



SCIENCE-Fiction Fanzine

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"MeOrot" SF conference: <http://meorot.sf-f.org.il/2014/> Dec. 18 – Hebrew U, Jerusalem



**חדשות האגודה – דצמבר 2014 The Israeli Society for Science Fiction and Fantasy**

**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) Aharon's review of the new SF movie "*Interstellar*"
- 2) More about Robin Williams' SF-related movies. In this issue: "*The Final Cut*" (Plus a few words about a Speculative Fiction movie he starred in – guess which one)
- 3) Aharon's rubric about leading edge Science and Technology
- 4) ooOOPppss... In our last issue, we promised "A report about .. ICON fest .., **and the new project to translate Hebrew SF to English...**" – we did talk about ICON, but forgot about "**Zion's Fiction**": <http://www.zionsfiction.com/category/zions-fiction/> (Check out the link. We'll discuss it in an upcoming issue)

– Leybl Botwinik (CyberCozen assistant editor)

**\*\* You are all invited to Leybl Botwinik's lecture (in Hebrew) at the "Meorot" conference day at the Hebrew U, Jerusalem, on the 18<sup>th</sup> of December at 19:00 (see: <http://meorot-program.sf-f.org.il/>)**

**– "Yiddish, Wars, and Extra-terrestrials: What's the Connection?"**

## Movie Review: "*Interstellar*" (2014)

by Aharon Sheer

The newly released movie "*Interstellar*" (2014) was written and directed by Christopher Nolan. The storyline starts with a wormhole that is discovered in space. When an Earth ship is sent through the wormhole, it reaches a new planet circling another star.

In the plot, Earth has been facing an ecological disaster (perhaps due to global warming), and there is a problem feeding the multiple billions of people on Earth. The new planet – if it can be settled – becomes a potential salvation for humankind.

A new trend – to be “anti-science and anti-technology” – has become common on Earth. This is a future where children are taught in school that humans reaching the moon and walking on it never happened – that it was all special effects. In the meantime, the space program continues, albeit in secret.

I wonder what such people would think of current pictures of a human-made robot landing on a comet. In general, people reject scientific study and engineering.

Ideas such as Wormholes, the worldwide collapse of Agriculture, and the settling of another planet are tropes that are usually found in SF novels. It was refreshing to find them appearing in a movie. Other than that, there was nothing particularly new in the plot, but I'd still consider it to be a good movie. My main critique was, that at 3 hours, it was too long.

## Movie Review: “*The Final Cut*” (2004-starring Robin Williams) + A bonus review

by Leybl Botwinik



Sometime in the near future, parents can have special memory chips (EYE-Tech implant called ZOE) implanted in their children while in embryo (before birth). Once implanted, they begin recording the child's every visual and aural experience, from just before it's being born right up to its (adulthood) death. Not everyone can afford this (1 in 20 has one), and children are only informed of the implant when they 'come of age' (around 21) and are mature enough to understand the import of this.

The idea behind this, is that upon their death (and we all die at some point), all the accumulated visual memories can be recorded on a tape, and loved ones can have a souvenir of their life experiences. Of course, no one would want to see every single second of a person's waking moments, so a special profession of editors – called “Cutters” gather the memory chip's data, go through it, and edit the vast amount of info into a 'consumable' video product to be screened at a family gathering, and distributed to friends and families at the discretion of the deceased's bereaving family members.

Today, we would equate the Cutter to a Biographer who makes a documentary film of an individual's life. Here, however, are the 100% real experiences, as the child/person grows up, as seen and heard by the person him/herself. All this, of course, at the discretion of the Cutter's choice selections and censorship. Of course, as often happens with technologies that affect human social life, there is also a movement opposed to this 'intrusion' in a person's privacy and they show up with placards and protest the private screenings calling them blasphemous.

Robin Williams plays Alan Hakman, a middle aged man, with many years of Cutter experience. In fact, he is in great demand, since he is recognized as perhaps the best in the field. His output videos are considered to be of the highest quality and the most touching, full of integrity and humaneness.

One of the interesting issues here, is how much should one expose to the audience. After all, the Cutter is the censor. He/She can show anything they want in the 'final cut'. There is so much trust in the Cutter – something akin to religious awe, that the video is not even pre-screened in a private showing to the family before presenting it 'publicly' to those gathered at the ceremony.

Hakman's female friend looking at his editing workstation and calls it the "Guillotine": "... You're like the mortician, or a priest or a taxidermist– or all of them".

Ethical issues arise, such as: What to expose in a person's private life? What if the person did some 'bad' things, that the authorities should know about? The Cutter must remain neutral, like a priest hearing a confession, or a doctor respecting the privacy of a patient and not openly divulging 'private' and 'personal' information – what we know as professional discretion.

Years ago, I read a book – I don't remember its name or the author – where special police agents would arrive at the scene of a death. They would then connect up their brain with the deceased person's in order to 'read' the last moments of that person's life and record it on a special device. This recording would then represent a correct and factual account of the circumstances of death, for court and police proceedings, as required. Here, everything stays private – except in the Cutter's own memory. In the movie, he looks at a woman and recalls a scene he deleted of her affair with the

Deceased, even as he is speaking to the widow.

In the movie, we find Robin Williams as a very cold person, driven by a childhood event that haunts him his whole life that eventually gets resolved in the movie. At the same time, he is hired to Cut an important political person's final video, and uncovers some nasty business in that person's conduct over the years. This puts him and those around him in danger. This also leaves him with the moral dilemma of what to do with that information.

This is not your typical 'lite' Robin Williams, but in many ways, seems to reflect some of the internal struggles that Williams himself went through in his later years (maybe a kind of premonition) – on how to deal with life, that is not always 'rosy' – or how kife deals with you...

#### **Some notes of interest.**

Just after the opening scene with Alan Hakman as a child (followed by some movie credits), the movie opens with the 3 rules of the Cutter's Code. The presentation is reminiscent of the opening scene in Williams' previous movie "Bicentennial Man" where the 3 Laws of Robotics are presented right at the beginning. Although the story takes place in the near future, and the 'technology' can be considered 'hi-tech', there is a certain rustic quality evident in the movie. This gives it a feeling of 'quaintness' and being 'old-fashioned'.

For example, everyone is dressed rather conservatively, often in suit and tie – all the women in dresses and skirts. Furniture and buildings, etc. are wood and leather, not plastic/metal/glass. The Cutter machine has video displays, but the chassis is hardwood, as is the Cutter's laptop case, and when interviewing family members, Williams takes notes with a pen in a small booklet.

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### And one more film: *"Man of the Year"* (2006)

So as not to end on a pessimistic note, here's a very quick look at an interesting film that is not included and not mentioned as one of Robin Williams's Science-fiction related works – for obvious reasons. However, I decided to include it because it's akin to Speculative Fiction (which is, in fact, usually included under the caption 'SF') – but may (as in this case) be so close to the here-and-now, that it may have actually already happened someplace...

It's all about a programming glitch in an election vote-counting computer that places Tom Dobbs the comedian (Robin Williams), who hosts a news satire program – right smack in the White House. It's probably too bad that this never happened. The world would probably have been a better place for it.

[**Personal note:** a few nights ago – on the eve that I started writing about this movie – Prime Minister Netanyahu set the stage for new elections in Israel – Now that's coincidence!]

The plot revolves around the comedian Tom Dobbs who decides to give it a go as a presidential candidate. At first, contrary to his style, he 'becomes a politician', mouthing slogans and straight criticism about all sorts of important issues. However, he soon returns to his satirical and whimsy style as he garners about 17% popularity according to the polls, placing his independent run in 3<sup>rd</sup> place ... There is a great scene where he is invited to the traditional TV debate between the Democratic and Republican party candidates, and he literally steals the show. His scene in Congress is also noteworthy.

In the background, a single 30+ programmer Eleanor Green, tests the new Delacroy Corporation voting application

that will be taking over the entire US electoral voting system, and discovers a bug that could place the wrong candidate as President. When she warns her boss and his lawyer, they brush it off, since the election is so close, and they don't want to lose face or money from their rising stocks. They even send a hired crook to drug her and set her up as a drug user and 'sick' employee that needed to be laid off.

Eventually, Eleanor confronts Dobbs and tells him that he didn't really win (on his own). Now Dobbs has to make the crucial decision of whether to go ahead and become President – and possibly change America and the World for the better (although his 'power for good' will be based on a lie) – or face the truth and reveal it to the American public. Oh, and he also falls in love with her – making the dilemma that much more poignant.

It's too bad, the writer stopped the fun here (before Dobbs actually becomes President and ignites his particular brand of mayhem in the White House and on the world stage). This was definitely a lost opportunity, especially given the fact that Williams was the star. On the other hand, this is also not Williams at his funniest, but he does have some very good political lines in the movie, including the famous '**change diaper>politician**' one.

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In conclusion – and in memoriam – Robin Williams has left this world in our hands. He contributed a legacy of major and minor movie roles in plots that were quite distinct (although we discussed the SF-related ones, how can we not mention his quintessential roles in movies like: *"The World according to Garp"*, *"Good Morning Vietnam"*, *"Moscow on the Hudson"*, *"Patch Adams"*, and many, many others).

I would call Williams a teacher of sorts. His roles and his persona are both worthy and noteworthy, such that we all have something to learn from him.

He will be long remembered.

## ***Sheer Science***

- Submitted by Aharon Sheer

### ***1) Experiencing Experiments***

#### **Follow Scientists, not the Lab Notebook**

Melissa McCartney

Scientific experiments rarely go as planned. Despite following the scientific method, experiments often double back, repeat a step, or move in a new direction. Why then, do classroom laboratory exercises present students with a linear set of tasks resulting in a known outcome? To create a more authentic experience, Alaimo *et al.* redesigned four undergraduate organic chemistry labs to allow students to generate reliable data through repeating experiments, participate in authentic data analysis, and receive instruction in data-driven decision-making. These changes shifted the lab from an exercise in following directions to an exercise of learning the iterative process of a scientific study.

*J. Chem. Educ.* 10.1021/ed400510b (2014).



### ***2) If Spiderman Only Knew...***

#### **Climbing up the Walls like a Gecko**

Jake Yeston

The Tokay gecko scurries across ceilings with the help of tiny hair on its feet, which generate weak intermolecular forces that add up to a secure foothold. Scientists have recreated dry gecko-like adhesion using silicones, plastics, carbon nanotubes, and other materials, but they've run into a scaling problem: The stickiness drops rapidly with increasing surface area. Hawkes *et al.* offer a solution: an adhesive consisting of 24 tiles that distribute loads evenly among themselves, offering the same adhesive strength for sizes from a square millimeter to the area of a human hand. The adhesive works even if one tile fails to stick. Wearing hand-sized adhesives, a 70-kilogram human can climb a vertical glass wall, the team showed.

*J. R. Soc. Interface*, 10.1098/rsif.2014.0675.



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

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