

Cyber Cozen

Science-Fiction Newsletter

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ICON98

Report by **Brian Stableford**

Icon98 was the second in an annual series of cons organized by the **Israeli Society for Science Fiction & Fantasy**, in association with the **Israeli Star Trek Fan Club** and **Starbase 972**. It took place at the Tel Aviv Cinematheque from 6th-8th October, during the Sukkoth holiday period. The British Council kindly supplied travel grants to Ian Watson and myself so that we could attend the con as guests. All the talks and panels in which we were not involved were in Hebrew, but the con did attract one American attendee in the much-travelled Alan Slate. Two tracks ran throughout, one in the cinematheque's main auditorium, the other in the smaller Goldie Hawn Theater.

Attendance at the con exceeded the organizers' expectations; approximately 600 people attending for one or more days. Many young people were attracted to the con by the media program, which included three Stanley Kubrick movies, the director's cut of **Terminator 2: Judgment Day** and **Twelve Monkeys** as well as episodes of **Babylon-5** and all the episodes of the various **Star Trek** shows dealing with the Borg. The Hebrew program included a sequence of panels and talks connected with the "Habitat" project, involving the design of a closed ecosystem for us in space habitats, and talks by Avi Chami on time, Noah Brosch on space

exploration and Thomas Goodman on cybernetics. The con's prime mover and presiding genius, Dr Emanuel Lottem, talked about "Fate and Religion in **The Lord of the Rings**", having recently completed his new Hebrew translation of the epic. He and fellow editor Dorit Landes were also the leading voices on a very popular panel on "Science Fiction Publishing in Israel" whose other members were Aharon Hauptman -- the editor of Israel's only sf magazine, now unfortunately deceased -- Eli Eshed and Didi Hanoch.

Ian and I were collected from the airport by Liya Mirenberg, who continued to render invaluable assistance in transporting us back and forth from the Astor Hotel on the seafront -- from which we could watch the sun setting into the Mediterranean -- to the Cinematheque. The creator of the sf & Fantasy Society's web page, Dotan Dimet, and its secretary, Avner Friedman, showed us some of the sights of Tel Aviv, including the memorial to the assassinated prime minister Yitzhak Rabin. The jewel in the British Council's Tel Aviv crown, the effervescent and boundlessly enthusiastic Sonia Feldman, guided us around others, including the Museum of the Diaspora. Before the con had officially got under way the organizers took us to Old Jaffa, from whose shore we could see the waves breaking

The Israeli Society for Science Fiction and Fantasy Wednesday May 19th

Dr. Nahman Ben Yehuda, Department of Sociology, Hebrew University (in Hebrew)
"Future Societies"

Meetings are held in Beit Ariela, 25 Shaul HaMelech, Tel Aviv, at 8 pm
Join the Society, go to its meetings! Call 03-528-3803 or 03-604-4959

Rehovot Science Fiction

Next SCIENCE FICTION CLUB Meeting:

Tuesday July 27 **Avi Chami** (in Hebrew)

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

over Andromeda's Rock; there Ian read the soliloquy he had written -- crediting it to Euripides' lost play *Andromeda*--for his novel *Whores of Babylon*. Ian's own reading was followed by Liya's heartfelt rendering of Emanuel Lottem's Hebrew translation of the soliloquy. Ian and I gave two talks each in addition to a question-and-answer session, all of which drew pleasingly large and enthusiastic audiences. After the con Ian and I spent two days in Jerusalem, where we were assisted in our

explorations by the Israeli science fiction writer and poet Shlomo Shoval. The whole trip was hugely enjoyable and fascinatingly instructive.

There will be a third Icon next year, and Emanuel Lottem is already making plans for a Millennial con in the year 2000. He hopes to hold it on the last three days of the year, and for the countdown to the Millennium's End on December 31st he has booked the uniquely appropriate site of Armageddon. Only in Israel can this be done.



Short Reviews: by Aharon Sheer

Starfarers by Poul Anderson (1998), 383 pages.

Would you go on a starfaring voyage knowing that you would not be back for 12,000 years? With nine other people? Poul has described future technology, the "zero-zero drive", which repeatedly takes energy out of the fabric of space in order to speed up a space ship, and then puts it back, leaving the ship to coast at ever higher speeds, getting something for nothing. With a space-ship that can approach the speed of light, it is possible to have interstellar travel. Because of relativistic effects, the occupants of the ship age slowly, and return to an earth much changed.

The book deals with intertwining themes: how earth might change over those many years, and how the travellers respond to those changes. Most travellers go away for only decades, or a few hundred years, visiting the nearer stars, but each time they come back to an earth which is more hostile to them. How would you react to neighbors who lock up their house for decades, and when they come back to visit they are still young? In the early years such travel is profitable, as the starfarers bring back new discoveries. As time goes on, such new things become tiresome. Remember how each moon voyage in the 70s was less and less interesting? New human colonies are established, but none matches earth in its livability.

But what about those who went for 12,000 years? What will they find when they get to their destination, the distant region whose controlled neutrino "trails" clued earth in to the idea of the zero-zero drive in the first place? Two hundred years from now one ship will go to visit the the source of those "trails", in order to come back and report on the advanced aliens they expect to find there. Six men and four women -- a real setup by the author to provide some phony drama. How do you divide four women among six men? Still and all, it's interesting to read Poul's speculations about a variety of future (and alien) technologies, as well as alien society and biology. He has created some truly alien aliens. We feel Poul's optimistic hope that mankind will somehow overcome its current search for safety and comfort, and keep trying to explore and settle space, far and near, regardless of the cost and danger.

By the way, one of the heroes on this long trip is an Israeli woman, Hanny Dayan, a descendant of Moshe Dayan. There is even a scene in Israeli Jerusalem in 200 years. I wrote Poul and told him that I was glad to see that he thinks there will still be an Israel in 200 years. Poul replied as follows (30 April 1997):

"Actually, although the story involves ten people from different parts of the world, there's little ethnicity about any of them. I assume that in another 200 years or so, global communications, etc., will have pretty well wiped out such distinctions -- at least among the high-tech, cosmopolitan types who'd be involved with a space mission.

"This in turn, of course, implies that high-tech civilization will still be around by then. I don't know. Nor do I know whether there will still be a state of Israel or, for that matter, a USA -- though if the latter does survive, I do doubt very much that will then be a republic in anything but name. Quite likely the American Caesar has already been born."

Fire Watch by Connie Willis (1985), 271 pages. Recommended by Bill Silverman.

Connie Willis's award-winning novel *Doomsday Book* (1992) about a time traveller visiting the period of the Black Plague was reviewed in CyberCozen in December 1993. Her recent *Bellwether* (1996), a comedy of contemporary manners, was reviewed in July 1998. (By the way, *Bellwether* has been translated into Hebrew: the Hebrew title is rather obscure, but look for a book by קוני ויליס .This is a varied collection of stories, from time travel to the London Blitz ("Fire Watch") to a comedy of manners

("Blue Moon"). In the middle are a couple of science fiction stories so complex that I couldn't understand them the first time; I had to read them again using my knowledge of the ending in order to figure out what had happened ("All My Darling Daughters", "The Sidon in the Mirror"). Some of the stories have a very strong Christian flavor ("Samaritan"), while others are rather free sexy ("All My Darling Daughters"). There's even a ghost story ("Service for the Burial of the Dead"). It's a good book of stories, and it has something for everyone. Recommended.

To Say Nothing of the Dog by *Connie Willis* (1998), 493 pages.

The author has created a Victorian comedy, which is fun to read and contains a puzzle as well. This belongs in the same time-travelling future as the author's **Doomsday Book** (1992) (reviewed in **CyberCozen** in December 1993), but, while that book was optimistic about our future, it described a rather depressing past, the Black Plague in the Middle Ages that killed a third of Europe's population. This book, on the other hand, takes us back to the lives of the well-to-do in the Victorian era. How would you, as a time-travelling vacationing historian, like to spend a few weeks as a house guest in the country home of a wealthy Victorian family? Of course you will be prepared with subliminal tapes on manners and behavior, and on the language, so you will not make too many mistakes. Still the mistakes you do make may be quite hilarious.

The puzzle presented has to do with the way the time travel net protects the past from influences that might significantly change the future. Try and go back to the assassination of Lincoln, or the defeat of Napoleon by Wellington, and the net will either not open for you, or it will send to a significantly different time and place than the one you wanted. Nor can you take things from the present to the past which the past would detect as anachronous. The traveller to the Victorian era will have to do without his wrist watch or pocket flashlight (torch). (Although, see **Doomsday Book** for an exception to that.) Nor can the traveller return to the present with things from the past. If he's wearing clothes that originate in the Victorian era, the net won't open for him to go back to the future; he has to first switch to the imitation Victorian clothes he brought with him. And what happens if a traveller inadvertently changes something critical? The net will begin producing all kinds of changes in the plans of other time travellers, all to bring about a readjustment so the overall flow of history will not be affected. All this is described through amusing events in the story, which leave the reader with a puzzle to try and figure out.

The book is influenced by the classic Victorian novel, **Three Men in a Boat, To Say Nothing of the Dog** by *Jerome K. Jerome*. I read it many years ago and enjoyed its portrayal of how the Victorians entertained themselves before television, CDs and all-weather vehicles. The author even has the conceit of having her hero see Jerome K. Jerome's boat row by! It's a fun book to read, although for the sf content it is (like too many books today) much too long. If it had been the same length as the book that influenced it, it would have been much better.



בקורת ספרותית מאת דותן דימט

הביאו לי את ראשו של נסיך החלומות \ רוג'ר זילאזני ורוברט שקלי \ הוצאת עם-עובד, 308 עמודים מיותרים
Roger Zelazny and Robert Sheckley, Bring Me the Head of Prince Charming

בשאלו, אשר שואף לרומם את מעמדו על ידי העלאת יוזמה מקורית לתחרות המתקיימת בין כוחות האור וכוחות החושך לרגל האלף הראשון לספירה. הצעתו של השד היא לשחזר את אגדת היפיפיה הנרדמת בתנאי מעבדה, כך שסיום האגדה יהיה רע ומר, דבר שיהווה ניצחון רוחני של כוחות הרשע. ליישום הרעיון הוא מגייס את עזרתם של מכשפה וגיבן, חותם על ארמון מכושף באפסנאות, ותופר נסיך ונסיכה מחלקי גוויות כמעשה פרנקנשטיין. כמובן שיש הסתבכויות. המון הסתבכויות.

יש כמה וכמה דרכים לכתובה משותפת של ספרים, אבל נראה לי שזילאזני ושקלי משתמשים כאן בשיטה שהשתמשת בה בכיתה ז': כל אחד כותב פרק ושולח לשני, שחייב לכתוב את פרק ההמשך. באופן הזה, כל אחד חייב להוציא את הגיבורים מתוך התסבוכות שאליה זרק אותם הכותב הקודם, ואז להכניס אותם לתסבוכת חדשה. שקלי וזילאזני יכולים לכתוב דבר כזה מתוך שינה, וכנראה עושים זאת. אין כאן זכר אפילו למגע-יד חולף של מוזה שתקנית בחצי מישרה. זילאזני ושקלי מטיחים בקוראיהם צרורות

זילאזני ושקלי עושים חסד מסויים עם הקורא בספרם האחרון: אין צורך לקרוא בו הרבה בכדי לקלוט שהוא ספר די מחורבן. אנשים סלחניים שאין בפיהם מילה רעה על איש יאמרו אולי שהוא "חביב למדי", אבל אותם אנשים לא ישתמשו במילים בוטות יותר גם בבוואם לתאר את המגיפה השחורה, ויש להתייחס להערכה כזו בחשדנות הראויה.

מה בעצם יש לנו כאן: זילאזני ושקלי הם שני סופרים שאינם נעדרים כישרון, ואשר רכשו בזכות את חיבתם של קוראים ישראלים. ספרים קודמים של זילאזני (כולם בהוצאת עם-עובד) כוללים את **אדון האור** וסידרת הפנטסיה המצויינת **אמבר** (בעיקר מומלצים חמשת הספרים הראשונים). שקלי זכור לטובה בזכות סיפוריו הקצרים שהתפרסמו ב**פנטסיה 2000** ז"ל (מגזין אהוב ששמו וודאי לא אומר כלום למי שגילו מתחת לעשרים), וכן ספרי המד"ב הסטיריים שכתב בשנות השישים, ביניהם **אלמוות בע"מ** (שעובד לסרט הבינוני **פריג'אק** [Freejack] תוך כדי השמטה שיטתית של כל האלמנטים המעניינים שבו). הפעם רוקחים השניים מהתלת-פנטסיה קלילה, על שד זוטרי הטוחן שמירות

וכשמסתיים הספר, השטח נותר מלא שיירי-
 רעיונות שנזרקו לזירה ולא פותחו, כמו למשל
 גילויטינת- בובות שמביא השד כמתנה לילדה, או שפע
 הגידג'יטים המכושפים שנשלפים ונשחכים אחרי תריסר
 עמודים. ברגע שצמד הכותבים מגיע לסיום, הם אורזים
 והולכים לאסוף את הציק. ככה זה כנראה כשופרים
 צריכים לעבוד לפרנסתם. האפשרות האחרת, שהם
 כתבו את הספר להנאתם, היא נוראה מידי מכדי
 להעלותה על הדעת

(פורסם במקור בצומת השרון, מקומו של
 אזור השרון)

לא-מבוקרים של קלישאות פנטסיה שמקומן בבוידעם:
 גמדים, דרקונים, מלאכים, הרפיות ואלים
 מהמיתולוגיה היוונית. אפילו סנטה קלאוס, שהחליף
 את ישו ככוכב האמיתי של הכריסטמאס, צץ כאן
 במהלך ביקור בקוטב הצפוני, קפוא וחרמן.

לכן למרות כל התסבוכות השונות והמשונות
 שצצות, אין שום בניה של מתח, כי הוא מתפוגג פרק
 אחד בדיוק לאחר שנוצר. לכן כל ההתרוצצויות
 התזזיזיות מסצינה עבשה אחת לשניה נראות כנסיונות
 חסרי משמעות למלא עמודים. במקום סיבוב מסחרר
 ברכבת-הרים, הקריאה כאן פחות מותחת מנסיעה על

פני פסי ההאטה התמירים של כפר-שמריהו.



Film Review: *Blade*

reviewed by **Raz Greenberg**

The reason I was looking forward to seeing *Blade* was the fact that it was written by *David S. Goyer*, who co-wrote the excellent *Dark City* which I reviewed in the March issue of *CyberCozen*. And that was my biggest disappointment of this film. But it wasn't the only one.

The story is a modern-day take on vampires. It turns out that vampires have been living among us for years, running everything from business to government behind the scenes. Against them comes Blade (Wesley Snipes), a half-human half-vampire who holds a vendetta against all vampire-kind for killing his mother. He is aided by an old mechanic/scientist/whatever (I couldn't figure it out) named Whistler (Kris Kristofferson) and a young pretty Doctor (N'Bushe Wright). Things get complicated when a rebellious vampire, Deacon Frost (Stephen Dorff) decides ruling the world from behind the scenes isn't enough: he wants to do it out in the open. All hell (literally) breaks loose.

This could have been a wonderful setting for an *X-Files* style conspiracy psycho-thriller, but it isn't. The plot quickly gets lost in a series of action sequences. Also lost is Goyer's attempt to recreate *Dark City* in giving the viewer a feeling that something bigger is going on (we learn that within the first 20 minutes of the film, so it's not really surprising). And the dialogues are the worst: going from overworked

macho cliches through unfunny jokes to basically stupid lines.

As for the acting: with the exception of Snipes who gives a stone-dead performance almost everyone does surprisingly well, considering they weren't given much to work with. Kris Kristofferson gives his usual confident performance. Stephen Dorff is excellent (and obviously having fun) as the bad guy. And there's even one brilliant casting of former pornstar Traci Lords as a female vampire.

Not everything is bad in this film. British director Stephen Norrington (whose first film *Death Machine* has achieved something of a cult status and a certain amount of critical acclaim) handles the action sequences well, giving the movie some of the intensity the script lacks. Mark Isham's music sometimes goes over the top, but it gives the right atmosphere. Special effects are also nice (still, you can't help feeling this film would have been twice the success if they used half the ketchup). And there are some brief moments of true brilliance: I thought the vampire dance club sequence at the beginning was great and I liked the scenes with the vampire Italian (oops, sorry, Rumanian!) Mafia-like council meetings. There's also an attempt to give a scientific explanation to vampirism (again, a touch of *The X-Files*) but like all other great elements in this film, it is left largely unused. Overall, *Blade* is a big disappointment.

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For mail delivery of *CyberCozen*, please donate 30 shekels per YEAR; For airmail to US \$15; If Aharon Sheer can hand-deliver it, 15 shekels.

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