

חדשות האגודה – דצמבר 2023 The Israeli Society for Science Fiction and Fantasy 2023

תל אביב: מועדון נובמבר יעסוק בספר "שערי אנוביס" טים פאוארס (הוצאת אופוס), ויתקיים ביום חמישי 28.12, בשעה 19:30, פנים אל פנים או בצורה מקוונת, בהתאם למצב. לקבלת המיקום יש להירשם במייל של דפנה קירש. בדף האירוע בפייסבוק: <https://www.facebook.com/events/1041913523811981>
ירושלים: לפרטים על המפגשים של המועדון הקריאה ניתן להצטרף לקבוצת הפייסבוק: <https://www.facebook.com/events/690079196174998>, או ליצור קשר במייל עם מרכזת המועדון בירושלים - **גל אחינוב**, ולהצטרף לקבוצת הוואטסאפ של המועדון.

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:

- Reviews: *Star Trek: Picard* (season 1) & *The Creator* (movie)
- Special Wartime Issue (#3): Some thoughts

Our usual tidbits from the Web.

– Your editor, Leybl Botwinik

Special Wartime Issue #03

LB: CyberCozen will be back in its normal mode – ASAP. Take care!

Dear Readers:

So, ... we're into the 3rd month of war against terrorism, and several early stages have been wrapped up, but there is still more work to do.

**Rough Translation of balloon over the 'khanukia' candles:
 We have gone through so much throughout history.
 They've all been erased and only we've remained.
 Living, breathing, kicking from those days to this day !!!**

Since the horrendous attack by HamaSS-ISIS on Oct. 7th that sent us reeling, Israel Defense Forces (IDF) have taken the field and destroyed most of the terrorists' infrastructures in northern Gaza and is making its way to the heart of the southern terrorist stronghold of Khan Yunis.

A great deal of northern Gaza has been demolished, primarily because the schools, mosques, and other civilian structures were infested with terrorists, booby-trapped, and used as striking grounds for snipers. Many 'civilian' buildings, including hospitals and UNWRA facilities were linked via silos and underground tunnels as part of the terrorist web known in Israel as the 'Metro'. Weapons, explosives and ammo were stored in kids' rooms, and elsewhere, including in public buildings, hospitals, mosques, etc.



Israel has made many humanitarian concessions (gas, food & water, medicine, etc.) and – in exchange for just over 100 Israeli and foreign hostages – traded 3 times as many terrorists from Israeli prisons. Being worn down, with ammo and food running out, many terrorists have begun to surrender, There are still over 130 hostages being held ...

However, I'm sure you are getting much more detailed info from the newsfeeds – though not necessarily as detailed as we are getting here in Israel. In any case, I'm also pretty sure that the terrorists would dearly have liked to have had a time-machine to go back in time and undo their brutal attack. Israel and most normal people in the world would have preferred that too.

May the light drive away the darkness. Happy Khanuka and Happy Holidays!

Reviews: The Creator & Star Trek: Picard (season 01)

– By Leybl Botwinik

1) AI – The Real Thing

SF often presents a theme of struggle of some sort against ‘the other’. Sometimes ‘the other’ is an entity that represents a true existential threat, such as an alien invasion, zombies, sentient computers (e.g., Colossus: The Forbin Project, Terminator/Skynet). Similarly, mutants (e.g., X-Men/Homo Superior) which would ‘replace’ mankind – like the present-day human Cro-Magnon (Homo Sapiens) replaced Neanderthals.

I suppose that literature – whether in the form of books or movies (and similar media formats) – requires some amount of tension, suspense, or other emotional expression to provide ‘entertainment’. Better (or more intricate and evolved) literature may also include some educational messages, if not requisite questions to ponder.

One of those questions SF deals with is:

– “Should we treat AI as soulless machines (like a home appliance blender or vacuum cleaner)?”



Or “Does an ‘AI’ represent some form of sentience that must be considered – either as a potentially friendly entity or as a potential threat?”

In many SF storylines these AI entities are in human(oid) form, and more specifically have a role of ‘servants’ to man, that are then exploited or denigrated by ‘us’, in one form or other.

Does this not reflect on our own foibles as humans? How often have we seen someone at a restaurant, or in an office malign/put down/abuse a worker, servant, waiter, etc.? When this happens, I always feel that the person perpetrating the abuse is the one losing some part of their humanity, when that person is probably feeling/behaving as if he/she is ‘above’ humanity.

Taken to the extreme, the German Nazis and their various allies considered themselves to be ‘Übermensch’ (a superior/higher form of human), when in fact, they behaved as nothing other than ‘Untermensch’ (inferior persons) carrying out atrocities against such as Jews and Roma – whom according to Nazi race theory, **they** – the Nazis – considered Jews and Roma to be inferior beings) – and this led to behaviour as low as you can get (torture, starvation, medical experiments, etc.).

Recently, though, HamaSS-ISIS and their followers have proven that there are those who can reach even lower depths of depravity.

Following are a few short reviews of a recent TV series and a movie that deal with synthetic life forms / artificial intelligence (AI) / robots.

2) *The Creator* (2023)

The new catchword "AI" (for 'Artificial Intelligence') is the topic of the story – though it may just as well have been 'Robots', 'Synthetic life', etc.

Imagine, sometime in the near future, mankind develops (semi-)sentient robots to serve us in various ways. For example, as police (officers of the law), general labourers, farm workers, etc. They integrate into society, and even participate in sports events and such. Some are your typical mechanical 'bots' (walking boxes or bodies with mechanical parts, legs, arms, etc., where you see the pneumatic and electrical mechanisms), and some look nearly human – hands, faces, hair, etc. These speak like normal people, only their heads – which look absolutely human – have an aperture from ear to ear (like a pipe or 'tunnel' you can see through to the other side – see image below).

Many are friendly and even have formed human friendships/relationships.



One day, there is a nuclear explosion in LA – wiping out the city's population, and the AIs are blamed. The US government then outlaws all AI 'humanoids' (or other AIs), as well as all R&D related to this type of synthetic life. AI is considered to be a threat to civilization. In the Asian block countries, AI continues to be developed and AIs (robots) integrate well in society. However, the US sets out to hunt them all down and destroy them, shooting and blowing everything up in their crusade, regardless of civilian casualties.

In the end – this is a kind of spoiler, but in no way really affects the story line, it's more like a 'by the way' – we find out that what caused the LA disaster was not the AIs but some bug in the programming of the nuclear power plant. In other words – a HUMAN error by the programmers.

In any case, the bottom line, is that I enjoyed the film. Lots of good special effects, some interesting plot twists, etc. though – to be honest – there was nothing spectacularly new vis-à-vis the storyline. There have been numerous stories of one person protecting and saving the prodigy/child that will save the world. Also, of mankind exploiting machines, leading to war between humans and AI.

Nevertheless, well done, and good entertainment.

For those who want to learn more about the film and look into some of the dilemmas regarding Humanity versus AI, I found this Christian site that presents some interesting perspective on the film regarding the storyline content as well as the concept of CREATOR and SAVIOUR:

<https://answersingenesis.org/reviews/movies/creator-movie/>

3) *Star Trek: Picard – Season 01 (2020)*

Jean Luc Picard (played by the talented Sir Patrick Stewart), former captain of the Federation starship “Enterprise”, of the *Star Trek: New Generation* TV series, is back for three seasons of fun!

NOTE: Michael Chabon had an important role in writing most of the 10 episodes.

In the first season, Synthesoids (artificial life forms, like robots, that were co-workers in many industries – but often looked down upon by their human co-workers) destroy the Mars colony and are outlawed. Picard, as a Senior and decorated Federation Admiral wanted for years, to help the synthesoids achieve recognition as a ‘sentient species’. This is most probably because of his close personal companionship with Data, the unique and sentient android, who, according to the story, gave up his ‘life’ to save Picard.

– However, Picard’s active advocacy in the Federation for recognition of Synthesoid rights was overturned (because of the event on Mars) and he gave up trying. He resigned his admiralty and moved back to Earth, to his family estate in France, to produce wine.

His quest for the rights of Synthesoids is rekindled, however, when he is visited by a synthetic ‘offspring’ of Data that comes to him for help. And the rest is ‘story’ ...



The episodes are mostly well-written and include great special effects and some novel technology ideas. Also reintroduced are some of the past *Star Trek: The New Generation* (TNG) crew members (most have aged quite well), as well as some new faces that will continue into Season 2. Oh, and the Borg (including Seven of Nine), and the Romulans.

<p>And speaking of Romulans, here is a picture of a Romulan pendant/badge that looks like it has a Star of David in it:</p>		<p>></p>	
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One thing that bothers me personally – in general in literature and particularly in film and TV shows – is the overuse of flashbacks, and this show has quite a few. Nevertheless, the episodes flow quite well and both the new and the old members of Picard’s new crew play some memorable roles.

For more on Season 01 and its storyline: <https://warpfactortrek.com/star-trek-picard-season-1-in-retrospect/>

Fun from the Web

- Detecting alien life might be easier if we hunt for 'Jurassic worlds.' Here's why.
<https://www.space.com/dinosaur-era-earth-clues-search-for-alien-life>
- Fake images of the war in Israel and Gaza make it difficult to separate truth from fiction
<https://forward.com/culture/569109/stock-image-fake-ai-images-israel-gaza-war>
- AI chemist finds molecule to make oxygen on Mars after sifting through millions
<https://www.space.com/mars-oxygen-ai-robot-chemist-splitting-water>
- SETI Institute gets \$200 million to seek out evidence of alien life
<https://www.space.com/searth-extraterrestrial-life-major-funding-boost-seti>
- Inside a historic trip to Antarctica, crewed by over 100 women scientists
<https://www.space.com/women-astronomers-antarctica-leadership-climate-action-earth>
- NASA's X-59 'quiet' supersonic jet heads for a new red, white, and blue paint job
<https://www.space.com/nasa-x-59-quesst-paint-job>



TV & MOVIES

- The Predator franchise is due for a big comeback following the success of 'Prey'
<https://www.space.com/predator-franchise-comeback-prey>
- 'Star Trek: Strange New Worlds' Season 2 transports onto on Blu-ray and 4K UHD Dec. 5
<https://www.space.com/star-trek-strange-new-worlds-season-2-blue-ray-4k-uhd>
- Season 4 of 'For All Mankind' debuts with alternate asteroid history
<https://www.space.com/for-all-mankind-season-4-timelines>

BOOKS

- Is the truth out there? Garrett M. Graff on his new UFO book (exclusive)
<https://www.space.com/garrett-graff-ufo-book-interview>

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