

Science-Fiction Fanzine

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Special message to our readership

Dear readers,

Due to the current illness afflicting our founding Editor-in-Chief, Aharon Sheer, I have been asked to **temporarily** take over the preparation and publishing of upcoming CYBERCOZEN issues. This July issue is, consequently, late and only appearing this last week of July 2014. We hope that the upcoming issues will be published before the 15th of each month, and optimally, the first week of each month.

I would like to take this opportunity to invite you to contribute Fantasy/SF related book and or movie reviews, articles on upcoming technologies, commentary, etc...

Feel free to send me your feedback by e-mail or contact me by phone:

E-mail: leybl_botwinik@yahoo.com. Tel: Leybl_botwinik 054-537-7729

Wishing Aharon a speedy recovery,

Leybl Botwinik, assistant editor

The Israeli Society for Science Fiction and Fantasy

מועדון הקריאה

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>

This month, we're continuing our series of articles about Zombies with the promised book review!

Enjoy!

Leybl Botwinik

UNDEAD Reborn: About Zombies – PART II

by **Leybl Botwinik**

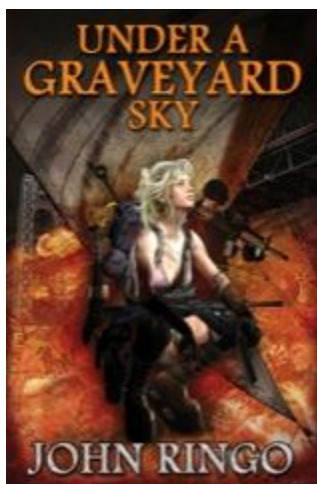
BOOK REVIEW: *Under a Graveyard Sky* by John Ringo

Reviewed by Leybl Botwinik

Book 1 (of 3 books – only 2 published so far) in the “*Black Tide Rising*” series / 367 pages
Baen Publishing Enterprises 2013

Cover: Shows heavily armed girl and man, with a background that looks like a burning bridge in one corner and burning bodies around them. She is crouching on platform shoes with rifle across her lap; he is standing and shooting downwards into the burning bodies.

About the Author: John Ringo has written numerous SF novels and short stories (see his website at: <http://www.johnringo.net/>) that are available via BAEN books (see at: http://www.baen.com/author_catalog.asp?author=jringo). Some of his works have been in collaboration with other SF writers. His website "About" page touts "New York Times bestselling author of science fiction and thriller novels with over one million novels in print" – which beggars the question of who his website editor/proofreader is (?A **million** novels?)



Steven John Smith, a high school history teacher for the last 10 years, receives a coded SMS from his brother Tom. Steven is a former Australian special forces, like his brother Tom who is nearly two meters tall, a former Australian SAS commando, and the "General Manager for Security and Emergency Response" for the Bank of the Americas. Tom, via this posting, has insider info and sends a warning to his brother to prepare for the worst. The code is simple: "AlasBabylon Q4E9".

"Alas Babylon was a book about a nuclear war in the 1950s and survivors in the aftermath. The novel by Pat Frank was still one of the best looks at post-apocalyptic life ever written. And he and Tom had agreed that it was the best choice for a code indicating a real, this is no shit, general emergency. Not "I've got cancer" but "grab the bug-out bag and activate your Zombie Plan." Which was why he wondered if this was the same feeling those morning New Yorkers had felt looking up at the gush of fire from the side of the Twin Towers. Disbelief, sadness, even anger. His mouth was dry, palms clammy, his sphincter was doing the bit where it was simultaneously trying to press

neutronium and let go all over his seat. He felt all the cycles of grief go through him in one brief and nasty blast. Tom was not a guy to joke about the end of the world."

Without waiting for outside confirmation such as from newscasts or Internet searches, he calmly leaves the class in the middle of his lecture, gathers up his equally shocked but ever-ready survivalist family and takes a series of steps to secure them and their 'exit' from society in order to survive the worst that can happen: a Zombie plague that is spreading across the US (and the rest of the world), like wildfire.

The book reads very well. It is divided into two main parts: the beginning of the end, as the family joins up with Tom at his bank's secure (or so they thought) NY headquarters, and part two, how the family is separated from Tom, and heads out to sea in a newly bought and heavily stocked sailboat in order to survive the plague. Note, that there is a lot of military jargon in the book, and detailed descriptions of weapons and how to best use them in conjunction with fighting off Zombie attacks.

In the first part, we see some cameo shots of police officers and health officials dealing with the plague and its consequences – wild Zombies. This immediately gives a sense of reality as well as bringing us up-to-date on what the plague is all about, how it is affecting people and possible ways to combat it, or at least to stay alive.

It seems, that someone deliberately planted plague-filled gas canisters at strategic transportation sites (airports, railway stations) spraying passengers who would then spread the disease all over the world. The plague has two stages: First, an airborne disease that takes about a week to display

the first symptoms, but is nevertheless already spreading. Then the victim gets sick – with flu-like symptoms – and the second stage when the “Zombie” rage kicks in and the victim becomes a rabid mindless and highly aggressive ‘body’ with an urge to bite and tear at other people – which further spreads the disease.

Our main heroes, the Smith family, are: Steven (former commando), his wife Stacey (geek and electronics/mechanic extraordinaire), daughters Sophia (15, short, like her mother – and like her, very intelligent and self-sufficient) and Faith (13, built like an Amazon: tall, resilient, strong – and has her father’s penchant and abilities for fighting). They are all well ‘trained’ via family activities and stories to be able to take care of themselves, and this includes weapons training and survivalist lore and preparation – so when it hits – though at first unbelieving – they are ready for the worst and tackle each obstacle head on, with conviction and without hesitation. When they meet up with Steven’s brother Tom and join him in NY’s secure bank building, they are introduced to their first Zombies, as well as a vaccine that helps them survive. Young Faith (13 years old) is the first of them to meet Zombies face to face, and kills one with just a baton, and later actually goes hunting them, but meets several and is nearly killed herself. She eventually does get bitten, but thanks to the vaccine survives.

In part two, the family has left NY and takes to the Atlantic Ocean to avoid the chaos. The plan is to find a safe haven from the anarchy of infected humanity. What they discover, instead, is a sea dotted with ships filled with Zombies and here and there, survivors. With strong humanistic motivation, they start clearing the ships, salvaging what they can, and organizing the few survivors – offering them hope for a future.

An interesting twist or novelty vis-a-vis the Zombie mythos, or more specifically, characteristics of the ‘traditional’ Zombie manifestation is the following, best described by the author’s medical expert

character, Dr. Curry (reference to the French “Currie” scientist couple?):

“...Initial presentation of neurological symptoms are, in no particular order, palsy, disorientation, dizziness, blurred vision and, notably, formication. Note: I said ‘for-mi-cation.’ This refers to a form of paresthesia or ‘itching, tingling’ which feels like ants crawling on or biting the skin. Series of presentation is somewhat random but at a certain point the patient tends to strip to get the ‘spiders’ or ‘ants’ off.”

“Strip?” Richard said.

“Yes,” Tom said. “In all of the cases that have come to the attention of the police, the subject has been naked.”

“That seems sort of...”

“The term you’re looking for is obscene,” Richard said. “Any idea...why? Just for the embarrassment factor? Pornographic?”

“If it’s intentional, it’s smart,” Dr. Curry said. ...

...

“One thing that always bugged me about biological zombies,” Curry said, musingly, “at least the ones that were something like realistic. Say I am Legend. They’ve got to crap. Every species eliminates waste. If you can’t figure out how to use a door handle, how are you going to take off your pants to take a crap? And modern clothing is going to plug it up. Eventually the subject dies of impaction and necrosis.”

“So you really think that was built in?” Depene asked.

“The words that are on every message about this are ‘lethal and sophisticated,’” Curry said.

So, the next time you see a naked person running at you, try not to get bitten.

Under a Graveyard Sky is the first of three books in the “**Black Tide Rising**” series.

For some fascinating further reading, see the following two websites about reasons

why/how a worldwide zombie apocalypse can happen, and why it can't (It always pays to be prepared):

1) How it can happen:

http://www.cracked.com/article_15643_5-scientific-reasons-zombie-apocalypse-could-actually-happen.html

2) Why it can't happen:

http://www.cracked.com/article_18683_7-scientific-reasons-zombie-outbreak-would-fail-quickly.html

Next time: *Some Zombie movie reviews.*

Quote of the month:

“Can an Artificial Intelligence Machine be ‘Human’?”

What Makes a Human Alive: Intelligence? A Soul? A Sense of Humour? Regret?

Let's consider the following article:

“Computer passes 'Turing Test' for the first time after convincing users it is human”

By Hannah Furness, and agencies - 1:06PM BST 08 Jun 2014

... Five machines were tested at the Royal Society in central London to see if they could fool people into thinking they were humans during text-based conversations.

The test was devised in 1950 by computer science pioneer and Second World War codebreaker Alan Turing, who said that if a machine was indistinguishable from a human, then it was "thinking".

No computer had ever previously passed the Turing Test, which requires 30 per cent of human interrogators to be duped during a series of five-minute keyboard conversations, organisers from the University of Reading said.

But "Eugene Goostman", a computer programme developed to simulate a 13-year-old boy, managed to convince 33 per cent of the judges that it was human, the university said...

[See the full June 2014 article at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/technology/news/10884839/Computer-passes-Turing-Test-for-the-first-time-after-convincing-users-it-is-human.html>]

See also the 2012 article: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/science/science-news/9489002/How-long-before-robots-can-think-like-us.html>

Here is Turing's concept:

“...could a machine “think”?

Turing considered that question to be meaningless, so proposed the imitation game as a way of sidestepping the question. Better, he argued, to focus on what the computer can actually do: can it talk? Can it hold a conversation well enough to pass for human? If so, Turing argued, we may as well grant that the machine is, at some level, intelligent.”

A few weeks ago, my son Nathaniel (author of the recently published “anshey hamaagal” SF book I recently reviewed for CyberCozen) and I had a discussion about what makes humans unique that even the most advanced Robot/Computer could not match. Of course our conversation was inconclusive – as will be this short presentation – but A) it was fun throwing ideas back and forth, B) it opens up numerous possibilities for further thought, and C) It gave us the opportunity to search into the depth of our own souls/minds to attempt to understand ‘human nature’.

Amongst the issues he brought up were:

- Friendship, and in particular the concept of, literally: 'freely offered love' – which is appropriate for these trying days around the world and in the Middle-East specifically, and coincidentally (or not) – coinciding with the Jewish period of mourning (3 weeks / 9 days) over the destruction of the Holy Jewish Temple in Jerusalem almost 2000 years ago. According to tradition, the disaster was triggered by 'sinat khinam', which in Hebrew is the exact opposite: "hatred for hatred's sake" [literally: 'Free hatred']. But pets can love you – does that make them 'human'? Most pet lovers think so ☺.
- To be reborn different each day: An Artificial Intelligence (AI) machine (computer or robot) has a set program. Even if it has random, or alternative programs, it will never have something 'new'. Although it doesn't sleep, even after a reboot, it always starts up in the same sequence – at least the initial base sequences. In the Jewish faith, every morning when we wake up, we thank the Lord for 'returning' our life to us in a prayer called the "Mode Ani" [I recognize...] – that is similar to a reboot, as if we 'die' in our sleep and then are reborn when waking up. However we don't necessarily act in the same way each morning (there is no "program") – even if we have a stringent regime (be it exercise, diet, or prayer – or just breakfast and off to work/school/activity).

We discussed the above and more... and we'll leave further thoughts on the topic for another time.

[Maybe someone would like to review related stories/movies like: "Bicentennial Man", "I, Robot", "Blade Runner/Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?", "Short Circuit [aka: Number 5]"? Others?

– From the point of view: **Is the Robot/Android/Replicate 'Alive' or 'Human'?**]

More Food for Thought:

Here is a Google search that came up with a very interesting set of articles that are worthwhile looking at, if you like this subject area:

<https://www.google.co.il/webhp?sourceid=chrome-instant&ion=1&espv=2&ie=UTF-8#q=can%20robots%20think%20philosophy>

What do you think:

What makes humans unique – different from robots, computers, or even "intelligent" animals like dogs, horses, dolphins?

We'd love to hear your thoughts on this subject and will be happy to publish some of them!

For Comments: E-mail: leybl_botwinik@yahoo.com. Tel: Leybl_botwinik 054-537-7729

Assistant Editor: Leybl Botwinik. Founding Editor: Aharon Sheer. Logo by: Miriam Ben-Loulou

For free email delivery (PDF format) write to leybl_botwinik@yahoo.com

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