



Science-Fiction Fanzine

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## Letters to the Editor

Aharon,

Your latest *CyberCozen* was excellent (May 2003). I love the fact that you look at the genre(s) from "top to bottom," including reviews of children's books. (And even a review from a child!) And Eli Eshed's short reviews are eye-openers. The short piece about Tamar Borenstein Lazar looks like something that should be turned into a true biographical sketch. The woman is amazing. Do her works appear in English?

Great job.

Sid Berger

**Ed. Note:** Unfortunately, Tamar Borenstein Lazar's books have **not** been translated into English.

Aharon,

The May 2003 *CyberCozen* was an excellent and fun issue, first of all.

In your review of *Ruah Enoshit baCochav [Human Ghost in Goalbuck]* by Avi Segal you stated that *Star Trek* has never had aliens with four-fingered hands. Actually, they have. In *Star Trek: The Next Generation* there was an episode in which Riker is sent down to a planet disguised as one of the inhabitants of that planet to scout the people out and see if they are ready to join the Federation, or something to that effect. The inhabitants of that planet had three fingers and one thumb on each hand, an effect which was created by the pedestrian method of binding together the two middle fingers of each hand. One part of that middle finger was shorter than the other, which rather spoiled the effect.

I asked around among my Trekkie friends, and they told me several tidbits of information about this episode. They told me its name, which was "First Contact"; they told me that Bebe Newirth played an alien in that episode; and they told me what season it was in, but I no longer recall that information.

There used to be a children's science fiction series when I was a kid, called *Danny Dunn*. Is the *Dani Din* series based on that? It sounds quite different. The *Danny Dunn* series seemed to be more soundly based on science -- but on antiquated science. For example, they did not yet know of all the nine planets at the time of the writing of that series. And in another I seem to recall that they used sound waves to manipulate something on the outside of a spaceship, while it was in space. I'm no scientist, but I'd imagine that to be impossible.

But that series had no magic or wizards in it. Only one book in the episode dealt with outer space; another one had Danny Dunn working with a computer, which of course was half the size of the laboratory, and could do his homework for him, including writing reports without his direct input.

Has the book *Alilot Gilgamesh [Tales of Gilgamesh]* by Shin Shifra, the children's version of the epic of Gilgamesh, come out in English as well? It does not seem to be available at Amazon.

Mordechai Housman

**Ed. Note:** Unfortunately, *Alilot Gilgamesh* by Shin Shifra has **not** been translated into English.

## Short Book Review by Aharon Sheer

*Passage* by Connie Willis (2001), 780 pages.

Connie Willis is one of my favorite authors, and I have read all of her novels. This

won the LOCUS Award for best sf novel of 2001, and was a Hugo nominee. This is a **science**

thriller, but it is also a near-future **science-fiction** thriller. It starts out as a modern comedy of manners, somewhat like her book *Bellwether* (1996, reviewed in *CyberCozen* July 1998), describing people who work in a major city hospital – and as such is very entertaining. But this is also a story of great personal tragedy. And this is also an anti-religious tract. I started out laughing and I ended up crying.

The medical subject is research into Near Death Experiences (NDE), a serious topic for research, which, Connie Willis points out, is improperly often used as a vehicle to sell certain religious points of view. She assumes that new future technologies will enable better serious study of such NDE experiences. For example, in the book a future method of studying the brain has been developed, which provides far more accurate and detailed scans of brain activity, as compared to the currently used PET (Positron Emission Tomography). Furthermore, it uses chemical tracers, not radioactive ones, allowing more frequent use. The new method is called “RIPT”, but she does not explain the meaning of these initials. My guess is that the “RIP” part of the name is significant [for Israeli readers, “RIP” stands for “Rest in Peace”, and often appears on

gravestones]. Another future research technique relies on a drug which seems to cause a harmless simulation of some of the brain activity which takes place during a “Near Death Experience”. This drug obviously allows studying such brain activity without endangering the experimental subject. The drug is called dithetamine (my guess is the “di” part of the name is significant).

As the research continues, very strange things happen. Much of the book includes serious medical terms, and can be a bit difficult to read. We have such neurophysiological terms as inhibitors, temporal-lobe stimulation, acetylcholine, L+R pattern, theta-asparcine, endorphins, cortisol, LHRH, DABA, amygdala, hippocampus, etc. Not all of these are known today. Many readers will skip the serious scientific stuff, and just enjoy the human comedy and cry over the human tragedy. This is (1) serious social comment, (2) a wonderful description of the medical establishment and the research establishment, (3) a very human tale of many people who have suffered very significant experiences (we are talking about Near Death – and death itself), (4) a great love story. Highly recommended.

## Two Books by Richard Paul Russo – Reviewed by Aharon Sheer

A search in Nicholls and Clute *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* (Grolier Multimedia edition) shows that Russo was born in 1954, and published his first novel in 1988. The Encyclopedia entry, written by Neal Tringham, sums up author Richard Paul Russo (RPR) as follows: “At his best, RPR is a major exponent of ‘Humanist sf’, a writer who uses relatively conventional settings as a backdrop against which to portray the failures and triumphs of solid, believable people.”

### *Ship of Fools* by Richard Paul Russo (2001), 370 pages.

Recommended by Avi Chami.

This is a very enjoyable sf adventure story, despite the fact that it has as its background some terrifying events. A huge spaceship, with thousands of human inhabitants, has been traveling for so long that all memory of how the ship got started, and what they are supposed to be doing, has been lost. They have not visited a planet in at least ten years, and the last time they did so, the visit ended badly. We are told that on that last visit the ship’s religious ruler, the bishop of a religion obviously descended from Catholicism, tried to forcibly convert the planet’s colony to his religion. In this book some of the ship’s crew visit a planet, only to find that all of its occupants have been mysteriously murdered and in the most awful way. They leave in haste. Later on they find an enormous alien ship which is also turns out to be very dangerous. Ship society is unfairly divided

into a relatively small group of elite people, who enjoy complete control over the ship, while the dirty work is done by masses of people who are essentially slaves. The slaves would like to settle on a planet, any planet, rather than remain on the ship. But since the ship could not run without their work, the elite will not permit such a thing. Much of the book deals with interpersonal conflicts among the elite, and especially between the enforcers of religious orthodoxy and those who are skeptical, such as the captain. This is very good space opera; the explorations of the alien ship are fascinating. The main characters are also people whom the reader enjoys meeting and listening to. We like these people, for all their failings, and as a result the alien terrors take on a less chilling aspect. I will certainly like to read other books by the author.

***Carlucci's Heart* by Richard Paul Russo (1997), 391 pages**

This is the second of a trilogy (I did not yet read the first), it takes place in a future San Francisco, and has a police detective (Carlucci) as its named hero. This future has a high dense population, a warmer climate, an energy shortage (no air conditioning in the summer), much poverty (the U.S. is like a third-world country), extremely poor medical services for most of the people, and particularly, many new diseases. So this book is sort of a medical thriller. We have a second hero, Dr. Cage, who has taken the job of trying to help the poor sick in a free medical clinic. But he is also trying to figure out things about a new disease which has killed his best friend. The new disease is almost 100% fatal.

Although the book takes place in San Francisco, a city I have visited many times, the places described don't mean much to me. I would say the author does not create a good sense of

place in the large. That is, someone's room is described beautifully, and even the people in the neighborhood, but I don't feel the scenery of the place. I have no sense of the buildings or the view.

There are many questions that I had in reading this book. Is the future medical scene described reasonable? Does the disease make sense? How long could a viral disease which has an incubation period of less than two weeks and is 100% fatal survive? Could it potentially wipe out all of the U.S.?

What's nice about Russo's books is that he has heroes who care about what is happening, and try to make things better for people. As bad as things are, heroes like these are heroic! But they are still normal human beings, they are not fantasy supermen. I recommend this book.

**Science Fiction and Fantasy in Israel at the Start of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

By Eli Eshed -- Part 7.

**Comics**

Original comics appeared in the Hebrew language at the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Warsaw, in the children's magazine "Olam Katan" ["A Small World"]. In the 1920s Hebrew comics were published in magazines that came out in the United States. In Israel the first Hebrew comics appeared in the 1930s. The author of many of the first Hebrew comics was poet and playwright Lea Goldberg, who, together with illustrator Aryeh Navon, wrote a variety of humorous comics for children. Many had a fantasy plot; for example "Ori Mori" about a child who builds a settlement at the bottom of the sea, and "Olam Hafuch" ["Upside-Down World"] (1938) about a boy who reaches a world in which everything is upside down.

In the 1950s adventure comics began to appear in the children's magazines "HaAretz Shelanu" ["Our Land"] and "Davar l'Yeladim" ["Davar for Children"]. Some of these were a series of adventures of "Gidi Gezer" ["Gidi Carrot"], an Israeli fighter who receives his powers from eating carrots, and with these powers battles the British and the Arabs. In comics in the 1960s "Yoav Ben Halav" ["Yoav Milk"] was a boy who got his powers from drinking milk, and used these powers to fight criminals, terrorists, an evil wizard, and even reached another planet and fought with the residents there. Other comics described the discovery of lost Israeli tribes in remote lands in Asia and Africa, and of ancient cities from the Biblical period that miraculously survived in the Land of Israel and still sacrifice humans to the Canaanite gods. Other stories told of travels of Israeli youths to other planets.

Artist Dani Plant in 1959 wrote and drew a comics story "HaMabul HaSheni" ["The Second Flood"] about an invasion of aliens from Venus, with their army of robots; the defenders destroy them using bacteria. Plant published original comics about "Tarzan of the Jungle". In the 1960s he wrote a comics series about the travels of a boy to various prehistoric periods, which appeared as a book in 1972, illustrated by the author.

Writer Pinhas Sadeh, one of the most gifted Israeli authors, was – under a pseudonym -- one of the best and most productive comics writers. Many of his comics had science fiction content. In 1960 he wrote the story "Taglitoh HaGoralit shel Dr. Yosef K." ["The Fateful Discovery of Dr. Yosef K."] about a scientist at the atomic reactor in Dimona who discovers ants that grew to giant size as a result of exposure to reactor radioactivity, and a cure for cancer which can be made from the meat of these ants. Using this cure he persuades the leaders of the great powers, Kennedy and Khrushchev, to agree to peace between them, and even Egyptian leader Nasser agrees to sign a peace treaty with Israel. (The story today seems unbelievably naïve.)

In 1964 Sadeh wrote a story "El HaYareah b'Chadur Poreah" ["To the Moon in a Balloon"] (illustrated by Elisheva Nadel) based on a science fiction story by Edgar Allen Poe, which continued the tale of a Dutchman who traveled to the moon in a balloon, where he encounters an advanced civilization of midgets, descendents of escapees from Atlantis, who are served by giant spiders.

The most talented comics artist in Israel in the 1960s was Asher Dickstein, who wrote and illustrated two excellent science fiction comics. "Hallalit HaZman" ["Time Ship"] (1964) was about a crew of scientists and two youths who travel to a prehistoric period where they meet a two-headed alien. "Meistarei HaYabeshet HaAvuda" ["Mysteries of the Lost Continent"] (1965) was about the discovery of the remains of the continent of Atlantis under the sea by a crew of Israeli researchers (and two youths). There they discover a beautiful princess who falls in love with a brave Israeli researcher who fights evil enemies among the people of Atlantis.

The most talented comics artist in Israel in the 1970s was Giora Rotman, who brought realistic comics adventures to their peak. One of his longest and best-known comics (50 pages) was "Melisalda", whose story was written by Pinhas Sadeh. This story which was serialized in 1971-1972 described the travels of a boy to Venus looking for a girl from Venus who had fallen in love with him. He has adventures on various planets as he aids the Venusians in their battles against their enemies. His adventures continue on Earth where he uses devices provided him by the Venusians to fight criminals on Earth. In many ways this is the first "Graphic Novel" to appear in Hebrew.

Rotman continued to write and illustrate comics stories with science fiction elements. "Malkodet b'Mtzulot" ["Underwater Trap"] (1974) in which an Israeli mission discovers an undersea base of Martians. "HaEmek HaKadum" ["The Ancient Valley"] (1991) about the discovery of a lost city in Africa of Jewish fighters from the Great Revolt against the Romans who battles a parallel city of evil Romans. This latter story put the finish to a genre that for a while was very popular in Israeli comics about the discovery of lost Jewish cities. In every respect Rotman is the best adventure comics artist in Israel.

Another excellent science fiction comics work is the comic book by artist Dudu Geva, *Rav Sha'anani Neged B'no shel Godzilla [Mighty Sha'anani Against the Son of Godzilla]* (Ma'ariv, 1993). This wild humorous comic book tells of the battle of an unfit Israeli superhero against a family of dinosaurs that threatens to destroy the Earth after they took over a nuclear base on another planet. This is one of the classics of Israeli comics.

### Uri Fink

Uri Fink is the best comics artist in Israel today. His book *Zbeng La'Mchashef HaMathil [Wham to the Beginning Magician]* (Modan 2001) is a wild parody on the Harry Potter series in which Fink's standard characters from his *Zbeng [Wham!]* series, a group of bizarre high school students, play the characters from *Harry Potter*. Fink, a dedicated science fiction fan, regularly merges into his comics science fiction scenarios and parodies based on such series as *Star Trek* and *X-Man*, as well as original ideas of his own.



Recently Uri Fink published a comic book in English, *FINK*. In this book he deals satirically with the current situation in Israel, but also includes a story in which Captain Kirk battles his own starship Enterprise which shows clear signs of turning into a smothering Jewish mother.

Illustrator Shai Tsirka is one of the outstanding comics illustrators in Israel, together with Fink and Geva, but he does not avoid putting his Orthodox Jewish religious beliefs into his work. In his new book *Masah HaTzaid shel Babah [Babah's Hunting Trip]* (Modan, 2001) his usual hero "Babah", a man of the Mishna and the Talmud (a sort of Jewish "Astrix"), goes hunting for various fantastic animals mentioned in Talmudic tales, such as the "shamir" and the "leviathan".

### Other Outstanding Comics:

*Harpatkaot shel Zoë [The Adventures of Zoë]* by Dan Hofrat and Ofrah Amit appeared in the magazine "Masah Aher l'Yeladim" ["A Different Voyage for Children"] from issue 21 in December 1999 to issue 45 of December 2001, in 25 parts. These are the adventures of the girl Zoë on the isle of Crete who discovers that the ancient civilization of Crete stills exists underground. There she aids the good-hearted Minotaur (who has the head of a bull) in his struggle against King Minos and his evil followers. The story ends somewhat disappointingly when the Minotaur goes into the depths of the sea to meet with Poseidon,

King of the Sea. The adventures of Zoë and her friend Zoom continue from issue 47 with a new story by Hofrat and Amit in which the two are sucked into a well-known painting by Claude Monet, and there meet the painting's figures, and the painter himself. This second story has great potential for the future because of its strength of imagination.

### Comics in "Zombit"

Some very sophisticated science fiction comics have appeared in the computer magazine "Zombit". This magazine for computing and computer games has always devoted special space to science fiction. **Avner Friedman, who at the age of 15 founded the Israeli Society for Science Fiction and Fantasy**, got his start in "Zombit" writing for its special section on *Star Trek*. (Avner is now a pilot in the Israeli Air Force.)

Another figure who stood out in "Zombit" was comics artist Koren Shadmi, later Uri Fink's assistant in the "Zbeng" series, who illustrated one of the stories in Fink's *Profil 107 [Profile 107]*. Shadmi stands out as a writer and illustrator of complex adventure stories with a science fiction background. In "Zombit" number 9, a special issue devoted to comics, Shadmi began a new long comics story in color, "Gavish" ["Crystal"], about the world in 2025. The story stopped for no clear reason, and in its place a new and more complex story began, "Ice" (no connection to the science fiction novel of this name by Assaf Gavron), about a battle between two alien races on Earth, in which a hero by the name of "Ice" finds himself involved. Shadmi also published a parody in "Zombit" of the TV series *The X-Files*, called "T'kuim b' Afela" ["Stuck in the Dark"] (the name is a pun on the Hebrew name for *The X-Files* series, *Tikim b' Afela [Files in the Dark]*).

Another interesting story that appeared in "Zombit" was "Pearl Harbor", which began in issue 52 in 1999. The author was Sh. Koren. This complex and twisted story was about a young woman who fights a satanic intelligent computer. The surprising end has the forces of evil victorious, with the woman declining into an ideal life in a virtual reality. A very sophisticated story.

### Avi Katz

Avi Katz is a science fiction and fantasy illustrator. He does the covers for the magazine of the Israeli Society for Science Fiction and Fantasy, "HaMeimad HaAssiri" ["The Tenth Dimension"], and did the covers for the translations of Douglas Adams' books in Israel. Katz also did a science fiction comics series for children, "Virtuela", about the adventures of a girl in a variety of fantastic virtual worlds inside a computer. But the series, which appeared in a magazine called "Comics", died with the magazine.

### Other Comics Items

The first part of a new series written by Aviv Ohr and illustrated by Eran Aviani, *Arinaa* (Komikum 2002), appeared recently. This is a Tolkien-style story about the battle of the forces of good against the forces of evil, in a world of men and elves. The story is well-drawn, but the content is conventional. However this is a return to the almost-lost tradition in Israel of serious adventure tales such as those that were written and illustrated by Pinhas Sadeh, Asher Dickstein, and Giora Rotman. Let's hope that this book presages a new wave of such traditional comics.

In parallel to all this, comics fan and collector Alon Itzkowitz has prepared a CD-Rom of older Israeli comics which are almost impossible to obtain today, from the decades of the 1950s, 60s, 70s and 80s. In this way he has preserved comics which would otherwise be unavailable.

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

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