



Science-Fiction Fanzine

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### The Israeli Society for Science Fiction and Fantasy

#### מועדון הקריאה

במרכז דיוני מועדון הקריאה בחודש אוקטובר יעמוד הספר זוכה פרס גפן בקטגוריית הפנטסיה "אומה" מאת טרי פראצ'ט.

מועדון הקריאה בתל אביב יתקיים ביום רביעי, 27/10/10, בשעה 19:30, בבית הקפה "קפה קפה" ברחוב חשמונאים 95 (כשר). המנחה: דפנה קירש. לצורך היערכות למספר המשתתפים, מומלץ להירשם מראש באמצעות הדואל, בכתובת [dafna1485@walla.co.il](mailto:dafna1485@walla.co.il), כמו כן רצוי להביא למפגש עותק של הספר. ההשתתפות במועדון הקריאה אינה כרוכה בתשלום ואינה מותנית בהגעה למפגשים נוספים, ופתוחה גם למי שאינם חברי אגודה. בחודש נובמבר יוקדש מועדון הקריאה לספר זוכה פרס גפן בקטגוריית המקור "החמישית של צ'ונג לוי" מאת יואב אבני. פרטים על מפגשי המועדון העוסקים בספר זה יתפרסמו באתר האגודה ובמכתב החודשי. המעוניינים להנחות מועדוני קריאה בכל רחבי הארץ מוזמנים לפנות בדואל למרכזת הפרויקט, ליאת שחר: [liat42@gmail.com](mailto:liat42@gmail.com).

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

### Film Review by Aharon Sheer:

***King of Thorn*, 2010, 110 minutes.** Anime film, in Japanese with English subtitles. Directed by Kazuyoshi Katayama. Written by Hiroshi Yamaguchi & Kazuyoshi Katayama. Based on the manga comic series ***King of Thorn*** by Yuji Iwahara.

My grandson Yedidya wanted to see this at Icon Cinemateque, Succot 2010. He doesn't speak a word of Japanese, nor does he read a word of English, but he thought it's a fantasy film, which is what he wanted. The graphics were spectacular, the animation primitive (only the mouth moves when a character talks), the action fast and unendingly repetitive. Note that if there were a Hebrew translation of the title of this movie, it would be מלך קריץ. For those who know Hebrew, that may be a clue.

The story is supposedly science fiction. What is the plot? A strange virus has attacked mankind. It turns people to stone. When such a stone person falls down, it smashes into thousands of pieces. As more and more people become stone,

the American economy is collapsing. There are fewer and fewer customers to buy anything! An apparently very wealthy group comes up with the idea of saving a small number of humans (160) who will be able to repopulate the world when the disease has died out. The "scientific" solution is cryogenics! They will freeze 160 people (randomly selected from all of mankind to give a good representation of the world gene pool?) and unfreeze them in another hundred years. Of course only people not yet infected with this horrible disease will be frozen.

To complicate the story, one of those to be frozen is one of a pair of twin Japanese high-school girls. Only one has been accepted to be frozen. She asks her sister to wait for her until the end of the

hundred years. More strange, as we learn, is that one of the sisters tried to commit suicide not long ago, perhaps unable to face the thought that only one of them will be frozen and will survive.

So off go all the candidates to a spectacular Gothic castle in Scotland, where the cryogenic installation has been set up. The whole installation will be computer controlled so that even if all the people (guards, maintenance people, programmers, etc.) die from this horrible disease, the computer (nicknamed A.L.I.C.E. for some reason) will maintain the entire installation perfectly functioning until A.L.I.C.E. decides that it's time to wake every one up. In the pre-freezing orientation meeting, one of the subjects asks the following question, "Will we dream while we are frozen?" The answer is, "Yes, A.L.I.C.E. will provide all of you with dreams."

So everyone in the castle is frozen and time stands still.... But suddenly the installation wakes all the people up. Has a hundred years past? A quick look around gives us the suspicion that that is the case. The entire huge Scottish castle is covered with thick thorn-covered vines of a huge plant that has overwhelmed the castle. That must have taken decades to take place. (Think of Angkor Wat.) However, a look at the computer clock shows that only 48 hours have passed! Worse yet, only a small number of people (eight) have survived. So the remainder of the movie is stories of battles among the eight survivors (including the Japanese twin), and with a collection of monsters now

inhabiting the bowels of the huge castle, with underground rivers, and collapsing rock walls (earthquakes are frequent). Lots of shooting. From time to time the Japanese twin has flashbacks of her sister's attempted suicide. One of the survivors is a little boy with a small hand-held computer with a computer game on it. The little boy sees that what is happening to them is (perhaps) all part of his computer game. When something new happens, he declares, "We've advanced to the next level of the game." So the little boy recognizes the monsters and other characters from his game. Support for this are scenes of A.L.I.C.E. with its computer programmers, and various pronouncements by various people of how they have messed things up.

I must add that since I don't understand Japanese, and the English subtitles were often elusive, and I never read the original manga comic books, everything I understood about this movie may be completely wrong.

My conclusion was that the last hour and a half of this movie was a nightmare provided by A.L.I.C.E. so that the frozen people won't get bored, and in the end, they will all wake up. But while there seemed to be a happy ending for the twins, I was not at all clear about the other people. I think you just have to watch this for what it is, which is not much. An Earth-devouring plant, cryo-freezing, monster battles and cool Gothic imagery - it's the end of days as you've never seen it before.

### **Quote of the Month:**

"Recent studies have shown that a remarkable sixteen million men, one in every two hundred men worldwide alive today, are direct male descendents of fourteenth-century Genghis Khan — a nomad who commandeered virtually all the many sedentary peoples within his long reach. From the Great Khan's six Mongolian wives, as well as the many daughters of foreign rulers that he also took on as wives, and the great numbers of beautiful women he demanded as his due from conquered territories, the Great Khan is thought to have sired an enormous number of children, although the exact number is unknown....

The fact that so many men are direct male descendents of either the Great Khan or one of his near paternal ancestors indicates that virtually everyone on the Asian steppes is, through some line of descent, carrying the DNA of the Great Khan's family. Even Queen Elizabeth II is thought to be a descendent, through Mary of Teck and her Basarab dynasty ancestors. Physicist turned evolutionary theorist Gregory Cochran observes: 'This disproves the theory of history promoted by Marx and Tolstoy that says only social forces matter, not individuals. This shows that one man can make a difference.' The difference, of course, lies not only in the virtually single-handed creation of a vast empire, but also in a genetic imprint that leaves competing males in the dust."

From *Evil Genes* by Barbara Oakley, p. 267

### Quote of the Month:

"Genetics explains why you look like your father, and if you don't, why you should."

—Anonymous

From *Evil Genes* by Barbara Oakley, p. 253

## Holodeck in Star Trek by Eli Eshed

[Editor's note: Since I've been watching *Star Trek: The Next Generation (ST:TNG)* on Middle East TV (METV) these last months, and seen many Holodeck episodes, I thought it might be nice to reprint this article by Eli Eshed.]

One of the most prominent characteristics of all the new *Star Trek* series that differentiates them from the original series dating from the 1960s 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, as for instance the 'Wild West', the 1930's in Chicago, or the decade of the 1950's in Las Vegas etc. There are no limits to its power except for the user's own imagination or else the fear that the "holodeck" machine can suffer one of the endless malfunctions which might imprison the user or to cause the simulated characters to develop a consciousness of their own and thus discover they are not real after all.

In the original series made during the 1960s such technology was yet unavailable, although their producer, Gene Rodenberry did, in fact, think about this idea at that time. He planned to include such a machine within the "entertainment" hall of the crew; a plan that was not realized for lack of funds.

Nevertheless, in the 1970s, within the animated series of *Star Trek* where the budget did not present a problem (except for achieving a satisfactory level of animation), a technology which resembles the "Holodeck" is shown in an episode called "Practical Joker". There an alien intelligence exerts controls over 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 that we find certain crewmembers that for the first (and last) time experience being in a virtual environment of the kind characters of the next generation are so often found. The computer disrupts this activity like in many plots of the next generation of *Voyager* and *Deep Space 9*. However, this is unusual and does not represent the situation in general. Don't treat it too lightly, since the non-use of virtual reality is an indication of significant philosophical and cultural differences between the generation of the original series and that of the "next generation".

## Illusion is Bad

Virtual reality is portrayed as existing already 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. For those who do not remember it: the plot is about the arrival of the “Enterprise” crew, headed by Captain Picard and his female second-in-command (“No. 1”) on the planet Talus 4. There it becomes clear that its natives have a technology exactly similar to 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 would live happily with a local woman. The Captain, however, proves to be invincible and succeeds finally to free himself.

We find out later on that the Talusians once had a highly-developed culture. They even knew 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 are now facing extinction. Captain Picard leaves this planet, shocked by the fate of the Talusians that let this strange technology control them.

This pilot episode was redone as a story of the “usual” *Star Trek* crew in the episode called “The Menagerie”, in which the new story is acted out within the plot of Captain Picard’s kidnapping. He is shown as a mute and crippled individual aided by Spock who helps to bring him back to Talus 4. This planet is portrayed as the only world in the whole universe that even a flight to it is punished by a death penalty issued by the Federation! Nevertheless, Spock breaks the rules and brings Picard back to Talus 4 where he

could live an illusory life which would prove to be better than his present miserable life.

One can ask why did the Federation decide to inflict such a Draconian punishment on a flight to Talus 4? What kind of harsh calamity can happen if people should visit this dying culture? The answer to it is not given literally in this episode but it 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 they might sink into it, like what happened to the Talusians, and finally deteriorate.

Something of that sort is said by the Talusian representative to Captain Kirk at the end of this episode, when he tells Kirk that Picard lives his own life (a totally illusory life with a beautiful girl that in reality she herself is an illusion 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 it is not so pleasant, that includes continuous development instead of a perfect, ideal life that is all based upon illusion and leads only to deterioration and decline. It is possible to state that this message constituted one of the main issues 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 Picard 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 script writers were probably unaware of this conclusion and in fact such a fate reflects the drastic

### **A Holodeck is a Good Thing**

Seemingly 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 will 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 for 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 second episode. Therefore these machines had to have been dismantled long ago as too dangerous for use).

It seems that the results the Federation had dreaded earlier begin already to be discernible by various symptoms. The protagonists of the new generation are much less adventurous or active than those of the "old generation". They do not set out so often to explore new uncharted planets (a task that filled such considerable time spans of crewmembers belonging to 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 real worlds. We already see in familiar [?] episodes such as Barclay [?] that people

change that occurred in this series in regard to the use of virtual reality and illusion.

experience difficulties in disengaging themselves from the Holodeck and their number would probably increase in the following programs of *Star Trek*. This is exactly what has happened in Talus 4.

It is reasonable to suppose that these changes in the series reflect the changes in the "real world" that created *Star Trek*. The decade of the 1960s, when the original series was produced, were extremely active during which men practiced 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 1980s and the 1990s, 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 reality. 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 are progressively growing 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 under threat of death), because of dreaded future consequences.

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