

In Memoriam: Amos Gefen (1937-1998)

Amos Gefen was the FIRST person to translate modern American sf into Hebrew.

AMOS GEFEN - OBITUARY by Eli Eshed, sf historian

On January 25, 1998, Amos Gefen died. Amos was one of the founders and leaders of the new Israeli Society for Science Fiction, and for dozens of years one of the most important translators of science fiction, even during the period when very few in Israel had even heard of the term "science fiction".

He was born in 1937. In his youth he was a journalist for the controversial crusading weekly, "HaOlam HaZeh". From there he moved

on to a journal even more controversial, the erotic sensationalist "Bul". For a period of time in the 60s, the owner and editors of "Bul" were imprisoned (a unique act in Israeli history) after the magazine exposed the connection of the Israeli Secret Service with the kidnapping of Algerian leader Ben Barka. During this period Gefen became one of the chief editors and writers of the magazine, and kept it going.

(Continues on page 2).

Icon98 -- a 3 day sf and fantasy convention on the 6th to 8th of October (Succoth vacation) in the Tel-Aviv Cinematheque

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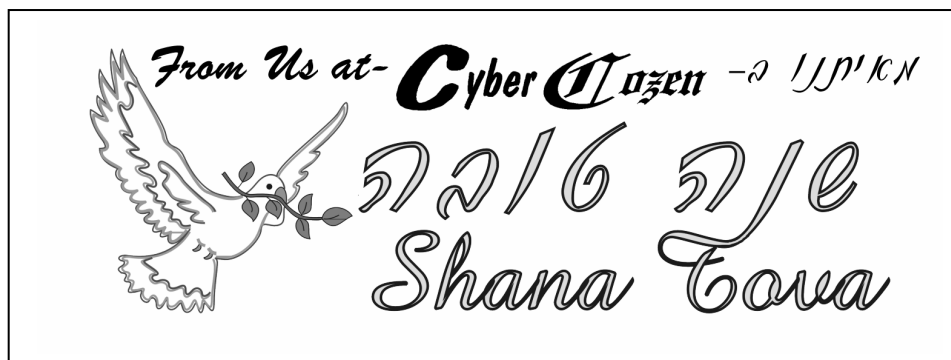
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This Issue of CyberCozen:

- A tribute to the Israeli translator and editor - *Amos Gefen* (1937-1998)
- Aharon Sheer reviews two books that wasted his time.

בגיליון זה של CyberCozen:

- מחווה למתרגם והעורך הישראלי - עמוס גפן (1937-1998) (אנגלית).
- אהרון שיר מבקר שני ספרים אשר בזבזו את זמנו. (אנגלית)



During the 60s Gefen was connected with the publishing house Matzpen. Matzpen only survived a few years, but during that time it carried out an ambitious systematic program of translating classic thrillers and westerns into Hebrew. This program was initiated by Gefen, and he was also the major (and almost the only) translator for the series. For Matzpen Gefen translated most of the "Saint" novels by Leslie Charteris, and the horror anthologies edited by director Alfred Hitchcock.

But today Matzpen is remembered mainly for being the first publisher to print modern science fiction in Hebrew. The sf books which Gefen translated were the first significant American science fiction books to appear in Hebrew. His first was **The Puppet Masters** by Robert Heinlein which came out in 1961, in one volume (following the example of the Ace double novels) together with Frank M. Robinson's **The Power**. Both books in his translation were so good that in an extremely unusual act for Israel they were actually reissued after many years: **The Puppet Masters** (in a fuller version) in 1979 by Massada, and **The Power** in that same year by Keter.

Amos Gefen translated additional sf books for Matzpen, some of them under pseudonyms. These included Aldous Huxley's novels **Brave New World** and **After Many a Summer Dies the Swan**, Fredric Brown's **What Mad Universe**, Charles Eric Maine's **The Tide Went Out** (which later came out in Hebrew in a different version under the title **Thirst!**), and the factual book by psychologist Robert Lindner, **The Fifty Minute Hour**, which includes a case history of a science fiction fan who so believed in the fantastic worlds he created in his imagination that he succeeded in persuading the psychologist who treated him in believing in them also.

Unfortunately the 60s were not yet ready for Matzpen's ambitious program of translating classic sf into Hebrew, and they went bankrupt after a relatively short period of intensive activity. Amos went on to translate such varied works as a textbook by Professor Yehezkel Dror on systems management, and Dutch "Sex Queen" Xavira Hollander's book **Xavira's Supersex** which he translated under an assumed name.

Gefen built a new publishing house, Tirosh, which published a variety of books and

periodicals, ranging from the professional journal "Traffic and Transportation" to books of poetry.

He returned to translations of sf during the 70s when he persuaded the publishing house Massada to begin a series of classic sf books for which he was the editor and main translator, and he thus started a new era in Israeli sf literature. Among the books he translated then were several by Isaac Asimov, including the **Foundation** trilogy in 1978, **The End of Eternity** in 1979, and **The Stars Like Dust** in 1981.

In addition, he translated **The Space Merchants** by Frederik Pohl and C.M.Kornbluth in 1978, the anthology **The Green Hills of Earth** by Robert Heinlein in 1979, **Imperial Earth** by Arthur C. Clarke in 1979, **Cryptozoic!** by Brian Aldiss in 1979, **No Blade of Grass** by John Christopher in 1979, the anthology **Time of the Eye** by Harlan Ellison in 1981, **The Tsaddik of the Seven Wonders** by Isidore Haiblum in 1981 (a "Yiddish"-style sf book to which Gefen added numerous comments and explanations), and **The Voyage of the Space Beagle** by A.E. Van Vogt in 1982. Gefen also edited the rest of the series which was translated by others. In the course of his translation work, Amos invented many new Hebrew words for sf concepts. One of them, "haizar" for "alien", has become part of the Hebrew language. Most of his other neologisms, despite being very clever, were not accepted.

With the closing of Massada's sf line in 1983, Amos stopped translating sf, but he continued to translate books and poetry, wrote articles on science and futurism for the Army publication "BaMahane", and was active in the community of writers, poets and theater people of Tel Aviv. He was also active in the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, and in particular the Society for the Preservation of Cats in Tel Aviv.

He returned to full activity in Israeli sf life as one of the founders of the Israeli Society for Science Fiction and Fantasy in 1996, and the society's publication **The Tenth Dimension** came out under his Tirosh imprint.

Amos Gefen was a man who during almost forty years worked and contributed to the sf culture in Israel, and "pushed" it during periods when it sometimes seemed that there was not another person in Israel who was interested. He will be sorely missed. May his memory be blessed.

AMOS GEFEN - OBITUARY by *Emanuel Lottem*, sf translator and editor

In the early 1960s, there was hardly any science fiction in Israel. Quite a few Jules Vernes, of course, a couple of H.G. Wellses, some E.A. Poes. But no genre-SF whatsoever. This is where Amos Gefen came in. I never had a chance to ask him how he himself became acquainted with SF, and now I regret this. But it was Amos who decided then that it was high time for modern SF to make its appearance on the Israeli scene.

Reading Heinlein's **Puppet Masters** in his translation was a revelation. I simply had no idea that people could write such marvelous stories, in such a breathtaking way. This was the unforgettable beginning of my own love affair with SF, with Amos Gefen as matchmaker. How

fortunate was I, to have been able to thank him for that while he was still with us!

He went on to publish many other SF novels and collections, some as translator, some as editor. Later on, his interests shifted elsewhere. But when the time became ripe for Israeli fandom to get organized, he was again right there in the middle, setting things up, moving and shaking. His ideas were numerous and fruitful, his advice useful, his criticism sincere, if somewhat sarcastic. We could see it was great fun for him, to become involved again in SF affairs. What we did not know was that all this time, his big heart was gradually failing him. This we found out too late.

AMOS GEFEN - OBITUARY by *Avner Ball Friedman*, secretary of the Israeli Society for sf and Fantasy (age 17)

My friendship with Amos developed during the times that I edited the Society's publication **The Tenth Dimension** in the offices of Amos's publishing house, Tirosh.

Writing an obituary about Amos seems almost impossible. Trying to write about Amos in the past tense seems even stranger - because for me, Amos always represented the living present galloping towards the future.

For me it seemed that everything Amos desired to do he succeeded in doing, without a great deal of difficulty. Both science (physics, math) and literature (of any kind) were his friends and allies -- a brilliant man, who could practice hard-core physics, and in the same

calculated way quote from the Bible or the New Testament or Heinlein's **Stranger in a Strange Land**. Indeed, if knowledge is power, then surely Amos was as strong as a titan giant.

It is awful letting him go. His advice, his companionship, his gentle ways of telling you that you are wrong, his patience and sarcasm, all of these will be greatly missed. Amos was like a universe for me to explore and grow wise from. And although I tried to seize as much as I could in the short few years that I knew him, I know now that there is so much I didn't get to learn and understand. For ever will that universe be missed by me.



Two Unpleasant Books I Regretted Reading Recently

by *Aharon Sheer*

None So Blind by Joe Haldeman (1996), 289 pages. Haldeman fought in Vietnam (1968-9), and was severely wounded, an overwhelmingly difficult experience. The war, with his wounding, was the major event of his life, and all of his writing has been influenced by it. Haldeman's first and most famous book, **The Forever War** (serialized 1972-4), shows the futility of fighting an enemy that you don't understand, a major characteristic of the Vietnam War, besides having a fine sf theme: the unending difficulties of fighting an *interstellar war* when your travel is limited by the speed of light and relativistic effects. **None So Blind** is a collection of short stories, most of them about Vietnam War veterans. Haldeman's view of his place in literature is made clear here, to my mind, by the following statement by the time traveler in the multiple parallel worlds story "**The Hemingway Hoax**" (which won both the Hugo and Nebula awards in 1991, for Best Novella):

"Most of my timespace is taken up with guys like Hemingway, Teddy Roosevelt, Heinlein, Bierce, Crane, Spillane, Twain.... They're writers who have an accumulating effect on the masculine side of the American national character. There's no one word for it, though it is a specific thing: individualistic, competence-worshipping, short-term optimism and long-term existentialism.

"There may be nothing after I die but I sure as hell will do the job right while I'm here, even though I'm surrounded by idiots.' You see the pattern." (p. 111-112)

The author places himself right there with the above-named American writers:

"Many of the stories in this volume have literary ancestors; they couldn't have existed without Heinlein or Hemingway or science fiction's New Wave of the seventies." (p. 289)

Beside "**The Hemingway Hoax**", there are two other prize-winning stories in this volume:

"**Graves**" won both the World Fantasy and Nebula awards in 1993 for Best Short Story.

"**None So Blind**" won the Hugo award in 1995 for Best Short Story.

In addition to the stories, the author provides an introduction to the book, and comments at the end of each story. If you like masculine warrior writers, try this book. I found many of the stories gripping but depressing, and often left them regretting that I had read them.

Past Master by R.A. Lafferty (1968), 248 pages. This book was recommended by Harlan Ellison, Terry Carr, Samuel R. Delany, Roger Zelazny, and Poul Anderson (all quoted on the book jacket, or on the first page). I hated it. On thinking about it, I realized that I don't like the writings of Harlan Ellison, Terry Carr, Samuel R. Delany, and Roger Zelazny. I do like Poul Anderson. The fact that the other four praised it so highly should have been a clue to me that it wasn't for me, rather than a recommendation.

Remember Arthur C. Clarke's admonition that any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic? And remember that books about magic are mostly fantasies and that I don't like fantasy? In this book the technology is so advanced that it is beyond any science we know. Daniel Gorelik once told us that one difference between fantasy and sf is that in sf people are driven by intelligent self-interest, whereas in fantasy there are characters who are purely evil or purely good. Sf characters' actions are a consequence of what they view as beneficial to themselves and their friends, while fantasy characters often act on what is good or bad for others. If you accept that as an important distinction between sf and fantasy, then this is *science fiction*. The problem is that almost every character in the book, whether natural or artificial, is repugnant. Should I tell you something of the plot? In earth's future a utopia called **Astrobe** has been established, in which people can live ideal lives. None need suffer from want or hardship, everyone can have all his needs filled. Society cares for his body and mind, and can repair all defects. Alas, something has gone wrong in this perfect future -- there are many people who insist on being unhappy. They choose to live in poverty and misery, to establish the worst slums, the most horrible pollution, the most disease-ridden environment they can create. To rescue their deteriorating world, Astrobe's leaders go a thousand years into their past and bring forward Sir Thomas More, author of the first book that used the word "utopia", the book **Utopia**, written in the year 1516. Thomas More is brought to this should-be-idyllic future, which he described (perhaps ironically) in his book a 1000 years before, to help find a solution to the disaster befalling Astrobe, a disaster in which people insist on being miserable, and making the reader miserable too. Does he find a solution? If you like fantasy, if you like Harlan Ellison, Terry Carr, Samuel R. Delany, Roger Zelazny, read it and find out. I regretted every minute I wasted reading this unpleasant book.

Letter to the Editor

Aharon, hi.

Dr. Gary Weisinger's recent lecture "**Genetic Medicine -- Science Fiction or Reality**" was excellent. I can recommend another novel -- a lot about genetics -- **Children of the Night** by Dan Simmons.

Thanks to Dr. Weisinger I now know the difference between Sci-Fi and Fantasy. Sci-Fi is the fiction for those who are scientific minded and hungry for knowledge. Fantasy is for those who prefer simpler things in life.

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Oleg - Does this explain why you are a fantasy fan? **Aharon**

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