



Science-Fiction Fanzine

Vol. XIII, No. 9; September, 2001

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| HAPPY NEW YEAR -- שנה טובה ומבורכת |
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Letter to the Editor

Aharon,

Did I tell you that there is to be another *StarTrek* series? This one is called *Enterprise*, and it will deal with the time before the original *StarTrek* series. This will be the fifth *StarTrek* series. It is to go on the air next month on the UPN network.

Currently, on the SciFi Channel, there is another Gene Roddenberry series running. It is entitled *Earth: Final Conflict*. I am enjoying it. It is shown here four nights a week. I get the feeling that they started showing it part way through, as it seems to be missing a lot of back story and exposition, but it is reasonably easy to follow anyway. It seems rather different from Gene Roddenberry's space operas. Did you notice that Roddenberry's widow, Majel, is one of the co-producers? As you may recall she played nurse Chapel in the *Original Series* under the name of Majel Barret. She also played Number One under the name of M. J. Hutech in the *Original Series* episode "*The Cage*". Also, she played Lwaxana Troi in *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, and she was the computer voice in all the series.

Ted Henderson

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| Israeli Society for sf and Fantasy -- http://icon2001.sf-f.org.il |
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| ICON 2001 sf/fantasy Convention October 3-5 Hol HaMoed Succot Cinemateque Tel Aviv |
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A Survey of the State of sf in Israel in the Last Five Years (Conclusion)

(Part 1 was published in the August issue)

By Eli Eshed, sf historian

Fantasy for Children and Young Adults

Michal Kartis Peretz has started a fantasy series for children, *HaAretz sheMitahat l'Shlulit [The Land under the Puddle]*. The first book was *HaMasa HaGadol [The Great Trip]* (Lilach 1998), and the second *El HaTzafon uv'Hazara [To the North and Back]* (Lilach 1999). The series is in the style of the classic Narnia series by C. S. Lewis. Children from our world fight the forces of evil found in a fantastic world under a puddle entrapped by weird and strange tree roots.

There are two excellent fantasies for children which deal with the interaction between magic powers and technology in the modern world. One is *Dabl Yu Dabl Yu Azazel [Double-U Double-U Azazel]* by Nurit Yovel (Yediot Aharonot, 2000), an Internet fantasy for children. The other is *HaMechashefa v'Disket haEimim Shel Tamar [The Witch and Tamar's Horror Diskette]* by Aviva Hagi (Yediot Aharonot, 2000), a science fantasy for children.

Stories about the Internet

There is a new genre of novels which just five years ago would have been thought pure sf. Today they are realistic novels. These describe relationships which are carried on through the Internet. Some examples: *Heder Prati Elza [Private Room Elza]* by Yaron Reshef, 1999. *N'kuddat Ha-G shel Keren Bird [The G-point of the Bird Foundation]* (Tmuna, 2000). *Halomot 98 [Dreams 98]* by Dana Ben Shaprut Arbitman (Halonot, 2000). All of them describe similar scenarios of people who discover a new world of relationships via the Internet, a world which no one could have imagined four or five year ago.... However, people do not change as fast as the technology. Undoubtedly additional books will appear in this new genre.

Sf in Comics

While the comics field is not well developed in Israel, there are some outstanding creators, of which the best is Uri Fink. He creates humorous comics, but is also a big sf fan. He has done a series of

humorous super-heroes. *SuperShlumper* is a short hero, dressed in pajamas, who fights various ridiculous threats from outer space. *Hartzulei HaHalal [Space Hartzuls]* is a parody of *Star Trek*. Fink's best work yet is *Profil 107 [Profile 107]*, a sort of alternate history of Israel in which super-heroes aid the Israeli government to achieve its political objectives.

In addition to Fink there is also a group of comics artists known as "Actus Tragicus" who work together with popular author Etgar Keret (mentioned above) and often create comics with an sf or fantasy flavor. However, they publish almost exclusively in English.

Sf and Fantasy in Movies and TV

Klara HaK'dosha [St. Clara] (1995) is a full-length movie which takes place in the near future and depicts a girl with supernatural powers.

A number of short student films have had sf and fantasy subjects. Director Eitan Bin Nun made films based on stories by Edmond Hamilton and Alexei Panshein (1989-1990). Yariv Gever, well-known director of filmed commercials, made the films *Guf Zar [Strange Body]* (1987) about people who exchange bodies, *Zar baIr [A Stranger in Town]* (1981) about a lonely vampire visiting Haifa, and *Shalom l'Mhasel [Hello to the Liquidator]* (1987) about a future, violent, Israel.

In addition several short films were based on fantasy stories by Etgar Keret. More stories by Keret have been filmed than by any other author. The best of them was *Amodu [Stand Up!]* (1995), directed by Uri Marcus, about a young man who can freeze people, and force them to do his bidding.

TV also produced some original sf. The most outstanding was *Hallalit [Spaceship]* (1998), a pilot for a comic series which was never made, about an Israeli spaceship crewed by humans and aliens. The ship travels in space to search for the Lost Tribes of Israel, starting with the planet Mars. *He'almut [The Disappearance]* (2000) was a six-episode mini-series thriller about people trying to contact aliens.

Conclusion

As can be seen above, the field of original Hebrew sf and fantasy is richer than one might suppose, and we can hope that, despite Israel's difficult situation, it will continue to develop in the future.

Author's Recommendations:

Gail Hareven, *HaDerech l'Gan Eden [The Way to Heaven]* (Keter, 1999); one of the best Hebrew sf books ever written.

Barry Prigat, *HaAretz HaMuvtahat [The Promised Land]* (Hed Artzi, 1999); the best book in the genre of ultra-Orthodox futures.

Shlomo Shoval, *B'Medinot HaShamyim [Nations of the Sky]* (HaKibbutz HaMeuhad, 1998).

Manuela Dviri, *Beitza shel Shokolad [Luovo di Cioccolata][Chocolate Egg]* (Yediot Aharonot, 2000); a collection of exceptionally interesting stories about the future of Israel.

Amir Or, *Shirat Tahira [The Song of Tahira]* (Hargol, 2001).

Addy Zemach, *Kolot Zarim [Alien Voices]* (HaKibbutz HaMeuhad, 2000); however most of the stories are not sf or fantasy.

Shlomo Leniado, *Isha Zara [Mirror Me]* (Yediot Aharonot, 1999); interesting, but not a good book.

Michael Omer, *HaGeographia shel Sof HaOlam [The Geography of the World's End]* (Opus, 1997), and *Mitkefet HaBarvaz [The Duck's Attack]* (Yaron Golan, 1999); both are enjoyable and show potential for the future.

Editor's Corrections: In Part 1, in last month's issue, I spelled Etgar Keret's last name wrong, Gail Hareven's first name wrong, Orly Kastel-Bloom's last name wrong, and gave a slightly wrong title for Manuela Dviri's book *Beitza shel Shokolad [Chocolate Egg]*. These errors are corrected above.

Ed. Note: For readers who might want to **purchase** one of these books, here are the URLs of two on-line Hebrew-language bookstores:

<http://www.dbook.co.il/>

<http://www.mitos.co.il/Book/Bookmain.asp>

Note, however, that several of the books described above are out of print.

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כל הזכויות שמורות למחברים וליוצרים. כפי שצוינו.

Comments about Some of This Summer's Films

Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within

Comments by Aharon Sheer:

The film *Final Fantasy* was fabulous. A science fiction film about a future invasion of earth by aliens. But the aliens are phantoms, and the defense uses spirits. So it's a fantasy?

Visually fascinating, it keeps you watching and waiting, right to the end, to see what will happen and how it will be portrayed.

Warning: this is almost entirely computer animation. Very very well done, mostly by Japanese animators, although all of the characters are Americans.

I liked the music, too -- but it's almost all Western music.

There's lots of shooting, and lots of explosions, but no bloody violence and no sex.

The movie theater was almost empty. The few people present couldn't seem to make head or tails out of the movie. (The new *Planet of the Apes* had a full crowd. That's a movie you don't have to think about to understand.)

Try *Final Fantasy* and see what you think. I liked it, and my wife was so engrossed she was silent almost throughout the whole movie. Only the ending bothered her, being one of the 500 standard movie endings.

If you like it, get your friends to go too.

Comments by Ted Henderson:

The critics here in the U.S. were not too impressed with *Final Fantasy* storywise, but they raved about the computer graphics, especially the texture of Aki's hair. All the individual hairs were apparent. I did not think the job on skin was as good. The faces seemed rather uniform in color and did not seem to contain the variations in pigmentation and texture seen in "real" skin.

Comments by Noam Shomron:

I saw *Final Fantasy*. Aharon, I think your wife's response to the ending could be attributed to the fact that the entire story, while I would not call it completely unoriginal, was more or less your "typical" science-fiction plot (especially among Japanese cartoons). Under the circumstances, why would you expect the ending to be any different?

More interestingly, what do you think about my claim that many Japanese directors (e.g., Kitano) insert a sort of apocalyptic sentiment into their films, like everything is coming apart, etc.? This seems to extend to Japanese science fiction films as well. I have hardly seen enough Japanese films yet to make broad generalizations, so I would be interested to know what your readers think.

Comments by Nir Goldfinger:

I thought the scientific ideas were pretty stupid but the animation was great. The whole ghost thing was dumb.

Comments by Raz Greenberg:

Incredible animation with some painful glitches, which can't cover for the film's poor story and weak characterization.

Comments by Yossie Silverman:

This is, hands down, the best effort to date for a CG (Computer Graphics) movie. The quality of the animation is such that, at times, one cannot even tell that we are not watching live-action. The illusion breaks down when actors speak or when we are drawn to their eyes. Neither the lips nor the eyes seem to move in a way one would expect. However, the movie is peppered with wonderfully real nuances, such as hair softly moving in the breeze - each single strand individually drawn - or at least that is how it appears. The body movements are equally well done. For once, the animation machinery felt like it could actually work in reality. No impossible motions and function such as one is used to seeing in animated efforts. Aside from the flaws mentioned above, the movie looks like it is a live-action flick starring unknown actors.

As for story, that is where it gets weaker. The plot is simple minded and makes no sense at all, well, very little. We have humans who don't seem to have changed much since today. We have aliens who are rather wraith-like ghosts, and, given that they represent the entire biosphere of a planet, come in a relatively small assortment (though they vary in size from human to whale, and larger). Finally we have what connects the two - spirit. On a fantasy level, the implication is that all living things have a soul, of sorts, that can be ripped out, and live on, or serve as food to other souls. The collision between humans and aliens is, as expected, incendiary. Aliens have the upper hand as the movie begins but it doesn't stay that way.

The primary problem I had with the script is that, while it attempts to explain away the various plot elements in a scientific manner, it fails miserably and instead comes across as rather new-age sounding mumbo-jumbo.

As for the characters - they vary in quality; most of them are rather one-dimensional - the rest attempt to make it to 2D, but only one grazes 3D - the Doctor (not Who) [Donald Sutherland's voice].

The soundtrack is fine and adds to the experience.

I would rate the movie as A+ for technical achievement, C for plot, C for acting. Worth seeing in a theater as a technological milestone. The next one ought to be indistinguishable from reality!

Planet of the Apes

Comments by Ted Henderson:

I can recommend the new *Planet of the Apes*. It is loosely based on the premise of the original movie of that name (apes are masters, humans are slaves), but in many respects it bears little resemblance to that one. Among other things, the special effects and makeup are well advanced over those of 1968.

Also, none of the actors in the original are on hand for this one. Other than theme and title, it is quite different from the original.

Comments by Avi Chami:

I read that they didn't want to do an exact remake of the original. In this aspect, they succeeded. The story of the origin of the *Planet of the Apes* is credible and original... BUT - this film is SO slow.

Everything seems to happen superficially... And the end is a disaster. I do not recommend going to see it. BTW - the effects are also so so - and again, especially at the end, even disastrous. You get the idea - I didn't like it.

Jurassic Park III

Comments by Ted Henderson:

I cannot recommend *Jurassic Park III*. The special effects are pretty good, especially the Pteronodons, but to say it is far fetched is to greatly understate the situation. The story itself is pretty cheesy. As one critic put it, "The dinosaurs get smarter and the people get stupider."

Comments by Steve Davis:

We did not go nor are we planning to go to *Jurassic Park III*. We did not go to *Jurassic Park II*. *JP I* was quite adequate. Their technical people portrayed the capital of Costa Rica as a small sweltering tropical seaport. They presumably did not even have the intellect to look at a map.

A.I. Artificial Intelligence

Note: the film is based on the Brian Aldiss story, "Supertoys Last All Summer Long", and was originally to be made by Stanley Kubrick. Sf author Ian Watson wrote the script and Steven Spielberg directed.

Comments by Steve Davis:

I enjoyed *AI*, but I suppose that it would been much better if Kubrick had lived to direct it, rather than being finished by Spielberg. It was very Spielberg (very CUTE).

Evolution

Comments by Nir Goldfinger:

A good comedy, but not a good sci-fi film. Too Hollywoody for me, and the science has no logic ("Head and Shoulders" has no selenium in it).

Comments by Steve Davis:

I saw the previews. It appears to be a good film only if you have previously been born with the IQ of a moron, and then proceeded to have a lobotomy.

Shrek

Comments by Amnon Stupp:

I saw Shrek recently, and enjoyed it.

One problem was that the movie was shortened by at least 10 minutes. This is an annoying habit at Israeli cinemas, especially with movies that are considered "for children". Apparently it is O.K. to cut costs at the expense of children, because they supposedly won't notice anyway.

I didn't find the story especially dynamic, perhaps because of the missing minutes. However, the humor was good. There were a lot of jokes for people who are familiar with current movies, and in general with children's literature.

For example there's a *Matrix* like scene, poking fun at Robin Hood along the lines of the joke about a boy scout who gets an old lady across the road against her will, and others. This is a type of humor you don't usually find in children's animation. There is an "educational" moral at the end, a must for such movies, but it is presented in a much more intelligent way than usual.

Comments by Aharon Sheer:

Eddie Murphy's voice as the talking donkey was very funny. There were a lot of sly remarks and clever jokes. But several times while watching the movie I heard the first half of an Eddie Murphy sentence, then there was a jump, and then I heard the second half of a completely different sentence. There was no sense to it. I can just imagine the reason: The translator says, "I don't understand this sequence. It has a lot of slang phrases that I don't know. I can't translate it." To which the distributor replies: "It's an animated cartoon to which only ten year olds will go. So we'll just leave that whole section out. The little kids will never notice it." How wrong the distributor was is shown by this: I went to see the English language version (with Hebrew subtitles) on a Wednesday evening for the 7:30 pm showing. Twenty minutes before the showing all the tickets were sold out. The hall was full. I looked around and estimated that more than 90 percent of the audience was over 18 years old. The movie theaters know what they are doing. They have a midnight showing for this movie. Would they have midnight showings for a cartoon for ten year olds?

Comment by Oded Weissman:

My recommendation: The animation is very good, but it is not so detailed, generally, that you need to see it on the big screen. Wait until it comes out on video and see the whole 90 minute movie, instead of the 81minute version shown in the movie theaters.

Comments by Ben Svetitsky:

Fast moving, very funny, with superb animation. Not for children -- they wouldn't understand the humor. [Ed. Note: Ben saw the movie in the U.S. The bowdlerized Israeli version is not so fast paced, and most of the sophisticated adult humor has been removed.]

Comments by Avi Chami:

I saw *Shrek* with the children. I think that although it has contents that are understandable only by adults, kids can (and did) have fun with the movie.

The Mummy Returns

Comments by Amnon Stupp:

I didn't see *The Mummy I*, and really didn't plan to go to *II*, but it happened. The plot is of course complete nonsense, but once you accept it as a comics-B movie, with the special "logic" of these types, it is very enjoyable. The action is non-stop, and quite good. Comparing it to the *Indiana Jones* movies, from which it obviously draws, it has twice the action. There really isn't a minute without something happening. I recommend it for action lovers.

Lara Croft: Tomb Raider

Comments by Amnon Stupp:

Tomb Raider was a disappointment, perhaps because I saw it after *Mummy II*. It has less action, the plot if anything is even more illogical and bizarre, and even the characters are shallower. In fact *Tomb Raider's* world-view is so shallow I found it off-putting. In *The Mummy* people work together, and even the evil people have some human qualities you can understand. In *Tomb Raider* it is all a one-woman-show, with a perfect heroine and a perfectly evil antagonist. Truly a video-game world. In short, a waste of time.

Comments by Raz Greenberg:

An unbelievable mix of uninteresting story, miserable special effects and stunts, and awful acting. One of the worst SF/F films of recent years.

**Thanks to all the friends and readers who contributed the comments
above about this summer's sf/fantasy movies! Shana Tova!**