



### The Israeli Society for Science Fiction and Fantasy

מועדון הקריאה של חודש אפריל יעסוק בספרו של גרג איגן "ההסגר".  
 המפגש יתקיים ביום חמישי, 24 באפריל, בשעה 19:30 ב"קפה גרג", ויצמן 2, ת"א. מנחה: איילת גרשוביץ.  
 לצורך היערכות למספר המשתתפים, יש להירשם מראש דרך הדוא"ל של רכות הפרויקט – [דפנה קירש](#).  
 רצוי להביא למפגש עותק של הספר. הכניסה חופשית ואינה כרוכה בתשלום, בחברות באגודה, או בהגעה למפגשים נוספים.

מועדון חודש מאי יעסוק בספרו של ניל גיימן "אבק כוכבים".  
 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>

### *Eifelheim* by Michael Flynn (2006), 481 pages

Michael Flynn (b. 1947) is an American statistician and sf author. As I've noted several times, today the sf authors are almost all middle-aged or elderly. The young people are writing fantasy. This was originally published as a novella in 1986 and nominated for Best Novella Hugo award in 1987. This full 2006 novel was a nominee for a Hugo award in 2007.

This is a wonderful novel. It has a fascinating Middle Ages hero, Pastor Dietrich, an intelligent, knowledgeable village priest, who has travelled and learned widely, but then settled in the small isolated village of Eifelheim. In occasional alternating sections, we have a contemporary historian, Tom Schwoerin, a cliologist, that is, a mathematical historian.

So we are introduced to daily life in Middle Ages Germany (the Rhineland), during the time that the Black Death was decimating Europe (but not Eifelheim). 1348. But the main theme is that aliens have landed near Eifelheim. Their ship crashed, their captain died in the crash,

and they are desperate to repair the damage and go home. Pastor Dietrich meets them and carries on conversations with them using a translation device the aliens have which can learn from practical examples, and from conversations, how to talk in German. The fascinating part is how the aliens try to explain their origins and philosophy to someone who knows well what Middle Ages and ancient Greek philosophers say about the world. How do the aliens explain that they are from a planet circling another star when for Dietrich the stars are fixed in a firmament surrounding the Earth? The aliens try to explain themselves to Dietrich, as best they can. This is indeed interesting!

And Dietrich proposes that the town's blacksmiths and carriage makers will help them to get home.

What attracts contemporary historian Tom to study this town is that Eifelheim just disappeared. According to Tom, when a village is abandoned, say by war, or famine, later on it is

usually resettled. A village is built where topography, water supplies, agriculture, etc., are suitable. Later people will settle in the same area for the same reasons. Look at Beer Sheva in Israel for a modern example.

So why did no one resettle Eifelheim? A mystery for Tom to study, and for the reader to enjoy. Interesting characters that we care about, and a fascinating story.

We learn that in the Middle Ages important things have been found which they do speculate on. Are there giants? A visitor says:

"... I met a pack peddler from Vienna once, and he told me that when they were erecting the cathedral there, the builders found huge bones buried in the earth. So the giants were real - *and their bones were made of stone*. They named the portal the Giants' Gate because of it. They couldn't have done that if they had been only fancies."

"The priest scratched his head. "Albrecht the Great described such bones. He thought with Avicenna that they had been turned to stone by some mineral process. But they may be the bones of some great animal lost in the Flood and not of giant men." [p. 102]

Dietrich has been injured. A visitor from Savoy (in France) treats his wound:

"Dietrich said, .... "Does Salerno then teach chirurgery?"

"The Savoyard laughed. "Holy blue! Mending wounds is an art, not a *schola*. Well, at Bologna is a *schola* founded of Henry de Lucca. But chirurgery is for clever hands -" He wiggled his fingers. "- not clever minds."

"Ja, the name 'chirurgion' is Greek for 'hand-labor.' "

"Oho, I see you a scholar -"

"I have read Galen." Dietrich ventured, "but that was many -"

"The Savoyard spat on the ground. "Galen! At Bologna, de Lucca, he cut open the cadavers and see that Galen

knows shit. Galen cut up only pigs, and men are not-a pigs!

I myself was apprentice when first public dissection - oh, thirty year since, I think - my master and I, we make-a the cuts while important *dottore*, he describe what he see for the students. Hah! We need no *physician* to tell us what we see with our eyes. Holy blue! You have the head wound! May I see her? Ah, she is deep but.... Did you clean it with the vino as de Lucca and Henri de Mondeville command? No?" He dabbed at the cut with a rag moistened in wine, "Wine that has turned is best. Now, I dry the cut and bring-a the edges together as the Lombards do. *La Natura*, she make a viscous fluid to bind-a the edges without the needlework. I will wrap-a the wound with hemp, to draw off the heat. ..." [p. 266]

One example of Dietrich talking about science to a contemporary occurs when William of Ockham comes to the village to visit Dietrich. Dietrich and Ockham had studied together in Paris. Ockham is famous for Ockham's razor which "states that among competing hypotheses, the one with the fewest assumptions should be selected. Other, more complicated solutions may ultimately prove correct, but—in the absence of certainty—the fewer assumptions that are made, the better."

Dietrich tries to persuade Ockham that the Earth turns under the sun rather than the Sun moving around the Earth :

"Ockham pushed himself to his feet. "Come, let us proof your proposition with an experience. The world turns, you said."

"I did not say that it *did* turn; only that, *loquendo naturale*, it *might*. The motion of the heavens would be the same in either case."

"Then why seek a second explanation? Of what use would it be, even were it true?"

"Astronomy would be simplified. So, applying your own principle of the least hypothesis -"

Ockham laughed. "Ah. Argument by flattery! A more potent argument by far. But I never intended entities in nature. God cannot be bound by simplicity and may choose to make some things simple and others complex. My razor, applies only to the workings of the mind." He was already striding toward the door and Dietrich scurried to catch up.

"Outside, Ockham studied the indigo sky. "Which way is east? Very well. Let us apply experience. Now, if I move my hand rapidly, thus, I feel the air pushing against it. So, if we are moving toward the east, I should feel an east wind on my face, and I -" He closed his eyes, and spread his arms. "- feel no wind."...

Ockham turned toward the Lesser Wood. "Now, if I face north ..." He shrugged. "I feel no change in the wind whichever direction I face." He paused expectantly.

"One must arrange the experience," Dietrich insisted, "so that all matters affecting the conclusion are accounted for, which Bacon called *experientia perfectum*."

Ockham spread his hands. "Ah, so the common senses are insufficient for this special sort of experience." Grinning as if he had triumphed in a quodlibet, he returned to the parsonage, Dietrich again in his wake....

Dietrich pressed the argument. "Buridan considered the objections to a turning earth in his twenty-second Question on the heavens, and found a response for each, save one. If the entire world moves, including earth, water, air, and fire, we would no more feel a resisting wind than a boat drifting with

the current feels the motion of the river. The one compelling objection was that an arrow loosed straight up does not fall west of the archer, which it would if the earth were turning underneath it, for an arrow moves so swiftly that it cuts *through* the air and thus would not be carried along by it."

"And this Oresme has resolved the objection?"

"Doch. Consider the arrow at rest. It does not move. Therefore, it begins already with the motion of the earth and, when loosed, possesses two motions: a rectilinear motion up and down, and a circular motion toward the east. Master Buridan wrote that a body impressed with motion, will continue in its motion until the impetus is dissipated by the body's gravity or other resisting forces."

Ockham shook his head. "First the earth moves, then the people move with it to explain why they do not constantly stumble; then the air must move with it to answer a second objection; then the arrow, to answer another; and so further. Dietl, the simplest explanation for why the stars and the sun appear to circle the earth is that they do circle the earth. And the reason why we feel no motion in the earth is that the earth does not move. Ah, ... why waste your powers on such trivia!" [p. 326-329]

So we see that in the Middle Ages people were already speculating on the idea that the Earth turns, and not the Sun.

We think of the Middle Ages as the Dark Ages, but we see from a priest like Dietrich that much more was known then than we usually think.

A fascinating book. The aliens are fascinating too, but I liked the descriptions of Middle Ages science and village life best.

## Should physical punishment for children always be prohibited (as decided by Israeli Supreme Court)?

In 2000, the court was ruling on the appeal of a mother who was convicted of brutal treatment and assault of a minor for hitting and slapping her children and, in two specific cases, hitting her daughter with a vacuum cleaner and punching her son in the face, breaking his tooth.

The lower court convicted the woman, Nathalie Baku, and sentenced her to a one-year suspended sentence and supervision by a probation officer for a year and a half. Baku appealed against her conviction and sentence to the Supreme Court. Two of the three justices on the panel, Supreme Court President Aharon Barak and Dorit Beinisch, rejected the appeal. In a minority decision, Justice Izhak Englard ruled that Baku had not used brutality against her children.

Beinisch wrote that "corporal punishment is not effective from an educational point of view and causes serious harm to the child."

So the justices cannot distinguish between mild spanking (which was legal in homes in Israel until the Supreme Court decision) and violent physical abuse.

### **BUT, here's what the science says:**

"... this meta-analysis failed to detect negative side effects unique to physical punishment. This finding is consistent with three reviews that concluded that the negative side effects of punishment are minor and can easily be avoided by making the punishment contingencies clear and by reinforcing appropriate behavior. Indeed, two reviews concluded that positive side effects of punishment were more common than negative side effects. One review considered physical aggression to be an established negative side effect of physical punishment. On that point, this meta-analysis found no evidence that physical punishment was more strongly associated with physical aggression than other disciplinary tactics."

*Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review, Vol. 8, No. 1:1-37, March 2005*

### **Limerick by Miriam Ben-Lulu (February 1996)**

Alone and shunned by his peers,  
The sorcerer spent his last years  
In spelling and making,  
And then decorating,  
Silk purses from tiny sow's ears.

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