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NEWSLETTER

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Wednesday, 31th August 2011

Today's Schedule

Students Katowice

- 8³⁰ – 10⁰⁰ breakfast at the hotel
- 10⁰⁰ – 12³⁰ free time and group activities at the hotel
- 12³⁰ – 14³⁰ lunch at the hotel
- 15⁰⁰ – 18³⁰ outdoor games in the Park
- 19⁰⁰ – 20⁰⁰ dinner at the hotel
- 20⁰⁰ – 20³⁰ briefing
- 20³⁰ – 22⁰⁰ recreation

Leaders Kraków

- 7⁰⁰ – 8⁰⁰ breakfast at the hotel
- 9⁰⁰ – 11⁰⁰ IBM #3 (elections)
- 11⁰⁰ – 14⁰⁰ consultations, marking and classification
- 14⁰⁰ – 15⁰⁰ lunch at the hotel
- 15⁰⁰ – 19⁰⁰ consultations, marking and classification
- 19⁰⁰ – 20⁰⁰ dinner at the hotel
- 20⁰⁰ – 23⁰⁰ consultations, marking and classification

Observations in Planetarium

Monday evening. The so far perfect weather starts to get worse. The forecasts for the next hours are cruel – the observation place must be changed into the one in the Planetarium hall. Here, there is a surprise for the competitors. One of the tasks, prepared by Mr Marek Szczepański, takes the students to Mars. "I thought it could be interesting," says the task's author. „We live in the XXI century when space probes land on Mars, so I decided to make a small preparation for landing on the Red Planet."

Many participants liked the idea, though some were surprised at first. "I was confused in the first few moments," says Jakub Vosmera, a student from a Czech team. "There is different latitude on the Mars so it was a bit difficult at the beginning. Apart from that, not all the stars were visible. But it was a fascinating problem. Unfortunately, in Planetarium you can't do things that are possible under the real sky. On the other hand, virtual sky allows for such a journey to a different planet."

A team from China, after quite a long conversation in their language, summarises the task using only one word: "interesting."

Planetarium tasks finished late at night.



The photos by Damian Jabłeka



Data analysis

tasks

Another Olympiad day. Groups of laughing young people are standing in front of the entrance to the building. Among them, there is a Polish team. They are thinking about a “Marsian task” from the previous evening and they guessing what kind of questions they are going to find in the envelopes in a few minutes. “We are not afraid; the tasks may not be more difficult than the theoretical ones that we solved in this hall yesterday,” they say.

The students enter the hall. Soon, the conversations stop. The only thing that can be heard is the interpreter Kasia Kowalska reading out the technical information concerning the tests. After a few minutes, there is a complete silence.

Two and a half hours later: the Polish group leaves the hall. The participants’ feelings are mixed. “To solve the first problem, one would need a computer,” “Not so difficult, but a bit vicious,” “The second task was much better.” These are only some of the opinions that the participants shared. Even those teams which so far have kept poker faces, left the building apparently tired.



The photos by Damian Jabłeka

Stanisław Lem- "Solaris"

Book review by Jarosław Juskiewicz
science editor, Polish Radio Katowice

Stanisław Lem is one of best known Polish science fiction writers. What is good about this kind of literature? Definitely the fact that it is able to inspire young people to get interested in cosmos. But not only.

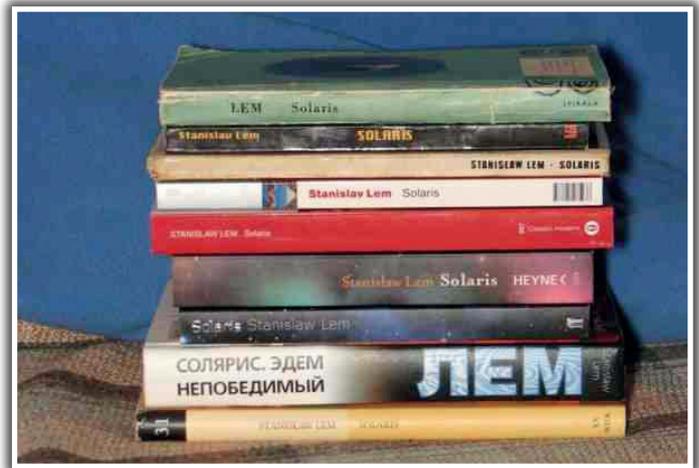
Though the book was written in mid-60s, it is not getting old. The psychologist, Chris Kelvin, arrives at the testing station floating above the surface of a jelly-like ocean covering almost the whole planet Solaris. Strange things happen at the station. Not long before Kelvin arrives, one of the scientists dies. Others close themselves in their rooms and act as if they were mentally ill. Two days after the arrival, he wakes up and sees a girl sitting on the verge of his bed. It is Harvey, Kelvin's fiancée who ... committed suicide a few years earlier.

"Solaris" has a few layers. Of course it is a story about love. It is also a psychological study of a group closed in shielded station. Finally, it is a treaty telling us how difficult or even impossible it is to get into contact with other forms of life. And that last issue is what I would like to focus on. The jelly covering Solaris is definitely alive. But it is not a huge "planetary brain" – such statement would be a far too great simplification. It is not God either, though some of Lem's readers claim so. Anyway, as early as at the very beginning of the book we get acquainted with almost one-hundred-year-old history of the branch of science known as solaristics and dozens of hypotheses concerning Solaris. Is it possible to have contact with something that is so different from the well-known forms of life existing on the Earth? While reading a book, we draw a conclusion that people do not actually get into contact with Solaris. On the contrary, the planet itself establishes contact with them, touching the most hidden and "the most cysted" memories (as Lem puts it), taking them out and materialising. How to live with a born and bred remorse living with us in a station and materialising anew each time we want to get rid of it? Why is a planet creating nearly artistic constructions on its surface? Is it a kind of art or just schizophrenic delusions? We will not find simple answers for those questions. Lem forces the readers to think and come up with their own interpretations.

Solaris is a prophesy of the problems that the cosmos conquerors can face in 100 or 200 years. Snaut - one of the scientists from the station - says: "We are setting off to reach cosmos prepared for everything, that is loneliness, struggle, martyrdom

and death. Out of modesty, we are not saying that aloud, but sometimes we think we are great. But it turns out that we do not want to conquer cosmos, but only stretch the Earth to its borders. Some planets are to be as deserted as Sahara, others as freezing as a pole or as tropical as the Brazilian jungle. We are humanitarian and noble; we do not want to impose our values and take up their legacy. We consider ourselves the knights of a sacred Contact. It is a second lie. We are not looking for anyone else but humans. We do not need other worlds. We need mirrors. We do not know what to do with other worlds. The one we choke with is enough for us."

Did Lem predict the future correctly? The time will tell. One is certain – "Solaris" is a book you always reach for with pleasure. The more so, it was translated into 41 languages.



Credit: Wikipedia

