

חדשות האגודה – אפריל 2021 The Israeli Society for Science Fiction and Fantasy

המועדון הקריאה יעסוק בספר "החולם" מאת לייני טיילור (מודן, 2019). תאריך, שעה, והקישור יתפרסמו בדף האירוע בפייסבוק. 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 בדף האגודה בפייסבוק.

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

This month's roundup:

- Yiddish SF&F 101 – Part 3
- As usual, interesting tidbits from various websites.
- Your editor, Leybl Botwinik

Sylvain St-Pierre of Montreal – May he rest in peace

We've just been informed – from our friends in Montreal's Science Fiction and Fantasy Association (MonSFFA) – of the tragic passing from COVID, of one of their most beloved activists: Sylvain St-Pierre.

I met Sylvain a few years ago, and he made such a nice impression on me. I especially loved the several presentations he had put together that I viewed on the MonSFFA website (and recommend others to see) – such a breadth and depth of knowledge, he possessed! What a great loss!

Cathy Palmer of MonSSFA writes:

Not only was Sylvain a close friend of many in fandom, he was a pillar of our community. Not only did he manage the club's finances for decades, he did ever so much behind the scenes. He wrote for WARP, kept the membership lists, gave well-researched presentations, and in recent months, was responsible for the programming of our on-line meetings. Not to mention keeping us all sane.

I wish I had had the opportunity to get to know him better - LB.

A memorial ceremony marked his passing: <https://www.monsffa.ca/?p=17239>

From SpacEL: – Celebrating Yuri Gagarin and Beresheet



This year we will celebrate the "Yuri – Beresheet" events through a collaboration with the Israel Space Agency (ISA) and Israel's Nature and Parks Authority (INAP). The INPA will operate exciting activities for guests at various sites, with quality educational content alongside plenty of fun!

✦✦ If you happen to be in Israel don't miss out on this opportunity on the nights of: **April 22, April 29, May 6.**

More details will be announced soon in the [SpacEL](#) Facebook page: [SpacEL](#)

Part III: Yiddish SF (&F) 1970s-2020

In this 3rd (and for now, final) part of our series, I'd like to cover some Yiddish and Yiddish-related SF of the last 50 or so years, including a brief look at my own SF (&F) writing.

Yiddish SF – Here and There

Ad-Hoc Yiddish SF

Let's start off with Daniel Soyer¹. In 1975, Soyer was a 17 yr. old student taking a Yiddish course at NY's Columbia U. As in many language courses, the teacher not only drills the students with grammar and reading exercises, but also often gives out writing assignments. Thus, the proud teacher sent in some samples of student efforts to be published in the Yiddish Daily "Forverts" of August 18, 1975 (p3). Prominent amongst them, we find Soyer's very short attempt at speculative fiction (aka SF).



Soyer's short essay is written like a news item, dateline 1998: "Yiddish, The Official Language of the United States". Interestingly enough – like Soyer – my first SF in Yiddish was also a byproduct of a class assignment (though I predated him by a few years)... It's likely that other Yiddish students may have "SFed" some assignment on a whim – and it's also known that teachers like to specifically ask students to use their imagination, speculate, and write up essays like "What will the city of the future look like", etc.

21st Century Russian Yiddish SF

Yoel Matveyev² loves SF. He is a poet, writer, translator, journalist, and computer specialist. Matveyev was born in 1976 in Leningrad, he later moved to the US, but is back in his hometown that has gotten back its original name St. Petersburg, Russia. I don't know him personally, but we corresponded and then had an interesting phone conversation a while back and I was more than happy to find out that he and some of his friends are writing new SF in Yiddish. Until that moment, I thought I was almost alone in writing new SF in Yiddish ... Yoel's stories – the ones I've had the pleasure of reading are a mix of Science, Fantasy, and Myth, often with some biblical elements intermixed. This is what I wrote him about one story "For Those who Are in the Sea"³ about Mer-people living among us:

To Yoel Matveyev:

I just now finished reading your story about the sea people. I like your writing, your language, and your free use of technological content. Your writing sounds very natural. The story, however, had the feeling of excerpts of a larger work (rather than of a completed story) – and I had the urge to read more and to better

ערשט איצט איבערגעליינט דיין מעשה מיט די ים מענטשן.
עס געפעלט מיר זייער דיין שרייבן, דיין שפראך, און דיין פרייען באנוץ פון טעכנאלאגישער אינהאלט. עס קלינגט טאקע זייער נאטירלעך ביי די.
די דערציילונג, אבער, האט מערער דעם געפיל פון אויסצוגן פון א גרעסער ווערק (איידער פון א דערגאנצער מעשה) - און עס ווילט זיך טאקע לייענען נאך, און זיך בעסער באקענען מיט די

¹ Daniel Soyer is a professor of history and Jewish studies at Fordham University and has continued being active in the field of Yiddish since that course (and maybe even a bit of SF. See: <https://museum.vivo.org/artifact/scholar-text-daniel-soyer/>)

² Yoel Matveyev - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yoel_Matveyev

³ Yoel Matveyev – "far di vos zaynen inem yam" - <https://www.gazeta.ru/84671-2/>

acquaint myself with the various characters and scenes. Could you write more about them?

It has a great potential and just begs that certain things should be brought to a close: Who are these sea-people (i.e. individuals only, or a complete civilization like in the Legends or Marvel/DC comics)? And who are these creatures from the planet Umbul...

פארשיידענע העלדן און סצענעס. אפער
שרייבסטו נאך מיט זיי?
עס האט גרויסער פאטענציאל און בענקט זיך
טאקע צו דערגאנצן זאכן: ווער זיינען די ים
מענטשן (ד.ה. צי זיינען פאראן נאך א סך אזעלכע
"מענטשן"-יחידים, צי א גאנצער ציוויליזאציע
ווי אין די לעגענדעס און מארוועל/די-סי
קאמיקס)? און ווער זיינען עס די פארשוניען פון
פלאנעט אומבול...

Another story I read, "*By the Waters of Babylon* (2018)"⁴, is about biblical Nimrod and his flying pyramid. We find young King Nimrod flying around the Fertile Crescent areas with a Golem as a navigational device, and mystics doing his bidding with feats of magic. All this takes place in the first two-thirds of the story, and then we find ourselves 'transported' into the thoughts of 3 individuals in today's modern day and age – all 3 of who had simultaneously 'dreamed' those same images from the first two-thirds of the story. They are: A Satmar Hasid, a Muslim man, and a woman university lecturer.

The 3rd story that he sent me "*Just the Weird that Thumps and Calls Out on the Roads* (2019)"⁵. This one contains elements of flying saucers, telepathy, and Yetis – and even Yiddish books.



In the 3 stories, that I've had the pleasure of reading, I had the same feeling as in the letter above that I wrote to Matveyev: that there are too/very many (actually quite good) ideas squeezed into them, and it would be nice to see the ideas and stories expanded, and to know more about the characters too.

⁴ Yoel Matveyev "Al Nehoroys Bovl" - <https://yiddishbranzhe.com/2018/06/01/%D7%A2%D7%9C-%D7%A0%D7%94%D7%A8%D7%95%D7%AA-%D7%91%E7%AD%8C%D7%9C/>

⁵ Yoel Matveyev – "Nor s'modne klap un ruft in vegn" - <https://www.gazetaeao.ru/68836-2/>
[This title was rather difficult to translate, but reminds me of "*Something Wicked This Way Comes*". It is from one of songwriter Viktor Tsoi songs that I haven't managed to

I look forward to more of his writing.

Just for fun: Some Yiddish SF Connections

Here are some interesting Yiddish-connections to SF. Some you may have known about, others probably not – though I may have mentioned them in the past:

- Three famous Yiddish speaking SF related actors: Leonard Nimoy, Martin Landau, and Lorne Greene. Nimoy stands out in particular, since he was a great enthusiast of speaking Yiddish⁶ and supported various Yiddish and Yiddish-related projects.
- The 'Jewish' tailor-robot in Woody Allen's *Sleeper*. He may not have actually spoken Yiddish in the Movie, but I'm sure he would have, if you'd have asked him politely.
- Isaac Asimov is known to have been brought up with Yiddish at home. Possibly other SF writers too.
- Surely the creators of Superman (Toronto-born [Joe Shuster](#) and Ohio-born [Jerry Siegel](#)) knew Yiddish, and probably Jack Kirby and Joe Simon who created Captain America, and other comics (both in DC and Marvel universes). Probably other comics artists such as Joe Kubert or animators like Max Fleisher.
- Klingon is, apparently, partly based on some Yiddish syntax. The Klingon Language Institute (KLI) has a Yiddish page⁷.

track down (yet) - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Viktor_Tsoi

⁶ Nimoy: Paying a Psychotherapist to Speak Yiddish With Me <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dvOocMLfu4>
Leonard Nimoy's Mameloshn: A Yiddish Story https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qK_bkBaOEG4

⁷ Years ago I was asked to (voluntarily) translate the Klingon Language Institute's landing page into a Yiddish

Yiddish SF – Leybl's Contributions to the Genre

Like most writers, I've been heavily influenced by every single printed work, essay, book, comic-book, advertisement, sticker, billboard, tee-shirt, graffiti, etc., that I've ever set eyes on. I am an avid reader (or was, years ago), and have gone through many an essay, story, poem, and book of both fact and fiction, history, war, science, literature, pirate, Wild-West, Cops & Robbers, mystery, Spy & adventure, horror, comic books, etc. in English. I have also read quite extensively in Yiddish.

In the Fantasy & SF field, I have read extensively and intensively of writers such as: Poe, Verne, Wells, Burroughs, Heinlein, Bradbury, Bova, Clarke, Dickson, Norton, Asimov, Silverberg, Ellison, Anderson, Zelazny, Simak, Sturgeon, etc., etc...

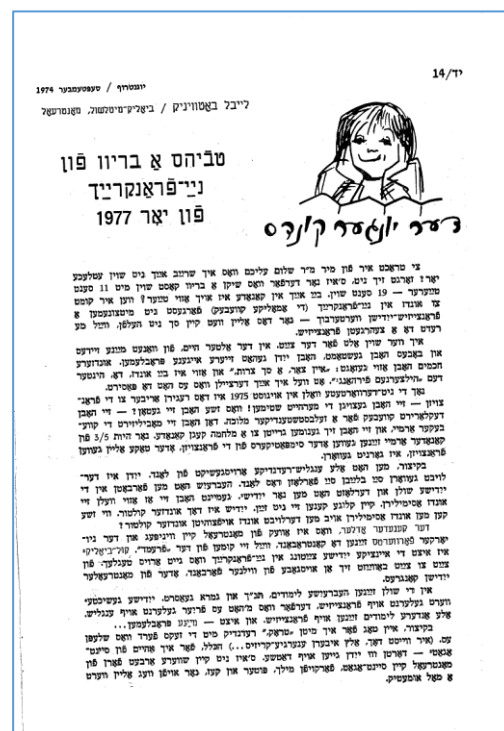
Although I had been reading SF sporadically via comics from quite a young age, the first time I was aware of seriously reading SF as a genre (and then became hooked on it), was at the end of grade 7 when I took a copy of Robert Heinlein's *The Puppet Masters*, with me on the end-of-the year graduating class outing to a Montreal amusement park. From then on, it was mostly Heinlein and Andre Norton. As I became more sophisticated, I began to read Ray Bradbury, and followed on with other great writers.

Of course, movies and some TV – especially Gene Rodenberry's Star-Trek – had a major influence on my SF development. I would also like to thank my good friend Shlomo Schwartzberg who would often point out and recommended a good read or film, or lend me one of his books.

Being a great lover of humour and satire, my first SF-story is a Jewish political satire, recreating Sholem Aleichem's Tevye the Milkman and several other characters from his stories, and transporting them in time and space to a modern, near-future, independent Quebec renamed as NEW FRANCE.

I was in grade 8, Bialik High School in Montreal – and like Daniel Soyfer (above) – I had to write a simple homework essay in Yiddish on Sholem Aleichem's Tevye the Milkman that we were studying in the original. Instead, some SF-Dybbuk got into my system, and I couldn't get to sleep, because I had this idea running around in my head of Sholem Aleichem's characters being transported into a future independent Quebec.

So I got up in the middle of the night, and wrote for about 1.5 hours, trying to exorcise it out my system. I later received a literary recognition and cash prize totaling \$10 for my efforts, and it was also published in the one and only Yiddish student's publication *Yugntruf* in NY.



And thus began my SF career, one late night in 1973.

Other SF/fantasy stories I have written in Yiddish (since high school, my fiction and poetry is almost exclusively in Yiddish) [most of the following are on my website <http://www.levblsvelt.co.il/lv-proze.html>]:

- 1976 – A semi-spoof in honour of my own 117th birthday “*in hundred yor arum* [100 Years From Now]”

version.

See: <https://www.kli.org/about-the-kli/info-in-other-languages/KLIYiddish/>

- 1978 – “*In himl un in dr'erd* [Judgement day in Heaven]”
- 1978-80 – A Star-Trek-like series “*Di shtern aleyh* [The Stars Themselves]” about Israeli Space explorers, including the logbook of a Jewish cosmonaut sent to Jupiter by the Soviets, as an experiment
- 1979 – A semi-spoof on robot waiters at a Bar-Mitzvah reception going haywire, which I wrote in honour of my brother Sender's Bar-Mitzvah
- 1980 – A semi-spoof on how a Bar-Mitzvah was celebrated 100,000 years ago, which I wrote in honour of my brother Yankl's Bar-Mitzvah
- 1980 – My now famous novel “*Di Geheime Shlihes*” about a Jewish Engineer in Vilna of the early 1930's whose first time-machine takes him 50 years into the future, and whose second time machine connects him up with a future civilization of Israelites, descendants of the 10 lost tribes living in some far off galaxy.



- 1978-1982 – a Yiddish comic page “*Der Hirsh* [male deer]”, whose 4th and (so far) last strip showed some Canadian Astronauts landing on a far-off planet and meeting Yiddish-speaking little green men (content and artwork is mine)



- 1985-1986 – And, of course, *CyberCozen* readers have already seen the 3 English translations⁸ of my futuristic Holocaust trilogy “*Fun nekhtn, haynt, un morgn* [From Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow]”, originally published in *Yugntruf* magazine. I wrote all of the above while I was still living in Canada.

After moving to Israel in 1988, getting married, starting a new job, and bringing up a family of 4 kids, my SF writing and writing in general slowed down somewhat, but I did continue writing – mostly unpublished shorter and longer works, which I hope one day to complete.

Here is a list of some of my SF/Fantasy I've had published since leaving Canada:

- 2007 – I wrote a piece about the State of Israel being dissolved and in its place, the new Kingdom of Judah replaces it. “*Natsyonal reynikungs tog* [National Cleanup Day]” was published in the “*Yerushalaymer Almanakh*” #28, p202⁹. It was a time of key and critical historic events for Israel: 2006-2007 saw Iran getting its Nuclear Weapons program dangerously

⁸ The first two translations were published in *CyberCozen* of April and May 1997. The 3rd translation was published in 2012. You can see them here: <http://www.levblsvelt.co.il/iv-shprakhn-Eng.html>

⁹ Leybl Botwinik – “*Natsyonal reynikungs Tog*” – <https://archive.org/details/yerushalaymer-almanakh-28-2008/page/n201/mode/2up>

rolling forward, the Israeli President (Moshe Katsev) resigns pending judicial inquiry for rape and sexual abuse (he was later jailed), and the PM (Ehud Olmert) undergoing investigation for accepting bribes and for obstruction of justice while he was Mayor of Jerusalem (he was later jailed). I thought it was a good moment for a 'Monarch' (king/queen) to reign (he/she would do so for a 10 year period and be replaced by some worthy 'graduate' who would be undergoing training in a special academy for potential leaders).

- 2011 – 100 years after the great NY Triangle Fire, I put out a monthly fictional account of a group of 29 surviving women from that tragedy that are transported by 'Pastekh [Shepherd]' – a mystery person – to rebuild their lives in a new time and place. I published "*Der Pastekh: mer keyn pakhed nit [The Shepherd: No More Fear]*" on my website as a diary of their first 10

days in their new life – but I never completed the story that was planned for about 30 chapters as Book-1, and several other books to follow – Maybe one day I'll pick it up again. You can follow the 10 chapters' English language summaries on the website¹⁰. I actually worked on preparing the published (and unpublished) material over a period of 5 years.

- 2020 – My award-winning children's SF short story "*Fly, Butterfly, Fly*" of an ET discovered by twin kids one Saturday morning¹¹.

I do have a longer story written while travelling between England and Italy – just before my move to Israel (1988) that has already gone through several permutations. It showcases some Yiddish speaking Aliens on a quest in a star-spanning ship – and I hope to get it published soon. I also have several other pieces that I would like to see made into movies.

As a side note, the Holocaust theme appears in many of my SF stories (particularly the earlier ones), but this is only natural, since the Holocaust changed the face of the Yiddish world (and nearly wiped out my Father's family). However, being a good student of History, I have marked it down as: Yet Another Chapter of our Bloody 2000 Years of Jewish History in Exile, and hopefully the culminating chapter of a long struggle for a peaceful coexistence with our neighbours, now that we are back in our homeland, Israel. But who knows? We can only speculate, and Hope.

All-in-all, I plan to continue to write Yiddish SF, only that I've lately started some other projects that I hope will come to fruition in the near future.

(Some) Fun from the Web (More next time)

- **'Debris' revealed: Take a 1st look at NBC's new sci-fi alien drama**
<https://www.space.com/debris-nbc-sci-fi-alien-show-teaser-trailer>
- **Eragon's Christopher Paolini enters the Fractalverse for his first sci-fi novel, 'To Sleep in a Sea Of Stars':** <https://www.space.com/christopher-paolini-eragon-author-interview-sci-fi>
- **SpaceX vs NASA: Who will get us to the moon first? Here's how their latest rockets compare:** <https://www.space.com/spacex-vs-nasa-who-will-get-us-to-the-moon-first>

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

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¹⁰ Leybl Botwinik – "Mer keyn Pakhed Nit" –
<http://www.levblsvelt.co.il/mkp-I-hovptzavtl.html>

¹¹ Leybl Botwinik – "fli, flaterl, fli" –
<https://forward.com/viddiah/456821/fly-colorful-butterfly-fly-by-levbl-botwinik-prize-winning-story/>