



SCIENCE-Fiction Fanzine

Vol. XXVIII, No. 05; May 2016

חדשות האגודה – מאי 2016 The Israeli Society for Science Fiction and Fantasy

מועדון הקריאה של חודש מאי

עוד לא קבלנו את הפירסום עבור חודש מאי ...

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

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

In Memory of Aharon Sheer, ז"ל (1936-2015)

This month, we're taking another pause in our "Aliens" series to bring you a special issue in commemoration to Aharon Sheer (z"l) who passed away last year. He was the legendary editor of CyberCozen for almost 27 years, and founder of the Rehovot Science Fiction Club (RFSC – 1989) – that at the time was the only club of its kind in Israel.



(ז"ל – 1936 USA – 2015 Israel)

Founding member of Israel's possibly first – and only – English language science fiction club (back in the 1980s): *Rehovot Science Fiction Club*. Edited, wrote for, published, and distributed CyberCozen, Israel's longest running science fiction fanzine – all on a volunteer basis – from 1989-2015.

Some early logos (RFSC + CyberCozen):

1989



1990



1991 (Jun)



1991 (Nov)



But before we get to that, some feedback on last month's issue in memory of Leonard Nimoy (z"l) & celebrating 50 years of Star Trek:

From: R GRAEME CAMERON

Sent: Friday, April 1, 2016 9:58 PM

Subject: Re: CyberCozen (monthly SF fanzine) - April 2016 issue [Leonard Nimoy (z"l) + 50 years Star Trek] Hi Leybl!

Thank you for sending me this commemorative issue.

Leaving my article apart, I must say the other articles are excellent, making this the best tribute zine to Leonard "Spock" Nimoy I've seen. Jolly good work.

As a long time fan of "Spock" I'm very pleased.

Cheers! Graeme

R Graeme Cameron is the editor/publisher of the Canadian SF fanzine *OBIR* (<http://www.obirmagazine.ca/>), writes for "Amazing Stories" (see his bio here: <http://amazingstoriesmag.com/authors/r-graeme-cameron/>) and is heavily involved in the Canadian SF scene, particularly with the VCON SF convention (<http://vcon.ca/>).

From: Gary Roth

Sent: Friday, April 1, 2016 4:33 PM

Subject: Re: CyberCozen (monthly SF fanzine) - April 2016 issue [Leonard Nimoy (z"l) + 50 years Star Trek] Really great issue -- thanks ! It was worth waiting for.

Hey there, Leybl!

Once again, a wonderful issue devoted to the memory of Leonard Nimoy. It was all very wonderfully produced, and I wish I could have had the chance to meet him at some point during my fannish career, but alas, that was never to occur. Even so, it is a blessing to have his work remain and have it entertain, inspire, and teach us.

Of the articles in this issue, I truly enjoyed all of them, but the story by Miriam Shmulevich-Hoffman is my favorite. It certainly sounds like something that Nimoy would certainly do; he always struck me as a man of principles and deeply held beliefs.

I also agree with Richard Graeme Cameron about how *Star Trek* rekindled my love for the science fiction genre, although I think the show more likely illustrated how science fiction could be used intelligently on television. Despite the obvious Hollywood treatment - handsome leading man, fearless captain, etcetera - and the inevitable dwindling resources and gawd-awful scripts, *Star Trek* still tackled important topics and issues that faced us in the 1960s and always will, sad to say. It was a landmark show, no question.

Oh, I simply adored *Mad Magazine's* "Star Bleccch" parody. It was brilliant, and ranks as one of their best efforts. Ever.

The "50 Years of *Star Trek*" article proves a simple fact: that this program, and everything that it stood for, shall continue in one way, shape, or form. More than anything, I believe the show gave us hope in humanity, probably now more than ever since we are constantly inundated by man's inhumanity to man. Can the human race rise above its petty squabbles and selfish interests? Possibly not. But then again, it could very well be that those negative traits shall act as catalysts for positive change. We can only hope. And that is probably all we could ever ask of ourselves.

An excellent issue, Leybl, and I thank you for it. I definitely look forward to next month's issue.

Live long and prosper.

John Purcell

John Purcell is the editor/publisher of the American SF fanzines *Askew* (paper-only) and *Askance* (<http://www.efanzines.com/Prior/index.htm>).

[Always glad to receive feedback – it strengthens my belief that there may actually be intelligent life somewhere out there in that vast virtually unexplored empty space between our ears, and beyond the millions of dumbphones, boob tubes, and flaptop computers ... - LB]

And an ominous (sounding) message
[TO YOUR RIGHT] related to our
previous AI run of issues:

AI won't kill YOU – but it may
help YOU get an early inheritance



Next up: Some of Aharon Sheer's biting satire and wit, as we look back at the early days of the *Rehovot Science Fiction Club* (RSFC) and the first 5 years of the *CyberCozen* monthly fanzine.

This being a purely volunteer effort, I can surely sympathize with Aharon's call for more articles, feedback, etc. In fact, he did a lot more. In addition to *CyberCozen*, he also organized monthly get-togethers with an array of excellent speakers on fascinating topics. And if that wasn't all, he also needed to physically print out, photocopy the *CyberCozen* issue in multiple copies, collate them, pack them into envelopes, address and stamp them, and send them out (except for some that were hand delivered too...) – and who was to pay for the postage? ... Let's see what he had to say about this.

From the RSFC bulletin of November, 1989:

REHOVOT SCIENCE FICTION CLUB (RSFC)

meets on the LAST TUESDAY of each month
at the home of Tova, Bill, Rami and Yossi Silverman,
19 Eisenberg St., Rehovot, Tel. 08-476142,
unless otherwise announced

Next Meeting:

Tuesday, November 28, 1989 - 8:00 p.m.

Lecture (in HEBREW) by Eli Eshed,
Information Science, Bar Ilan University,
"Robotics and Rabbinics:
Rabbinical Comments on Robotics Since the Time of the Golem"

Questions and answers about RSFC:

Why is that blood-sucker Aharon Sheer asking us to donate ten shekels a year to get the club announcements? Bear in mind that meetings are free. Lecturers donate their time. Only if you partake of refreshments are you asked to give two or three shekels to cover costs. The ten shekels per YEAR covers: Xerox of one announcement: 0.30; stamp: 0.50; envelope: 0.07; total cost: 0.87; twelve mailings per year: $12 \times 0.87 = 10.44$ shekels.

What other expenses does Aharon Sheer have? Telephone calls to potential lecturers, telephone call to each past lecturer to thank him (the lecturers lecture for free), organizational telephone calls (e.g., to the Silvermans), delivering of announcements to people who don't pay for them.

Are there people who get announcements who don't pay for them? Yes; e.g., the Sheers, the Silvermans, potential future lecturers, potential new members, three past lecturers, and a few people who come regularly to meetings and are either students, soldiers, unemployed or retired, or have promised to pay Real Soon Now.

How many copies of the club announcement were distributed last month? Fifty-five.

How many people were on the mailing list? Forty.

How many actually got their announcements via the mails? Twenty-six (the rest were hand-delivered).

How many members have paid the Mailing List Contribution so far? TEN.

How many people were on the mailing list before Sheer started asking for a Mailing List Contribution? SEVENTY!

If Sheer is losing so much money on RSFC, why does he keep doing it?

One possible answer: to impress Poul Anderson.

How many science fiction clubs are there in Israel? To the best of our knowledge, only one, RSFC.

Where do RSFC members live? At the last two meetings people came from Kiryat Tivon, Jerusalem, Kiron, Giv'at Shmuel, Tel Aviv, Rishon L'Tzion, and Rehovot. Announcements were also sent to people in Haifa, Ramat Aviv, Hadar Yosef, Petah Tikva, Bat Yam, Mazkeret Batya, Mitzpe Ramon, and Holon.

What is done at a meeting? About half an hour is devoted to SF: announcements, reports, short talks. Afterwards there is a talk on a topic suitable for an article in *Scientific American*. Isaac Asimov says the best way to get ideas for SF stories is to read *Scientific American*.

What other activities does the club have?

(1) A fan magazine called "About SF". The first (May) issue came out in May. The June issue will come out in November. The editor is now looking for very short stories for the July issue. Send them to Dena Ben-Kiki, 29 Spinoza St., Tel Aviv.

(2) Video film meetings. Three were held so far, one each in Rehovot, Petah Tikva, and Tel Aviv. Each was spur-of-the-moment and announced word-of-mouth only.

What will happen in January, February, and March, when Sheer hibernates? Either other people will find lecturers, and print up and mail announcements, or they won't. RSFC will continue to meet on the last Tuesday of each month.

Aside from being a 'blood-sucker' [he was mature enough to be able to laugh at himself and not get angry at himself ...], Aharon had a wonderful, if not biting, sense of humour. Aharon didn't pull punches – especially when he didn't see eye-to-eye with other people's ideas. To be fair, however, he did publish them ☺. Here's an example from the May 1993 issue:

Questions about the Big Bang by Aharon Sheer
Everybody nowadays knows there was a Big Bang. That's how the Universe was created. After all, it's described in detail in the Holy Torah, so it must be true. Nevertheless, there are a few (very few) people who are not completely convinced (probably anti-semites). Here are a couple of these no-goods:

... and he went on to describe each person and his/her viewpoint.

Here's his call for volunteers, from the December 1991 issue of CyberCozen (the early issues didn't always have a graphic logo, and it took a few years until it stabilized into the one we use now – created by the late Miriam Ben-Lulu):

ד"ר

Next SCIENCE FICTION CLUB Meeting:
Tuesday, December 31, 1991, 8:00 p.m., lecture (in ENGLISH) by
Prof. Lee Segal, Pure Mathematics Dept, Weizmann Institute
"Theoretical Biology: Is Truth Stranger than Fiction?"

Rehovot Science Fiction (usually) meets the last Tuesday of each month
at the home of Tova, Bill and Rami Silverman,
19 Eisenberg St., fourth floor, Rehovot, Tel. 08-476142.

CyberCozen SF Newsletter, Volume III, Number 12, December 1991.
Editor: Aharon Sheer. Ed.Consult: ANY VOLUNTEERS?? Ed.Assist: Elana Dror.
For mail delivery of CyberCozen, please donate TWENTY shekels per
YEAR. If Aharon Sheer can hand-deliver it, TEN shekels. Rehovot SF
meeting notices only, TEN shekels. Address: POB 9443, Tel Aviv 61093.
Copyright (C) 1991. All rights reserved to specified authors and artists.

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED: Tired of life? Want to give it all up? Volunteer to write part of CyberCozen! If you thought things were bad, you didn't know just how awful they could be. We're looking for people will prepare, from time to time, part of CyberCozen (on diskette, or camera-ready). Among the things we can guarantee: No pay. No public recognition. No praise. No satisfaction. No critical acclaim. No criticism of any kind. Is there a better way to go? ♦♦

Throughout the various issues, other than regular contributors on articles in English and Hebrew, the late Miriam Ben-Lulu would enhance the texts with her wonderful graphics (here is one, and we plan to re-publish more in the coming issues), as well as a humorous column by "Salacious Sal" who would offer advice on any number of problems (life, love, etc.) – including our very own Aharon who bemoaned his unthankful situation, and sought salvation from Salacious Sal. From the December 1994 issue, we have:



Advice Column: Salacious Sal's Advice to the Love Lorn

Dear Sal

I run an SF club in Rehovot, but I don't know how to find enough people to give talks on SF. How can I get the club members to help me?
Aharon Sheer

Dear Aharon,

You can't be serious! A Jewish State and no one wants to TALK?!!! A fine state of affairs that is. I suggest a contest: 3 minute maximum speeches on any outre subject you can think of. Listeners vote on the most interesting speech. The prize is a year's free subscription to CyberCozen and a year's freedom from the depredations of the Snack Dragon.

Always glad to help,
Sal

Or (here's something fresh), occasionally – I guess as a filler – Aharon would insert a real ad and then follow it up with some funtastic stuff he made up. Here's an example from the October 1993 issue:

Advertisements Advertisements Advertisements Advertisements

New Immigrant U.S. family wants to sell personal collection of Used S.F. books and magazines. Includes Astounding/Analog SF magazines from 50's and 60's. Call Sally Malovsky, 09-550288 (Hertzlia).

Loptick's Optics has a new supply of those fashionable flexible frames that give that ultra-chic look to faceted eyes. We still have a few of the rose-colored spy glasses for spies at our special reduced prices.

Anyone knowing where Flie Trappe is, please notify his family on Venus.

Editor's Note: Advertisements are published free of charge for subscribers of CyberCozen (and their friends) provided the ads have some relevance to SF or Fantasy, and are not in exceptionally bad taste.

And another one from November 1993:

WARNING: CyberCozen Newsletter is ~~desperate~~ for material! We need announcements, reviews, artwork, jokes, and very short stories in the areas of Science Fiction and Fantasy. Spelling errors in both Hebrew and English cheerfully corrected. Send your material NOW! ■ ■

And here he is again (June 1994), not pulling any punches and really hammering on Mordechai who, I assume, was a good friend, else he wouldn't have gotten away with this...

Mordechai, in later material send to Dotan, provides "numerous responses to Bracha bat Avraham on her thoughts both correct and mistaken". In my opinion, what distinguishes Bracha's writing on Space Halacha from Mordechai's is that Bracha is humorous and enjoyable to read, while Mordechai is simply dull! Maybe it won't make a good impression if I say it, but I prefer to laugh at nonsense than to grit my teeth at the truth. So I'll just keep publishing Bracha's stuff. However, I invite CyberCozen readers to send me their comments on it, and I will publish them with pleasure, because you are our readers, and I love to read what you write, even if you are boring! ■ ■

* * * * * * * * *

The February 1994 issue, marked the first five years of the club. This momentous moment was commemorated by a 'special issue' – when in fact, other than the few lines he wrote and a congratulatory letter, there was nothing special about this particular issue. That having been said, the 20th year issue is more interesting – but we'll bring you that at some future time. Here is the clipping from Feb 1994:

FIFTH ANNIVERSARY ISSUE

We held our first meeting in February 1989. We were preceded by a club in Tel Aviv (several members came to us from that), but our staying power has proven to be much greater. Recently you, our members, have forcefully expressed the opinion that a Science Fiction and Fantasy club should have lectures primarily on SF&F. To do that, we will need more help from YOU in finding speakers and panels on SF&F topics. Either prepare to talk yourselves, or help us find other sources. Only by so doing will we last another five years.

Equally important are the people who come to the meetings on SF&F. It's not fair to say "I want more talks on SF, but I'm not going to come if so-and-so talks, or if the subject of the lecture is such-and-such." Unless you can do better -- or can bring a lecturer who can do better -- then you should take your chances on what we've got. You can always talk to Bill and Tova, and borrow books, during the break. *The Editor*

Letters to the Editor:

Dear Aharon:

Congratulations on CyberCozen's 5th anniversary, may you continue to thrive. During our first (but certainly not the last!) trip to Israel, I was awed by many things. They include (not in order): seeing the bible come alive before my eyes, Shabbat in Jerusalem, Tiberias Hot Springs and Ein Gedi on the Dead Sea, Israeli salads, and the "hamish" Rehovot SF Group. I especially enjoy [the excerpts from] Jewish Space in the CyberCozen Newsletter, which will allow the diaspora to spread beyond the confines of this planet. It is very comforting to know that CyberCozen will guide us, on Mars and beyond, in the important aspects of Jewish life (but when is candle lighting time if you have two suns?).

--Grania Davis

Editor's Note: Grania Davis is an F&SF writer whose short stories appear regularly in *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*.

In September (or October) 1999, Aharon was invited to the annual ICON fest as special guest of honour. To commemorate that special event, he published a special issue that included highlights of the first 9-10 years of the RFSC. It can be seen here, on the CyberCozen repository:

<http://www.kulichki.com/antimiry/cybercozen/files/1999/CCSEICON99.pdf>

And reprinted here:



Icon99 Fan Guest of Honor: Aharon Sheer As told to Aharon Sheer

Who am I?

I am a funny choice for a Guest of Honor. First of all you expect a Guest of Honor to be a scintillating speaker, a delightful conversationalist, someone surrounded constantly by people who drink in his sparkling plays on words, and his comments on people and activities. I'm not like that at all.

First of all, it's almost impossible to talk to me. Most conversations go like this: I say something, and the other person says: "What? What did you say?" After a few such attempts, conversation lags. This is because I have a hoarse voice which is almost impossible to hear when there is any kind of background noise.

Second, I'm not an extemporaneous speaker. I like to plan everything in advance. If you ask me something, usually I have nothing to say. Like many people who write, I like to put things down on paper, revise, rewrite, correct, etc. This is not possible when I speak, so I tend to keep quiet.

The only kinds of conversations that I enjoy are very private, one on one conversations, without any attempt to put on or impress. If you're too smart for me, I'm not interested. If you have the patience, try a nice walk with me in the fields around Rehovot, where, if nothing else, we can talk about the latest weeds.

So how did I get to be Fan Guest of Honor?

Two things:

- 1) For nine years I ran what was (most of the time) the only science fiction (sf) club in Israel, *Rehovot SF*. It met in Rehovot *every month* for nine years, starting in 1989, and still meets occasionally in the summer.
- 2) Since 1989 I have published a monthly sf newsletter, *CyberCozen*. I'm never missed a month.

More information:

For most of those nine years *Rehovot sf* was the only *regularly meeting* sf club in Israel, and drew people from all over Gush Dan. The club only stopped regular meetings after the recently founded Israeli Society for sf and Fantasy began holding monthly meetings in Tel Aviv.

Rehovot meetings are held at the house of Bill Silverman. Bill's house has two great advantages: Bill has a big living room with a lot of chairs, and he has a science-fiction and fantasy library of over one thousand books in English, which he is willing to lend to the people who come to meetings (and mostly they return the books, too, which is really unusual in Israel).

The club was founded with help from a lot of other people: Besides Bill Silverman it had Dena Ben-Kiki (now Shunra), Elana Dror (now Rein), Ilana Gomel, Miriam ben-Loulu and her father Abe Bursten (אבי בורשטן), Eli Eshed, Yehiel Adar, and Amit Yizhar. Most of these people I had met at the short-lived Tel Aviv Science Fiction Club. Three of them still come to meetings!

I modeled my club after the *Elves*, *Gnomes*, and *Little Men's Science Fiction Chowder and Marching Society (Berkeley Cell)*. The "*Little Men*" (as they were known) was a club in Berkeley California that I had been a member of in the 60s. It had a successful meeting format: The centerpiece of each meeting was a **main lecture**, which was announced in advance, and could be on any subject which might interest people who read SF or fantasy (that covers almost all possible subjects). The meetings started with announcements, often there was a short talk on a book or author that someone had read, or a short presentation of an idea that someone wanted to talk about, followed by the main lecture. In addition, **refreshments** were served. This successful format served the Berkeley club for many many years, and it has served the Rehovot club well too. **I wish the Israeli Society would serve refreshments at its meetings too.**

I wanted to call the club in Rehovot the "*Elves', Gnomes', and Little Men's Science Fiction Chowder and Marching Society (Rehovot Cell)*" but the stick-in-the-mud members rejected all imaginative names proposed, and chose to call themselves "*Rehovot Science Fiction*". For Shame!

When the club first started, I sent out a monthly announcement about the each meeting. Dena Ben-Kiki in the meantime tried to publish a profit-making sf fan publication, "*About SF*", which unfortunately only attracted forty subscribers, not enough to cover expenses. "*About SF*" failed, so I decided to convert the monthly announcement into a newsletter which contains reviews, commentary, announcements, very short stories, humor, occasional drawings, etc. The newsletter grew to four pages a month, and is funded by donations from the members somewhat like the box at the club meetings into which people put money to pay for refreshments. If the donations don't cover the costs, I cover the difference. In all those years if anyone said he

wanted to get the newsletter but couldn't afford it, he got it free. Nobody gets paid for submitting things to *CyberCozen*; it is an entirely volunteer activity which people do for the fun of it (certainly not for fame, and not even for praise, which is rarely forthcoming).

I decided to call the newsletter *CyberCozen*. To "cozen" someone is to deceive or to bluff him, particularly to persuade him to do something that it is not in his best interests to do. I was able to call the newsletter *CyberCozen* despite the strenuous opposition of the stick-in-the-mud members of the club, mainly because I didn't ask their permission.

Recently Israel's SF historian, Eli Eshed, suggested putting out a selection of the "*Best of CyberCozen*". Eli went over the first six years and made his recommendations. Since I had been chosen FGOH of ICon99, I decided that it would be a good time to publish the *earliest* of that material now. I hope you enjoy it.



Graphics Editor's Note: Aharon Sheer

By Guy Eldar

On the Second year of my BA in communications, at the Collage of Management, I was writing a paper on the information society as it is reflected in science fiction films. The idea was to compare movies from the late 60's with those of the mid 90's (present, at that time). The only problem was finding those late 60's movies. Through friends in the Israeli Society for Science Fiction and Fantasy I made connection with Aharon Sheer, who, I was told, had a vast collection of SF videos. Although Aharon is more into books than movies, I did find those movies I was looking for in his private collection. Aharon expressed an interest in the subject of my paper and invited me to lecture about it at the Rehovot SF club, which he organizes. I was happy to oblige to his request, as it was a chance for me to return the favor for his assistant on my paper.

But that did not end my relationship with Aharon. As a "payment" (totally unnecessary, but very welcome), for the lecture I gave, Aharon gave me a year's subscription to *CyberCozen*. When I first received the newsletter

I was taken with its content, but was discontented with the overall look of its layout. It looked more like a letter and less like "news". I asked Aharon if I could assist in the reshaping of the newsletter's look and We've been reshaping and improving it ever since (for about a year and a half now).

Above you have read the personal description of Aharon Sheer of himself. As the Hebrew saying goes "The Baker Does Not Testify To His own Dough", so is the case with Aharon. He is much too modest to fully accept the small honor bestowed upon him by the society, as being its first "Fan Guest of Honor". Leaving aside the fact that Aharon is one of the most interesting and friendliest people I have ever met, he has done and will keep on doing a lot in promoting SF in Israel. He began doing so long before the idea of the society was ever conceived, and he will continue to do so for many more years to come. Personally, I'm proud to take part in this wonderful man's work and I believe the society has made the right choice in making him its first "Fan Guest of Honor".


That's all for now. In upcoming CyberCozens, I'll try to reprint more stuff by Aharon – and others, that may be of interest to our readers (and to future academics/historians studying the development of CyberCozen and SF in Israel and in the Universe). Up next, is an example...

* ** *** ** *

Before we continue on to Doron Calo's new "*Sheer Science*" article, here's some fascinating stuff I'd like to pass on to you, some of which was discovered as I was preparing this issue – concerning his previous column about Silicon based life. In the same December 1991 issue pictured above (concerning Aharon's call for volunteers), we have the following comment by Russian born SF writer and long-time CyberCozen collaborator, Leonid Resnick:

On the Question of SILICON-BASED LIFE by Leonid Resnick

I read Ted Henderson's comment on this in CyberCozen, July 1991. I'd like to describe the classical (I suppose) work in this field, written in the U.S.S.R. in the early 60's and unknown to Western readers. It's the short story by A. Dneprov, "The Clay God".



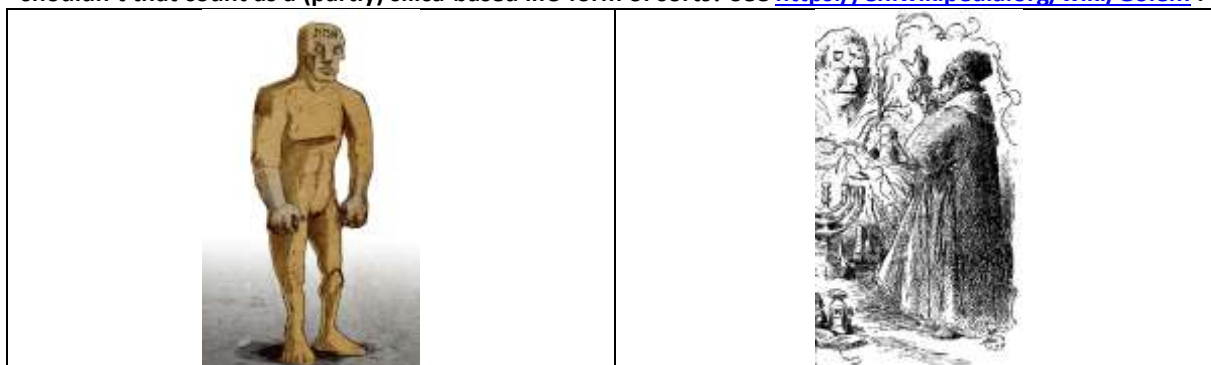
The story is written in the genre of hard SF. The hero fights against a Mad Scientist who has found a way to change carbon in the human organism to silicon. Men stay alive and are converted into creatures invulnerable to knife or bullet, as if they were living stone people. These monsters have become soldiers for the Mad Scientist. They hunt for the hero on a training battlefield, trying to kill him. But the hero discovers how to use two drawbacks of the stone soldiers: their low activity in the cool evening air and their need to drink a special chemical solution. Rappy ending: the hero is free, the Mad Scientist is dead, the stone soldiers are converted into clay statues.

I think that the writer lost a lot of possibilities to make a good adventure novel or novelette. Why did he not give his creatures heating suits and a supply of the chemical solution? The written story is only an illustration of the silicon life idea. Leonid Resnick ♦♦

(Drawing by Miriam Ben-Lulu)

But wait, there's more that I have to add... If Dneprov's Russian story seems to be a ground-breaker, there is a Yiddish short story that predates even him. In 1929 (??) Der Nister [= "the hidden one", pseudonym of the Russian Yiddish author Pinchus Kahanovich (one of the many Jewish intellectuals murdered by Stalin) – see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Der_Nister] wrote a biting satire/fantasy of an entire city made up of glass people – I'll try and do a write-up in an upcoming issue (and also try to locate the July 1991 issue that Resnick relates to).

And while we're on the subject, the Jewish "Golem of Prague", circa late 16th-century was made of mud – shouldn't that count as a (partly) silica-based life-form of sorts? See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Golem>.



Sheer* Science: Venus anyone?!

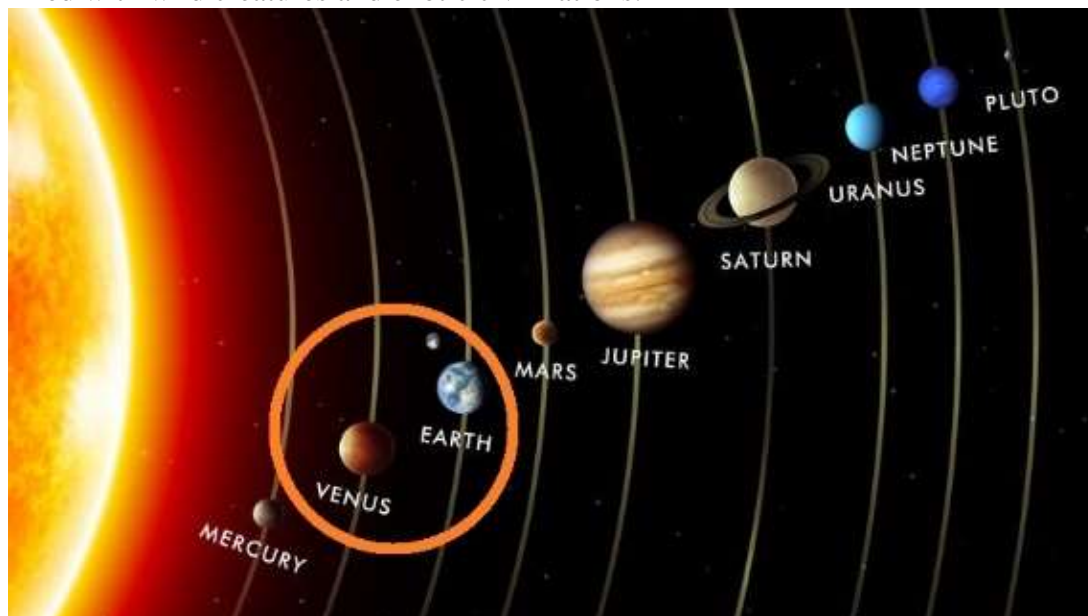
(* In memory of Aharon Sheer (נ"ט) – Founding Editor)

- Prepared by: Doron Calo*, PhD

(*our CC Sheer Science editor ☺)

Venus: Back to the Forgotten Planet

The planet **Venus** used to be a popular destination in science fiction stories. That's hardly a surprise – after all, Venus is the closest planet to Earth, and is also similar in terms of mass and density. Everyone was keen to find out what's beneath the thick cloud layer; SF's finest writers, from **Edgar Rice Burroughs** to **Isaac Asimov**, imagined it as a tropical jungle filled with wild creatures and exotic civilizations.



Some writers who didn't buy the jungle version of the planet thought it might actually be a dusty desert. The Soviets maintained that it might be a water world – and designed probes that would penetrate the clouds and then land in an ocean. It probably was quite a nasty surprise when the first Russian robotic probe reached Venus in 1967 and was faced with such harsh atmospheric conditions that it was **annihilated** long before it reached the planet's surface.

Venus, however, turned out to be exotic in quite a different way than was first imagined in science fiction. Today, we know that the environmental conditions seem mostly unsupportable of any sort of life: **extreme pressure and temperatures**, and an atmosphere mostly made up of **CO₂** (and those nice clouds? They turn out to be made up of **sulfuric acid!**). It's not really surprising, then, that Venus's popularity has been in decline ever since, and especially since more appealing candidates for exploration seem more available (**Mars**, anyone?). The last American probe visited the planet over 20

years ago, and a European craft observed it from a distance until 2014. It looked as though humanity was ready to forget about Venus altogether and focus on more pressing matters.

Fortunately, an unexpected plot twist brings Venus back to the center of attention, albeit sluggishly. The Japanese probe **Akatsuki** has recently achieved orbit around the planet against all odds. A massive engine failure in 2010 made the engineers at **JAXA** (Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency) scramble for a solution to prevent the probe from

entering an orbit around the Sun instead of Venus. The alternative route delayed the probe's arrival by 5 years, and the final orbit was quite wider than originally planned, but it did arrive.

And upon arrival, about 4 months ago, it began sending out interesting data.

One of the most conspicuous findings is that the planet's sulfuric clouds look **bow-shaped** when observed more closely.

These clouds seem to move relatively slowly; this may mean that the clouds are locked to ground features such as mountains or canyons, although no one knows what might cause such a phenomenon.

This joins a host of other mysteries that scientists were aware of, for some time: The atmosphere of Venus contains an **unknown substance** that absorbs UV light; The planet's surface is mysteriously young, and although it's known to feature volcanoes, we don't know whether they're active or not; It generates **fantastic winds** for no apparent reason; And did I mention that the whole planet rotates in the **opposite direction** to Earth?

And putting the mysterious phenomena aside, studying Venus might have some substantial benefits. Life could theoretically exist in the upper reaches of its atmosphere, but we'll never know for sure unless we send out more probes.

More importantly, finding out the deep history of Venus's hellish conditions might teach us humans an important lesson on **global warming** and its potentially catastrophic outcome (it is thought that the present conditions on the planet are a result of a **greenhouse effect** gone berserk).

NASA must be convinced that these reasons can merit subsequent missions to Venus, two of which are actually in the pipeline (the **VERITAS** radar mapper and the **DAVINCI** probe). Assuming that interesting findings will continue to trickle in from the resurrected Japanese probe, a new mission to Venus could be launched around **2020** – I've got my fingers crossed!

Links:

The Akatsuki orbiter on the JAXA website:

http://global.jaxa.jp/projects/sat/planet_c/

An editorial in Nature magazine:

<http://www.nature.com/news/destination-venus-1.19743>

NEXT MONTH: Back to Business as Usual!

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

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