



### The Israeli Society for Science Fiction and Fantasy

#### כנס מאורות 2013

האם גם אתם שייכים למיעוט האנשים בעולם המתגורר בערים? סליחה, אתם כבר לא מיעוט, אבל עד לפני פחות מעשר שנים, רוב בני האדם בעולם לא התגוררו בערים. ובכל זאת, אנו מספרים סיפורים על ערים מאז ומעולם.

המדע הבדיוני תמיד חלם על ערים – ערים חדשות ועתיקות, ערים של בני אדם וחיזורים, ערים על עולמות אחרים וערים של תרבויות אחרות. כנס "מאורות", אשר נערך זו השנה החמישית בשיתוף עם הרשות לקהילה ולנוער, בחסותה של קרן ירושלים, יוקדש השנה לנושא "עיר". הצטרפו אלינו **ביום חמישי, 5 בדצמבר**, נר תשיעי של חנוכה, ליום שכולו ערים במדע הבדיוני ובמדע. הכנס ייערך במתחם נוער שוחר מדע בקמפוס אדמונד י' ספרא (גבעת רם) של האוניברסיטה העברית בירושלים. לפרטים נוספים ניתן לבקר [באתר הכנס](#).

**מועדון הקריאה של חודש נובמבר יעסוק בספרה של דיאנה ווין ג'ונס "המהלכים בקצוות".** המועדון יתקיים במוצאי שבת, 23.11.13, בשעה 19:30, ב"קפה גרג", ויצמן 2, ת"א, בהנחיית איילת ירושלמי. לצורך היערכות למספר המשתתפים, יש להירשם מראש דרך הדוא"ל של מרכזת הפרויקט, [דפנה קירש](#). כמו כן רצוי להביא למפגש עותק של הספר. כניסה חופשית ואינה כרוכה בתשלום, בחברות באגודה, או בהגעה למפגשים נוספים. מועדון חודש דצמבר יעסוק בזוכה פרס גפן "מגדל הזכוכית", מאת רוברט סילברברג. לקבלת עדכונים שוטפים על מפגשי מועדון הקריאה ברחבי הארץ ניתן להצטרף לרשימת התפוצה או ל[דף האגודה בפייסבוק](#).

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

### Book Review by Aharon Sheer

#### *Old Man's War* by John Scalzi (2005), 351 pages

This is one of the best sf novels I've read in a long time. Although it's a twenty-first century novel, it happily lacks the things which distressed me in the last two 21<sup>st</sup> century novels I read and reviewed here in the last months. I'm referring to *Accelerando* by Charles Stross, which I reviewed in September 2013, and *Blindsight* by Peter Watts, which I reviewed in July 2013.

John Scalzi is a new writer, although he was born in 1969, over 40 years ago. It seems, I suppose, that the really young guys are writing fantasy. It takes maturity to write sf these days.

Scalzi says that he learned to write sf by reading Heinlein novels. Indeed he has Heinlein's sense of humor, and the feeling that this is actually a possible future. The characters are real people, and you care about them. This novel is a war story, and reminds one slightly of Heinlein's *Starship Troopers*. In both novels the warriors have superpowers. In Heinlein's novel they are from mechanical devices; in Scalzi's novel the powers are from genetic engineering.

It's cheerful and pleasant novel to read. This despite the fact that as a war novel it has a lot of blood and gore, and

tragic endings for many of the characters. No matter, it was enjoyable for me to read. I certainly plan on reading more of his novels.

In this future, when a person reaches the age of 75, they are allowed to enlist in the Colonial Defense Force (CDF). It seems that Earth has developed (at last!) faster than light travel and has gone out to see the other stars. And then they discover that there are lots of aliens and many of them hostile. If Earth wants to survive in this nasty interstellar future, it must colonize new planets all the time, and be prepared to defend those colonies. Otherwise those nasty aliens might decide to colonize the Earth, with unpleasant consequences for human beings. It might leave the universe with no remaining human beings.

The hero is John Perry, and he narrates the novel. When he goes in to enlist (on his 75<sup>th</sup> birthday), he has a little chat with the recruiter:

“You’re going to join an organization you’ve never met. Doesn’t that bother you?”

“No’, I admitted. ‘I’m old, my wife is dead and there’s not much reason to stay here anymore. Are you going to join when the time comes?’

“She shrugged. ‘I don’t mind getting old.’

“I didn’t mind getting old when I was young, either,’ I said. ‘It’s the being old now that’s getting to me.’” [p. 17]

So off John Perry goes, getting on a starship, the *Henry Hudson*, that will take him and his fellow volunteers to their basic training. As they walk through the starship:

“Jesse tugged on my sleeve and pointed to our right.

“In a small mess area, I caught a glimpse of something tentacled and blue, holding a martini. I alerted Harry; he was so intrigued

that he went back and looked, much to the consternation of the trailing apparatchik. She shooed Harry back into the herd with a sour look on her face. Harry, on the other hand, was grinning like a fool. ‘A Gehaar,’ he said. ‘It was eating a buffalo wing when I looked in. Disgusting.’ Then he giggled. The Gehaar were one of the first intelligent aliens humans encountered, in the days before the Colonial Union established its monopoly on space travel. Nice enough people, but they ate by injecting their food with acid from dozens of thin head tentacles and then noisily slurping the resulting goop into an orifice. Messy.

“Harry didn’t care. He’d spotted his first live alien.” [p. 39]

One of the first things done to the elderly recruits is to remake their bodies. When they wake up in their new 20 year old bodies, they get a description of what has been done. I found this fascinating:

“NOT JUST A NEW BODY --  
A BETTER BODY

“You’ve surely noticed the green skin tone of your new body. This isn’t merely cosmetic. Your new skin (KloraDerm™) incorporates chlorophyll to provide your body with an extra source of energy and to optimize your body’s use of both oxygen and carbon dioxide. The result: You’ll feel fresher, longer -- and better able to perform your duties as a CDF serviceperson! This is only the beginning of the improvements you’ll find in your body. Here are some others:

|| Your blood tissue has been replaced by SmartBlood™ – a revolutionary system that increases oxygen-carrying capacity fourfold while it guards your body against

disease, toxins, and death from blood tissue loss!

|| Our patented CatsEye™ technology gives you sight you have to see to believe! Increased rod and cone counts give you better imaging resolution than can be achieved in most naturally evolved systems, while specially designed light amplifiers allow you to see clearly in extreme low-light situations.

|| Our UncommonSense™ suite of sense enhancements allow you to touch, smell, hear and taste like you never have before, as our expanded nerve placement and optimized connections expand your perceptual ranges in all sense categories. You'll feel the difference from the first day!

|| How strong do you want to be? With HardArm™ technologies that boost natural muscle strength and reaction time, you'll be stronger and faster than you ever dreamed possible -- so strong and fast, in fact, that by law Colonial Genetics can't sell this technology on the consumer market. That's a real 'leg up' for you recruits!

|| Never be unconnected again! You'll never lose your BrainPal™ computer because it resides in your own brain. Our proprietary Assistive Adaptive Interface works with you so you can access your BrainPal™ your way. Your BrainPal™ also serves to coordinate nonorganic technologies in your new body, such as SmartBlood™. CDF service people swear by this amazing piece of technology -- and so will you." [p. 92-93]

There are more body improvements, but read it for yourself.

Before they go off to war, the new friends become close to each other:

“‘Choosing friends’ was something I did a lot of.

“All of the Old Farts knew that our group was temporary at best; we were simply seven people thrown together at random, in a situation that had no hope for permanence. But we became friends, and close friends at that in the short period of time we had together. It's no exaggeration to say that I became as close to Thomas, Susan, Alan, Harry, Jesse and Maggie as I had to anyone in the last half of my ‘normal’ life. We became a band, and a family, down to the petty digs and squabbles. We gave one another someone to care about, which was something we needed in a universe that didn't know or cared that we existed.

“We bonded. And we did it even before we were biologically prodded to do so by the colonies' scientists. And as the *Henry Hudson* drew closer to our final destination, I knew I was going to miss them.” [p. 118]

I hope I've given you a taste of this wonderful novel. Highly recommended. And this is just Scalzi's first novel. There are lots more.

## 'The end of civilization' as we know it The Third Review by Leybl Botwinik

### 3- **Dark is the Sun** by Philip Jose Farmer

Book 1 of 1 (standalone)  
Panther SF books / Granada publishing 1981  
400 pages

Cover: Shows five figures standing in what looks like a jungle: a scantily clad woman and man, each armed with knives, club or sword. Slightly behind the woman but up against the back of her legs, a big cat (like a cheetah). Behind the man, a giant plant-man pointing at something. And, apparently leading the way, a large red foxlike creature.

About the Author: Needless to say, Farmer is one of the best known and highly awarded SF writers. He passed away a few years ago, in 2009, at the age of 91.

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We find ourselves in a far, far future world. So far ahead in time, that we have just about reached the end of life on Earth. As the heroes of the story later discover, the Sun has just about burnt itself out, and will turn dark, marking the end of life on Earth. The 'civilization' of the period consists of various tribes living under primitive conditions. Our hero, Deyv, is in search of someone who has stolen his 'Soul Egg' – a talisman that is considered to incorporate a person's soul.

As the story unfolds – as Deyv tries to track down the thief and retrieve his Soul Egg -- he meets up with an assortment of other intelligent creatures – including a young woman from another tribe whom Deyv originally accuses of being the thief, but whose own Soul Egg had also been taken. The story continues with the strange group as it tries to catch up with the thief. At one

point in the story, they discover that there is an imminent end to life, but that there is a way to save themselves.

I won't go on with more on the story, because I was very disappointed by the book. Farmer has concocted an incredibly different future world, with very few reference points I could relate to. That is not to say that the storyline is not plausible, it's just that while reading the book, it felt that the writer was 'high' on something, and was describing scenes and episodes as if still under the influence of hard drugs, or hard drink. After less than half way into the book, I abandoned reading it, and just flipped through the book, trying to find a place I could relate to, in order to continue reading normally.

Nothing attracted my attention. In fact, there were continual 'annoyances' that disrupted my appreciation of the book. One of these was the name of the hero. Every time it came up, I kept saying to myself "Davey" (as if it was written "Devy"), when in fact, the name "Deyv" was – as far as I can tell – meant to be read as "Dave". Very disconcerting.

Even the plant creature, in my opinion, was devoid of anything characteristic. A talking tossed salad would have been more interesting.

As I said, I was totally disappointed by Farmer, who is otherwise one of my favorite authors, and I have always enjoyed his books.

**Next Month: The Fourth article in this series by Leybl Botwinik**

## Quote of the Month

The two science quotes below are from the magazine *Science*, Editors' Choice: Highlights of the recent literature

### Going Backwards by Brad Wible

For decades, many U.S. communities have bused students to schools beyond their local neighborhood, a result of Supreme Court decisions aimed at reducing racial segregation. Recent legal challenges have led to the elimination of busing in many areas, with students' schools again determined by the neighborhoods in which they live. In Charlotte-Mecklenburg, North Carolina, busing was eliminated, but school-assignment boundaries were also redrawn, changing which neighborhoods sent students to these schools. Billings *et al.* took advantage of this natural experiment to study educational and social outcomes. They tracked over 40,000 students, roughly half of whom changed schools as a result of remapping. The black-white student achievement gap widened, and both black and white students scored lower on exams after assignment to new schools with larger proportions of minority students. White students were less likely to graduate high school or attend a 4-year college when assigned to schools with more minority students. Finally, crime rates among minority males increased. Allocating more resources to high-minority schools may have offset some of the negative academic outcomes at earlier ages, suggesting policy remedies to counter negative peer effects in school.

Summary of *Quarterly Journal of Economics*. **129**, 10.1093/qje/qjt026 (2013).

### Pay Attention by Sacha Vignieri

Males of many species display elaborate sexually selected traits, with the peacock's train as a classic case. We might presume that peahens would perceive a trait as we would, but the intricacy of the train suggests that its appeal could be considerably more complicated than it might seem at a glance. Yorzinski *et al.* take advantage of the development of gaze-tracking technology to look at the peacock train from the vantage point of the hen. Specifically, they trained females to wear a gaze-tracking device and then let them interact with males. They found that during the majority of the time the females were with the males, they weren't even looking at them, although males could attract their attention by shaking their wings. Further, when they did pay attention to the males, they looked not at the showy top of the fan, but at the feathers at the bottom and at the male's feet and legs. Though these results might at first suggest that the fan is perhaps a byproduct of selection for the lower feathers, subsequent experiments showed that the tops of the fans were in fact useful for attracting females at long distances. Overall, these results show that multicomponent male displays are the cumulative result of an attraction dance, and they suggest that to understand the evolution of such traits, we should study them through the eyes of the intended target.

Summary of *Journal of Experimental Biology* **216**, 3035 (2013).

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