



ICon99 Fan Guest of Honor: Aharon Sheer  
As told to Aharon Sheer

Who am I?

I am a funny choice for a Guest of Honor. First of all you expect a Guest of Honor to be a scintillating speaker, a delightful conversationalist, someone surrounded constantly by people who drink in his sparkling plays on words, and his comments on people and activities. I'm not like that at all.

First of all, it's almost impossible to talk to me. Most conversations go like this: I say something, and the other person says: "What? What did you say?" After a few such attempts, conversation lags. This is because I have a hoarse voice which is almost impossible to hear when there is any kind of background noise.

Second, I'm not an extemporaneous speaker. I like to plan everything in advance. If you ask me something, usually I have nothing to say. Like many people who write, I like to put things down on paper, revise, rewrite, correct, etc. This is not possible when I speak, so I tend to keep quiet.

The only kinds of conversations that I enjoy are very private, one on one conversations, without any attempt to put on or impress. If you're too smart for me, I'm not interested. If you have the patience, try a nice walk with me in the fields around Rehovot, where, if nothing else, we can talk about the latest weeds.

So how did I get to be Fan Guest of Honor?

Two things:

- 1) For nine years I ran what was (most of the time) the only science fiction (sf) club in Israel, **Rehovot SF**. It met in Rehovot *every month* for nine years, starting in 1989, and still meets occasionally in the summer.
- 2) Since 1989 I have published a monthly sf newsletter, **CyberCozen**. I'm never missed a month.

More information:

For most of those nine years **Rehovot sf** was the only *regularly meeting* sf club in Israel, and drew people from all over Gush Dan. The club only stopped regular meetings after the recently founded Israeli Society for sf and Fantasy began holding monthly meetings in Tel Aviv.

Rehovot meetings are held at the house of Bill Silverman. Bill's house has two great advantages: Bill has a big living room with a lot of chairs, and he has a science-fiction and fantasy library of over one thousand books in English, which he is willing to lend to the people who come to meetings (and mostly they return the books, too, which is really unusual in Israel).

The club was founded with help from a lot of other people: Besides Bill Silverman it had Dena Ben-Kiki (now Shunra), Elana Dror (now Rein), Ilana Gomel, Miriam ben-Loulu and her father Abe Bursten (אב"ר), Eli Eshed, Yehiel Adar, and Amit Yizhar. Most of these people I had met at the short-lived Tel Aviv Science Fiction Club. Three of them still come to meetings!

I modeled my club after the **Elves', Gnomes', and Little Men's Science Fiction Chowder and Marching Society (Berkeley Cell)**. The "**Little Men**" (as they were known) was a club in Berkeley California that I had been a member of in the 60s. It had a successful meeting format: The centerpiece of each meeting was a **main lecture**, which was announced in advance, and could be on any subject which might interest people who read SF or fantasy (that covers almost all possible subjects). The meetings started with announcements, often there was a short talk on a book or author that someone had read, or a short presentation of an idea that someone wanted to talk about, followed by the main lecture. In addition, **refreshments** were served. This successful format served the Berkeley club for many many years, and it has served the Rehovot club well too. **I wish the Israeli Society would serve refreshments at its meetings too.**

I wanted to call the club in Rehovot the "*Elves', Gnomes', and Little Men's Science Fiction Chowder and Marching Society (Rehovot Cell)*" but the stick-in-the-mud members rejected all imaginative names proposed, and chose to call themselves "*Rehovot Science Fiction*". For Shame!

When the club first started, I sent out a monthly announcement about the each meeting. Dena Ben-Kiki in the meantime tried to publish a profit-making sf fan publication, "*About SF*", which unfortunately only attracted forty subscribers, not enough to cover expenses. "*About SF*" failed, so I decided to convert the monthly announcement into a newsletter which contains reviews, commentary, announcements, very short stories, humor, occasional drawings, etc. The newsletter grew to four pages a month, and is funded by donations from the members somewhat like the box at the club meetings into which people put money to pay for refreshments. If the donations don't cover the costs, I cover the difference. In all those years if anyone said he

wanted to get the newsletter but couldn't afford it, he got it free. Nobody gets paid for submitting things to *CyberCozen*; it is an entirely volunteer activity which people do for the fun of it (certainly not for fame, and not even for praise, which is rarely forthcoming).

I decided to call the newsletter *CyberCozen*. To "cozen" someone is to deceive or to bluff him, particularly to persuade him to do something that it is not in his best interests to do. I was able to call the newsletter *CyberCozen* despite the strenuous opposition of the stick-in-the-mud members of the club, mainly because I didn't ask their permission.

Recently Israel's SF historian, Eli Eshed, suggested putting out a selection of the "*Best of CyberCozen*". Eli went over the first six years and made his recommendations. Since I had been chosen FGOH of ICon99, I decided that it would be a good time to publish the *earliest* of that material now. I hope you enjoy it.



Graphics Editor's Note: Aharon Sheer

By Guy Eldar

On the Second year of my BA in communications, at the Collage of Management, I was writing a paper on the information society as it is reflected in science fiction films. The idea was to compare movies from the late 60's with those of the mid 90's (present, at that time). The only problem was finding those late 60's movies. Through friends in the Israeli Society for Science Fiction and Fantasy I made connection with Aharon Sheer, who, I was told, had a vast collection of SF videos. Although Aharon is more into books than movies, I did find those movies I was looking for in his private collection. Aharon expressed an interest in the subject of my paper and invited me to lecture about it at the Rehovot SF club, which he organizes. I was happy to oblige to his request, as it was a chance for me to return the favor for his assistant on my paper.

But that did not end my relationship with Aharon. As a "payment" (totally unnecessary, but very welcome), for the lecture I gave, Aharon gave me a year's subscription to CyberCozen. When I first received the newsletter

I was taken with its content, but was discontented with the overall look of its layout. It looked more like a letter and less like "news". I asked Aharon if I could assist in the reshaping of the newsletter's look and We've been reshaping and improving it ever since (for about a year and a half now).

Above you have read the personal description of Aharon Sheer of himself. As the Hebrew saying goes "The Baker Does Not Testify To His own Dough", so is the case with Aharon. He is much too modest to fully accept the small honor bestowed upon him by the society, as being its first "Fan Guest of Honor". Leaving aside the fact that Aharon is one of the most interesting and friendliest people I have ever met, he has done and will keep on doing a lot in promoting SF in Israel. He began doing so long before the idea of the society was ever conceived, and he will continue to do so for many more years to come. Personally, I'm proud to take part in this wonderful man's work and I believe the society has made the right choice in making him its first "Fan Guest of Honor".

The Best of  **CyberCozen**

February 1989 – February 1992

Selected by **Eli Eshed**

(which is why there are no articles here by Eli Eshed)

*Ed. Note: What's missing in the selection below? Material in Hebrew, and some nice drawings by Miriam ben-Loulu and Alon Itzkowitz. In the early years I used a text editor which did not handle Hebrew, so all Hebrew material was submitted camera ready and simply photocopied. Hence I do not have computer readable text of Hebrew stories and articles to use in this compilation. Similarly for the nice drawings we printed in the early issues. Sorry. However, we do have some new graphics done by our current graphic editor, Guy Eldar.*

Aharon Sheer



April 1991



POEM: On Reading Science Fiction (1982)

The bug-eyed monster's got the girl!  
 (I bite my nails in consternation.)  
 And now the poison gases swirl;  
 The hero leads an insurrection.

And then my heart beats faster still,  
 I grip the book in fascination.  
 The robots now provide the thrill  
 As humans watch in resignation.

But SF's phantoms fade to gray  
 As Phantoms speed in close formation.  
 The roar of Sky Hawks rends away  
 All thought of peaceful contemplation.

Miriam Ben-Loulu

SPECULATION: INTERSTELLAR INTELLIGENCE THEORY

By **Omri Guttman**

A few weeks ago, I found myself thinking of what a superior, more intelligent race would be like. Many SCI-FI books talk about other intelligent races, having their origins on faraway star systems, yet these races nearly always have extremely similar intelligence to us humans. Even when the author specifically states that the creatures are wiser, better than us, he can only show it through their superior technology, and not by actually describing their thinking process. As a matter of fact, all extraterrestrials I've read about thought and reasoned much like their human counterparts. Even if it would be hard to contemplate a superior race, maybe one

could nevertheless exist? By simulating evolution, I have theorized that this is not the case!

Let us take an imaginary planet system, whose evolution has gotten to a point where the most advanced creatures are as intelligent as our monkeys, and other forms of life range intellectually from the ape to the ameba. Each life form has its own special method of subsistence, and here too, survival is insured only for the fittest. In this scenario, the intelligent creature might find his brain to be an advantage, but it certainly does not provide him a

way to survive an attack by a predator with stronger muscles and larger teeth.

Now, suppose that this monkey-like creature developed ever so slightly and perfected the use of a club. With this weapon, the creature would have an enormous advantage over the predator, and from here on, could proceed to rule the animal kingdom, and spread its habitat much more easily. In this example, evolution has in one short stroke given the monkey-creature a key to total domination, much like Homo Sapiens on Earth.

Looking at our planet, it seems that our species has crossed a very delicate "red line", and has progressed through the ages to build many great civilizations and to advance technology at a ferocious pace.

Yet, the actual difference between our brains and the chimpanzee's is marginal, if compared to the difference between a chimp and an ameba. Summarizing, it is possible to say that a minute addition to intelligence could result in a huge advantage, and guarantee total domination for the race in question.

In such a manner, evolution comes to a singular point. After achieving a certain stage of development, one species can insure its success.

Nothing [but its own doing] can now pose a threat to Homo Sapiens, and therefore, its evolution is no longer necessary. In but a fraction of Earth's history, modern man has achieved unprecedented quality of life, security of existence, and domination of the planet.

Today, it would be fair to say that every member of the Homo Sapiens race is at liberty to reproduce, and an increase in intelligence would not constitute an advantage in the fight for reproduction. Thus, from evolution's standpoint, we could remain at our current level of intelligence, and not put our species at risk.

Having come this far, it is possible to say that any type of being we might encounter in the future should be either below or at our level of intelligence. This would work well with most alien models of movies or science-fiction stories, but might pose another problem: maybe a species of our intelligence cannot understand enough to create space travel? Maybe that's why no intelligence has contacted us yet? Maybe not...

Genetic engineering fans might believe that a superior form of life could be created by an inferior being. To me that seems very far away from us right now, but who knows?

AHARON SHEER COMMENTS :

Do you agree with Omri? Do any SF books have a CONVINCING description of an alien superior in intelligence to Isaac Asimov? How about Larry Niven's Protector? Is there an SF alien whose intelligence is CONVINCINGLY depicted as radically DIFFERENT from ours, not better (they do not "think like we do")? (I would say the Japanese qualify, but they are probably humans.) Omri's evolutionary contention seems to be that once intelligent beings are smart enough to invent a club for bashing other animals over the head the evolution of intelligence stops. In my opinion the history of the Jewish people provides support for Omri's contention. What happens to those who are a little bit smarter? Can we get some arguments on this? Send comments to CyberCozen!



ELANA DROR COMMENTS :

I would say that the horse-like "Companions" of Mercedes Lackey books qualify as not thinking like we do. For those who are interested, a new Mercedes Lackey book is out, "By the Sword", related to the Vows and Honor series. I also think that Aharon's remark about the Japanese is in bad taste.

ALON ITZKOWITZ COMMENTS :

It seems to me that SF writers find it difficult to create an imaginary race if they do not have an excellent knowledge of physics and biology. JOHN VARLEY did fine genetic work in "Titan" and "Wizard", and HAL CLEMENT in "Mission of Gravity" (exciting astronomical, geographical descriptions). If so, does this mean a writer must be also a scientist? Without such a background, would he lack the ability?

Arthur C. Clarke ("Space Odyssey") never describes the alien creatures in his books. Are they beyond our comprehension, or is he afraid?

	<p>01.01.01</p> <p>The end is also the beginning...</p>	
<p><a href="http://www.armageddoncon.org">www.armageddoncon.org</a></p>		

July 1991



ON-BASED LIFE?

Ted Henderson, a reader in the U.S., writes:

I read your science fiction newsletter with interest, especially the contribution made by Omri Guttman.

One interesting speculation I have read about the development of life on other worlds is that the chemistry may not be based on Carbon as life on earth is. For example, Silicon is very chemically similar to carbon. If silicon based life were to evolve somewhere, it would be quite different.



BOOK REVIEW:

"Tik-Tok" by John Sladek

Daw Books, 1983, 254 pages.

Reviewed by Aharon Sheer

Suppose that slavery were once again legal. What would you think of an owner who ordered his slaves to have sex with his house guests, or enjoyed bringing his friends to watch while one slave had sex with another, or had his slave emasculated? What about a slave owner who ordered his slaves to stand still and do nothing for weeks on end, until they became mentally unbalanced from boredom? Or what about slave owners who are not deliberately cruel, but simply completely indifferent to the thoughts, feelings and desires of their slaves, viewing them as inferior beings who exist only to serve? Situations as horrifying as the worst abuses of slaves in the American Deep South before the Civil War are described here (for examples of the real thing, see some of Mark Twain's short stories).

But author John Sladek's slaves will never revolt, never disobey and never run away; they are ROBOTS governed by Asimov's three Laws of Robotics. These are not the charming and warm human/robot relationships described by Asimov (although in truth, Asimov's Susan

Calvin even murders an occasional robot herself: see the stories "Robot Dreams" and "Liar".)

Sladek's vision is all too clear, his dialog and characters so real that you can see and hear his humans as if they were in front of you. Tik-Tok, Sladek's robot hero/anti-hero, whose "asimov circuits" have somehow become inoperative, makes us rejoice when he kills innocent humans randomly and without expressed emotion. In shock we have to remind ourselves that WE are humans. When men have the power over other intelligent beings that Sladek's humans have over their robots, how many unthinkingly misuse that power? (Ask any Israeli cleaning lady about her treatment at the hands of many of her employers; and she can quit, or if necessary, fight back!)

Viciously satirical, both very funny and painful, Sladek's book makes me hope that Asimov-style robots will never become available for purchase.

My thanks to Yoav Friedmann who recommended "Tik-Tok" to me.

Rehovot Science Fiction club

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.

Lectures are held in English and/or Hebrew, depending on the lecturer.

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

For more information please contact Aharon Sheer at:

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All are welcome!!! (must notify in advance)

August 1991



ILANA GOMEL: Answer to OMRI GUTTMAN

Omri's article ("Interstellar Intelligence Theory", CyberCozen, April, 1991) raises two points which I will address separately. The first one is the question of whether a superior intelligence can exist. The second one is the question of whether such an intelligence can be convincingly imagined by inferior beings (such as ourselves). There is no necessary connection between the two issues. It may indeed be that a superior intelligence exists (or can exist), but that we are simply unable to imagine it.

With regard to the first point, it may be that in the animal world a minimal increase in intelligence is sufficient to give a survival edge to a species. But once intelligence appears, a whole new game is set in motion, with its own rules which are not reducible to the laws of biological evolution. Even discounting social insects, we can tell from self-observation that intelligence is not an individual but a collective phenomenon. Children who are brought up by animals or in total solitude never develop the capacity to think. A community of intelligent beings is not the same thing as any other biological species: it creates a culture which develops by its own intrinsic laws. For example, the biological law of the survival of the physically fittest is supplanted by the law of the survival of the socially fittest: not the healthiest but the smartest or the richest. In the case of humanity, cultural evolution takes over where biological evolution leaves off. Since the Neolithic period, there has been no biological change in the human being but there has been enormous cultural progress: modern civilization is capable not just of dominating its environment but of modifying it (mostly for the worse, but this is irrelevant to the argument).

To say that there has been no change in human intelligence since the Stone Age is to tie intelligence to a physical characteristic: say, a bigger brain. But this is not the case: intelligence seems to depend not so much on the brain size as on the amount and complexity of neuron connections, or maybe on the more efficient use of the basic brain structure (I've read somewhere that most people use only a small percentage of their actual brain capacity). And even if today the individual human being is no smarter than the Cro-Magnon man he/she is part of a much more complex structure than the primitive society of

hunters and gatherers. Who says there is no such thing as the IQ of a whole civilization?

And even for the individual, things are not too bleak. Intelligence might be genetically determined, but unlike an animal species, an intelligent community is genetically self-regulating. Even in a very primitive society, reproduction is not governed by a free-for-all contest but rather by a complex of social mores. In modern society there are cultural mechanisms -- such as the incest taboo -- that fulfill some of the functions of the abolished natural selection.

Isn't the old Jewish custom that the best Torah scholar is the most desirable match an attempt to artificially breed for intelligence?

In the future, genetic engineering may provide the most powerful tool of cultural evolution. Omri is skeptical about it because he does not believe an "inferior" form of life can produce a "superior" one. This is what biological evolution is all about, but in any case, "inferior" and "superior" are cultural, not natural, concepts. Nature knows neither inferiority nor superiority but only adaptation. A civilization that has at its disposal the tools of genetic engineering will use them according to the ends dictated by its worldview. A culture that values stupidity as the highest good will, presumably, have no difficulty in artificially producing a race of morons. Modern Western civilization, however, values individual intelligence, and given the means to increase it, will probably do so. There have already been attempts in this direction: the rage for eugenics in the early twentieth century, given a bad name by the Nazis; and a sperm bank in the US stocked by the sperm of Nobel laureates for the benefit of any woman who wants a genius's child.

To sum up: I think that having once appeared in a species, intelligence has its own dynamics not reducible to natural selection. We know very little about the laws governing the development of civilization. It might be that there is a limit to the development of a species or an individual. But this limit is not set by biology.

With regard to the second point, about the impossibility of describing a superior intelligence, I would agree with a slightly different formulation: it is impossible to describe the totally Other. Many people claim the human mind is incapable of imagining something completely unconnected to reality as we know it. Imagination works not by creation ex nihilo (out

of nothing) but by recombining, transforming, distorting, etc., elements of experience. All SF aliens are such recombination or distortions of mundane concepts. Just one example: in Gardner Dozois' latest anthology "Aliens" intelligent creatures from outer space are presented as: angels; walking refrigerators; a tentacled street artist; a bum with gills; talking dogs; three-legged rabbits; mutinous trees; and ancient Egyptian gods. One might claim that this is the result of poor imagination but, in fact, some of these stories are quite good. Even the best aliens in SF -- Wells' Martians or Lem's Solaris -- are the product of a more sophisticated use of the same strategies of presenting the unknown through the known.

The point, surely, is that the alien intelligence might not just be superior or inferior

to ourselves but essentially different: so different, perhaps, that we might not realize we are dealing with an intelligence at all. Even if an SF writer attempts to portray our own super-intelligent descendants, the quantitative increase might result in a qualitative change, so these creatures will appear totally incomprehensible. The best an SF writer can do is to work by analogy, perhaps comparing his/her aliens to the ultimate intelligence of God: the strategy Lem uses in *Solaris* and Frank Herbert in *Destination: Void*. In any case, even if some super-genius SF author (perhaps a product of genetic engineering) did manage to describe an intelligence totally different from our own, the result would be incomprehensible and therefore, no fun at all.



POEM: "ALF" by Miriam Ben-Loulu

Look Children, see Alf?  
 Now look at Alf's face.  
 (No, he's not an ugly bear.  
 Alf's from outer space.)

Look children, look and learn.  
 Space's at our front door.  
 (First "E.T." and now "Alf" dolls  
 At your local store.)

(Superman and Wonder Girl  
 Made too much of violence.  
 But the laughs on dear Alf's show  
 Only murder silence.)

Look children, see Alf?  
 Alf is very nice.  
 (If he weren't from outer space  
 Would you watch him twice?)

Look children, look and learn.  
 Space is a new fad.  
 (But I keep on wondering  
 Were BEM's this bad?)

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by an Alf Non-Fan



Note for those too young to have met them personally, "BEM"'s are "Bug-Eyed Monsters", which many years ago graced the covers of all the worst SF magazines, and showed up in a number of early SF movies too.



BOOK REVIEW:  
 WAY of THE PILGRIM  
 by Gordon R. Dickson, Ace Books, 439 pages  
 Reviewed by Aharon Sheer

Once in a while a book comes along that you can't put down. You not only read it on the bus, and while walking down the street, as with any normal book, but also while sitting in front of the computer waiting for compilations and links to finish, at work, and have to make up funny excuses to your boss when he catches you at it. Yet many of these leave you saying "Eh! So what..." when you finish.

Gordon Dickson has written a number of books which deal with the reactions of humans and aliens to the meeting between them.

In *The Alien Way* the hero entered the mind of a member of a more technologically advanced alien species that potentially posed a great threat to earth. By comparing the alien way of behavior with that of bears on earth he was able to understand them and find a way to meet them in peace (not so easily done with BEARS).

In *Earth Lords* a highly intelligent dwarf-like species had landed by accident on earth hundreds of years ago. They had been kept as court pets by ruthless rulers (there are a number of famous paintings from the Baroque period that show these dwarfs; for example, by Velazquez). Then the aliens succeeded in founding a secret refuge under the ground in Canada. The hero had to deal with them as one of their slaves, and find a way to thwart their desire to revenge themselves on earth's people.

But in *Way of the Pilgrim*, the whole earth has been enslaved by a race so technologically superior that one of them, alone, can stand off an army of millions of humans equipped with the most powerful nuclear weapons. The hero, exceptionally gifted in

languages, has become a servant and translator for these honest, hardworking and intelligent beings, who demand absolute obedience and right behavior not only from themselves but also from those who work for them. The aliens expect to tame human beings and make them love them, as a dog loves its master, and work for them, as cattle work for their masters. The aliens have done this on numerous other planets. And the problem which the hero solves is how to cozen them into thinking that humans cannot be tamed, and more, that humans are not worth even TRYING to tame, so that the aliens will voluntarily leave, without wiping out all of mankind, as they could easily do.

Dickson's books which deal with aliens leave the reader asking questions. Is the behavior of the aliens reasonable? Would human beings really respond that way? Does the solution really follow from the situation the author has described? In other words, whether you agree with what Dickson has done or not, the books leave you with something to chew on.

One comment about style. Poul Anderson's style is like the gentle waves of a quiet sea breaking softly on the shore, as moonlight flashes silver off the ripples. Dickson's style in this book and in *Earth Lords* is like the thumping feet of an army of perfectly disciplined soldiers, marching before the reader, company after company after company. But maybe that's done deliberately, because of the subject matter. It does seem to me that the style in Dickson's *Childe Cycle* Series (which I found completely uninteresting) was considerably warmer and more human.

The Israeli Society  
 for Science Fiction and Fantasy  
 Dedicated to promote and encourage Science Fiction and Fantasy in Israel.  
 Meetings, new and information on *Science and Science Fiction*  
*Join the Society, go to its meetings!*  
 For more information see the society's stand at ICON99  
 or  
 enter the society's web site at: <http://www.actcom.co.il/~ny/>



September 1991



## STORY: *The Helm of the Great Goddess*

By Leonid Reznick

"Hey, you in the castle! Bring down the bridge, open the gates! I killed your king! I'm your new king. Bring down the bridge, scoundrels! I'll get you anyway. It will be better if you let me in willingly."

As I expected: silence. Shadows on the high walls move, arms flash in the light of torches. They are digesting the news. Hard to believe that their formidable ruler, King Moro, has been killed. The great warrior, unmatched knight. King Moro -- the man who destroyed our village, captured my sister and some other fine girls. King Moro -- the damned butcher, killed my relatives and some two hundred men and children from our village. The cursed king.

And he isn't so great. The holdings of some neighbor barons are not smaller. And in comparison with Count Solo, Moro is a mere landlord. But he is -- a king. He owns the Helm of the Great Goddess Morotory, that brings him power over the clan. And now the gold Helm is shining on my head.

The people on the walls can see it clearly. Night has come and the green light of rising Smoln reflects from the gold Helm. That's why not a single arrow has been sent down from the walls. Any man of Moro's clan would be punished immediately by the Great goddess if he tried to kill the owner of the Helm. I didn't fear the wrath of the Great Goddess. I'm from a free clan. Nobody from ours has been charmed for loyalty to kings. Maybe that's why they don't like us.

Everything is still on the walls. They can bash their heads against the wall, not knowing what to do, but they will not open the gates. Well, I wasn't waiting for that. I'll do it myself. I'm the best shooter of the two western kingdoms. My third arrow cuts the rope that's holding a boat near the castle wall. Interesting what they need a boat for? Fishing? Looking around? No matter. Here it is, the cherished arrow with strong string. I raise the bow and shoot. Fine! The arrow is deeply set into the boat. Now I've got to pull the string carefully, without tearing it. Ah ha! There's some movement on the walls. Hundreds of arrows fly toward mine with its string. They're good at that, let them do it. I'd like to see that man that can cut a string in daylight, but at night...What's that? O Goddess! I've underestimated the enemy. What one great bowman can not do, a hundred

bad ones have done. Somebody's arrow has hit mine and broken it. I try to pull carefully. But no, the string is loose. The boat sails freely and they're throwing torches from the walls. That's bad. This plan has failed; I've got to think of another.

A cold wind is rising from the north. I can't wait all night near the moat. It is a pity that I'm a bad swimmer. The Helm of the Great goddess is heavy on my head. It's defending me against the wrath of Moro's relatives, but can't help me to overcome the moat. A strong detachment would not be able to capture this castle, and I'm alone. Am I a madman? No. The Helm won't let them repulse my attacks. The wrath of the Goddess is terrible, even if no one is alive who witnessed it: for many years people have not dared to break the charm.

A small pillar near the drawbridge's far edge draws my attention. A plan is ready. I get a rope, then find a good piece of stone and tie it to it, firmly. The contraption is suitable. I swing it over my head, slowly letting out rope. Everything is going fine ... as long as the rope doesn't become too long. It's hard to turn, but I've got to do it quickly. More ... and more. I help with all my body, I feel giddy. It seems as if I'm holding the whole world in my hands. Nausea....It's done! The end of the taut rope has met the small pillar and wound around it. One -- two pulls for control. Fine. The next moment a rain of arrows flies toward the rope. I've got to do everything quickly. When I clamber up the rope, not a single man will shoot. No one....Unless they have mercenaries in their castle from other clans, who don't fear the charm.

I fasten this end of the rope around a huge stone. Now I'm in the air. Silence. So, there are no mercenaries. They'd be shooting. I'm a perfect target. Some said that Moro dares not have mercenaries, afraid of coups. But anything can happen. At last I'm at the castle's wall. It's old, with gaps between bricks. I find a place under a battlement's projection. No one from Moro's clan will even move in my direction, but there are many women of other clans in the castle. And it's sufficient to have a tender woman's hands throw a stone at my head....

A hard climb. But I'm ready for it. I've brought four special daggers and they're a big help.

So -- I'm up. Guardsmen in armor are standing on the walls, near and far from me. I go past. There is doom in their eyes. My Helm reflects the dark-red flame of torches and green cool shining of Smoln. The bright red jewel, the Eye of the Goddess, is filled with blood. I go down from the wall, take a servant under my hand and put my sword to his throat.

"Where do the women servants live?"

Half dead from fear he makes a weak gesture with his hand.

"Lead me!"

He leads. A low, dark and dirty room, filled with rage.

"Corely!" I shout. "Corely, where are you?"

I hear some rustles in the dark, then slow movement, then somebody breaks from among the crowded bodies and throws her arms around my neck.

"Lorn! Dear, how did you get here? Is everything fine with you?"

I'm not in the mood for laughter, but I'm smiling.

"I'm fine, sis. And you?"

She doesn't speak. Fool's question. Well, anything can happen in this life. I've got to hurry.

"Is there anybody from our village? Who wants to go with me? Rise and come."

Six women rise. Holding Corely by her hand I go out of the room. She leads me to the chambers of the rulers. Six women walk behind us. We stop near the Queen's bedroom. The stout oak door is closed. Try my sword on it? That will take time.

"Open it!" I shout. "Open, by God! I can get inside by myself, have no doubts, but it will be worse for you."

The door opens. Honestly, I wasn't waiting for that. The Queen stands on the threshold. King Moro is a killer and a rascal, but his wife is perfection. Her figure is hidden by a dark-blue cloak, and I can see only her face. It seems the Goddess herself is here among us.

"Come here," says the Queen, "We'll talk."

I leave the women (not a single guard is with us) and come inside. The Queen closes the door.

"I'm on your side," she says. "I'm sick and tired of that old grumbler. That scoundrel had almost forgotten me. He brought other girls from neighboring villages. He was dirty and vile. I'm glad he's dead. I see you're young, handsome and clever. And you've killed Moro, so you're strong. I'll help you."

"In what?"

"I see you intend to go away. Don't. Stay here, be King. I'll help you to win over Moro's brothers. Believe me. You won't be the first to become King in that manner."

I look at the rings on her hands. She's from Kort's clan, and she doesn't fear the wrath of a Great Goddess. Women know how to make use of a dagger. If the Helm had been taken by a relative or a noble -- they might submit. But taken by a common man like me... Don't cheat me, Queen!

She stands and looks at me.

"No," I answer. "I'm going away. And you too. Come!"

"Why?" Amazement is on her face. "Do you want revenge? Fine!" She takes a few steps toward her raised bed. "I'm sure you won't want to go away in the morning."

"That's why I'm going away now. I hope there will be no need to drag you."

"Fool!" Her face becomes angry. "What don't you like? Are you afraid? Need advice? Moro has two brothers. Go and kill them now. They're panicked and can't hide. It will frighten everyone here." After a short hesitation she adds, "By the way, his brothers' wives are very beautiful. Almost like me. They will belong to you too."

I look at the woman and cannot comprehend how so much evil can be under such a beautiful cover. But her words help me to avoid her resistance at this moment.

"Show me where these wives live," I say with an interested look, and go to the door.

The Queen comes behind me. In the corridor I let her lead. After a hundred steps we stop. A tall man, as huge as Moro, blocks our way. His face is like Moro's.

"Stand still, villain!" he says. But there's no feeling of threat in his voice. "Go away from here."

The Queen turns, smiles and nods slightly. I place my right hand on a hilt, but then remove it and take a step forward.

"Well, go ahead," I say. "I'm too lazy to try my sword on you. Do me a favor, strike me. I'll watch how the Goddess turns you into a burning ball...The people haven't seen it for so long. Maybe it's all a fairy tale? If you have even an ounce of courage, try!"

His face is pale with fear, but I don't like his eyes. The next moment I hear the sound of a string tautening. So they do have a mercenary in the castle! I tumble on the floor, taking my sword out. So, the Queen's nods were not for me!?

The arrow struck the right arm of Moro's brother near his shoulder. Rising on my

legs I understand why this mercenary didn't shoot me earlier. Well, it wasn't a mercenary. Just a common kitchen servant from another clan. Besides, he is an oldster. He couldn't hit my back even from that distance. Two guardsmen, possibly his helpers, are running away. The bow drops on the floor. There's no need to act against the oldster. The unlucky man looks like he's dying of fear.

"Lead me!" I tell the Queen, and we go.

The wives of Moro's brothers are very beautiful. Not worse than the Queen. The sword in my hand and my sullen face don't promote any arguments. My sister leads us further. On the way I pick up more women, less good-looking, and add them to my procession with the aid of a rope. As a rule, northern pirates do it. But I do the same not for easy money. I'm not going to sell captives in the slave market. When lords lay waste to villages, only the most adroit and fastest men escape to the forest. No matter. Tonight there will be a big celebration at Three Oaks. Our lads are tired of unmarried life. Lords boast of their family trees, but theirs will not be superior to our children. I'm sure my child will have some noble blood. Even if it is the blood of Kort's family.

Our procession comes out into a yard. Men are clenching their fists. They are filled with anger but paralyzed by fear. The Helm of the Great Goddess reflects not only the green light of Smoln, but the pale yellow beams of rising Sorv. As legends say, spirits of the killed live there.

I have enough time before sunrise. Women servants drive out a lot of horses and

mules. I guard and they load foodstuffs from cold cellars. A big caravan leaves the castle. Standing at the lowered drawbridge, I declare to the castle's inhabitants:

"For everything done tonight you must not thank me. Thank your former King Moro! Nobody asked him to devastate our villages, rape our girls. I treated you better. But you must draw the proper conclusions and not repeat Moro's mistakes."

Shortly before leaving I break open and set on fire some casks of oil. Bonfires will occupy their minds for some time. Let them....Desperation is the engine of many interesting ideas.

After leaving the gates, I hurried the horses and mules. Soon our caravan crosses a creek. The sun shows its first rays. In a short time we'll be near the forest-savior, where my guys are waiting for us. The Helm is too heavy. I take it off and place it in my saddle bag. Copper it's made of, not worth much, but the gilding and what's more the ruby are genuine. Even King Moro himself wouldn't be able to tell if it's a fake. Damned King Moro. Yesterday evening he was drinking with the Baron Tko....Most probably he's still sleeping in the embrace of some servant-maid.

But when King Moro returns home....I don't know what he'll do. Even kings can't muster the courage to come into the Big Striped Forest. There are no guys there who are charmed for loyalty to gold helms. Praise be to the Great Goddess!



December 1991



SILICON-BASED LIFE by Leonid Reznick

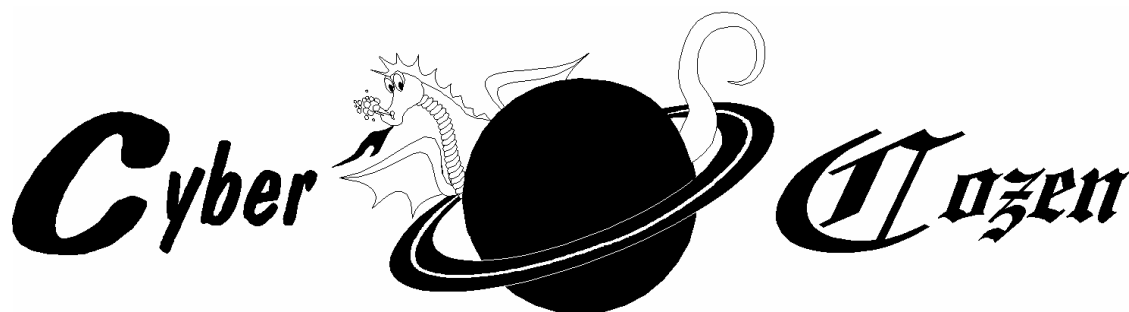
I read Ted Henderson's comment on this in *CyberCozen*, July 1991. I'd like to describe the classical (I suppose) work in this field, written in the USSR in the early 60's and unknown to Western readers. It's the short story by A. Dneprov, "*The Clay God*".

The story is written in the genre of hard SF. The hero fights against a Mad Scientist who has found a way to change carbon in the human organism to silicon. Men stay alive and are converted into creatures invulnerable to knife or bullet, as if they were living stone people. These monsters have become soldiers for the Mad

Scientist. They hunt for the hero on a training battlefield, trying to kill him. But the hero discovers how to use two drawbacks of the stone soldiers: their low activity in the cool evening air and their need to drink a special chemical solution. Happy ending: the hero is free, the Mad Scientist is dead, the stone soldiers are converted into clay statues. I think that the writer lost a lot of possibilities to make a good adventure novel or novelette. Why did he not give his creatures heating suits and a supply of the chemical solution? The written story is only an illustration of the silicon life idea.

We hope you've enjoyed this  
special edition of

אנו מקווים כי נהניתם  
ממהדורה מיוחדת זו של



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# Happy Holidays

# חג שמח

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