

SOON

Mormon, a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, along with his one wife Kristine, and their five children, who are each named after famous writers, in Greensboro, N.C.

We asked our only correspondent who had actually read 88 books of any kind—Bob Gersztyn—to conduct the interview. He watched *God's Army*, a film about Mormon missionaries in Los Angeles, prior to an hour-long phone interview with Mr. Card, as part of his preparation.

As befitting someone with two first names, Card has also written dozens of plays that have been produced in regional theater as well as scripts for animated videos for the family market. His book *How to Write Science Fiction and Fantasy* won a Hugo award in 1991. He has taught writing courses at several universities, as well as at a number of major writing workshops.



THE DOOR INTERVIEW: Orson Scott Card By Bob Gersztyn

THE DOOR MAGAZINE: You make references to Mormonism directly or indirectly in your work, yet it really hasn't hampered your success as a writer in the secular world. Why?

ORSON SCOTT CARD: Because I've been very careful.

The simplest way of saying it is, the reader should not be compelled to make a decision whether they accept a particular religion or not while reading the story. I've written fiction that included characters who were believers in a particular religion. Not always Mormonism. In fact, not even *usually* Mormonism. I never require my readers to decide whether it's true. I only let the story depend on the fact that the *characters* believe it's true. And I give them ample justification for that belief. That way my readers have never had to decide whether they agree with me on a particular point, or even in a fact, in most of my books.

Nor have I even given them any reason to believe that what they're hearing is what I actually believe myself. Because quite often I'll include the religious beliefs of characters who don't share my beliefs—sometimes presented critically, but often presented quite sympathetically.

DOOR: Do you consider The Book of Mormon and the other Mormon scriptures to be equivalent to the Bible?

CARD: Absolutely. Yes.

DOOR: Would you consider Joseph Smith to be a prophet equal to Moses or Jesus?

CARD: I don't consider Jesus to be a prophet. I consider Him to be the Son of God. And



therefore no other prophet is equal to Him. But Joseph Smith certainly functions in the same role in our time that Moses served in his.

DOOR: How do Mormons view traditional versions of Christianity such as Protestantism, Roman Catholicism, Coptic, Eastern Orthodox and others?

CARD: To the degree that traditional Christianity appears to be the actual teachings of Jesus in the New Testament, we have no disagreement with them at all. In fact, the place where most of our disagreements usually come is in the areas of mainline Christian belief that actually stem more from neo-Platonic philosophy that was current in the second and third century A.D. than to anything in the New Testament. Those are the places where our disagreements sometimes become quite clear. But when it comes to the actual teachings of Jesus and belief about the divinity of Christ, we have no quarrel. We are right down the same line with them, and believe that the New Testament is as reasonably factual an account as one can hope to get from witnesses, from diverse witnesses, that are writing after the fact.

DOOR: It's interesting that the main characters in *The Tales of Alvin Maker* and the *Ender Wiggin* series are children.

CARD: It's an easy impression to get, but I'm not writing about children, I'm writing about people. When I write about a human being, in order to understand him well, I have to begin when he's a child, because that's when life begins. And most of the major decisions in our lives that shape who we are take place during that period. My major works all take the child beyond childhood, into adolescence and then to adulthood and taking a responsible role in society.

So I suppose that in a sense I would say that most of my books are not really about children, they're about the education and training of a human being, so that the *Alvin Maker* books indeed begin with Alvin as a child, but we've been several books away from his childhood now. So

to say that I'm writing about a child is really kind of wrong.

Ender's Game specifically used children because I was saying something about the way that we use children to fight our wars for us. We make them 18, 19, or 20 year olds, rather than 9, 10, or 11 year olds. But nevertheless that is who fights our wars, it's our young men in that precise passionate age. And so there have been times when I've definitely used the child, the fact that my characters are children, to great effect in the stories.

What science fiction is best at, I think, is taking things that are true, but hard to see, and by exaggerating them in a science fiction story we can make them easier to see.

When a society is in a time of crisis, to protect itself, it hurls its expendable young men—and I use that "expendable" in quotes—at the enemy until we either win or lose. And such is the nature of the human being, that those societies that are best at doing that are the ones that tend to prevail in the long run. And those that lose the will to do that, that can no longer bear to send their young men out to fight, are actually, as I read history at least, on the road to dissolution, and decay.

DOOR: What about your book *Xenocide*?

CARD: That's where I face the issue quite squarely. It's really about the right of society to fight, to defend itself. Right now I hear so many people, in the name of tolerance, say, "Let's be more understanding of the Muslim culture and make sure we blame only the ones in Muslim culture who are bad."

That's all well and good, but it's like looking at Germany in the era leading up to World War II and saying, "Remember, we don't hate Germans. We only hate the Nazis." But you have to realize that somehow the German people allowed the Nazis to act, to gain power, to use their armed forces, and even if regular Germans didn't all agree with Nazi beliefs, nevertheless it was the might of

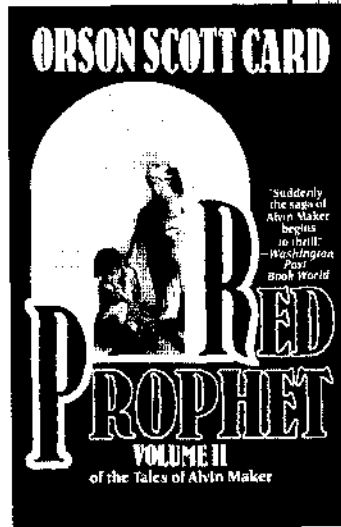
Germany that we had to fight and defeat in order to destroy the Nazis.

Right now we're facing a terrible threat. There is enormous public support in many parts of the Muslim world for what Osama Bin Laden did, and would do in the future. We may not like it, but our war will not be over until the Islamic world repudiates those views.

DOOR: There are interesting parallels in *Xenocide* with what's going on right now—even

Science

fiction to me is valuable not for the spaceship stuff, but because it's the most open and free genre of literature in existence right now.



though you wrote it years and years ago.

CARD: Does a society have the right to destroy another in order to protect itself? In other words, is there a right, an absolute right of self-defense?

As a Christian, I have to face the "turn the other cheek" view. On an individual level, one can make a strong case for the idea that, "No, there is no right to self-defense. It is better to die than to kill." But do you have a right to allow someone else to die rather than kill?

In Mormonism we have many exam-

ples in our scripture that go both ways—like pacifism, radical pacifism where you endure slaughter in order to remain right with God, and in almost the same story, those who are willing to lay down their lives to protect the helpless, and those who are willing to kill to protect the helpless.

My own conclusion is, "Woe unto those by whom offenses come, but if war has been forced upon you, then you have not just a right but an obligation to the society that you are part of to fight to preserve that which is good." That's one of the places where I have my deepest quandary in the present war.

Which is again the fundamental issue of *Xenocide*: Do we have a right to destroy an alien species? It's really saying, do we have a right to destroy another society that is trying to destroy us? The rules I set up in *Xenocide* say that if you can talk to them and reach an understanding and trust that they have changed their mind about

destroying you, then you have no right to destroy them.

But if you cannot talk to them and be heard and have any hope of any kind of agreement between you, then you owe it to your own people to eliminate the possibility of the other side destroying you.

DOOR: In *Xenocide* you up the ante again for clarity—there is a weapon that

could absolutely destroy the human race.

CARD: What Islam has cannot possibly destroy the human race. But what it could do is bring down American culture as we know it. Now my question is, "As a people we have a right to defend ourselves against a physical attack, but is our society so great and wonderful that we deserve to prevail over the values of their society?"

Frankly, I think that right along with

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fighting this war and eliminating the ability of our enemies to kill us, we have an obligation to address the areas where our society is in fact not better than theirs and in many ways considerably worse. Where our influence is in fact destructive, when we spread it abroad. In other words, we need to become a better people before we have the right to judge other nations. We do have a right to defend ourselves in the meantime. Even imperfect people have a right to defend themselves. But we don't necessarily have a right to impose our culture on others against their will.

DOOR: In the latest introduction to *Ender's Game*, you say: "In science fiction however, the whole point is that ideas are fresh and startling and intriguing. You imitate the great ones not by re-writing their stories, but rather by creating stories that are just as startling as new." Please elaborate.

CARD: There are those who think that what they need to do with science fiction is come up with a "cool new idea." I tell my writing students there are no new ideas. In terms of story, we're going to tell the same stories over and over again, but with different twists and turns and causal relationships. So that what makes the story worth telling is that the writer believes in it and cares about it and then hopes to find readers who will also believe in it and care about it.

Fantasy, science fiction, literary stories, they're all the same stories we've been telling ever since human beings gathered around campfires. There's nothing new, because there's nothing new in human relationships. We haven't changed.

DOOR: Some people feel that the books of the Bible were the equivalent of present day works such as your own. That is to say, literature mixed with history, theology, morality, ethics, and wisdom to assist in the upward ascent of man.

CARD: The books of the Bible have some key differences. Most of the books have very separate origins and were

gathered together long after they were originally written.

The individual books have very different purposes. I mean the book of Obadiah and the collection of Psalms and the legends collected in the book of Judges and the five books of Torah are radically different.

The book of Job is probably the closest thing to what science fiction writers or what fiction writers do because I think of it as a work of fiction. I don't think God actually hangs around with Satan and makes bets with him. I don't think that represents anything other than the conceit of a writer, of a poet, trying to explain why bad things happen to good people.

And I think he

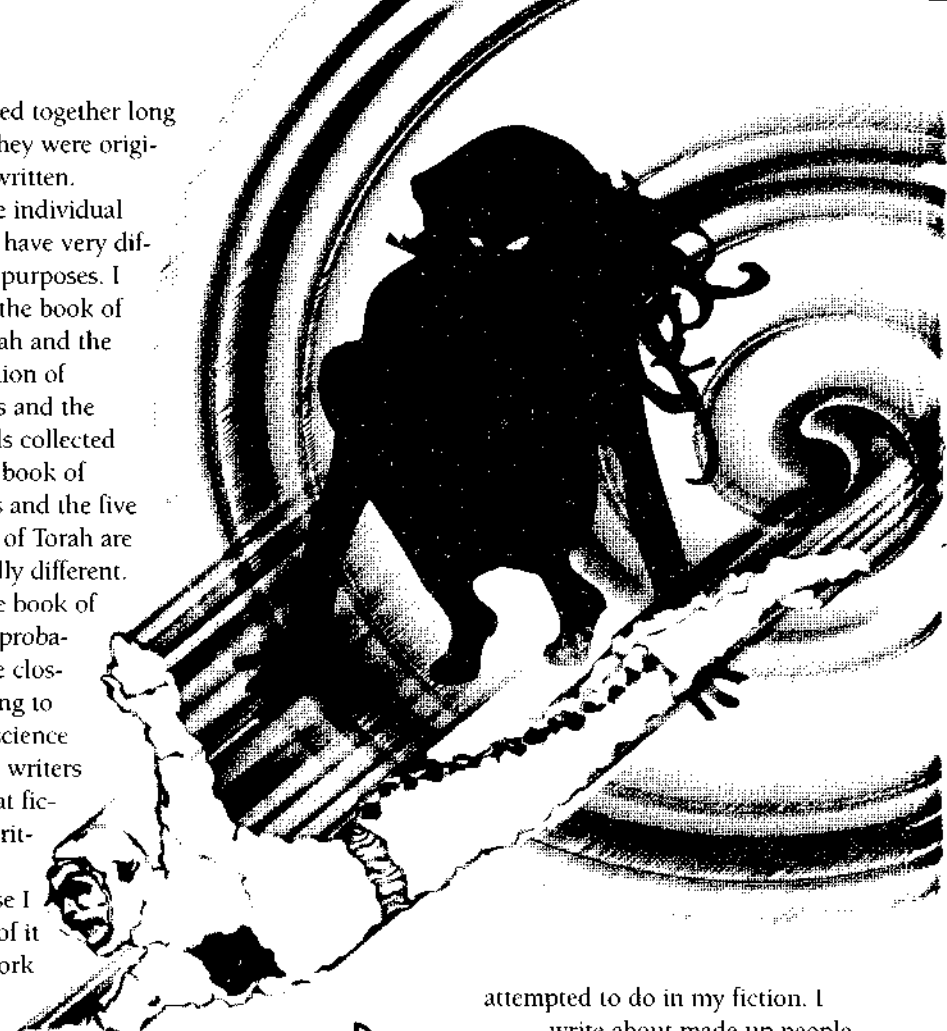
blew it and got it

almost entirely wrong.

But that's my personal judgment.

When we talk about something like Genesis and Exodus, we're talking about the very ancient accounts of the dealings of real people with the very real God. That's far from anything I've ever

would hope that my work has more uplifting moral value than say, "The Song of Solomon" and the book of Job.



Down underneath, fantasy, science fiction, literary stories, they're all the same stories that we've been telling ever since human beings gathered around campfires and told stories.

attempted to do in my fiction. I write about made up people. What you're getting is out of my head. Not out of any revelation. I claim no authority for what I write that is even remotely comparable to what is claimed for—and I believe is present in—say Exodus.

DOOR: Finally, why is science fiction important?

CARD: Science fiction, to me, is valuable not for the spaceship stuff, but because it's the most open and free genre of literature in existence right now. Way freer than the formula-laden, heavily controlled, literary fiction where you scarcely can breathe without having to run into somebody's set of rules or another. Science fiction in terms of the story you tell has an audience that is eager for new things. And so the science fiction writer is far freer than in any other genre right now.