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

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"**

GAMING *** **דרקוניקון 2015 - כנס המשחקים של הקיץ – 13 לאוגוסט, רמת גן** ***
https://www.facebook.com/events/719363694852082/

SUPER HEROES *** **גיבורי על מה ולמה: דורון פישלר על גיבורי על * – 18 לאוגוסט, סלונה, יפו ת"א** ***
https://www.facebook.com/events/1580579905526635/

GAMING *** **אליפות ישראל 2015 League of Legends – 19 לאוגוסט, בת ים** ***
https://www.facebook.com/events/431505513677584/ & http://2015.lolisrael.co.il/

MANGA-ANIMA *** **CAMI 2015 כאמ"י– 20 לאוגוסט, ירושלים** ***
https://www.facebook.com/events/1580579905526635/

מועדון הקריאה של חודש אוגוסט מפגש המאה של מועדון הקריאה, יעסוק בספרו של גבריאל גרסיה מארקס. המועדון יתקיים ביום חמישי 13.8, ב-19:30, ב"קפה גרג", ויצמן 2, ת"א. מנחה: דפנה קירש.

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

In this issue:

1) Sheer Science: Robot Kills Man
2) Artificial Intelligence (AKA: AI) in recent films – Part II:
   - "*Avengers: Age of Ultron*" film (2015)
   - "*The Machine*" film (2014)
   - + More next month ☺
3) *SPECIAL GUEST CONTRIBUTION* by Dutch SF writer and enthusiast Dirk Bontes – read all about him!
4) "Terry-Tech": Pratchett's "science and technology". Bumped off to an upcoming issue
   (only because of lack of time/space ☺)

– Leybl Botwinik (CyberCozen editor)

Sheer Science: Robot Kills Man in Factory

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

We'll start this issue with a direct connection to the last month's and this present issue's topic of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Robots. Walla tech news website offered up a headline (in Hebrew) that goes, something like: "Robot caught worker in Volkswagen factory and killed him" (http://tech.walla.co.il/item/2869075?fromAii=2870635 "גרמניה: רובוט תפס עובד במפעל פולקסוואגן והרג אותו") This happened in Germany, and the article and its headline were most probably very close translations from the German (or English) original (e.g. http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/technology-science/technology/robot-crushes-factory-worker-death-5986108)

Why, I ask, is it necessary to **headline** the machine as a "robot". This is not the first time a worker has been accidently killed or injured by a machine (try a Google search).
In fact, although we call most of the new semi-mobile machines in factories "robots"– they aren't really. They are many generations behind what will one day actually be called a robot or autonomous serving machine. Should we already look into installing Asimov's 3 laws in them?

Reviews of Artificial Intelligence (AI) Films – Part II

Artificial Intelligence (AI) really becomes interesting when mechanical devices start resembling humans in form, speech, and action. Here are some more movie reviews of recent, related, films.

Film Review: Avengers: Age of Ultron (2015)
– Reviewed by Leybl Botwinik
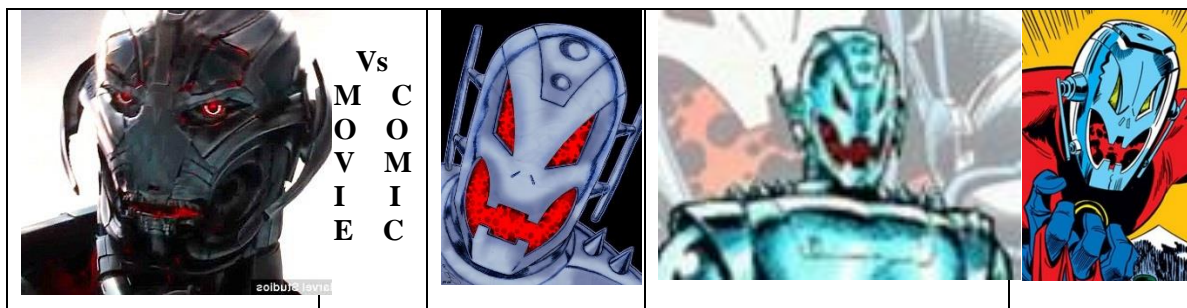
For fans of Marvel comics that have been following the evolution of Ultron, the movie is a dismal failure: – Many of the key ideas that make Ultron unique have been discarded or ignored. On the other hand, for those who like to see Marvel heroes bickering amongst each other and/or fighting to save the world (both tried and true favorite Marvel traditions), the movie is just about right. True, there are few 'powerful' or memorable moments as compared with the previous Avengers movie or even in the separate hero ones, but the ones that are presented are excellent fodder for future development and interest or intrigue. Probably the most memorable moments have to do with Black Widow's KGB spy background, as well as with her flirtation with both the brutal Hulk and simultaneously with his introverted genius scientist alter ego – Bruce Banner.

But let's get back to Ultron – the thinking machine that builds himself a robot body and wants to destroy all humans in order to make this a better world… it's not even clear for whom – for the robots, I guess. In fact, none of the other robots are independently conscious – he is the only one with AI and controls them like dumb terminals of himself, and even his own 'distinct self' is partially alien in origin – so what is his agenda, and what would he accomplish by destroying all intelligent life on Earth? The movie doesn't really answer that – at least, not the way most movies deal with AI/Robots who want to destroy humanity because they (we) are flawed. Somewhere or other in the movie it is mentioned, but it is just a fleeting comment.

The original comic concept of Ultron is much, much more convincing and better developed (much more complex) – but what can you do? The comics can afford to stretch out their storylines over several issues, and then further develop the 'bad guy' with hints and clues, etc. This movie has to deal with so many major players from the previous movies (Thor, Captain America, Black Widow, Bruce Banner/Hulk, Tony Stark/Iron Man, and Hawkeye) – each with its own character that needs to be developed or at least given film-time. And then, there are the new 'supers' that also need to be introduced and developed… So all this 'noise' offers little time for Ultron.

Yes, Ultron and the AI concept have some good moments, but overall, there is no big deal here in the AI field – it's just another OK Avengers good-guy-vs.-bad-guy movie. It's basically as Nick Fury put it at the end of the film: "Trouble, Miss Romanov … No matter who wins or loses, trouble still comes around…"

To learn about Marvel's real Ultron and its various manifestations, see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ultron and http://marvel.com/universe/Ultron

On a side note – I prefer the comics' depictions of Ultron's head(s) over the movie one. In my opinion, he is much scarier in the comics, where his head is a simple hollow metallic sphere and contains what looks like the fire from a nuclear furnace inside (very reminiscent of frightening Halloween pumpkin heads)… In some versions, he can't even move his jaw (which has protrusions at the opening that look like big teeth or the jaws of a tractor scoop). His voice is somehow generated and projected from deep within his evil metallic skull. The movie head is mechanical (i.e. complicated) and has small beady eyes, unlike the sharp and wide, deep hollow skull-like eyes of the comics. – Compare the images above, just below the title of this review.

Film Review: The Machine (2013)
– Reviewed by Leybl Botwinik
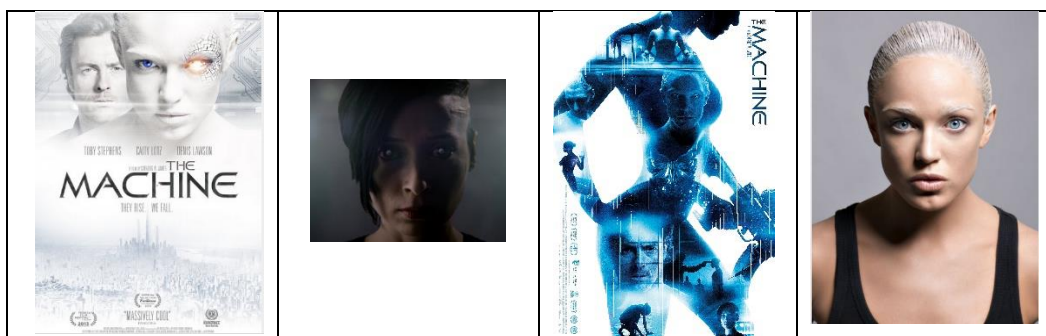
A computer and robotics scientist, Vincent McCarthy (played by Toby Stephens) is working to help soldiers that have incurred severe head injuries, to rehabilitate and return to duty by placing implants in their heads to boost their damaged brain and motoric systems. He is joined by a young programmer, Ava (played by Caity Lotz) who is an idealist and has a background of social action. [**side note**: "Ava" is also the name of the robot in the 2015 movie "*Ex Machina*"]

Together, they plan to create a self-sufficient AI based cyborg whose brain patterns are Ava's after they have been downloaded into an experimental super computer the "quantum" computer. Their project, under military supervision, is hijacked by Thomson, the project head (chief of Britain's Defense Ministry, played by Denis Lawson), who has Ava murdered. The unsuspecting McCarthy continues with the project despite the setback, and downloads Ava's brain patterns to the cyborg who is then taken away for extreme military training. The cyborg, of course gains independent thought.

There are many (possibly too many) sub-plots in the story, such as:

1) The setting is in the near future UK, where the world economy is in ruins during a cold war with China **[NOTE: This is irrelevant to the main plot]**

2) It is thought that the implanted soldiers cannot talk – but they can, in fact, communicate – though it sounds like they're talking in Binary. There is a pattern of mystery about this and about them that later develops in the film, but not really conclusively **[NOTE: This is <u>almost</u> irrelevant to the plot]**

3) The distraught mother of one of the first injured soldiers that had an implant who had gone crazy years ago and killed McCarthy's assistant and almost mortally wounded him as well. This soldier was then shot and his body disposed of, without informing the next of kin (the mother). **[NOTE: this is irrelevant to the plot]**

4) McCarthy's child is dying and part of his work is aimed at 'fixing' or curing her deteriorating condition. **[NOTE: This is <u>almost</u> irrelevant to the plot]**

5) **Etc. – probably too many sub-plots for this short a film of only 90 minutes**

- Denis Lawson – the bad guy, Thomson – puts in a fair performance.
- Probably anyone could have replaced Toby Stephens in the role of McCarthy.
- Caity Lotz played both roles very well – as the idealistic and cute programmer, Ava, and as the cold, calculating, and efficiently lethal "Machine".
- The implanted Suri – who heads security has a very useless role.

The long and the short of it – from my perspective, after having watched the movie twice – is as follows:

The plot is not tight – at all. There are a few good spots in the movie action, and several worthwhile ideas, and for those who follow female robots (stalk at your own risk) there is what to see. All in all, however, it's a waste of time and those interesting concepts poorly handled and underdeveloped – even the 'Turing'-like test. So much more could have been done here, in particular with the very weak ending. If they had at least given it a good ending, then maybe my criticism could be ignored – or at least 'suffered' – but no, they gave it an inconclusive plot ending that is no ending at all. The only merit – other than the very pretty and talented Caity Lotz – is that someone studying the film could extract some good ideas and concepts that could be used in other stories/films.

According to the poster (see first image above), it surprisingly won a prize in some film festival…

SPECIAL GUEST: **Dirk Bontes**

We have a special bonus this issue: A guest presentation from a Dutch SF writer and fellow enthusiast. We'll let him introduce himself, so let's hear out what he has to say – LB.

**Dirk Bontes about himself and his books**

I was born in 1957 and have just about forever been a fan of the fantasy and science fiction genres, am a member of three Dutch science fiction associations, and have an affinity for the Beta-sciences and studied chemical biology for a number of years.

When I was nine years old, Divine intervention changed my brain and my mind, for the worse and for the better. The mind in my opinion is comparable to a see-saw: when one end goes down, the other end goes up. So I deviate quite a bit from the human norm. One might call me a non-human alien intelligence.

From 1983 to 2002 I entered (and won) several short story contests. I also helped organize other contests including from 2009 to today: Anaïd Haen's own short story contest: ***Fantastels***. In 2012 I started my own genre short story contest: ***Trek Sagae*** to generate stories that might be published in the fanzine of ***The Flying Dutch (TFD)***, a Star Trek association.

Despite having won three major Dutch science fiction, fantasy and horror contests, I hardly ever write new stories. I simply have no story plan, no plot when I start writing and usually whatever story I write, fails in the middle. Instead I write books about my (pseudo)scientific discoveries.

I worked for a university library, doing simple work, from 1998 until and including 2003. Then I quit, expecting to provide for myself by writing, but I never earned a penny.
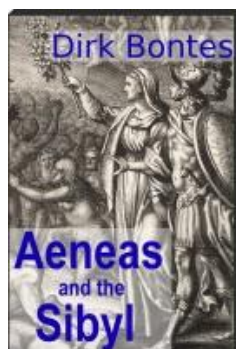
After eight years my money ran out and I had to apply for social security again. I saw an opportunity, though, to earn money by translating the sixth book of the Aeneid from the Latin. I spent a year translating that brief Latin text, improving my Latin very much, could not find a publisher for it and at last published it at the Internet website of Smashwords under the title "***Aeneid Liber Sextus***". This book is about the voyage of the Trojan hero Aeneas, son of the goddess Aphrodite, to the Underworld, the Orcus, the realm of the 'dead'.

This Orcus in my opinion was a huge space habitat in a geostationary orbit above Indonesia. There are all kinds of science fiction elements in my translation and my commentary on the translation: cyborgs, space elevators, spaceships, stargates, an electricity plant and so on. Earlier translations by other people do not have these science fiction elements because they lived before such concepts and technology existed and everybody ever since has simply been following in the footsteps of previous translators.

I expected that my translation of Aeneid VI would quickly make me a millionaire – but that did not happen. Instead of nearly everyone with an intellectual inclination buying my revolutionary translation – which everyone on Earth ought to read – nobody bought it.

Next I published a couple of evolution theory articles, and published a Dutch language book about Zwarte Piet (Black Pete, alias the Devil), the clone of Saint Nicholas. That book has a lot of mythology in it and it is of course about Heaven and Hell (the Underworld) and the civilization of the pagan gods.

My latest publication – and the reason why I wrote to **CyberCozen** – is my interpretation of the book "***True History***" by Lucianus of Samosata, which was published in the second century A.D. It is generally regarded as a very early example of science fiction: pre-science fiction. Throughout the ages it has directed mankind's longing to the Moon and Outer Space, and as such it has been the inspiration for many science fiction authors.

In "***True History***" – there are plenty of translations available for free on the Internet, and I recommend that people read one of them before they start on my interpretation

– Lucianus tells that he wants to leave behind for posterity a monument of lies. But does he lie?

Lucianus describes a voyage to the Moon and back, a war in space between the forces of the Moon and of the Sun about the Morning Star, and the very peculiar exclusively male homosexual people who live on the Moon. The events that he describes often are fantastic, bizarre, utterly weird, incomprehensible.

In fact Lucianus' "***True History***" consists of two books. The voyage to the Moon and back is in the first book. The second book – and the final part of the first book – is about events that in general did not make sense to me, and which I therefore do not pay much attention to.

Most of the first book, though, I could make sense of, using my knowledge of world mythology and folklore and what I had already discovered about the civilization of this earlier human species of the pagan gods. Previously, though I already had come to some conclusions about the activity of this earlier human species on and near the Moon, my knowledge of their activities in space was limited to the Terran space elevator (Heaven) and the Orcus (Hell), so it was limited to the vicinity of Earth. My analysis and interpretation of the Moon voyage in Lucian's "***True History***" has expanded that knowledge to what was going on near the Moon and to the biotechnology that was used on the Moon; I already was familiar with some of that biotechnology because of the theories I developed in my book about Zwarte Piet, and had previously also encountered similar concepts in one of the mythology stories of a tribe of American Indians.

I have published my interpretation as an E-book at Smashwords under the title "***Lucian's "True History". Its Credible Parts Interpreted***" (http://www.smashwords.com/books/view/556791). It is small – nearly eleven thousands words – and it was quickly written. Interpreting "***True History***" was quite a puzzle, though, let me assure you. There is no plot. I just follow Lucianus' narrative. I quote his text whenever there is cause for it, and next I offer my interpretation of that quote. Then I go on to the next quote and so on. This book therefore is a contemporary interpretation of Lucian's book, using concepts that are familiar to our age of space technology and biotechnology. It is intended for everyone who has an interest in those fields, or in Antiquity, or in mythology, or in religion. It is especially intended for people who want to know who, why, and how we are as human beings and what our purpose and calling as a new human species is.

LB: If anyone wants to contact Dirk, try: https://twitter.com/DirkBontes1

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

LATE BREAKING NEWS: We see into the future (and the past) !!!

We'll be updating you on some interesting developments in the next while – so stay tuned!

-    The editor