

Graphics Editor Guy Eldar resigns

The strange, ugly and old-fashioned appearance of this month's *CyberCozen* can be explained by the sudden and regrettable (although not completely unexpected) resignation of Graphics Editor *Guy Eldar*. Guy said that the **pressure of his studies, his work, and his impending marriage (!)** simply made it impossible for him to continue.

Guy's popular column, "Science Fiction and Fantasy News and Rumors" will be missed by many. Guy's little drawings (see the one on the left, from his column) added charm to each section of *CyberCozen*. Guy's attention to typefaces and letter sizes made each issue enjoyable to look at and more readable. I can do little of what he did – sorry readers.



Letter to the Editor

Aharon,

I recently received the March issue of *CyberCozen*, and I was interested in and appreciative of Raz Greenberg's reviews of the *Babylon 5* movies. I have seen all of them and have tapes of the first three. Apparently these movies were shown on the Movie Channel in Israel. Here in Los Angeles, California, they are shown on the **SciFi Channel**.

I gather the SciFi Channel is not available in Israel. Currently they are showing daily rather randomly all the episodes of *StarTrek: The Original Series*. Also daily, they are showing all the episodes of *Babylon 5* in sequence. They have recently started the sequence over for a second run. Next week, on a weekly basis, they are going to show *Crusade* in sequence. I have not seen any of that series.

This past weekend I went to a *StarTrek* convention in Pasadena. Among the guests were performers from all four series along with some of the producers, writers, and directors. James Doohan (Scotty) was there. He seemed quite feeble at 81. I fear this will be his last convention. Ricardo Montalban (Khan) was also there. He is 80 and partially paralyzed due to an accident. He had to be assisted to the stage and used a walker, but his mind is still lively and he speaks well. George Takei (Sulu) and Nichelle Nichols (Uhura) were also there. Both of them are younger than the other two and are in much better shape physically and mentally. George Takei is an excellent public speaker. In part, he told about growing up in a Japanese relocation camp in Arkansas. Japanese citizens of the U.S. were placed in such camps during the Second World War with Japan (early 1940s).

Later this year, there is to be a *FarScape* convention in Burbank. I am planning on attending. *FarScape* has begun its third season, also on the SciFi Channel.

Ted Henderson

Readers! Ask YES! To bring us the SciFi Channel. It's worth paying for! The Editor

Computer Games and the Internet Considered Dangerous

By Eli Eshed

One prominent feature of all the later *Star Trek* series, that differentiates them from *The Original Series* that ran from 1966 to 1969, is the "Holodeck" machine. This machine enables a crewmember of either a space ship or a space station to create a perfect-looking artificial

environment according to his desire. It can reconstruct any historical period: the 'Wild West', the 30s in Chicago, the decade of the 50s in Las Vegas, etc. There are no limits to its power except for the user's own imagination. However, there is the fear that the "holodeck"

machine might suffer one of its frequent malfunctions which might imprison the user, or cause the simulated characters to develop a consciousness of their own and thus discover they are not real after all.

In the original series such technology was not made available, although the producer, Gene Roddenberry did, in fact, think about this idea at that time. He considered including such a machine within the "entertainment" hall of the crew, a plan that was not realized for lack of funds.

In the 70s, in the animated series of *Star Trek* where budget did not present a problem, a technology that resembles the "Holodeck" is shown in the episode called "Practical Joker". There an alien intelligence exerts control over

Illusion is Bad

Virtual reality was portrayed as existing in the first pilot episode of *Star Trek*, "The Cage", which was produced in 1964 with a different crew than the one we are familiar with, except for Mr. Spock. The plot is about the arrival of the "Enterprise" crew, headed by Captain Pike and his female second-in-command ("No. 1"), on the planet Talus 4. There it becomes clear that its natives have a technology exactly like that of the "Holodeck" we know. They capture the Captain and force him to live through various virtual realities that cannot be differentiated from our "real" one while they try to break his psyche and "tame" him so that he will live happily with a local woman. The Captain, however, proves to be invincible and succeeds finally in freeing himself.

We find out later on that the Talusians once had a highly developed culture. They had had space flight and had explored the stars, but after they discovered their technology of "illusions" they preferred to dwell more and more within the illusory worlds they created until their culture had completely deteriorated. They even forgot how to manipulate the complex machines of past ages and were now facing extinction. Captain Pike leaves this planet, shocked by the fate of the Talusians who let this strange technology control them.

This pilot episode was redone as a story with the "usual" *Star Trek* crew in an episode called "The Menagerie". Here Captain Pike is the previous captain of the Enterprise. The story is acted out within the plot of Captain Pike's kidnapping. He is shown as a mute and crippled individual aided by Spock who helps to bring him back to Talus 4. The Federation has threatened the death penalty for anyone visiting Talus 4. This planet is portrayed as the only

the computer of the "Enterprise" and causes disturbances in the activity of various departments on the spaceship, one of which is the "Entertainment Hall". It is there we find certain crewmembers experiencing being in a virtual environment of the kind characters of *The Next Generation* so often enjoy. The computer disrupts this activity as in many plots of *The Next Generation*, *Voyager* and *Deep Space 9*. However this is unusual and does not represent the situation in general. Don't treat this too lightly, since the *non-use* of virtual reality is an indication of significant philosophical and cultural differences between the creative generation of *The Original Series* and that of *The Next Generation*.

planet in the whole universe where a visit is punishable by death! Nevertheless, Spock breaks the law and brings Pike back to Talus 4 so that he can live an illusory life that would be better than his present miserable life.

One can ask why had the Federation decided to inflict such a Draconian punishment on a flight to Talus 4? What kind of harsh calamity might happen if people visit this dying culture? The answer to it is not given literally in this episode but is self-understood. It is the fear of the Federation that people (and the races represented in the Federation) will learn the Talusian technology of virtual reality and sink into it, as happened to the Talusians themselves, and finally deteriorate.

Something of the sort is said by the Talusian representative to Captain Kirk at the end of this episode, when he tells Kirk that Pike lives a totally illusory life with a beautiful girl who in reality is the illusory life of an ugly old woman. Kirk, however, enjoys a real life of unceasing activity, which is a better life.

The message is clear: Better to live a real and active life, even if not so pleasant, that includes continuous development, rather than a perfect, ideal life that is based upon illusion and leads only to deterioration and decline. It is possible to state that this message constituted one of the main ideas of the original series.

For this reason I, for my part, consider the fate of Captain Kirk in the movie *Generations* especially tragic, since he was compelled to parallel the fate of Captain Pike and live for decades in the "Paradise" of the "Nexus" that is all illusion. Some would say that it was just a fitting ending for Kirk's brilliant career, but I found it to be sick and frustrating. This ending stands in complete contradiction to

Captain Kirk's own philosophy, as repeatedly expressed throughout the original series, that doing and creating is better than a lazy existence, even when one is both happy and rich. The producers and scriptwriters were probably

unaware of this contradiction, and in fact such a fate reflects the drastic change that occurred in this series in regard to the use of virtual reality and illusion.

A Holodeck is a Good Thing

Apparently the Federation in general underwent a drastic ideological change in this respect, since how can we otherwise explain the fact that in the period of *The Next Generation* every space ship and space station possesses a "Holodeck"?

The Holodeck is in fact the same technology the Talusians used and that the Federation feared to such an extent that it proclaimed that anyone who uses it would be put to death. This measure was taken to deter people from learning its secrets, but now the same Federation allows it and actually makes this technique available to all. (This decision does not make sense considering the fact that they already know the dangers due to the numerous malfunctions that occur in Holodecks every other episode. Therefore these machines should have been dismantled long ago as too dangerous for use.)

It seems that the results the Federation had dreaded earlier are already discernible. The protagonists of the new generation are much less adventurous or active than those of the "old generation". They rarely set out to explore new uncharted planets (a task that filled considerable time for crewmembers in the original series), and deal more with planets that are already known to them. They choose to spend most of their free time "indoors" in the Holodeck, within the artificial environments their imagination conjures up rather than dwell "outside" in the real worlds. We see in certain episodes of *Star Trek* that there are people such as Engineer Berkeley who experience difficulties in disengaging themselves

from the Holodeck and that the number of such will probably increase.

This is exactly what happened on Talus 4.

It is reasonable to suppose that these changes in the series reflect changes in the "real world" that created *Star Trek*. The decade of the 60s, when the original series was produced, was an extremely active one during which men developed space flight and reached the Moon. The culture of the Hippies, who preferred to live under the influence of drugs instead of experiencing an active and adventurous life, was not approved at that time.

The decades of the 80s and the 90s, however, are those in which computer games flourished, as well as the Internet and virtual reality. More and more people prefer to stay home by their computer and the wonderful world it offers rather than set out and face a hostile world. While investments in the space program dwindle together with public interest therein and at the same time investments and interest in the computer industry and Internet grow progressively stronger, the new *Star Trek* series naturally reflect this change in perspective.

I cannot but wonder whether the Federation was right in trying to prohibit the use of the Talusian technology that produces virtual reality (even threatening death to those who go to Talus), because it dreaded future consequences.

An article that discusses a sci-fi story telling about possible results of virtual reality can be found in:

<http://pseudo.sf-f.attacca.com/story.php3?id=16>

Two Good but Depressing Books, reviewed by Gal Haimovich

Rumanian Science fiction Anthology, Nemira publishing (1994), 221 pages

15 short stories by young Romanian SF writers; translated to English. Reviewed by Gal Haimovich.

When I first saw this book on a shelf at a used-book store my first thought was "Huh? Romanian SF?" Then I thought, "well, it's probably some pseudo-science filled with Gypsy mysticism". And the first paragraph of the first story gave me exactly that impression. But leafing through the book changed that early impression and certainly reading the book proved how wrong I was.

Most of the stories in this book are not traditional SF. Science Bizarre would be more appropriate. All the stories are well written but the plot is not your typical logical plot of the average SF story. It is rather like a dream (or a nightmare) where everything seems normal and with its own internal logic from inside yet upon waking you find it to be strange, twisted; the end of the story is almost always unexpected. Still, with all of the above, these stories are SF, some even hard-core.

The stories are all different from one another yet there was one feature common in all of them and that is sadness, melancholy, present sometimes all through the story, sometimes at the end, but always there. Even the few humorous stories consist mostly of black humour.

Nevertheless, though I became depressed, I'm glad I read this book. The stories are good; they are not shallow but with deep thought behind them, intended, successfully, in invoking emotions and thoughts and not just to entertain.

And here are summaries of some of the stories:

Moreaugarin's crusade by Ovidiu Butnila

In a future galaxy, Moreaugarin leads an army of criminals and mercenaries, in pretence of a crusade, to release the legendary Ideal City from the Pilgrims. The pay promised – Ancient-light Diamonds from the walls of Ideal City – are known to make a man immortal. The story, told by one of the mercenaries, reveals itself as a hi-tech yet sometimes fantastic battle of evil forces against the city of angels.

All bets on the "Black Widow" by Cotizo Draia

This story might belong to the space opera genre. But this is no ordinary E.E. "Doc" Smith / Star Trek kind of a space opera.

The Human race has been at war for over a 1000 years with an alien race called Migrators. The Black widow is chasing a human spacecraft of smugglers who managed, for the first time, to capture a live Migrator. And as the plot unrolls, it also become more entangled. The good are not always good and the bad are not who we thought they were.

The song of the Libelungs by Mihail Granescu

This is a very strange story. It is, I guess, a post-apocalyptic world. A young man and an old man are walking in a barren field, among radioactive remnants of the ancient enemy – the Libelungs. The legends say that some day they would come again and then they should be killed and on no account they should be allowed to reach the ocean, because then the end will come.

Suddenly, out of the radioactive ash, the Libelungs return. Beginning as worms, they develop into people and then into angelic forms. All through this metamorphosis, which takes hours, men slave to slaughter the Libelungs, without any resistance. At the beginning, the reader sides with the humans, trying to save their world from the awful worms. But as the story develops, the reader's attitude changes 180 degrees because now we see the ugliness of the humans, slaughtering the passive Libelungs (and some other humans as well. This story is not for the weak in the stomach) whereas the Libelungs become beautiful. The end is unpredictable, yet very fitting.

Mechanical swan dance by Rudu Pavel Geho

After a nuclear war humans live in an underground city. The richer and more powerful you are, the closer to the surface you are. The narrator, a petty criminal, lives with his two friends, Lym – ex-medical doctor and Anushka – a hacker, at the 45th level. While celebrating their success at a bar in the 25th, he falls in love with a dancer girl. He is so obsessed with her that he goes all the way and kidnaps her. This story is built on slum-city scenery and characters, in a very touching, sad way.

The symbiotic man by Cristian Lazarescu

This hard core nightmarish story presents us with the suicidal thoughts of a cyborg. The descriptions of rotten flesh on stainless steel limbs are quite appetising.

Joseph by Adrian Preda

This is one of the saddest stories in this collection. In post-atomic war Romania there are people who are different, mutants. Some of them possess para-psychological powers. This is a story of a friendship between two such people – a young man and a little girl - living in a communist, cruel, anti-mutant world, and thinking about the happy world that might have been.

Images in the mirror by Razvan Haritonovici

The shortest story in the book. It is a bitter world, with no love or friendship, there are no real plants or animals - every thing is artificial. The narrator receives two seeds of **real** mirror, which he plants and "waters" with mercury and silver. He then travels through the land and meets a man who tells him of old times when there were real plants, real men, children.

Modern martial arts by Alexandru Ungureanu

An apprentice in a new kind of martial art is trying to earn his title. But the interesting thing is that he himself doesn't fight, but a replica of his, made totally for the purpose of the fight. And the replica has desires of his own....

And something about the writers: Almost all of them have scientific training (engineering being the most popular) and one of them (A. Mironov) is (or was when this book was published) the Minister of Youth and Sports. Some of them won Romanian SF awards, and most of them are members of a Romanian SF club and are well known to Romanian and perhaps to European readers as well.

Inferno by Larry Niven and Jerry Pournelle (1976), 237 pages. Reviewed by Gal Haimovich

Well, being totally depressed after reading the Romanian SF collection, I looked for something that would cheer me up. *Inferno* looked promising but also turned out to be somewhat depressing.

As the name implies, it is an homage to the first part of Dante's *The Divine Comedy* and the book is actually dedicated to him.

The narrator, Allen Carpentier, is a rather successful sci-fi writer with five Hugo nominees. However, since he as yet never won a Hugo, he tries to impress the fans, hoping they will choose him next time. So, in a drinking party, he bets he can drink a whole bottle of rum, sitting on a windowsill on the 8th floor hotel room.

Unfortunately, halfway through, Asimov shows up, obviously drawing all the attention. Allen chokes and while trying to recover, falls out. Allen wakes up with total lack of sensation – he sees nothing, not even his navel, only dull grey. He hears nothing but his thoughts; he can't touch anything, yet he still feels his body. So his first thought, as proper for a sci-fi writer is that "I died and the fans made me a corpsicle". After an unaccountable time (could be five hours, could be 500 years), he suddenly finds himself lying on the ground, in the Vestibule of Hell. At least, that's what Benito said. Benito is the man who freed Allen from the bottle he was locked in. Benito claims he knows a way out – the same way Dante left – down.

And so, across the river Acheron, through the villas of the virtuous pagans, Allen and Benito go down into hell.

Well, Allen doesn't accept that it's hell. He calls it Infernoland and he tries to rationalise every thing he sees with typical sci-fi tricks: that aliens, or extremely advanced humans built Infernoland as an amusement park, using highly sophisticated engineering and all the sci-fi clichés (warped space, anti-grav, bioengineering, tiny black holes and more). But, as Allen goes down, his attitude changes, to accept the bitter truth, that it is Hell, created by God, governed by Lucifer.

Another problem which bugs Allen is, who is Benito, who knows so much about hell and is quite capable of ordering Hell's clerks around and why does Benito help him? Although Allen doesn't find out till almost the end, I figured it out by page 80.

It's been a while since I read Dante's *Inferno* yet I believe that Niven and Pournelle give a fair reproduction of his descriptions. They did think up some new punishments which Dante didn't see in his journey. For example – anti-environmentalists were sunk in a tar pit, and oil drenched birds pecked at their heads. When Dante walked by the boiling lake of blood he failed to notice an island composed of the souls of judges and congressmen who kept criminals out of jail on account of a "technicality". And don't ask what happened to a sci-fi writer who invented a new religion (no names mentioned but my guess – Hubbard).

All in all, it's a good book and a nice homage to Dante's *Inferno*, but if you are squeamish, better you don't read it. The descriptions of the punishments are quite vivid. It is especially disturbing if you are a sinner....

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