



sf newsletter February 1998

**פתח תקווה חוג למדע בדיוני וקומיקס-**

**Petah Tikva Science Fiction and Comics Club (in Hebrew)**

יום חמישי 19 לפברואר - 19:30 - Thursday February 19

**"ניסים מדעיים בתנ"ך"**

רח' פיקא 9, פתח תקווה - 03-922-3171 - 9 Pika St., Petah Tikva

בביתו של אלון איצקוביץ -- At the home of Alon Itzkovitz

**The Israeli Society for Science Fiction and Fantasy**

**Monthly meetings (in Hebrew) on *Science and Science Fiction***

**Wednesdays: Tentative dates: 25/2, 25/3, 13/5, 17/6**

*Join the Society, get its announcements, and go to its meetings!*

*Call 03-528-3803 or 03-604-4959*

Each meeting attracts about 100 people with a lecture and discussion

Meetings are held in **Beit Ariela, 25 Shaul HaMelech, Tel Aviv at 8 p.m.**

Vol. X, Num. 2. Editor: Aharon Sheer. For mail delivery of **CyberCozen**, please donate 30 shekels per YEAR; air mail to US \$15; if Aharon Sheer can hand-deliver it, 15 shekels. Logo by Miriam Ben-Loulu.

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## Hot News: Aharon Sheer Resigns

Sort of. Aharon Sheer announced that he will continue publishing **CyberCozen** as long as he has material. Here are Sheer's explanations:

1) Only **seven** people came to the December meeting. Even Aharon Sheer didn't come (he was sick). It's not fair to invite a great outside lecturer like Dr. Moshe Podolak, and then have only seven people come! This is a symptom of a long term downward trend, as less and less people come to meetings, and those few that do come, come later and later.

2) At the January meeting (to which about 20 people came), the lecturer arrived 15 minutes late, explaining that it took him one hour and 20 minutes to get to Rehovot from Tel Aviv by car! Under such circumstances, we can hardly expect people to come from outside the Rehovot area, and hardly anybody from Rehovot comes any more.

3) One of the consequences of the fact that people come late is the cancelling of the *short talks*. We used to have a short 5 or 10 minute talk before the main talk, giving people a chance to tell us about something that interests them without the obligation of preparing a long lecture. With meetings starting ever later, the short talks have disappeared for lack of time (or energy).

4) The Israeli Society for sf and Fantasy has a meeting on science and/or science fiction every month in Tel Aviv. It's much easier for our members who live in Tel Aviv / Kiron / Hadar Yosef / Ramat Hasharon / Hod HaSharon / Netanya / Holon to get to a meeting in Tel Aviv than in Rehovot.

5) Aharon Sheer is tired of organizing meetings after nine years. In fact, he's been tired of it for the last two years. Maybe people have sensed that, and that's one reason why they've

stopped coming.

6) Aharon Sheer's father died in January, so he is now in his year of mourning. This also affects his mood.

7) How about some young blood? We have people who started coming when they were in their early twenties -- and have been coming for nine years. Where are the new people in their early twenties?

8) How about somebody from Rehovot, young and enthusiastic, willing to do things that Aharon Sheer did years ago and is embarrassed to do a second time? It doesn't hurt to look at familiar ideas with a fresh, excited approach. Aharon Sheer hasn't got it.

9) **Conclusion:** If someone wants to give a talk in Rehovot, we'll organize a meeting at Bill's house around him/her. If someone wants to organize a meeting around any sf/fantasy idea, great. Aharon Sheer will give him/her help, if he/she wants it, or just get out of his/her way.

## Letters to the Editor:

### Is there such a thing as Internet email ethics? Some comments:

Dear Aharon,

Internet society is not civil! It is expedient and pragmatic - primarily because everybody contributes and everybody participates; its a free-for-all with no limitations or prejudice - "On the Internet, nobody knows you're a dog." (anonymous)

You like the Internet for the freedom it affords you to communicate, both in narrow groups, and in wider forums, where you have the potential of encountering and influencing a broad spectrum of ideas and opinions. But you pay for that freedom by exposing your own ideas and opinions to discussion, criticism and in some cases ridicule. Trying to constrain the scope or range of dissemination of ideas is pointless in such a milieu as the Internet.

[Tova] points out that the telephone provided a means of rapid, private communication, but that advances in technology have made such conversations accessible to anyone who is interested. Her point and mine is that while privacy MAY be valuable, it is becoming increasingly impractical, and will eventually be impossible as well as impractical.

**Bill and Tova Silverman**

P.S.. My personal opinion is that privacy, which all good liberals (myself once included) championed, is a dead issue. The electronic age will eventually invade and expose EVERY area of communication and cognition. "Resistance is futile."

You may quote me! Also note that regulation will not help - even with Draconic punishments (e.g. Prohibition in the '30s or Clinton's "War on Drugs"). Regulation doesn't work when the regulations are (virtually :) unenforceable.

**Bill**

Dear Aharon,

I remember you were concerned about Internet email privacy, so I asked someone: apparently electronic mail does not have any "special" copyright protection. If I were you, I would simply use good judgement in deciding what may and what may not be repeated. *Caveat:* highly-paid lawyers. I suspect that is not much of a concern outside the U.S.A., though.

**Noam Shomron**

## More About Time Travel

### Times and Such by Amnon Stupp

I recently read a short story, "**Time Bomb**", by Timothy Zahn, in the collection of short Zahn stories **Time Bomb and Zahndry Others** (1988).

The story had a very interesting and unique perception of time-travel. In the story a scientist discovers equations which will make it possible to build a time machine. The result is that he becomes a walking center of destruction, everything falls apart in his hands, especially

synthetics.

The idea is that if a time machine is possible, people could go back into the past and change history. For example people hate cigarettes, so they can go back in time and change history so that tobacco does not become acceptable in the Europe. If it is possible for such a thing to occur, the probability that cigarettes exist is smaller.

The effect is only strong in the vicinity of this scientist, and there the smaller probability that cigarettes exist is enough to make them fall apart in his hands. Unfortunately cigarettes are not the only thing affected, but anything people hate will have its existence probability reduced.

Another example are engines, which are destroyed if the scientist is too near them.

But, there is a catch. Because of this effect, it turns out later in the story that it is actually impossible to build a time-machine. Because, the closer the time machine gets to completion, the greater is the effect, and the probability that the materials used to build the machine exist is smaller. What happens is that the time machine falls apart in the hands of its builders.

I will not reveal how this problem is solved in the story, so as not to spoil it.

However, this raises one of the constant problems of time-travel. In this case - if a time machine can not be built, then there is no destruction-effect. But if there is no effect, than it can be built, and so on.

In my opinion time travel into your past is impossible. The paradoxes presented are too great. Also, if we believe that energy conservation should exist from moment to moment (and not "within all time"), it is obvious that time travel is impossible (unless one changes places in the past with an equal amount of matter/energy).

Of course, travel into other "time-lines" which does not change your own past is a tried and true method, but this is not really time travel but a kind of dimensional travel.

The idea is that parallel dimensions are slightly shifted in time compared to each other, and so if you travel "sideways" into a near dimension you will find yourself in a world which appears to be our world but in a different time period.

This is a familiar idea, which has a place in many SF and even Fantasy works (a book I happen to remember right now is for example **Jack of Eagles** by James Blish, and I recall others but do not remember their names).

*Ed. Note: I think John Brunner well summed up the impossibility of that kind of time travel in which we can change our past in **Times Without Number** (1974), a parallel history novel. Here is his conclusion:*

"He could visualise the path of history in each of those innumerable potential worlds where man had gained the power to travel through time. (Perhaps they were all potential, none more "real" than any other?) It would lead always back upon itself, like a snake swallowing its own tail. Man being what he was, there would sooner or later come a moment when the temptation to amend the past would lure someone into tampering with the course of events which led to the actual discovery of time apparatus. Whereupon a new universe would form." (p. 199)

*John Brunner convinced me.*

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### Short Reviews: by Aharon Sheer

**The Time Ships** by Stephen Baxter (1995), 520 pages. Baxter is one of the best new young (born 1957) writers of hard sf. **Raft** is perhaps his most famous novel. **The Time Ships** pretends to be a sequel of H. G. Wells' classic 1895 novel **The Time Machine**, and as a result the first part suffers from Wells' own fault of too much narration and too little action. As our table showed a couple of months ago, the earlier part of **The Time Ships** has paragraphs which are

unusually long, and very little dialogue. Baxter's great success at copying the style of Wells made that part of the book for me rather hard going and boring. Apparently aware of the problem himself, the author cleverly attaches a far-future not quite human descendent as a companion to his contemporary (1891) hero, thus giving the hero someone to talk to and giving the reader a lot more interest and variety. Basically the whole idea of this book is to present modern theories of time travel (quantum time travel), in which for every situation in which there is more than one possible outcome, all the outcomes coexist simultaneously in parallel worlds. Everything which could have happened has in fact happened, in some parallel world. The time traveller, at the moment at which he activates his machine, creates two futures: one in which he disappeared in his machine, and one in which his machine did nothing. When he arrives at his time destination, he creates a new parallel universe: one in which he arrived. The old one (in which he didn't arrive) continues exactly as before. Thus all paradoxes of time travel are eliminated. You can go back and meet yourself -- but that earlier you that meets the later you is no longer the same earlier you that didn't meet the later you that went back in time. You can go back and have sex with your grandmother, but the child will be born in a new parallel universe, not the one you came from. Baxter plays some not always delightful games with this idea, creating a pretty horrible new alternative future for the twentieth century, for example, but we can rest assured that our marvelous present remains undisturbed. This is the kind of story telling I like, even if, at over 520 pages, it seems to me vastly too long.

**Starship Troopers** by Robert A. Heinlein (1959), 208 pages. Translated last year into Hebrew as **לוחמי החלל**. The movie (**גברים ביחלל**), based on the book, is now in the theaters.

When I was a kid in the 40s and early 50s, Heinlein was one of my favorite writers. As the years went by, alas, he began to turn large sections of his books into political tracts, which makes them in part rather boring. This book starts and ends with some very convincing future battle scenes. This kind of action makes it perfect for a contemporary sf movie.

Unfortunately, much of the middle of the book is a long-drawn out description of a future society which "works". The author says that the main criterion by which to judge the successfulness of a political system is that it survives for centuries; if it does, it must be good. In this future they have a democracy in which the only people who can vote or hold public office are people (men or women) who have served two years in the totally voluntary army, and completed their service. Everyone else is subject to the rule of these ex-soldiers. On some planets -- like earth -- only 10% of the population are interested enough in government to volunteer for army service; on others, 80% of the adult population are veterans. Another curious aspect of this future society is public corporal punishment. Children and adults are whipped publicly for various crimes. We are witnesses in the story to the whipping and subsequent discharge of a soldier who struck his commanding officer. Even the hero gets whipped once, but considers himself lucky, since he wasn't discharged from the army. In this future, by the way, "Moral Philosophy" is a scientific, mathematically based subject, as precise and as firmly grounded as Newtonian physics is for plotting space station orbits. Unfortunately the author does *not* provide a mathematical appendix for the interested reader.

A lot of this book describes in great detail the military principles and organization of the future Mobile Infantry (MI) (the heroes of this novel). Israeli military officers may find all of this comprehensible and perhaps even interesting, but I didn't.

The worst - and most realistic - part of the book is the ending. It is neither happy nor unhappy. There's a war on, and while progress is being made in learning how to fight those giant Bugs, with their hive society and total willingness to die for their hive, the war continues. The author quotes Thomas Jefferson (1787): "The Tree of Liberty must be refreshed from time to time by the blood of patriots." We would like to hear at the end that the Bugs have been defeated, and humankind can now live in peace. But they haven't been, and they can't.