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Howard B. Lazar

Science fiction by Leo Melamed is uniquely believable and thoughtful

The Tenth Planet by Leo Melamed

Bonus Books, Chicago.

Real science fiction has its basis in the statement, "What if ...". It begins by taking a known concept or device and projecting its future development.

Unlike Star Wars (which is fun but a sub-genre known derogatorily as space opera), real science fiction is totally believable.

Using this criterion, *The Tenth Planet* is science fiction of the highest order.

Melamed walked a slippery tight rope with his main characters — they are aliens. Aliens in space opera are treated as bug eyed monsters. In real science fiction they are accorded dignity. The first modern author to develop the idea that aliens can be treated on their own terms was a *landsman*, Stanley G. Weinbaum. His story, "A Martian Odyssey," paved the way for Melamed's treatment of a different yet comprehensible culture.

Melamed, however, chose a more difficult approach. Weinbaum's Twel! only superficially resembled us. Melamed's Kyro is subtly different. It is through Kyro's thought process that we come to respect him on his own terms.

Melamed created a totally believable alien. His next task was to place him in a believable culture. He did it. There is complete internal consistency in this novel. Not since the works of Dr. Paul Linebarger (writing as Cordwainer Smith) has a writer developed a viable culture unlike ours.

There is a tradition in science fiction to tell stories of "confir-

mation." That is to say you reach the ending, your reaction is, "I thought so!" H.P. Lovecraft developed this device into a fine art.

Poe, on the other hand, wrote stories of "revelation." When you reach the final (usually italicized line) your reaction is one of amazement.

Because Melamed has written a tale of "revelation," to discuss the plot would be a disservice to the reader. *The Tenth Planet* requires careful reading and, I am pleased to say, thought.

I particularly enjoyed the sequence on pages 182-183. Melamed has cleverly used a technique made popular by Jonathan Swift in *Gulliver's Travels* (itself a good example of early science fiction). Again, I will not spoil your enjoyment by further elucidation.

One other point about this novel makes it unique. Melamed displays a magnificent command of the English language. How refreshing at a time when many authors have resorted to writing for an audience with a third-grade education!

This point is even more salient since English is not Melamed's mother tongue. Like Joseph Conrad, he absorbed English as a second language and displays knowledge of it rarely found in the native born.

The Tenth Planet has not yet been given the exposure it richly deserves. To obtain a copy I had to have a book store order it. If your local dealer does not stock it, do as I did. It is very little trouble for a very worthwhile book.

Howard Lazar is Great Lakes regional director of American Associates, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev. He is known nationwide (and in Israel) for his articles and lectures on science fiction.