



Science-Fiction Fanzine

Vol. XXVI, No. 2; February, 2014

### The Israeli Society for Science Fiction and Fantasy

**מועדון הקריאה של חודש פברואר יעסוק בזוכה פרס גפן "שדים ברחוב אגריפס", מאת חגי דגן (זמורה ביתן, 2012).**

המועדון יתקיים ביום ראשון, 23 בפברואר, בשעה 19:30 ב"קפה גרג", ויצמן 2, ת"א. מנחה: [ליאת שחר-קשתן](#).

החודש יתקיים מועדון קריאה גם בירושלים. המועדון יתקיים ביום חמישי, 27 בפברואר, בשעה 20:00 בבית הקפה "קופי בין", רח' יפו 34, ירושלים. מנחה: [יהושע ברנהרט](#).

לצורך היערכות למספר המשתתפים, יש להירשם מראש דרך הדוא"ל של המנחה. רצוי להביא למפגש עותק של הספר.

הכניסה חופשית ואינה כרוכה בתשלום, בחברות באגודה או בהגעה למפגשים נוספים.

**מועדון חודש מרס יעסוק באסופת הסיפורים "היה יהיה 4", שנתון אגודה ישראלית למדע בדיוני ולפנטסיה.**

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

### Letter to the Editor

With respect to your review of *Congo* by Michael Crichton in the January 2014 *CyberCozen*: Nice review - the Gorilla scenes sound to be quite fascinating. Keep up the good work.

Leybl Botwinik

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### 'The end of civilization' as we know it

### The Fourth and Last Article in this series by Leybl Botwinik

### 4- Melvaig's vs. Spiders' vs. Dark Sun Worlds

So, what does the future hold for us: invasion from space/time/mutated creatures, worldwide cataclysmic upheaval (war, disease, or natural disaster), or just the petering off of life at the end of time...? I've read stories or seen movies of (some examples given in parenthesis – obviously not all-encompassing):

1. Life after atomic war (*A Canticle for Leibowitz*, *Mad Max*-movie, *The Postman*)
2. Life after a global pandemic killing off most humans (*My Name is Legend*, zombies)
3. Alien invasions from outer space (*War of the Worlds*, *Tripods* trilogy, V- TV series)
4. Creature invasions from other dimensions (*The Mist*-movie)
5. Robot/computer takeover (*Forbin Project*-movie, *Terminator*-movie)
6. Far, far future (H.G. Wells' *Time Machine*)
7. ... even dragons destroying all modern civilization (*Reign of Fire* - movie)

8. ... even apes taking over the world (*Planet of the Apes*)
9. ... or the USA being taken over by the Soviets (*Amerika*-TV series)
10. Etc. (I'm sure there are more variations on the theme).

Interestingly enough, most stories have us reverting to some sort of primitive or backwoods existence barely being able to survive (maybe with a few reminders/remnants of some modern tools, signs of civilization, etc.). Those few where we more or less stay 'modern' usually deal with robots/computers taking over. Even technologically advanced aliens tend to prefer keeping us enslaved and living a technologically-deprived life (e.g. *Tripods* trilogy).

Every time I occasion on stories depicting the extreme and massive change to life and the social order around the globe or possibly only in one (large) area, I ask myself the following:

- Could this happen (does it sound plausible)?
- How would I behave in a similar situation?
- Is there hope for the future under the given circumstances?

Of the three books reviewed, the worlds of *Melvaig*, the *Spiders*, far future *Dark Sun* show how fragile (or transient) our civilization really is, and how easily it can be destroyed, taken over, or even forgotten in time. Moreover, how difficult it would be for most of today's citizens of the modern 'Western World' to survive without simple necessities we take for granted such as running water, supermarkets, medical assistance, etc. One might argue, that modern society today is very dependent on so many factors, that if just one major or several minor 'incidents' happen that will deprive us of what we are now used to, we would be totally 'lost'. Cases in point are mobile phones, GPS, Internet. How did we ever exist 10-15 years ago without them?

To get back to the books: A sociologist or anthropologist would most likely be happy with the depictions of life and society in the *Spider World* novel. The other two novels – although taking the time to explain how people interact, what is key in what society, etc. – take mostly place during a trek (or quest), and only briefly meet up with other societies and interact with them. Most of what we learn about life in those days (or 'history') is from conversations or 'flashes'. In *Spider World*, on the other hand, we are privy to several modes of existence – which our hero, Niall actually participates in:

1) His original home, hidden and secreted far distant from others like him, living with only his immediate family. Because of the danger of the Spiders discovering them, there are very few organized societies of humans beyond the Spider's reach, so every family survives on its own.

2) Niall, after surviving the attack that destroys his family, hooks up with one of the few surviving hidden societies of humans outside of Spider control. He stays with them for a while, until they too are discovered and are captured by the Spiders.

3) The City where the Spider Lord lives, and where all the captured humans are brought to be either enslaved or used as Spider food.

In the three books, all of the characters are discovering new things about life beyond their small and limited world/society. Each of them ends up leaving their birth place and wandering

out, beyond the limits of where they have ever been.

Of the three books, the most mature of the heroes is Melvaig – a family man and a hunter. Because of that maturity, one has a good solid read, but also very little development of his character. Niall, on the other hand, is the youngest, and in his wanderings to seek out the Spiders and try to defeat them, he is introduced to new sights as well as emotions – this makes the best reading, since the character is always tested, often wanting, but still determined to overcome his weaknesses (or lack of knowledge). Deyv is the least intelligent of the three, I would say, and the least developed. Since I didn't read the book in its entirety, I can't make a full analysis of his character, but he seems the most naïve of the three heroes.

All in all, reading about life after some major turning point – where to survive required putting one's skills and

wits to the ultimate test – has always been fun for me. My earliest novels of the 'survivalist' genre include the classics such as: *Robinson Crusoe*, *Swiss Family Robinson*, and Jules Verne's *The Mysterious Island*, and later such SciFi classics as: *Tunnel in the Sky*, *Alas Babylon*, and others.

Reading about such stress-filled situations is one thing, but knowing that today, there are hundreds of millions of people barely eking out a living, in war-torn or economically depressed countries, makes one re-think one's own situation. Thank God, I am where I am, and need only read about surviving cataclysmic circumstances. I believe, though, that this reading makes me all the stronger – that if faced with a situation beyond the norm, some of the 'theory' that I've picked up in my armchair travels may someday be of use... and let's hope that day never need arrive...

### Quote of the Month:

“The first step in reverse-engineering the emotions is try to imagine what a mind would be like without them. Supposedly Mr. Spock, the Vulcan mastermind, didn't have emotions (except for occasional intrusions from his human side and a seven-year itch that drove him back to Vulcan to spawn). But Spock's emotionlessness really just amounted to his being in control, not losing his head, coolly voicing unpleasant truths, and so on. He must have been driven by some motives or goals. Something must have kept Spock from spending his days calculating pi to a quadrillion digits or memorizing the Manhattan telephone directory. Something must have impelled him to explore strange new worlds, to seek out new civilizations, and to boldly go where no man had gone before. Presumably it was intellectual curiosity, a drive to set and solve problems, and solidarity with allies -- emotions all. And what would Spock have done when faced with a predator or an invading Klingon? Do a headstand? Prove the four-color map theorem? Presumably a part of his brain quickly mobilized his faculties to scope out how to flee and to take steps to avoid the vulnerable predicament in the future. That is, he had fear. Spock may not have been impulsive or demonstrative, but he must have had drives that impelled him to deploy his intellect in pursuit of certain goals rather than others.”

From *How the Mind Works* by Steven Pinker, 1997, p. 372

### Short Book Review by Aharon Sheer

***Beyond This Horizon* by Robert Heinlein (1948), 158 pages.**

This little-known book by Heinlein has a couple of interesting ideas. It seems to take about a hundred years

from now, toward the end of the twenty-first century.

One idea is to improve the human race by selecting for the best genes. Heinlein tells the reader that this only became possible when microscopes were developed that were able to see individual genes. People are not forced to use the geneticist's services, but most do. These superior human beings never have tooth decay. They never get colds or the flu. They are stronger, faster, and smarter than humans of today.

Those people who have not been genetically developed are called "control naturals". Still the control naturals have the benefits of the advancement of medicine. If they take their medication regularly, they will never have colds – but if they forget, they will. One would think that a genetically superior person would only have children with another such. But in fact, love conquers all. The control naturals not only mate with other control naturals (obviously), they also mate with genetically superior people too.

The hero of this book is a "star line", one who is vastly better than most others. But he has no interest in having children. However his geneticist is not satisfied with that. His geneticist wants him to carry his line on. The geneticist has a huge database of information about the genetic characteristics of vast numbers of people. He goes over the files and finds the ideal woman for our hero. A little trickery – they meet and fall in love – and we even have a description of the development of these superior children

The second major idea in this book is seen in the fact that people are extremely polite to one another. Men are very careful not to offend other men. There is a reason. Almost all men go armed with weapons. "An armed society is a polite society," says Heinlein.

Mostly they use "beam weapons" (presumably laser weapons, although the laser had not yet been invented in 1948; they were invented in 1960). (Also the hero uses an ordinary 45 caliber pistol, a rare weapon in those future days.) A quarrel between two armed men may end with the faster one killing the slower one. Or perhaps the faster one just wounds the other, so he cannot fire back. In a situation where any man may shoot or kill another man, without penalty, people avoid quarrels. No wonder men are so polite to other men! Control naturals would always lose in such a conflict, so they wear a "brassard": a badge worn round the upper arm. A man wearing a brassard will not get shot – but he must always give in to the armed man. Maybe he came first, but if the armed man insists on going first, the man with the brassard must always give in. Of course some men may voluntarily wear a brassard, even if they do not have to. It's a personality choice.

Women, however, rarely go armed (although the hero's perfect match does!). In Heinlein's worlds women see themselves as helpmeets for their men. They do not battle them; they flatter them and serve them. Women know their place! Heinlein presents one exception: an elderly and highly respected woman who is a consultant who gives advice to the government. But she is rude! Discourteous. Our hero says that if she were a man, he would have shot her! But of course he cannot do that. She is a woman.

There is a lot of other silly stuff going on. But the two major ideas certainly present Heinlein's ideas of a possible future ideal world. Yes, he really thought that that is how the future *should* look.

**POEM: *Point of View* by Miriam Ben-Lulu (from April 1996)**

If I were looking down like G-d ...  
or Creatures from another sun ...  
I wonder what my thoughts would be  
on humankind's idea of fun.

I wonder if the wars make sense  
to Beings far above,  
Or do They find it hard to grasp  
our need for human love?

But then - what's "up" and what is "down"?  
Perhaps it's us, not Them  
That looking down, will find it hard  
to understand Its whim.

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