



CyberCozen

Science-Fiction Newsletter

Vol. XII, No. 1; January, 2000



Letters to the Editor

Dear Aharon,

My grandson Daniel (now 14 ½) has improved greatly at reading English thanks to the fantasy novels of *Terry Pratchett*; he's got the whole family reading them – even ME! *The Wyrd Sisters* made delightful characters out of Macbeth's witches, and the sequel, *Witches Abroad*, was a hodgepodge of all the fairy tales we were brought up on! But his books are full of puns, which I love. And then suddenly, in the

midst of all the fantasy and parody Pratchett'll come up with some profound remarks, such as: "They accept evil not because they say 'yes' to it, but because they don't say 'no'." This sentiment has appeared many times and in many places, but Terry Pratchett sort of takes you by surprise with his inserts of serious comment in all the tomfoolery of his imaginative novels. Have a good year 2000.

Clara Rimon

Aharon -

In last *CyberCozen*, you wrote that **Travolta** is producing *Battlefield Earth - The Movie*. A little interesting side fact that was omitted is that Travolta is not only an

enthusiastic sci-fi fan, he's also a VERY enthusiastic Scientologist, which is of course the "religion" that author *L. Ron Hubbard* invented.

Assaf K. Dekel

(More letters to the editor on page 2)

The Israeli Society for Science Fiction and Fantasy

Meetings (in Hebrew) on *Science and Science Fiction*

Next Meeting: *Wednesday January 26, 2000*

פרופ' חיים בראשית will speak (in Hebrew)

On "*Strangers and Aliens in Science Fiction Films*"

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

Join the Society, go to its meetings! Call 03-528-3803 or 03-604-4959

Have you written your letter yet!?!?

Save Crusade!

Watch *Crusade*, Saturdays at 23:40 on Channel 3 in Israel!

Write Letters!!! For more details enter "*Crusade for Crusade*" site at

<http://www.astro.umd.edu/~fleming/index.html>

01.01.01

The end is also the beginning...

www.armageddon.org



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עורך גרפי ועיצוב : גיא אלדר.
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עבור משלוח בדואר של *CyberCozen*, הנכם מתבקשים לתרום 30 ש"ח לשנה; עבור דואר אויר לארה"ב \$15; אם אהרון שיר יכול למסור את העיתון באופן אישי, 15 ש"ח.

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כל הזכויות שמורות למחברים וליוצרים, כפי שצוינו.

Dear Aharon,

I enjoy reading *CyberCozen*, and especially the reviews, the more the better.

However, to summarize *Battlefield Earth*, by L. Ron Hubbard (1982), as Guy Eldar did in the December issue, by saying it is the story of a survivor of an alien invasion looking for other survivors, is somewhat of an understatement. The book is 1064 pages of what used to be called Space Opera, describing how the lone survivor defeats the invincible aliens, frees countless worlds, and changes the universe forever. I suspect most readers of *CyberCozen* would find the book simplistic, but I rather enjoyed it, though even I finally got tired (after all - 1064 pages!). Hubbard builds all his personal fixations into the book, for example a depiction of psychiatrists as completely evil (alien psychiatrists of course), and - not to forget - a hero who is tall, blond, blue eyed, and American.

Anyway, as regards books about to be translated into movies, I read on the net that there are plans for a script of *Starline Rising* by David Brin.

I also read in *Newsweek* of plans for a movie based on *The X-Men* comic series. Using

Guy Eldar's system *The X-Men* might be summarized as a bunch of mutants looking for others of their kind. Seriously, however, this is the most successful comic line ever, having spawned many others (two *X-Men* titles *Uncanny X-Men* and *X-Men*, and also *Excalibur*, *The New Mutants*, *X-Force*, and others), several very interesting Trade Paperbacks (thick books containing several comic book issues), and most importantly many interesting stories. The animated series, shown on Israeli TV recently, is also very good in my humble opinion. I don't know which of the story-lines is being proposed for the movie, and I don't know how a live-actor movie would be, but it should be interesting.

As this is a SF-fan magazine, I must remark that *The X-Men* are based on SF (mutants), and have many SF-inspired stories (aliens, travel to other stars, other dimensions, time travel, etc.). Of course, this can be said about many other famous comic stories: *Superman* is after all an alien. The quality of comic-SF is usually problematic, but this only makes it even more suitable for movies, doesn't it?

Regards, Amnon Stupp

Two Reviews of

Future Noir: The Making of Blade Runner

by Paul M. Sammon, 1996, 441 pages



by Aharon Sheer:

A whole book about *one* movie? When *Blade Runner* was first shown in Rehovot in 1982, I didn't even bother to go. From the title it sounded like an action picture about knife fighters. I had no idea that it was a science fiction film. Only after Bill Silverman and I started Rehovot Science Fiction in 1989 did I hear about the film. We had a fine review of it in an early issue of *CyberCozen*, and that stimulated me to want to see it. When it showed up not long afterwards in Beit HaAm I went (1000 seats, 30 people in the hall). The copy was in such bad condition that it was impossible to appreciate it visually. The story came through though, and it was clear that this was an exceptional sf movie. Finally, I bought the video -- the letterbox version of the Director's Cut. Since then I've seen it at least ten times, twice on the big screen. It is visually fantastic. We see details: Art, architecture, street life, dress, hair style, ecology, weapons, whole areas of the city closed to private transportation -- numerous details of city life in 2019 have been thought about. I've never seen such successful detail in any other sf film. And that is only the background to a truly powerful and moving story, with a deep moral lesson.

There is so much to tell about this movie that I was kept interested. Some examples. The director, *Ridley Scott*, was an unusual guy in that he wanted input from his actors. The famous death scene of Roy Batty, near the end, in which Roy tells of the things he saw in space, and concludes, "All those moments will be lost, in time. Like tears in rain.": that line was invented by the actor himself, *Rutger Hauer*, the day the scene was filmed. Some people on the set cried when they saw that scene filmed, it was so emotional.

The movie was filmed almost entirely at night for a strange reason. Most of it was filmed on the studio back lot, which is in the hills above Hollywood. These hills provides a great background for a western: a small town with bare land and brown hills in the background. You've seen such shots dozens of times. But for a film which portends to take place in a huge dense city whose buildings and industry crowd together for miles in every direction, it is an unconvincing background. So, by filming at night, the director hid that background from the viewer!

Here is a passage from the book which gives an example of the layers of detail in this film, which must have made an impression on the actors, but the viewer of the movie cannot possibly see most of them:

“... Los Angeles’ 2019 bus system – represented by two heavily retrofitted public transport vehicles – was identified by signs on the buses proclaiming them part of the ‘Megatrans’ group (smaller sign by these vehicles’ front doors warned, ‘Driver Is Armed; Carries No Cash’).

“This decidedly inhospitable tone had even been carried out to include such usually innocuous artifacts as parking meters These squat bulky objects were topped with plastic domes that glowed green while time remained on the meter, red when that time had expired. ... Inflation, however, has kept pace with the future; one minute’s parking was worth \$3.00. But it was the fine print on these parking meters that captured this writer’s attention. Bending closer, I read these words; ‘WARNING -- DANGER! You Can Be Killed By Internal Electrical System If This Meter Is Tampered With.’” [p. 102]

2) Review by **Raz Greenberg**:

If you go to people today, and ask them what, in their opinion, is the best science fiction film ever made, *Blade Runner* is bound to come up at some point. With its stunning visuals of futuristic urban hell, Vangelis’ fantastic score and a complex plot inspired by Philip K. Dick’s novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep*, there’s very little doubt that this is one of the best and most influential science fiction films ever made. Upon its initial release, however, *Blade Runner* was considered a financial disaster and a critical catastrophe. Only through a network of many devoted fans has the film achieved its status, leading to the release of the very successful Director’s Cut in 1992. Paul M. Sammon, the author of *Future Noir: The Making of Blade Runner* is of those devoted fans, yet he’s different. This is because his involvement with the film started even before the film began shooting – as a reporter for various science fiction magazines he covered the film at almost all the stages of its making and its release. In *Future Noir* he gives what is perhaps the most detailed description ever about the making of *Blade Runner*.

The book starts with something of a long forward, summarizing both the film and Dick’s novel. I found this part of the book to be a little overly detailed. I imagine a person who reads this book will already be familiar with the film’s plot, and the chapter concerning the novel has a big problem I’ll address later. But all in all, it’s good reading. Then come two chapters describing the long path the film followed in Hollywood, from an original (failed) optioning of the novel in 1974 to getting director Ridley Scott involved with the project. The short biographical highlights of the people mentioned in these sections provide an interesting background. The next section, which I found very interesting, concerns the many rewrites the script went through, describing (among other things) how the title “Blade Runner” came up and how the book’s “Androids” became the film’s “Replicants”. The following sections describe the process of shooting the film. It starts with two short chapters describing the film design and the cast. Short – because the two subjects are extended in the following chapter, which describes, in great detail, how each and every major scene in the film was made. This is the book’s biggest chapter, and I found it interesting – but also very problematic. I mean, do you really have the patience to read 105 pages about this kind of thing? However, if you decide to skip this chapter altogether, you probably have no business reading this book, since it was pretty much written around it. So, the only real option is reading this chapter from start to finish. But it’s worth it: there’s plenty of interesting information in it. Problems get worse in the following chapter, dealing with the special effects. It is very technical, and despite the author’s promises to the contrary, people without some background in the subject won’t understand it. The rest of the book discusses the film’s release and its different versions.

The most fascinating part of the book, for me, describes the creation of the film’s futuristic environment through interviews with the designers and the director. If you thought that the film looked very impressive when you saw it – well, you have no idea what went on while the filming took place. While shooting the film director Scott has paid attention to the smallest things like magazine covers and fine print on parking meters – even though he knew that these things couldn’t be spotted in the movie itself. Also interesting were the insights into the question that keeps bothering the film’s fans: Is Deckard (the film’s hero) a replicant himself?

Unfortunately, I found the book to be weak in the two areas where *CyberCozen* readers are more likely to be interested. The first concerns Philip K. Dick and his novel. While Sammon does give a good summary of the novel and a very interesting biographical information about the author, he simply doesn’t go deep enough into the differences between the novel and the film. He settles for giving some short examples, concluding that “*Blade Runner* was most faithful to *Sheep* where it really counted”. Many people who read the novel, myself included, will have problems with this statement. The second disappointing part of the book concerns the film’s cult status and its impact on the films and books that followed. The subject is summarized in less than ten pages and when the section entitled “The Birth of Cyberpunk” comes down to just half a page – without really explaining what *Blade Runner* had to do with it – readers have every right to feel cheated.

Overall, I found *Future Noir* to be a very interesting and enjoyable reading, though it's not for everyone. If you like reading about film making as much as I do, than I warmly recommend it. If you don't... then maybe you'd better watch *Blade Runner* again instead.



Poem :

I dreamt I was Spock by **Elliot Lazerwitz**

Last night I dreamt I was Spock
lizard hindbrain, reptilian features
yet feeling from within,
half-human.

I took a lover and,
cleaved in two,
phasered her out of being.

I felt the sheer terror
of not knowing how to feel.

And, feeling,
married the ship for my bride
foregoing my issue for years to come.

They tell me
human women used to swoon over me
but that is not what I recall.

It is illogical
for a woman to love
a lizard man such as I.
I refuse to believe this.
Yet, I must admit
I feel delight.
Indeed, it frightens me.

Best to wait
for my Amok Time
when I can wildly court
with no fear of betrayal ...

I awoke
gripped as by a vise.
I missed my lover so
knowing that, to her,
I must seem sometimes very Vulcan.

The author welcomes feedback and comment at:



email: ELLIOT@NewMail.Co.il

TV Series Review: *Crusade* by **Raz Greenberg**



At the risk of sounding political (and Aharon omit this paragraph all together), I have to say that I've always seen J. Michael Straczynski, the creator of *Babylon 5* as the Shimon Peres of science fiction TV. He has this really great vision. He sees a clear destination in the horizon. He knows exactly where he's going. How he gets there? Why, that's, that's... details.

Alas, those were the same "details" that sometimes made watching *Babylon 5* a frustrating experience. While the idea of making a "novel for television" sounded good in theory, *Babylon 5* proved that there are some things that just don't cross very well from one medium to another. And so, what *Babylon 5* gave us during its 5 year run was mostly stories stretched across 5-10 episodes, when they could have (and should have) been resolved at 2-3 episodes at the most. Other than that, there were almost no stand-alone episodes worth watching (with the exception of season 2's outstanding *And Now For a Word*). The sad fact is, if you wanted to really enjoy

Babylon 5 you had to watch all of its five seasons (okay, you could give up the 5th) from start to finish. And while it does give you a sense of certain completeness of the story, when you check out the components that this story is made from, you're bound to find them lacking. Then there are Straczynski's other problems as a writer. First and foremost, the fact that for every good piece of dialogue he writes (and he can write really good ones when he tries hard enough) there are five others that sound like someone chewing toilet paper. A bigger problem, which I admit to never fully understanding, is Straczynski's lack of ability to create something remotely similar to a sympathetic, likeable character. While watching *Babylon 5*, whenever I started to find myself liking a character, it soon afterwards turned out to be: 1) dead (Marcus) 2) having a dark secret (Garibaldi, Londo) 3) and selfish motives (Lennier, Lyta) 4) or simply leaving the show for no apparent reason (Sinclair, Ivanova) 5) to be

replaced with a less than satisfying character (Sheridan, Lochley).

Babylon 5's short-lived spin-off, **Crusade**, has many of its ancestor's problems, though to its credit, it does seem to resolve many others. The show takes place immediately after the TV-movie **A Call to Arms** (screened at the last ICON). After a deadly biological attack on Earth by the Drakh aliens, the population is infected with a virus that will kill everyone in 5 years unless a cure will be found. A special team is assigned to find this cure before time runs out, using the alliance's newest ship, the Excalibur. This team is lead by Gideon (Gary Cole), a cardboard, one-dimensional captain (supposedly chosen for his resourcefulness, but he's such a boring character, so I'm more than certain that they confused him with someone else). Two other members of the team are the cardboard, one-dimensional telepath first officer Matheson (Daniel Dae Kim), and a cardboard, one-dimensional doctor (Marjean Holden). There are two other major characters, however: a thief called Dureena Nafeel (Carrie Dobro) and a technomage called Galen (Peter Woodward). They certainly make more interesting and likable characters (and given the fact that **Crusade** has only 13 episodes, I wonder if it will be enough for Straczynski to ruin them for me the way he did with Garibaldi, Londo, Lennier and Lyta). Their dialogue, respectively, while not

Shakespearean, is slightly better than the others'. The actors who play those characters fit; while Cole, Kim and Holden are simply terrible, Dobro and Woodward (again, while not being academy award material) do a reasonable job.

What **Crusade** really has going for it, is the feeling that something actually happens. The pilot episode was fast, suspenseful and action driven (three things you couldn't say about most of **Babylon 5's** episodes). **Babylon 5** has always been the front runner in terms of special effects on TV and **Crusade** is no exception – the action sequences are very effective, and the make-up effects (an element that thankfully seems to have been toned-down in **Crusade**) are convincing. Another fresh aspect is the musical score, which marks a nice change from **Babylon 5's** space-opera cliches. Overall, I have to admit that the pilot episode left me looking for more.

The sad news is that after the cancellation of **Crusade** Straczynski seems to be moving away from **Babylon 5** to other things. He is now heading a comic book series called **Rising Stars** (recommended, by the way) and trying to start a new show called **The World's on Fire**. Hopefully, he will learn from the mistakes he made on **Babylon 5** and **Crusade**. In the meantime, with no other science fiction show on the screens in Israel, **Crusade** is really the only option for sane science fiction TV viewers here. Just don't expect too much.



Science Fiction and Fantasy
News and Rumors

Collected and brought to you by **Guy Eldar**

Before I give you some of the news coming your way, I wish to comment on the above letter sent to Aharon regarding my news of **Battlefield Earth** and **The X-Men** movies. I agree that sometimes I tend to summarize a lot of the plots and history of the movies I present here, but due to printing space I usually prefer to give you more of the news and less of its history. I apologize if some of you find it underestimating some of these movies and I wish to thank Amnon Stupp's information addition to my last news column.

And now for this month's news. Not my usual input, about things in the making, but moreover, about things coming soon for us to view. Look out for these new upcoming series soon to air on our Israeli TV screens. The really big news is the purchase of the rights for **Futurama** (reviewed in September 99's issue by **Raz Greenberg**) by Star World. A starting date is yet to be announced and unfortunately, the new season has started at the beginning of this

month and **Futurama** is not part of the new schedule. A recap for those of you who forgot what this series about – it's another **Matt Groening** animated creation (creator of **The Simpsons**) where a young "Homer"-like delivery-boy finds him self moved a thousand years into the future to the year 3000. I only hope that **Futurama** on Star World will not share the same fate as the final seasons of **ST: DS9** that are just sitting in the warehouses of the Israeli Educational Television, collecting dust instead of being on the air for our enjoyment.

Another series which seems promising is the upcoming Israeli SF called **Vanishing**. I must admit I don't know a lot about this series, only from what I saw in the pre-views, that it seems like an Israeli version of **the X-Files** and from the short sequence it appears to be very well put together. It starts sometime in the near weeks and I hope to bring you a review of it in the next issue of CC.

Comments, News and Rumors' facts and sites would be appreciated. Write to: eldarguy@netvision.net.il

Please submit messages as "News and Rumors".