

חדשות האגודה – פברואר 2020 The Israeli Society for Science Fiction and Fantasy

החודש יתקיימו מפגשי מועדון הקריאה כמפורט להלן. לצורך היערכות למספר המשתתפים/ות וקבלת הודעות על שינויים, יש להירשם מראש דרך הדוא"ל של המנחה, המופיע בקישור הרלוונטי לכל מפגש. רצוי להביא למפגש עותק של הספר. הכניסה חופשית ואינה כרוכה בתשלום או בחברות באגודה, וכן אינה מותנית בהגעה למפגשים נוספים.

- **המועדון בתל אביב** יתקיים ביום חמישי, 20.02, ויעסוק בספרו של מייקל בישופ "פיליפ ק' דיק מת, כמה נורא" (כנרת-זמורה ביתן, 1999), בשעה 19:30 בבית פרטי בתל אביב. מנחה: הדס זעירא. כתובת מדויקת תינתן לנרשמים ולנרשמים למועדון, במייל של מרכזת המועדון, [דפנה קרש](#).
 - **המועדון בירושלים** יעסוק כנראה בספר "בבל 17" מאת סמואל דילייני (זמורה ביתן, 1984). מועד ופרטים נוספים יתפרסמו בקבוצת הפייסבוק [מועדון הקריאה הירושלמי של האגודה](#). ניתן גם ליצור קשר במייל עם מרכזת המועדון בירושלים - [גלי אחיטוב](#), ולהצטרף לקבוצת הוואטס'אפ של המועדון.
 - **המועדון בגליל מערבי (כרמיאל-משגב)** יתקיים ביום שלישי, 25.2.20, ויעסוק בספר "הניצוח שבאפר" מאת סבה טהיר (כתר, 2016). המועדון יתקיים בשעה 20:30 בבית פרטי במשגב. כתובת תמסר לנרשמים ולנרשמים במייל של המנחה, [ד"ר קרן פייט](#).
- כל האירועים של האגודה מופיעים בלוח האירועים (שפע אירועים מעניינים, הרצאות, סדנאות, מפגשים ועוד) לקבלת עדכונים שוטפים על מפגשי מועדון הקריאה ברחבי הארץ ניתן להצטרף לרשימת התפוצה או בדף האגודה בפייסבוק.
- Society information is available (in Hebrew) at the Society's site: <http://www.sf-f.org.il>

This month's roundup:

- Part X of the Zion's Fiction review: Short story #14 [p.s. Last time I wrote Part "VIX" for story #13 – it should be "IX"]
- Thanks again to Yehezkel Laing and the interesting Star Trek story he contributed [Part I appears here this month]
- As usual, interesting tidbits from various websites
- Your editor, Leybl Botwinik

Once more around the block

Leybl, hi. Thank you for your thoughtful response to my missive. I appreciate your continued interest in the book.

You noted, if I understood you, that because *ZF* included stories that did not directly reflect the Israeli or Jewish reality, yet had the temerity to run an illustration of Herzl on the cover, the book might be guilty of misleading advertising. Sorry but I can't agree. We defined what we believed qualified as Israeli SF/F, and identified those we thought were its purveyors, in the intro.

The book featured stories by Israelis of any ethnic group or nationality or gender inclination, Arab, non-Jewish -- consider the million plus Russian immigrants, many of them ardent SF lovers that the Rabbanut does not recognize as Jewish — living or dead, abiding in Israel or abroad, born to Israeli parents, expressing any viewpoint or mode of SF/F they wanted to, including dark fantasy and even horror (of course, we wouldn't have included anything of an anti-Zionist or anti-Semitic bent). Remember, the book is called *Speculative Fiction*, not SF, which makes it a different kettle of fish, and a rather large one. We made these and other distinctions up front and in full view.

In so doing, we tried to be as inclusive as possible, to showcase some of what we thought was the best Israeli SF/F on hand. I'd juxtapose this with the recently published anthology, *Palestine 100: stories from a century after the Nakba*. As a review in a recent issue of the *Tel Aviv of Books* rightly noted, Palestinian SF/F almost exclusively addresses the Palestinian struggle. I mean, what do you expect of them — whimsy? Our book, in contrast, didn't seek to score points. Yes, we couldn't find any stories reflecting an Orthodox sensibility, mostly because any such material tended to be outspokenly didactic and generally aimed at children.

As for Arab-Israelis, we tried reaching Sayed Keshua. He didn't respond to several email and telephone enquiries. We highlighted Pesach Amnuel because he is a Russian-Jewish Israeli with a huge readership in his native land, and because some of his work is so well considered it has been reprinted in some of the late Gardner Dozois's year's best anthologies.

As for Israelis having had it up to *here* with the Palestinian conflict, this is just no excuse for refusing to contend with the “aliens” just up the road, however much many of us paternalistically believe we know them. There’s stuff going on in there beyond the security wall that our drones don’t pick up. Moreover, the regional conflict, however much one prefers to ignore it, remains *the* defining issue of Israeli existence. We ignore it at our peril. And where better to address issues otherwise deemed too hot to handle head on than within the genre? This is what the best SF has always done, to provide a haven with so-called dangerous visions. Israeli SF, which stands second to none in terms of quality or breadth of interest, can’t stand by the wayside and still be taken seriously.

As for our Herzl cover, while he envisioned a Jewish state, he saw such an entity as a thoroughly modern polity. As such, it would inevitably extend citizenship to its indigenous non-Jewish ethnicities as well as to naturalized populations and individuals. So I don’t have any issue if the stories we chose emerged from these populations, nor with any non-Jewish or non-Israeli themes they might have pursued. Similarly I don’t have a problem with stories one would never imagine were ever even written by Israelis. We had one criterion when it came to selecting our stories. They had to be worthy of publication.

Best,
Sheli (Sheldon Teitelbaum, co-editor of *Zion’s Fiction*)

LB: Thanks for your further comments, Sheldon. I agree with some of what you say, but not everything – but this isn’t the forum for that discussion, particularly since you are the co-editor and YOU decide what you want in a book.

I would, however, like to point out that I don’t think your statement (that has nothing to do with SF) “consider the million plus Russian immigrants, ...that the Rabbanut does not recognize as Jewish —” is correct. The last I heard, it was about 35% of the million... In any case, the bottom line – as you wrote – is that each story is a gem worth publishing, and that’s why I took the liberty of reviewing each and every one of them. I look forward to the next book, with bated breath ☺. Good luck to you and Emanuel Lottem.

And, from a reader:

Thank you, Leybl, for yet another very interesting issue of *Cyber Cozen*. The letter from Sheldon Teitelbaum, followed by your response, was enlightening. I appreciate the background to the story that Sheldon provided - once again, making me want to order a copy of *Zion’s Fiction* - and your comments about the issue of alienness in the story “White Curtain” are helpful. Once I can actually read this story I will probably be able to understand what you gentlemen are talking about here. In any event, I really must order a copy, so thank you for once again including the website on the last page so I can do just that.

The many links are fun to peruse, and while I disagree with many of these “Best of” rankings, it is fun to note how many of these science fiction books, movies, and TV shows I have actually read or seen. That is the game I usually play with these listings.

That was an interesting little story by Yehezkel Laing. At first I thought it was a piece of non-fiction, since it sounded so matter-of-fact as straightforward real-time reporting, but once the dates starting slipping into the future, it began to make more sense. A bit of thoughtful perspectives presented here. Good job by Yehezkel.

And that’s that. Again, thank you for the issue, and I look forward to the next one.

All the best,
John P

Other reader feedback:

Dear Leybl:

I really appreciated that guest column by Yehezkel Laing. It describes current events in a certain framework, and then extrapolates them in a unique, plausible, near-futuristic way. I like the political aspect that mixes in with the science (it’s almost humorous and ironic at the same time) -- it’s unfortunate when masses perish due to certain powers’ shortsightedness (I’m an optometrist -- had to get that word in !). Looking forward to more well-written pieces from a worldly perspective.

Gary

Some fun from the Websites:

Is there anyone out there?

How NASA's Next Mars Rover Will Hunt for Alien Life

The strategy involves matching geochemistry with structure.

By Mike Wall December 11, 2019

SAN FRANCISCO — Spotting signs of long-dead life is a tall order for a lonely robot on a faraway world, but NASA's next Mars rover should be up to the challenge, mission team members said.

NASA's 2020 Mars rover is scheduled to launch next summer and touch down in February 2021 inside the Red Planet's 28-mile-wide (45 kilometers) Jezero Crater, which scientists think hosted a lake and river delta in the ancient past. The six-wheeled robot will then scour the area for potential bio-signatures. This work will consist of observing Jezero rocks in fine textural detail and using several spectrometers to map geochemistry precisely onto that texture, Mars 2020 deputy project scientist Katie Stack Morgan told reporters today (Dec. 10) here at the annual fall meeting of the American Geophysical Union (AGU).

Continue reading at:

<https://screenrant.com/unseen-80s-sci-fi-masterpieces/>

Related:

<https://www.space.com/21900-nasa-mars-rover-2020-images.html>

(Almost) everything you need to know about space

PINTEREST – Space and Astronomy (facts and Infographic) - 324 Pins

Did you know? Einstein predicted black holes and gravitational waves 100 years before they were actually detected, Jupiter has rings, Earth's gold came from the collision of neutron stars millions of years ago. You probably don't.

Tune in to learn about our universe, galaxies and planets. Find infographics on astronomy and Space Exploration.

See these at:

<https://www.pinterest.com/curiousismpage/astronomy-and-space-education-facts-and-infographi/>

Robots, AI ..., Some short clips worth seeing:

World Economic Forum - 8 predictions on AI & Robotics

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9LkuhF8Jfpo>

How Close Are We to Replacing Humans With Robots?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dA4I3PiDMz4>

What happens when our computers get smarter than we are? | Nick Bostrom

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MnT1xgZgkpk>

Will robots take our jobs? | CNBC Explains

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a-7Azh0D98>

Hot Robot at SXSW Says She Wants To Destroy Humans | The Pulse

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W0 DPi0PmF0>

Following are fake – but great CGI special effects:

New Robot Can Now Fight Back!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dKjCWfuvYxQ>

New Robot Makes Soldiers Obsolete

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v3RIHnK0 NE>

And the stories behind these visual effects:

How We Faked a "Boston Dynamics" Robot

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gCuG-KJap8>

We Used CGI to Fake Military Robots

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zOvDwBvxAvA>

Reaching for the stars...

SpaceX's Full-Size Starship Prototype Takes Its 1st 'Breath'

The test campaign for the Mk1 has apparently begun.

By Mike Wall November 19, 2019

It looks like SpaceX's shiny new Starship prototype has entered the test phase.

The full-size Starship Mk1 vehicle "breathed" during an apparent pressure test yesterday evening (Nov. 18) at SpaceX's facilities near the South Texas village of Boca Chica.

The milestone was captured and posted on Twitter by @SpacePadrelsle, which has been closely tracking activity at the Boca Chica site.

Continue reading at:

<https://www.space.com/spacex-starship-mk1-test-campaign-begins.html>

From Soviet to science fiction icon, the weird life of Isaac Asimov 100 years on

Not perfect, but pretty damn good

By Iain Thomson in San Francisco. 6 Jan 2020

His own stamp



Asimov in later years



Asimov wrote or edited over 500 books and reams of articles on everything ranging from science, psychology, astronomy, biochemistry (which he taught – on and off – at the Boston University School of Medicine) and, of course, science fiction. Even non-SF fans have probably heard of his widely acclaimed ***Foundation*** series of books and his ***three rules of robotics***.

In actual fact the centenary is a bit of a fudge because Asimov never knew his actual birthday and picked January 2 as a likely date, and one that allowed for an extra holiday after the Christmas festivities. He was born around the turn of the year in 1920, three years after the Russian revolution, in the Soviet town of Petrovichi, although he emigrated to the US at the age of three.

Like many Russian Jews the family moved to Brooklyn in New York, and Asimov's father ended up running a confectionery store and newsagent. Asimov taught himself to read at the age of five and taught his sister too, and consumed the pulp science fiction magazine stocked in his father's shop.

At the age of 15 he applied to Columbia but was rejected, ostensibly on age grounds but, as he wrote in his autobiography ***I, Asimov***, he recounted that the university had filled its quota of Jews for the year. After multiple rejections he eventually earned his Master of Arts degree in chemistry in 1941 and earned a Doctor of Philosophy degree in chemistry in 1948, serving as a civilian in the US Army in the Second World War.

An academic career beckoned and in 1949 he joined the Boston University School of Medicine as a biochemistry teacher. But by then he had already been getting science fiction short stories published for nearly ten years. In 1950 he wrote his first book and largely abandoned his teaching career, finding writing more lucrative and enjoyable.

The classics

Some of those short stories became the ***Foundation*** series, initially a trilogy but later extended to other works. The books, which chart the decline and rise of a galactic empire – aided by the theory of psychohistory – was based around English historian Edward Gibbons' famous ***Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*** and they proved a massive hit: in 1966 the books won a special Hugo Award for "Best All-Time Series," beating out Tolkien, Edgar Rice Burroughs, and Robert Heinlein.

Continue reading at:

https://www.theregister.co.uk/2020/01/06/isaac_asimov_100_years_on/

Race to the Sun (Part I)

A Star Trek Story by Yehezkel Laing

New Orders

Star Date 1328.9 – The enterprise is in pursuit of a stolen spaceship. But not just any spaceship – a prototype of a vehicle unlike any other ever produced before. The Avagar is the fastest Star Ship ever built, reportedly capable of spanning the vast distances between galaxies in only a few hours! She was stolen from a docking port of a Federation research facility located on the edge of the Natex Ebulla.

The pursuit has prevented us from carrying out our main mission - exploring uncharted planets. But Starfleet Command says the prototype is too valuable to fall into the wrong hands and – as the closest ship in the vicinity – has ordered us to cease our explorations and search for the stolen vehicle.

Any progress Mr. Chekov?

Logically.

No sir - Scanners all read negative. But there is a large radioactive cloud in the Octavian sector which is blocking our sensor readings there. I am concentrating on piercing the cloud to try to see what is beyond it.

Corporal Matthews is the son of Johnny Matthews, a good friend of mine from my academy days. John is the captain of the USS Intrepid – a deep space survey ship.

Very good Mr. Chekov, continue with your work.

I'm nothing like my father, sir. He's a Star Ship captain. I'm just a simple mechanic.

Corporal Matthews, reporting to the bridge sir.

There's no such thing as simple personnel on the Enterprise, Corporal. Everyone here is the best at what they do. Anyway, I promised John I would take good care of his boy.

Ah Mr. Matthews, welcome to the Enterprise. It's a pleasure to meet you.

I don't want special treatment sir, such as a special tour of the bridge.

Thank you sir, it's an honour.

Well then just consider it part of your training Corporal. A Star Ship mechanic must surely have knowledge of how the bridge operates!

How are your living quarters? I trust they're sufficient.

Sir - I am picking up potential readings of the Avagar.

More than sufficient sir. Much better than at training camp.

Excellent. Corporal Matthews I would like you to meet First Officer Spock.

Good job Chekov. Where?

Its an honour to meet you too sir. The stories of your exploits are legendary.

Just beyond the radioactive cloud in the Octavian sector.

Excellent. Navigator, plot a course for the Octavian sector mark 34.3 by 67.1 at warp factor 2.

Yes sir.

What is the Avagar sir?

A spaceship prototype capable of spanning millions of light years in only a few hours.

Wow. That's fast! What kind of warp drive does it have sir?

None.

No warp drive!?!

The Avagar operates on impulse power alone.

How is that possible sir?

I am told the ship works using a WH.5 Incisor powered by a Thermal String Decapulator. By leveraging the incredible force of the Decapulator, the Incisor literally rips a small hole in the fabric of the universe, creating a temporary wormhole through which the Avagar can reappear almost instantaneously at any point within a distance of 100 million light years.

Wow. That would revolutionize space travel!

Yes, but as I said, the vehicle is still experimental.

Captain, incoming transmission from Starfleet Command.

Patch it through Lieutenant.

Yes sir.

Captain Kirk - about the Avagar...

We've picked up her signal and are in hot pursuit Commander.

I want you to abandon the search.

Abandon it sir? But we've finally got a lock on its location!

It will have to wait. Something more important has come up, the anniversary celebrations of the Mehgah System. The USS Falcon was supposed to take part, but it has been disabled due to mechanical difficulties. As the closest ship in the area, you are to represent the Federation at the celebrations.

Sir, you want me to discontinue the search for what is probably the most advanced Star Ship in the Galaxy to go to a party?

Not just any party Captain. The anniversary of the Mehgah system – the largest star system in the entire Federation, with 1.2 trillion inhabitants. Mehgah is the Federation's main base of operations in the entire Quadrant. Maintaining good relations with it is critical to the ongoing defense of the Federation. You will therefore report to the Mehgah System immediately.

Yes sir, understood.

Navigator, set a course for the Mehgah System. Warp Factor 6.

Yes Captain.

Biggest Party in the Universe

It is an honor to have the famous Captain James T. Kirk joining us for our anniversary celebrations!

I wouldn't have missed it for the world, Mr. President.

Not according to my sources. I heard that the USS Falcon was to take part in the celebrations and only due to a technicality have you joined us.

One mustn't believe everything one hears Mr. President. The Mehgah System is an astrological wonder and attracts visitors from the far ends of the galaxy. Even Federation Star Ship Captains are curious to witness its

wonders. Its creation must have been incredible.

All the more so, for the fact that it is not a natural wonder, but rather manmade, as our three-dimensional holo-presentation will soon explain... Ladies and gentlemen, honoured local and foreign dignitaries I am pleased to welcome you to the 100 year anniversary celebration of the Mehgah System – the largest system in the entire galaxy. For those of you unaware of its history, we have prepared this short presentation...

Once upon a time, not too long ago, three separate star systems existed in close proximity to one another: Zelta, Ayega. and Zeeba. But the stars of two of these systems, Zelta and Zeeba, were rapidly dying and their populations were in danger of being wiped out.

Engineers of the Ayega Star system came up with a daring plan which would save the populations of both systems while prematurely destroying the two dying stars located on opposite sides of Ayega. By prematurely imploding the two dying stars simultaneously, under controlled conditions, the engineers managed to blast their respective planets out of their orbits and into orbit around Ayega.

In essence Ayega now contains three times the number planets of a regular solar system. The artificial blasts were crafted precisely so that each planet's new orbit would not destabilize that of any other. Today the Mehgah System boasts 103 planets revolving in 76 different orbits, more than any other known solar system. The system is famous for...

Suddenly the presentation goes dead and the holo-image of the Mehgah System is replaced by that of a short man wearing a black hood.

Residents of the Mehgah System – congratulations on your anniversary. I am sorry to inform you that it will be your last, unless one billion universal bullion are placed

in galactic bank account number xf65th7. You have 24 hours to meet these demands or I will knock the Mehgah System's planets out of their orbits and destroy all of your precious home worlds! You've been warned!

Mehgah Disaster

Oh, this is disturbing. Most disturbing indeed!

Mr. President I urge you to dismiss this idle threat. There is no device powerful enough to knock the planets of the Mehgah system out of their existing orbits.

Captain, I beg to differ.

What are you talking about Spock?

There is one device capable of engendering such an effect, a Thermal String Decapulator.

The Avagar!

Yes. Detached from the WH.5 Incisor, the Avagar's Decapulator could produce an explosion measuring some 1078 kiloton. More than enough to destabilize the orbit of mid-sized planets.

...and cause a massive deadly chain reaction in the Mehgah system!

Correct sir.

Kirk to Chekov. I want you to do an immediate sweep of the Mehgah System for the Avagar.

Yes sir. Initiating scan now.

Captain, I have also taken the trouble to perform a spectrometer analysis of the extortion message. The analysis shows the extortionist to be 50 years of age, male, and a speaker of the Ugadi dialect.

Ugadi. Are you certain? Oh my – that is bad!

Mr. President – what is it?

Well, you see, during evacuation of the Zelta system, not all of the planets' populations were successfully retransferred.

What are you saying?

The planet Marva was one of the system's most advanced societies. But underneath its surface, living in underground catacombs, was a regressive warlike tribe – the Ugadi. They simply refused to be evacuated under any circumstances. Several attempts were made to forcefully remove them – but these were largely unsuccessful. Except for a single family.

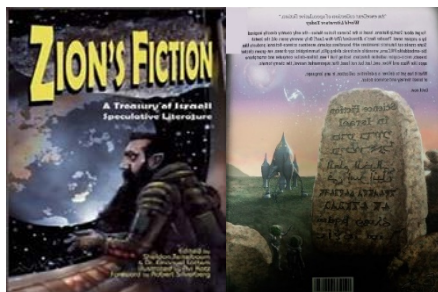
So you simply blew them up !?!

We were racing to save billions of lives! It wasn't done on purpose!

Chekov to Kirk. We've located the position of the Avagar within the Mehgah System. It's on a collision course with the system's sun...

TO BE CONTINUED IN OUR NEXT ISSUE!

“Zion’s Fiction” ed. Teitelbaum & Lottem - Reviewed by Leybl Botwinik (Coming to you, from the world’s prime SF nation)



Story #14 – Two minutes too early by Gur Shomron

The year is 2137, the venue, the Linton family house, where the 3 siblings are participating in the annual Worldwide Puzzle championship against other groups of 3 genius kids. They have 48 hours to complete an intricate puzzle, but if they can manage it within 24 hours or less, they will be considered among the top contestants. To aid them, they have a hovering AI computer called “Piper”. It seems, however, that the parts were delivered 2 minutes before the actual start of the competition (which is against the rules). Something fishy here.

This 12 page short story is quite interesting and well written. I enjoyed the suspense and the twist in the plot (I’m not going to spoil it for you). Unlike most of the other stories in the collection, Shomron’s story is not only about kids, but seems to be written for a young audience (though adults will enjoy it as well. I did!).

This storyline, setting, characters, etc. is also one of those in the ZION’S FICTION collection that may be considered ‘universal’ and has no connection to Jews, Israel, Jewish tradition, etc. but is – as the co-editor mentioned in his letter – “...worthy of publication”

MORE ZION’S FICTION QUICK STORY REVIEWS – NEXT TIME !

For more on the book, see the official website at: <http://www.zionsfiction.com/>

Also: https://www.amazon.com/Zions-Fiction-Treasury-Speculative-Literature/dp/1942134525/ref=sr_1_1

Feel free to send comments / reviews of related books & movies (or tell us about your own experiences with time-travel or alternate realities – Déjà vu is also fun to read about...)

We’d love to hear your thoughts on the above topics and with your OK, we may publish them!

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And <http://efanzines.com/CyberCozen/index.htm>

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