חדשות האגודה – יולי 2015 The Israeli Society for Science Fiction and Fantasy

פרס עינת 2015 – התחרות ממשיכה!

אגודה ישראלית למדע בדיוני ולפנטסיה ומשפחתה של עינת פלג ז"ל מכריזות בזאת על פרס עינת – תחרות סיפורים קצרים בז'אנר הספרות הספקולטיבית, במטרה לעודד יצירה ישראלית מקורית. **הנושא: "הרפתקאות"**

***   סטארבייס 972 – Starbase 972 – Israel's Hebrew Star Trek Fan Site

המקום היחיד שבו עוסקים ב"**מסע בין כוכבים**" בעברית מוזמנות ומוזמנים להצטרף למסע – עשו לייק לדף הפייסבוק החדש ובקרו באתר המחודש! For English: http://starbase972.com/about_e/

מועדון הקריאה של חודש יולי יעסוק בספרו של ג'ורג' מרטין "**מסעות טאף**". המועדון יתקיים ביום חמישי 23.7, ב-19:30, ב"**קפה גרג**", ב"ויצמן 2, ת"א. מנחה: דפנה קירש. **ואוגוסט:**מפגש המאה **(100!)** של מועדון הקריאה...

כל האירועים של האגודה מופיעים בלוח האירועים (שפע אירועים מעניינים, הרצאות, סדנאות, מפגשים ועוד)

לקבלת עדכונים שוטפים על מפגשי מועדון הקריאה ניתן להצטרף לרשימת התפוצה או לדף האגודה בפייסבוק.

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

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In this issue:

1) Artificial Intelligence (aka: AI) is in the (film) news again. … This, one of the all-time favorite SF themes is popular again as we'll see in the following film reviews:

- "*Blade Runner*" film (1982): 2015 re-release + planned sequel and new episode(s) (?)
- "*Chappie*" film (2015)
- "*Ex Machina*" film (2015)
- + More next month ☺

2) **Sheer Science**: "*Humans need not apply*" (15 min. documentary "**wake-up call**"???)

NOTE: "Terry-Tech": Pratchett's "science and technology". Bumped off to an upcoming issue (only because of lack of time/space ☺)

> *"So, let's get started" – says I*
> *"AI – AI, Skipper!" – says AI*

― Leybl Botwinik (CyberCozen acting editor)

Reviews of Artificial Intelligence (AI) Films – Part I
– Reviewed by Leybl Botwinik

It looks like Artificial Intelligence (AI) is back in fashion again. Big time. On the Big screen, – with a significant number of films having been released in 2015, and more to come. In addition, there seem to be two AI related TV series that are just starting this summer – so it's still a bit too early to review them: "*Humans*" about robot servants, and possibly "*Mr. Robot*" about a computer hacker (the name suggests AI of some sort, but the trailer doesn't – but since it's just started, we'll give it a few episodes before we assess it).

Interestingly enough, what all the recent movies have in common, is that they have human-like (android) - or at least robot-like mechanical form, and are not confined to programs running on computers or in cyber space (such as in the recent 2013 "*Her*" movie – which deserves a special review of its own …).

This is understandable, because the audience likes to see to believe, prefers a physical object to relate to: whether in fear, awe, or sympathy – and computer onscreen typeface or paper printouts,

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or launching of rockets, sabotaging lighting, etc. is quite frankly – (generally) boring. When we go to see a movie, we expect to see things moving, being broken, physical fights, and more.

When thinking machines start to look human – as opposed to mechanical and electrical circuitry – it becomes all the more adrenalin-producing, as we shall see in the following reviews.

Film NON-Review: Blade Runner (1982.. 2002.. to 2015?)

I just read, that the quintessential Android-thinking-machine (here they're called "replicants") movie "***Blade Runner***" that was originally released in 1982 is going to have a new release this year, and that a sequel is planned that will also feature the original hero of the film – Harrison Ford, although in a secondary role.

The movie that was originally released in 1982 – though relatively ignored at the time – eventually became very popular and this resulted in several further releases, and it seems, still going strong. The storyline is of military androids that escape to Earth and want to 'live', but are hunted down by the government agents called "blade runners"

Coincidentally (or not) we reproduced Aharon Sheer's (ז״ל) own review article about both the film, and the book about making the film, in our special memorial issue, so we won't do a full review at this time. (See the January 2000 article entitled: "**Future Noir: The Making of Blade Runner by Paul M. Sammon, 1996, 441 pages - Review by Aharon Sheer**" at: http://www.kulichki.com/antimiry/cybercozen/files/2000/CCJanuary00.pdf or find our reprint in the May 2015 Aharon Sheer memorial issue, p36: http://efanzines.com/CyberCozen/index.htm).

So, we can't wait to see the upcoming sequel.

In the meantime, we'd like to present some links to a slew of articles that seem to be 'previews/teasers' to the upcoming re-release of the original movie as well as about the upcoming sequel. Rumor has it, that there may even be a TV series in the offing.

1. Did you know that there were 7 versions of the film – mostly concerning modified endings? See this excellent article: http://www.theguardian.com/film/2015/mar/14/why-blade-runner-is-timeless (Mar 2015)
2. About the upcoming follow-up film/sequel: http://www.theguardian.com/film/2015/apr/05/blade-runner-final-cut-timeless-sci-fi-classic-review (5 Apr 2015)
3. About the original: http://www.theguardian.com/film/2015/apr/02/blade-runner-the-final-cut-review (3 Apr 2015)
4. About the planned sequel: http://www.theguardian.com/film/2014/nov/26/ridley-scott-blade-runner-sequel-wont-direct (26 Nov 2014)
5. About the planned sequel: http://www.theguardian.com/film/2013/jun/03/green-lantern-writer-blade-runner-sequel (3 Jun 2013)

Film Review: Ex Machina (2015)
– Reviewed by Leybl Botwinik

Exactly one year ago, July 2014 issue (see at: http://efanzines.com/CyberCozen/index.htm) I wrote a short article about the Turing test and the feasibility of recognizing if an unseen interlocutor is human or not.

This film takes the concept to the extreme. Being faced with what is obviously a machine, with an artificial brain and pre-programmed, young computer coder Caleb is asked to ascertain whether the robot he is interacting with is really 'alive' – i.e. has its own conscience – or is it just cleverly disguised (i.e. programmed) to react in such ways, that one could believe it to be.

The setting is in the isolated mansion of the recluse billionaire Nathan, creator of the robot (who is Caleb's boss). He has taken his previous creations several steps forward in sophistication. The vulnerable young (and single, geek) Caleb is confronted with a fascinating mental exercise in AI, but at the same time, his hormones and probably blood pressure are being tested to the limit when faced by a stunningly gorgeous automaton Ava (played by the beautiful Alicia Vikander).

The only other people at the mansion, are Nathan and his geisha woman who does not understand English. Nathan, the brilliant scientist, is also a very gritty down-to-earth person, and also lewd in many instances. Certain primal instincts are aroused in Caleb, particularly by his proximity to the sexy robot and are further provoked into "male-must-protect-female caveman" by hints that there are things happening behind the scenes, and Ava is in 'danger' (and maybe he himself). – i.e. not is all that it seems to be.

There is a great deal of suspense and many questions arise in the film that keep the viewer on edge. The fact that the automaton sounds and seems to act as if it really is alive, and its sheer female sexiness are added factors that affect Caleb and places him in a dilemma: Is he the one possibly being tested (and not the robot)? Is the robot really alive? Is it really in danger and he needs to save it? Or is it all some sophisticated and cruel game played out by Nathan?

*** FOR MATURE AUDIENCE ONLY ***

More about senses-enticing sexy women robots in the movies:
http://www.esquire.com/entertainment/a35060/female-robots-gynoid-sexism/

About expressing emotions via facial (artificial) expressions: http://www.female-robots.com/

About the obsession of making "female" robots: http://www.theguardian.com/film/2015/jan/15/ex-machina-sexy-female-robots-scifi-film-obsession

A list of "fembots": https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_fictional_female_robots_and_cyborgs

More on Ava and other AI 'females': http://io9.com/from-maria-to-ava-why-are-so-many-artificial-intellige-1699274487

http://www.awardscircuit.com/2015/06/02/women-in-cinema-from-ava-to-athena-the-female-robot-in-film/

Film Review: Chappie (2015)
– Reviewed by Leybl Botwinik

The movie takes place somewhere in South Africa, which is nice, because we rarely see any films shot there, let alone SF ones. The only other one I know of is "*District 9*" – and it's by the same film director, the South African Neill Blomkamp.

The setting is in a city, not unlike what we would see today: modern 'clean' areas, and old run-down areas as well. The human police force is significantly bolstered by police robot cops that are entirely mechanical and artificial (unlike in the human bonded "*Robocop*" movies). These are sold to the government under contract by a private firm run by Michelle Bradley (played by Sigourney Weaver of "*Alien*" fame. Her role here, by the way, is entirely minor and insignificant to the plot: Your own mother could have played the part).

The main story line is about a damaged robot cop that is upgraded by its programmer, Deon Wilson (played by Dev Patel), as an experiment in Artificial Intelligence. Since the damage is irreversible – the robot's battery will soon run out and can't be replaced – Deon thinks that this is a great opportunity to try out his new program – and no one will be the wiser, since he steals the damaged robot on its way to the scrap heap. The upgrade, of course, gives our robot hero intelligence and self-awareness.

The thinking robot – called **Chappie** by his newfound friends – is very reminiscent of the humorous "**Number 5/Johnny 5**" in the movie "*Short Circuit*", (see: http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0091949/?ref_=nv_sr_1) and several scenes (or moments) even seem to mimic the other movie. Some examples:

- Chappie is originally designed as a bullet-proof SWAT police robot and Number 5 is a laser-shooting light mobile military war machine – both with limited AI and electro-mechanical functioning, based on human instructions to carry out their 'peace-keeping' roles.
- When they begin to evolve, they both progress from a "baby's" mental and 'mechanical' capacity to an evolved 'mature' thinking machine, including jerky movements and breaking of objects as they adjust to their mechanics to pick up things, etc.
- Both have attachment to a female / 'mother' figure, though in addition to his 'Mommy', Chappie also has a 'Daddy' and his 'friend'. Unlike the everyday 'normal/typical' female in "*Short Circuit*" the people that adopt Chappie are a dysfunctional couple and their friend who are thieves and live on the fringe of society – not exactly the best role models, and yet Chappie – in a way – manages to actually bring out the best in them.
- Both machines have a 'warm spot'/sympathy for other living creatures (e.g. dogs)
- Both have an Indian (Asian) programmer in their 'lives': Deon who 'created' Chappie, and Ben Jabituya in "*Short Circuit* " who helps Number 5 escape the authorities.

In a sub-plot reminiscent of "*Robocop*", the bad-guy in this movie – Vincent Moore (played by Hugh Jackman) – wants to further his own project at Michelle Bradley's factory that manufactures the police robots. He wants to promote his huge, flying, man-controlled attack-bot replete with cannons etc. (The giant bot also looks like the ones Robocop has to face down).

To do so, he sabotages all the robot cops and when massive rioting takes place in town, he is given the go-ahead to help restore order. This sub-plot, in my opinion, was neither really well played or well thought out and integrated into the main story line – although it is a necessary part of the story.

Unlike the family movie "*Short Circuit*", the "*Chappie*" movie has many bad role models, and like in "*RoboCop*", there is a fair amount of violence and people get shot up and die.

All in all, though, the movie is entertaining and has many thought-provoking moments. Except for the '*Robocop*'-like subplot, I could see the movie again. There is a great deal of energy and emotion generated between Chappie and the people around him, and this creates a moving experience so much so, that I look forward to a sequel.

<u>Next Month:</u> **More AI movie reviews**

Sheer Science
- In memory of Aharon Sheer (ז"ל) – Founding Editor

"**Humans Need Not Apply**" is both a fascinating and disturbing walk through history, economics, politics, technology, etc. concerning the human factor – and how we are being replaced by machines and automatons: both purely mechanical and AI-enhanced.

Is it inevitable and irreversible? Is it good, bad – or just 'is'?

The person who sent this to me wrote:
> *"Not one to let schadenfreude affect the zeitgeist, this [15 minute] clip titled "Humans Need Not Apply", has plenty of supporting evidence today - who knows where we will be next decade !!"*

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Pq-S557XQU

Enjoy!

p.s. A personal note on this: If you listen closely to the narrator, it sounds like this may actually be an artificial voice. I think it is…. Technology has come a long way…

<u>We'd love to hear your thoughts on any of the above subjects and we may publish some of them!</u>