a language you don't even speak.’

“‘That's Synthesis?’ [p. 112-116]

I've included this long quote for two reasons. One is to fill up space in **CyberCozen**. The other is to include something that I have previously read about (the Chinese room). Much of what is in this book is simply beyond my comprehension. And I barely understand, if at all, the explanations in this book.

Now comes the next surprise. *Theseus* sends Jack down to *Rorschach*:

Rorschach responds: “‘*Rorschach* to *Theseus*. Please respond. Your current heading is unacceptable, repeat, your current heading is *unacceptable*. *Strongly* advise you to change course.’”

...

“‘Oh, right,’ *Rorschach* said suddenly. ‘We get it *now*. You don't think there's anyone here, do you? You've got some high-priced consultant telling you there's nothing to worry about.’

“Jack was deep in the forest. We'd lost most of the tactical overlays to reduced baud. In dim visible light *Rorschach's* great ridged spines, each the size of a skyscraper, hashed a nightmare view on all sides. The feed stuttered as Bates struggled to keep the beam aligned. ConSensus painted walls and airspace with arcane telemetry. I had no idea what any of it meant.

“‘You think we're nothing but a *Chinese Room*,’ *Rorschach* sneered.

“Jack stumbled toward collision, grasping for something to hang on to.

“‘Your mistake, *Theseus*.’

“It hit something. It stuck.

“And suddenly *Rorschach* snapped into view -- no refractory composites, no profiles or simulations in false color. There it was at last, naked even to Human eyes.

“Imagine a crown of thorns, twisted, dark and unreflective, grown too thickly tangled to ever rest on any Human head. Put it in orbit around a failed star whose own reflected half -light does little more than throw its satellites into silhouette. Occasional bloody highlights glinted like dim embers from its twists and crannies; they only emphasized the darkness everywhere else.” [p. 122]

And how about a little on vampires, and war:

“Imagine you are a prisoner of war.

“You've got to admit you saw it coming. You've been crashing tech and seeding biosols for a solid eighteen months; that's a good run by anyone's standards. Realist saboteurs do not, as a rule, enjoy long careers. Everyone gets caught eventually.

“It wasn't always thus. There was a day you might have even hoped for a peaceful retirement. But then they brought the vampires back from the Pleistocene and Great Grieving Ganga did *that* ever turn the balance of power upside down. Those fuckers are always ten steps ahead. It only makes sense; after all, hunting people is what bloodsuckers evolved to *do*.

“There's this line from an early pop-dyn textbook, really old, maybe even TwenCen. It's something of a mantra – maybe *prayer* would be a better word -- among those in your profession. *Predators run for their dinner*; it goes. *Prey run for their lives*. The moral is supposed to be that on average, the hunted escape the hunters because they're more motivated.

“Maybe that was true when it all just came down to who ran faster. Doesn't seem to hold when the strategy involves tactical foresight and double-reverse mind fucks, though. The vampires win every time.” [p.182]

I've only brought here things I think I understand, the book is filled with pages of stuff that don't make sense to me. I gave up reading it before getting to the end. Too hard for me.

For Comments: 13 Pinsker St., Rehovot 76308. Email: asheer@netvision.net.il. Tel: Aharon Sheer 08-947-1225

Editor: Aharon Sheer. Logo by: Miriam Ben-Loulu

For free email delivery write to asheer@netvision.net.il (PDF format).

rightCopy © 2013

כל הזכויות שמורות למחברים וליוצרים, כפי שצוינו. All rights reserved specified authors and artis