



Science-Fiction Fanzine

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The Israeli Society for Science Fiction and Fantasy

Fan.con – Thursday 31/7/03 – a light-weight one day all day sf / fantasy / role playing con for fans in the shade at Park HaYarkon (Tel Aviv) – starting about 10 am and continuing until about 20:00. A joint event with Starbase972 and the role Playing Society. Designed by the young for the younger. Lectures, filk singing, role playing, creative writing seminar (must sign up for that in advance), and more. Light refreshments. 40 shekels for others, 20 for members. See <http://icon.sf-f.org.il/fancon2003/>

More Society information is available (in Hebrew) at the Society's site: <http://www.sf-f.org.il>

Letter to the Editor

Aharon - I just read the Connie Willis book *Passage*, reviewed in the June *CyberCozen*. It was not a relaxing experience. The way that Joanna character went running around like crazy, she had *me* running around with her, all tense and tired out. (I get involved when I read a book, especially one like that.) It was a very gripping book, but possible a *little* too long. The book was excellent! Unusual, fascinating subject – couldn't put it down.

Clara Rimon

Short Book Reviews by Aharon Sheer:

Destiny's Road by Larry Niven (1997), 433 pages.

Recommended by Bill Silverman, who said "It's not bad." We know this is a Niven book because the center of interest is an idea, and not a person. As usual, the hero is highly intelligent, but remains a puzzle throughout the book. But the whole book is about a puzzle. Thus in *Ringworld* the main character is not Luis Wu, it is the Ringworld. And in *Protector* the main character is the idea of the "Protector". In this book the main character is the planet Destiny. In this future described here, a ship has traveled a long time from Earth to bring a large number of colonists and all their equipment to this planet. This was a one-way trip. They cannot go back to earth, they are on their own. Most of the colonists were frozen for the trip. Over two hundred years ago the ship reached Destiny, and the human colony was established.

The job of the reader (and the hero) is to figure out why humans set up the society and communities of Destiny the way they did. Why did they build the Road, and why did they set up the caravan society that travels the Road? As we find out, Destiny's problem for humans is that its life forms do not have enough potassium to enable humans to function properly. According to Niven, a human who tries to survive only on plants and

animals that grow on Destiny will become stupid and incapable of carrying out intelligent actions. This is because of the lack of potassium. In a few weeks such a person will no longer function intelligently. The damage, if it goes on long enough, may become irreversible. Earth life can live on Destiny (they have chickens, for example, which provide them with eggs, and have stocked the lakes and oceans with earth fish), but because of the lack of potassium, earth animals and plants that grow there cannot supply humans with enough potassium. The solution is "speckles", grains of spice which contain potassium. Speckles are sold ONLY by the caravans, and the only way to survive is to buy speckles from them. So getting along well with the caravans is essential to surviving on Destiny. A human cannot run away and hide; there are no hermits on Destiny. You have to have speckles.

So the whole book is the quest of a young man to understand why the original settlers set things up the way they did. Where do speckles come from? If the potassium comes from the space ship, what will happen when they use up the supply? If the potassium comes from somewhere else, why is it that nobody the hero knows knows

where that is? Each chapter starts with a little information about the original settlers – quotes from their writings. So each chapter provides the reader another clue about how the original settlers discovered things, and how they made their decisions.

Niven also plays the anthropological game (soap operas). Each of the isolated towns along the Road has its own customs and practices. Relations between men and women, families, work practices, are different in each place, and different again in the caravans. So he enjoys puzzling his young hero with the surprising behavior of people as he travels from town to town, and lives with a caravan.

The one problem I had with this book is that as far as I know, potassium is essential to life. If you don't have enough potassium in your blood, your muscles will not function properly. They will spasm. Your heart may simply stop functioning. You will have cell damage. So a lack of

potassium will not simply make people stupid ("speckles-shy" is an expression for someone stupid), it will eventually kill them. So "speckles-shy" bandits will not wildly attack caravans, they will be too sick to do so. Here is a list of symptoms of potassium deficiency I found on the Net: "Acne, continuous thirst, dry skin, constipation, general weakness, insomnia, muscle damage, nervousness, slow irregular heartbeat, weak reflexes, paralysis." All earth animals living on *Destiny* – including the egg-laying chickens – will die young, probably before they lay eggs.

Despite what appears to be a significant scientific error as part of the basis for the whole book, this is better than most sf books – after all, it is a Niven book. *Ringworld* was not stable, *Neutron Star* tides will kill you even if you can stay in the middle of the ship. Part of the fun of Niven books is trying to find his mistakes. If you like puzzles and anthropology, you will enjoy this.

Crygander by Thomas T. Thomas (1992), 316 pages.

I heard the author speak at a science fiction convention in 1994, was intrigued, and bought a couple of his books. *ME* (1991) was reviewed in *CyberCozen*, December 1998.

The science fiction aspect of this book is in the field of transplants and prostheses. The book was written in 1992, but the medical developments he predicts for the year 2000 have not yet come to pass. The story takes place in 2020.

The hero of the book is Jean Metis, a European detective who was shot by a terrorist about the year 2000. His spinal column was severed and he was left paralyzed. About the year 2000, part of his spinal vertebrae which were destroyed were successfully replaced by a prosthetic substitute spinal column, and the damaged part of his spinal chord repaired, so that he in 2020 – at age 90 – is in excellent physical condition (despite occasional problems with back pains). His advanced age has also required a few transplants – but here again medicine has advanced. The problem of rejection of body parts transplanted from other people has been solved, and transplant patients no longer have to worry about rejection, or to take drugs to suppress it.

The second character modified by modern medicine, also supposedly done about the year 2000, is the title character, Crygander. Here the modifications are all the more remarkable, for Crygander is half man,

half woman. One side of Cry's body is woman, the other side man. The left side of Cry's face, the left arm, left breast, left leg, are those of a woman. The right side of Cry's face, the right arm, right breast, right leg, are those of a man. Cry has the genitals of a man in front, and behind them the vagina of a woman. Here we have the ultimate in transplants, since only half of these peripheral organs are Cry's originals – the remainder are functioning transplants from other people.

Where do all these body parts come from? There is a statement made that the third world provides an inexhaustible supply of spare parts. But also there is another source, as we soon see.

In 2020, 20 years after these two people have been rebuilt medically, they meet. I don't think it will spoil the story to tell you that they have sex. Cry is good – when Cry wants to be a woman, Cry can concentrate the other person's attention totally on the woman's side, and fully arouse the other person sexually. Similarly, Cry can play the man's role to a woman. And what is Cry's profession? Cry runs a very expensive bordello, and Cry is the star of this place.

Some time before 2020 the US has sold the San Francisco Bay island of Alcatraz to a Japanese corporation. It is now legally a part of Japan, and no longer subject to U.S. laws. Alcatraz is now called "Babylon", the most mysterious and expensive bordello in

the world. Babylon is an attraction point for young people – mostly women -- who want to meet some of the wealthiest people in the world. It offers them jobs, and the potential of a magic future.

The book starts by telling of a 17 year old girl who has run away from her home in Germany, where she felt stifled by a strict family. She has reached San Francisco, but run out of money. The idea of going to work for Babylon – the antithesis of everything her family stands for – attracts her. Wealthy acquaintances assist her to create a new adult identity (she is underage), and she joins Babylon. A common enough tale of a teenage runaway, who finds herself becoming a sex-provider. But this girl is not an ordinary runaway. Her father is the German Minister of Defense.

So our hero, top European detective (a World Cop) Jean Metis, has been sent to the U.S. to find her. Detective work suggests that she has gone to Babylon. Normally getting her out would be a serious problem, because Babylon is no longer in the U.S., it is part of Japan. But in this case the girl is a minor, so Babylon's keeping her there could cause them difficulties. Jean Metis goes to Babylon with an American policeman, under cover, to try and find the girl, and get her out. And thus he meets another elderly modified person: Crygander.

Another aspect of this tale is the very quick conversion of young people to superb servers of the bordello's clients. We are not told enough about how this is done – this aspect of the book seems extremely unlikely. One can only guess that Babylon is able to use future conditioning techniques. After a few days in Babylon a young person with no prior knowledge of how to respond to unusual client requests is able to make these clients very happy.

So we have a detective story, an international intrigue story, a tale of future medical feats, a tale of a bordello, and a set of interesting characters. For example, the American detective working with Metis finds himself deeply attracted to one of Babylon's woman employees. He is quite aware that it is not proper behavior for an American undercover detective to get involved emotionally with an employee of the place he is investigating, in the middle of a case. We also have some details of running a bordello on one of the world's most unusual islands – we would like to know a lot more.

The book has some touches of humor too. Consider the following conversation between the American detective and World Cop Metis:

“What does any seventeen year old girl want?”

“Sex, drugs, rock and roll,” Metis quoted from memory.

“What? Well, yeah, all of that. But maybe not the classical music, though.” p. 80

Or this one, between an artificial intelligence and the bordello manager Aaron Leitways:

“See if you can get me about fourteen hours of sleep before nine o'clock this morning.”

“Ha. Ha,” the intelligence said. ‘Manipulation of the space-time continuum is beyond my current programming, Aaron.’

“Just checking, doll.” p. 135

I enjoyed this book as it kept me turning the pages to see what would happen. But some of the details are quite disgusting. There are some nasty things going on in this bordello!

Hebrew Book Review by Aharon Sheer – SF Book Recommended by Eli Eshed:

הגדה הנכרי בטכך הגדה HaNochri b'Svach HaGada [Stranger in the Tangled Bank] by

Sariel Shany (2000), 363 pages.



Recommended by Eli Eshed and Gal Haimovich. This is a complex thriller which looks at first like a conventional thriller. My first thought was that such a thriller is not for me. But after reading a while – and then looking over the Contents list – I found the book to be divided into periods: the **present** (2000), the **future**, and the **past**.

The **future** described is well ahead of us: It is a future in which nation-states no longer exist; instead the world is run by enormous corporations, such as Microsoft and Gencico. The world's food is mainly grown in the sea. Thanks to genetic engineering, for example, whale meat is expensive, but a staple. But no other meat is available except to the most wealthy, suggesting enormous

on-land population growth. The moon has been colonized and is trying to maintain its independence. Some periods in the **past** which are described go back as far as France before the French Revolution, but the emphasis is on the period before and after the Second World War. The portrayal of the future is not the only science fictiony thing about this book. Some of the same people appear in all three periods. How is this possible? That is one of the questions some people in this book try to understand and to control.

The book cover does not label this book as science fiction. On the contrary, the emphasis is on the thriller aspects, the spy tale. A look at the contents tells us more – but there is no date on the **future**. I personally found the **future** the least well built. There is a very general picture, and some hints of future technology for controlling human behavior, such as a very sophisticated use of pheromones. But most of this takes place in a very conventional “thriller” atmosphere, with little feeling for a possible future environment. In fact, it is all too much of the same. The **past** is better drawn – I have the feeling the author has a great interest in history. And in the **present** there is an introduction to today’s genetics and potential use of DNA, but without much feeling as to where this might really go in the future.



The characters are all hard-nosed unpleasant people, of the kind that I would prefer not to meet personally. They kill people with a casualness which is striking. However, their cruelty is strongly influenced by what I think is one of the main points of this novel, although perhaps it was not the author’s intention when he wrote it. My friend Bernie Weinberg tells us that an American statistician calculated how long people would live if they were immortal. Sound like a silly question? Suppose that people did not die of old age or from disease, but they could die from having physical damage, such as cutting the heart in two or crushing the brain. How long would they live? Assuming that the only cause of death is physical destruction of the functional parts of the body (traffic accidents, falling off a ladder onto your head, murder, etc.), the American statistician computed an expected life span of 500 years. That’s all. (Of course, some people would live much longer.)

Now let’s redo the idea and include wars. Americans have mostly been spared the ravages of war on their own land, so I assume the American statistician did not include that in his calculation. But think about Europe, where for example the Germans killed 20% of the population of Yugoslavia during the Second World War. If you were an immortal living in Yugoslavia at the time of WWII, what would that do to your expected life span? Author Sarel Shany discusses two scenes of mass murder in this novel: Nanjing in China, where the Japanese committed horrifying atrocities during the early 1930s, killing almost all the local population, and Dresden Germany, where massive Allied fire-storm bombings during WWII destroyed almost all of the civilian population of this city. In this book, “immortals” caught in these two cities were almost all killed. Without any statistical basis for the following statement (someone else will have to do this calculation), I would **guess** that world-wide – including wars – the average life span of an “immortal” would be on the order of 300 years. So it would seem that creating a new world without war would be the greatest contribution to extending individual life spans that any one can do. Medical research has little to offer in this area.

I found myself continuing to read, waiting to see what the resolution of the great puzzle of this book would be. The ending was amusing, but overcomplicated.

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כל הזכויות שמורות למחברים וליוצרים, כפי שצוינו.

Science Fiction and Fantasy in Israel at the Start of the 21st Century

By Eli Eshed -- Part 8.

Poetry

Science fiction poetry is a field which is beginning to develop in Hebrew. Well-known Israeli poet David Avidan wrote poems and songs on science fiction subjects in the 1970s and 80s, and even created a full-length science fiction movie, *Sheder Min HaAtid [Message from the Future]*, about time travel, which was based on one of his poems. But he remained an isolated figure.

Since Avidan one can find science fiction elements in the works of a number of poets. Binyamin Gallai wrote a number of poems dealing with the cosmos. Scientist Avner Trainin wrote poems about early scientists such as Leonardo de Vinci, and in his poems there are references to scientific ideas such as parallel worlds. Scientific elements appear here and there in the works of other poets such as Dan Pagis and Tzvi Atzmon (a scientist by profession). The works of poet Maya Bejarano Shevi reveal great interest in certain scientific ideas.

The poet Rahel Chalfi is especially noticeable because in many of her poems there are references both to scientific and science fiction ideas. She has an especially strong cycle of 12 poems which deal with women witches who were burned at the stake, which is based on research that she did on this subject. This is the most important poetry published in Hebrew on the subject of witchcraft. These poems were originally published in a collection of poems in 1979. They were recently reprinted in a complete collection of all her poetry up to 1999, *Mahl'fot HaShemesh [Solar Plexus: Poems 1975-1999]* (HaKibbutz HaMeuhad, 2002).

More than many other poets, science fiction elements are found in the poems of Shlomo Shoval, who published two books of poems about science fiction subjects, and Amos Adelheit, who has published many poems with clear elements of science fiction, and even published a sort of science fiction story poem in the journal "Achsav" ["Now"].

A recent book of poetry by biologist Noam Lahav *Ahavat Navadei HaYakum [The Love of the Wanderers of the Universe]* (Halonot 2002) deals with the mysteries of the universe, and uses many science fiction motifs.

The most important Hebrew science fiction poetry book *ever* is a new book by Asher Reich, *Atid Domem [Inanimate Future]* (Keshev, 2002), which came out as this was being written. All of the poems in this collection deal with science fiction subjects of an apocalyptic character. This is the first time that an entire Hebrew poetry collection has dealt solely with science fiction subjects.

There is also accelerated development of Hebrew "filk" songs, songs written and sung by science fiction fans on science fiction subjects. These are sung more and more at science fiction conventions, and also appear on the Internet.

Music

Pita Morgana - HaYakum baPitah [The Universe in a Pitah] (2001), is a musical album which tells the story of a rock group kidnapped and taken to outer space by aliens. The creator is **Nir Yaniv**, who also maintains the Internet site of the Israeli Society for Science Fiction and Fantasy. He also plans a science fiction radio play based on this album. Although several dozen copies of this album have been sold at science fiction conventions, it has not yet found a commercial producer. Nir has since created and sung a variety of songs with science fiction content.



Opera

Alpha v'Omega [Alpha and Omega] (2001). This is an original fantasy opera. The libretto was written by poets Dudi Manor and Aneh Harman, and the music by Gil Shohat (who proposed the original idea). The plot is based on a series of engravings by Norwegian artist Edward Monk. It presents a fantastic story of the creation of the human race. The story is nihilistic and tragic, and quite different from the Biblical story of the Garden of Eden. The story is of the first two humans; one of them, the female, has sexual relations with a variety of animals who can both think and talk, and from these relations the modern race of humans was formed. This opera was impressive in the power of its imagination.

Eli Eshed's series will be continued in following months.