

Cyber Ozon

Science-Fiction Newsletter

Vol. XI, No. 7; July, 1999

This Month's Rehovot sf Meeting!

Yes, Rehovot sf will have a meeting this month, July 27, 1999. The excuse is that the *Israeli Society for sf and Fantasy* doesn't have meetings in Beit Ariela in the summer, so we are not competing with them. We will also have a meeting in August – see announcement below. Note that the Israeli Society will have its second annual convention "*Icon99*" during the Succot vacation this fall. Keep that in your book!

Outline of Avi Chami's Lecture (which will be in Hebrew): Evolution

Some scientific background:

The evolution of the theory of evolution:

- Creationism vs. Evolution
- Key concepts of Darwin's theory: Random variation and natural selection
- What is DNA?
- Darwin and Wallace: Is natural selection a unique tool for evolution?
- Lamarck: Does "experience" during the lifespan of an animal affect its heritage (DNA)?
- "Selfish" DNA
- The evolution of Mickey Mouse, or the many astounding characteristics of human beings.
- The genetic clock and the Cambrian explosion.

Evolution in SF - The future of mankind

What happens to evolution when intelligent beings appear:

- Intelligent beings stop evolution – *Brain Wave* (by Poul Anderson), *A Fire upon the Deep* (by VERNOR VINGE).
 - Robots / machines as our planned or accidental inheritors/competitors (numerous SF books and movies - *Terminator*, *Blade Runner*, *The Matrix* - titles by Asimov, Phillip K. Dick, Bradbury, ...). A minor variation on this: Humans and Machines converge to a new kind of "hybrid" with the best (or worst) of both worlds.
- Humans become pets / slaves / you say what of alien races.
- Atomic weapons and the mutants.
- The evolution of man as a predefined path.
- The "next step" analogy - From unicellular to multicellular => evolution to "multi-human" beings (gestalt) - *Childhood's End* (by Arthur C. Clarke), *More than Human* (by THEODORE STURGEON).
- The global being - GAIA

Rehovot Science Fiction: Next SCIENCE FICTION CLUB Meetings:

Tuesday July 27 *Avi Chami* (in Hebrew)

"The Evolution of the Human Race as Depicted in sf Stories"

Tuesday August 31 *Inbal Saggiv-Nakdimon* (in Hebrew)

"Israeli sf including books translated to Hebrew, Israeli sf magazines and fanzines, fan activities, conventions etc."

Rehovot Science Fiction meets (when it meets) on the last Tuesday of the month
at the home of Tova and Bill Silverman,

19 Eisenberg St., fourth floor, Rehovot, Tel. 08-947-6142.

There is a REFRESHMENT CHARGE of 3.50 Shekels (for those who partake).



Film Review: **THE MATRIX** by Raz Greenberg

Ever since the excellent *Dark City* (reviewed in the March 1999 issue of *CyberCozen*) dealt with the borders between reality vs. dreams everyone, it seems, want to do the same. First came *The Matrix*, then *David Cronenberg's eXistenZ* and more recently *The Thirteenth Floor* has also hit the big screens in the United States. You'd think no one would have the courage to release films with such a complex concept in the same year (and around the same time) the new *Star Wars* movie should come out – but they just keep coming. And you'd think that – based on what happened with *Dark City* and *Gattaca* – that we'd never see these films on the big screen in Israel and we'll have to wait for the video. Well, guess again – *The Matrix* is already here (and I beg the film distributors not to let *eXistenZ* skip the big screens here).

The Matrix introduces us to Neo (Keanu Reeves), computer programmer by day and computer hacker by night, who finds out that the entire world around him isn't real. It's sort of a virtual reality where people's consciousness functions while their physical bodies are used to "feed" the Matrix – an artificial intelligence built in the early 21st century. A group of rebellious "real" people led by Morpheus (Laurence Fishburne) and Trinity (Carrie-Anne Moss) fight to defend Zion, the last "real" city that exists, against the Matrix. They recruit Neo because they believe he is "The One" who can defeat the Matrix. The catch: in order to defeat the Matrix, you have to spend time in its virtual world where "The Agents" (replacing "The Aliens" from *Dark City*), who can defy any known rule of gravity and mortality, will go after you.



Oh, sorry, did I confuse you? Well, fear not. All this complex story is nothing more than a backdrop for an action/adventure movie that makes less and less sense in the narrative level as it progresses. But it's unlike any other

action/adventure you've seen recently. First, *The Matrix* keeps a perfect balance between the action and the plot. Second, the action itself is so exciting and so well choreographed by directors Larry and Andy Wachowski – that you don't mind watching a film which is less sophisticated than it pretends to be. Also, *The Matrix* is one of the most atmospheric science fiction films seen in a long time. It starts with an incredible score, which goes from a John-Williams-like heroic space opera to violent dance music. Add the incredible cinematography by Bill Pope (*Darkman*) and the amazing set design – this is indeed a very stylish film.

Unfortunately, while the Wachowski brothers seem to know a lot about style, their ability to guide actors leaves a lot to be desired. Keanu Reeves does most of the acting by twisting his face, Laurence Fishburne seems a little too pleased with himself (even when he's supposed to be tortured), Carrie-Anne Moss doesn't do anything besides looking pretty and Hugo Weaving does one of the most unconvincing villains ever seen on the big screen.

But all in all, *The Matrix* is a good film. No, it isn't anything like *Blade Runner* (a comparison I read in at least two Israeli newspapers), but if you're looking for *Blade Runner* in any science fiction film, then you probably shouldn't be watching those films in the first place (let alone criticizing them...). As it is, we finally have the opportunity of seeing an intelligent science fiction film on the big screen. So go see it today – and let's hope there's more to come.

Ed. Note: This film is also strongly recommended by Nikolas Borshevski, Avi Chami, and me. It had me sitting on the edge of my seat almost all the way through. See it!

<p>ICon99 -- a 3 day <u>sf and fantasy convention</u> on the 28th to 30th of October (Succoth vacation) in the Tel-Aviv Cinematheque</p>		
<p>sf and fantasy films and lectures</p>		
<p>All Con events featuring guests from the world, and all films, will be in English.</p>		
<p>All other con events will be in Hebrew.</p>		
<p>Join The Israeli Society for Science Fiction and Fantasy, get its announcements, go to its meetings, and go to its convention! Call 03-528-3803 or 03-604-4959</p>		
 <p>www.armageddoncon.org</p>	<p>01.01.01 The end is near!</p>	

Two Opposing Reviews of the new **STAR WARS** Series

STAR WARS **EPISODE I: THE PHANTOM MENACE**



1) Reviewed by Aharon Sheer

One of the fun things about the original *Star Wars* movie (and I have to warn you that I only liked the first one – the other two bored me) was that at frequent intervals new and entertaining and interesting things kept showing up. We saw a desert-like area on a planet with two moons. We met two different kinds of robots, each with its own unique personality. We went into a bar with alien musicians playing alien music, and a variety of colorful aliens sitting around and drinking. We met a young man unhappy in an out of the way place who wanted very much to go elsewhere. We met a Jedi knight, Obi-Wan Kenobi, played wonderfully by Alec Guinness, and also met his radically different nemesis, Darth Vader. And so it went, with new scenes and characters appearing in a fun and exciting plot. In *The Phantom Menace*, it seems, there are almost no surprises, almost no new characters of any interest, almost no new scenes of any interest. There are a lot of special effects, including numerous aliens, but in the mass action scenes the masses of aliens are visibly two-dimensional (not only in their behavior, but they *look* two-dimensional). Since the same aliens look three-dimensional when you see them individually, it seems that they didn't have the computer time to do masses right.

There are only two new characters of any interest: One is an amphibious alien horse (?) named Jar Jar Binks, whose personality reminds some blacks of the clumsy and funny black servants in movies of 1930s, thus offending them. The other is a no-legged alien businessman who has a propeller on his tail to keep him

moving around, whose big nose and business ethics remind some Jews of anti-Semitic portrayals of Jewish business men, thus offending *them*. And these are the ONLY original and enjoyable new characters in the movie (I liked them both, proving that I am both anti-black and anti-Semitic)! *The Phantom Menace* is supposed to be a prequel to the first *Star Wars* movie, so a young Obi-Wan Kenobi appears. Sadly, he is not only a really mediocre actor (an insult to the memory of Alec Guinness), but he doesn't even LOOK like a young Alec Guinness. The latter problem could EASILY have been solved by the technology of *morphing*, that is using the computer to change his face to make him look like a young Alec Guinness – a simple technological trick that would have been of some significant value.

The movie has a boring plot, poor acting, little originality, and no interest. I saw it in a movie theater in Los Angeles which was almost empty. There were maybe ten people in the downstairs area (which should have held at least three hundred), and the balcony was also almost empty. The sound was so loud (apparently intended to be absorbed by the clothing of the three hundred people that were not there), that our ears were ringing when we left the theater. I realize that as *Star Wars* fans you have to go, but you're going to be disappointed. People went to the first *Star Wars* movie, liked it, went back to see it again, and recommended it to their friends. Few will do the same with this one.

2) Reviewed by Raz Greenberg

Sometimes it's very hard to write a film review without addressing the hype that surrounds it. In the case of *Star War Episode One: The Phantom Menace* it's impossible. I mean, what else can be said about this film which hasn't been said in the global and local press? In fact, in the case of *The Phantom Menace* the press has completely ignored some of the basic principals that should guide it while

writing about an upcoming film. I'll leave aside all those so-called journalists who had the chutzpa of giving away every plot twist of the film just for the pleasure of spoiling it for the fans. What I'm talking about is all those people who were kind enough to warn us (about three weeks before the film even screened here in Israel) that this is a terrible film, the worst thing that has happened to the cinematic medium since

Braveheart won the academy award, and that anyone who has an IQ higher than 115 should not spend their time and money watching it. I sure hope that the almost empty theater in which I was watching the film isn't a result of people reading those reviews. I mean, once in a while critics have this god-complex when they have to prove that they're smarter than the viewers, but I've never seen it done more vocally and unfairly as was done to *The Phantom Menace*.

So, as you see, this review is going to be very different than the ones I usually write. I'm not going to write long passages about the plot (interesting and suspenseful), the direction/photography/special effects (excellent/excellent/excellent), or the music (wonderful). What I am gonna do is confront all those people who tried to brainwash you against *The Phantom Menace* and prove them wrong.

But first... there are some people with whom I'm not going to argue. I'm talking, of course about all those people who didn't like this movie because of the merchandising, the promos or Natalie Portman's haircut. Much like the people who hate REM because they're popular or Jerry Seinfeld because he has too much money (I swear, I actually met some of those people), they really don't need me to teach them how to write film reviews. They need a good psychiatrist.

The people I am gonna argue with are all those people who find "reasonable" excuses for others not to watch this film. Their first argument seems to be that this is a "kids' movie" and that the plot is not complex enough. I'm sorry? Since when is *Star Wars* an "adult movie" to begin with? Since when was it supposed to be complex (and if that whole Darth-Vader-is-Luke's-Father thing is too complex for you, your life is very simple indeed)? What did those people think they were in for, a remake of *War and Peace*? Come on, the charm of the *Star Wars* saga came from its innocent legend-like

simplicity. And if those people didn't like the previous movies to begin with, what's the big idea about letting them review this one? At the very least, someone impartial should have reviewed this film.

The second and probably lamest argument is that there are too many special effects and that they come at the expense of plot/acting/money paid to set constructors. Again, I have to wonder if these people have seen the previous films - more importantly, if they had seen any movie to come out in the last 15 years. Most of the major films, from hits like *Independence Day* to "serious" works like *Blade Runner* were heavy on special effects. *Star Wars* films were always the pioneers in the special effects field. What's wrong with that? And no, the special effects don't come at the expense of anything else. On the contrary: they enhance the atmosphere.

As for all those people who found this film to be "unexciting" "boring" "not fulfilling its premise" - at this point I have to conclude that they probably entered the wrong theater by accident, since they have obviously watched a different film than I have. I had so much fun watching *The Phantom Menace*, I'm definitely going to see it again on video (and maybe even on the big screen). And let me assure you that it is very exciting. Best two hours of entertainment you can see on theaters now. George Lucas never pretended that *The Phantom Menace* is supposed to be more than that. So what's the problem?

My point in writing this review is (and this is the part in which I really start pushing my luck) that everyone - even film critics - can be wrong. And all those who gave bad reviews for *The Phantom Menace* were - in my opinion - wrong. So, go see this film. I'm sure that by the time you'll finish watching it, you'd feel that the force is indeed with you.

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