



SCIENCE-Fiction Fanzine

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חדשות האגודה – יולי 2017 The Israeli Society for Science Fiction and Fantasy

מועדון הקריאה של חודש יולי יעסוק בספרה של אורסולה לה גווין "הקוסם מארץ ים" (זמורה ביתן, 1985).

בת"א ביום ג', 25/7 בשעה 20:00, ב"קפה גרג", ויצמן 2. מנחה: דפנה קירש

בירושלים ביום ד', 26/7 בשעה 19:30, במסעדת "נגילה", משיח ברוכף 5, מנחה: יהושע ברנהרט

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>



To our North American Friends and Colleagues:
HAPPY JULY 1st – Canada Day (150 years young!)
& JULY 4th – US Independence Day !!!



This month's roundup:

Note, that this issue contains only 1 original work – we've all decided to take it easy ☺ - and even that article is borrowed ... but don't worry, we're planning more great stuff coming up in the next while.

- Some interesting AI and other stuff from the WWW
- Special contribution by DANNY SICHEL from Montreal: "Municipal Fantasy - Adventures in literary taxonomy"

NOTE: Sheer Science section will return next month - Dr. Doron Calo is taking a well-deserved vacation

– Your editor, Leybl Botwinik

Real Reader Remarks:

Thanks very much for sending me these-most enjoyable. I've never really thought of combining Yiddishkeit with science fiction. Although I suppose, like most Jews, I read stuff all the time and actively seek out science fiction with a Jewish plot, however tenuous. I even remember reading a set of four paperback books that my brother gave me from a second-hand bookshop in England (he was working at the British library at the time) about an alien creature and his companion, a Jewish girl, Leah, from the Jewish Ghetto in Rome of the Middle Ages, hopping from planet to planet! Plus obviously a lot of Jewish golems around:

Jumping through time to escape the genocide on his home planet, Scorpio lands on Earth in 1351, finding an ally in the Leah de Bernay, a beautiful young woman with her own enemies, as they flee from the vicious Hunters who drove Scorpio from his own world and now seek to seize the glowing orb of power that brought him to Earth.

See: <https://www.fantastfiction.com/m/alex-mcdonough>

Charles G.

Media & Communications Consultant

MORE INTERESTING STUFF from the WWW

For all lovers of 'pure and applied' [State-of-the-Art / Leading-edge / etc.] science, there is a wonderful bi-lingual [- that's English-Hebrew] site from Israel's Weizmann Institute "Davidson Institute of SCIENCE EDUCATION" with many interesting articles.

- English: <http://davidson.weizmann.ac.il/en/node>
- Hebrew/עברית: <http://davidson.weizmann.ac.il/node>.

They also have a Facebook page, and a YouTube channel with many short films in Hebrew and English (some with Hebrew sub-titles) – see:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCP926AKuhsPeSAnqf8avq7w>

From one “pensioner” to “another”:

Buzz Aldrin Tells NASA to Retire ISS

BY MATTHEW HUMPHRIES May 11, 2017

Space is hard, but the human race has achieved some impressive feats over the past few decades. Men on the moon, a laboratory circling the Earth, exploration of the surface of Mars; the list goes on.

However, the task of getting people to Mars, let alone allowing them to stay and survive there, is extremely hard due to all the problems that need to be overcome first.

Well-known former engineer and astronaut Buzz Aldrin suggested something rather radical this week to speed up our eventual trip to Mars. He wants NASA to retire the International Space Station to save billions of dollars.

...

Read more here:

<https://www.pcmag.com/news/353605/buzz-aldrin-tells-nasa-to-retire-iss?>

Are you ready for this?

This Map Shows Where Robots Will Steal American Jobs

BY LEE MATHEWS May 08.2017

If you believe Secretary of The Treasury Steve Mnuchin, there’s no need to worry about artificial intelligence taking your job. If on the other hand, you pay attention to things like the news and tech blogs, you might want to check out the results of a recent study.

Researchers from MIT and Boston U recently joined forces to figure out what kind of impact robots and other automation have had on local job markets. Not surprisingly, they discovered that an increase in automation tends to negatively impact local employment.

...

Read more here:

<https://www.geek.com/tech/this-map-shows-where-robots-will-steal-american-jobs-1698834/?>

See map and read more here:

<https://www.bloomberg.com/graphics/2017-more-robots-fewer-jobs/>

Why “How many jobs will be killed by AI?” is the wrong question

BY ANDREW MCAFEE AND ERIK BRYNJOLFSSON June 24, 2017

Over the past few years we've developed artificially intelligent machines that can do many things that used to require human minds: understanding speech, diagnosing disease, checking the terms of a contract, designing a mechanical part from scratch, even coming up with new scientific hypotheses that are supported by subsequent research. As this new software is embedded in hardware we'll get self-driving cars, trucks, and combines; delivery and inspection drones; and robots of many kinds.

These technologies are improving more quickly than even their creators would have predicted at the start of the decade, and the fact that the world's best players of both the Asian strategy game go and no limit heads up Texas hold-em poker are now AI systems indicates just how deeply they're encroaching into human territory.

...

Read more here:

<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/why-how-many-jobs-killed-ai-wrong-question-andrew-mcafee?>

Don't say we didn't warn you...

Why living on the starship Enterprise would actually be awful

BY BRIAN STEELE @QUIVERINGSTEELE



Testing, testing:

Nvidia Built a Video Game to Test Robots

SAN JOSE, Calif.—The benefit of advanced neural networks, one of the building blocks of artificial intelligence, is that they're constantly learning on their own, unsupervised by human programmers. That's fine for, say, helping Google Photos automatically tag family members in your recent vacation album, but such unsupervised learning doesn't quite cut it for AI-powered physical robots, which

A whole generation grew up watching the adventures of the starship Enterprise and her exploits on **"Star Trek: The Next Generation"**. They dreamed of slipping into that Lycra leisurewear uniform and voyaging to the farthest reaches of space and time. To boldly going where no man, er, no one has gone before.

Sadly, those nerdy '90s kids, so full of dreams and dunkaroos, had no idea they were living in utter denial, because, for all the fabulous adventures, scientific breakthroughs and interspecies sex crewmembers got to take part in, there were some serious downsides.

So, why would working on the Federation's flagship be an unending nightmare, you ask? Just trust us, if you get a job on this ship, you're not going to live long or prosper

...

Read more here:

<http://www.grunge.com/49325/living-enterprise-absolutely-suck/>

could cause grave injury or death if they malfunction.

So Nvidia, which makes the GPUs used in many machine learning supercomputers, designed a robot simulator—a virtual sandbox for AI-powered bots to play around in and allow engineers to monitor and test their behavior to make sure they won't go dangerously on the fritz. Unveiled at Nvidia's GTC developers conference here on Wednesday, the Isaac robot simulator is essentially a video game. It's based on Epic Games's **Unreal Engine**, the software suite that studios use to design everything from first-person shooters to architectural visualizations.

...

Read more here:

<https://www.pcmag.com/news/353598/nvidia-built-a-video-game-to-test-robots?>

On the other hand, Barcelona's "Star Trek/Wars" themed hotel might just be what the doctor ordered... Following are some pics sent by our intrepid travelling reader Gary Roth – thanks, GR! Try the Barceló Saints Hotel's "Orbital" room, or the "Orbital Suite":



"Sups" on:

Colonizing Mars could spark new kind of super human species

[ARIS FOLLEY, AOL.COM Jun 8th 2017](#)

The human species has significantly evolved during the last two centuries. Our population on Earth has exploded from about one billion to **over seven billion people**. And we've even changed physically as more humans are taller now than ever before.

But despite all of the natural changes the human species has undergone here on earth, a bigger change looms -- one that's light years away, literally.

Some of the biggest names in science and technology have been calling for the colonization of Mars, including visionaries like

No room on Earth? Rent on Mars:

Musk Outlines Aggressive Plan to Build a City on Mars


[BY DANIEL STARKEY JUNE.16.2017](#)

Last year SpaceX CEO Elon Musk briefly touched on a plan that he thought could lead to human colonization of Mars. It was... stunning to say the least. His plan required thousands of launches using the largest rockets ever built. But now Musk has published the outline for the project in the academic journal New Space.

The paper doesn't reveal too much new. But the mission proposal may well be the most ambitious thing people have ever done. Most of the heavy lifting will be done with an array of SpaceX Raptor rockets. These are still under development, but each will be three times burlier than the Merlin engines that drive

<p>SpaceX CEO Elon Musk and physicist Stephen Hawking. They agree that populating other planets could ensure the survival of the human race when the Earth is rendered uninhabitable by a disaster.</p> <p>...</p> <p>Read more here: https://www.aol.com/article/news/2017/06/08/colonizing-mars-could-spark-new-kind-of-super-human-species/22121906/</p>	<p>Musk's current line of Falcons. If constructed as outlined, the booster for the Interplanetary Transport System (the main spacecraft) would be the most rocket ever constructed by almost an order of magnitude, dwarfing even NASA's stunning Space Launch System.</p> <p>...</p> <p>Read more here: https://www.geek.com/culture/musk-outlines-aggressive-plan-to-build-a-city-on-mars-1703691/?</p>
<p><i>Holy Robots!!!</i></p> <p>This App-Powered Robot Priest Will Forgive Your Trespasses BY LEE MATHEWS JUNE.21.2017</p> <p>Take heed, wretched sinners... One day in the not-too-distant future a robot may indeed show you that the path to Robot Heaven lies in the Good Book 3.0!</p> <p>Over in Germany, members of a Protestant church have built a bot they call BlessU-2 to commemorate the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. It can deliver blessings in five different languages (English, French, German, Spanish, and Polish) and recite verses from The Bible.</p> <p>...</p> <p>Read more here: https://www.geek.com/tech/this-app-powered-robot-priest-will-forgive-your-trespasses-1704371/?</p>	<p>She's not very funny – but that's not her job...</p> <p>Watch: Japan's impressive robots that are learning how to carry out our daily tasks BY BECCA NOY June 26, 2017</p> <p>By 2020, Japan plans to have more robots performing daily tasks than anywhere else in the world.</p> <p>Meet Erica- Japan's robot that is a great receptionist.</p> <p>...</p> <p>Read, see, and hear more here: http://www.jerusalemonline.com/high-tech/watch-japans-robot-industry-is-booming-29353?</p>

**** Our special series on the Holocaust and SF will continue in an upcoming issue ****

NEXT UP:  From our "True North Strong and Free" friends in Montreal: With permission from the author, originally published on the MONSFFA site: <http://www.monsffa.ca/?p=5056> – we give you:

MUNICIPAL FANTASY

Adventures in literary taxonomy - On defining a new subgenre
BY: DANNY SICHEL JUNE 16, 2017

Some years back, I attended a panel on urban fantasy at ConCept. The panelists discussed the urban aspect, and they discussed the fantasy aspect, and when they were finished, there were still ten minutes left on the schedule. And they said, well, it looks like we've discussed both components implied by the name, I guess we can leave early!

And I realized... no, there's a third component. There's urban, and there's fantasy... and then there's the space between them. An enforced separation between the modern world – the urban environment – and the magic.¹ They've developed separately over the years

¹ At this point, you might say "well, wait, that's not always the case, I can think of works of urban fantasy where that definition doesn't apply"; that's the whole point of this essay. I'm arguing that although such works *may have been* called 'urban fantasy', they *should* not be.

(which is typically shown as leading to a certain degree of stagnation in the magic). The magic is hidden from the science and technology, and so it does not advance while they do.

This is what characterizes – or has characterized – the vast majority of works of urban fantasy over the years: the Masquerade, the Veil, the Cover-up, the Blindness. Magic exists, in the background, but the general population has no idea. The good guys lie, and erase memories, and their biggest danger is the general public finding out that they exist. When there's an epic battle between good and evil, the forces of good also have to ensure that it's wiped from the record. There is magic, and there are muggles; they know about us, but we don't know about them. They may benefit from our progress, but we remain forever unaware.

But what if this weren't so?

In the early 18th century, Girolamo Saccheri revolutionized mathematics by taking one of the fundamental axioms of geometry, and examining what would be implied by its opposite.² What happens if we apply that principle to urban fantasy? What if the supernatural magical paranormal fantastical elements, and modern society... are NOT forcibly separated?

Let's start by examining the justifications for the separation. One common excuse is that people would panic. As per Agent K, we're "dumb, panicky, dangerous animals and you know it." But panic doesn't last. We very quickly accept massive changes in the world as "the new normal". That's why the phrase "new normal" exists.

And we're *clever* monkeys, we are; when we know that something is real, we adapt. And we begin to use it. We exploit it. We make allowances for it. We take it apart to see how it works, and we tinker with it to see what else we can make it do. As per Phil Foglio (who was paraphrasing a line

misattributed to Larry Niven, which was itself an inversion of Arthur C. Clarke), "any sufficiently analyzed magic is indistinguishable from technology".

Another rationalization is that humanity is too dangerous for the supernatural: magical creatures would be harmed, hunted down, enslaved, exterminated. And, granted, when you look at human history, that's not so difficult to believe. But in general, we're past the age of the pogrom. If you're an intelligent race living secretly among modern humanity, you know how to hire lawyers and PR firms. You can lobby for legislation.

If we undo those justifications... if we assume their opposite... we get fantasy where magic has *openly* come back into the modern world, or been revealed *to the general public* to have been here all along. Or, alternately, magic has openly been around long enough that an equivalent to our modern technological society has developed. And, perhaps most importantly, that magic is an *issue of public policy*.

I propose that this subgenre be called: **"MUNICIPAL FANTASY"**.

"What's the difference between 'municipal' and 'urban'?" you might be wondering. "Don't they mean essentially the same thing?" And in a way, they do, but synonyms are never exact. They both refer to cities... but 'urban' is a general *feeling*, an *environment*, a *mood*. 'Municipal', conversely, implies more of a *system*, with regulations and public services. 'Urban wildlife' is raccoons eating your garbage and 'urban legends' are just stories you heard about from a friend of a friend of a friend. But "municipal wildlife" feels like the

² Yes, I'm aware that 'revolutionizing mathematics' was not at all what Saccheri had intended, that he was so horrified by his results, that he denied them, and that consequently they went largely ignored for another 150 years. That's not the point.

raccoons are only eating the garbage because it's their job, and "municipal legends" feels like the story won't be told outside city limits.

So, now that we've begun to establish what municipal fantasy *is*, let's see if we can refine our definition. A good way to start is by examining pre-existing works and assessing whether or not this new label applies to them. At this point, I'd like to remind you that ultimately taxonomy is arbitrary, and that literary taxonomy is even more so: it's tough to use a dichotomous key when there's no physical entity!

Joss Whedon's "Buffy the Vampire Slayer": When Buffy goes out to kill vampires, all she needs is a stake. The world in general has no idea what she's doing, or that vampires exist. Urban fantasy.

Laurell Hamilton's "Anita Blake": When Anita goes out to kill vampires, she needs a warrant. And instead of avoiding the police, she has to coordinate with them. Municipal fantasy.

Jim Butcher's "Harry Dresden": openly a wizard, but most people have never heard of him and nobody believes this is real. Urban fantasy.

Mike Carey's "Felix Castor": openly a freelance exorcist, and the existence of ghosts and demons became undeniable by the general public at some point about the year 2000 – no one's quite sure when, but Parliament has started debating what to do about zombies. Municipal.

Sean McGuire's "October 'Toby' Daye": she's a private investigator who's magically transformed into a koi and abandoned in a pond for 17 years (not a spoiler; it happens in the prologue to the first novel). When she's rescued, her life is ruined, because even when she goes back to her husband and daughter, she can't tell them that there's any such thing as magic. Urban.

Ben Aaronovich's "Rivers of London" and Paul Cornell's "Shadow Police" are both about the branches of British law enforcement that deal with magical things, and in both cases there's a substantial bureaucracy, but in both cases it's secret to the general public. Same in Harry Potter with the secret Ministry of Magic, and the hidden departments in Mur Lafferty's "Shambling Guides". All urban.

Charlene Harris's True Blood novels: vampires have "come out of the coffin", and now there's arguments over their legal rights. Municipal.

Mercedes Lackey's SERRATED Edge: elves are driving race cars and rescuing abused children, but elvishness is secret. Urban.

Holly Lisle's "Devil's Point" books, where God announces publicly that demons will be allowed to take physical form within the borders of North Carolina, and land surveyors use this to settle disputes about where precisely the borders of North Carolina are (if the demon takes three steps to the left, it is forcibly reincorporated; therefore, the border is *two* steps to the left), and even if individual demons try to pass as human, that demons *exist* is now a known and publicly accepted fact. Municipal.

And then there's Ilona Andrews' "Kate Daniels" series, and Wen Spencer's "Tinker", and Andrew Swann's "Dragons of the Cuyahoga", and Geoff Landis's short "Elemental", and the Shadowrun RPG and associated novels.... all municipal.

A particularly intriguing phenomenon happens when a series *starts* as urban fantasy, and then transitions into municipal. This happens in Jim Hines' "Magic Ex Libris", for instance – in the first book "Libriomancer". Here, magic is a tightly-kept secret and the general public has no idea, but by the time they hit book 4, "Revisionary", they've blown the

masquerade to bits and have to deal with the consequences that they can no longer hide. This is also what happens in Charlie Stross's "Laundry" novels: as CASE NIGHTMARE GREEN progresses, and the stars are right, eventually, the incidents become too big and too involved, and there are too many witnesses... and too much stuff gets uploaded to the Internet. And you can't mindwipe everyone who has access to Twitter and YouTube. Carrie Vaughan's "Kitty Norville" series *begins* with Kitty revealing magic to the world.

What all these works I've cited thus far have in common is that they're municipal fantasy of the first type: set in our world (or what was, until recently, our world), with magic. The second type is, as I've already mentioned, a world where magic has been around from the very beginning – and yet, people haven't let it stop them from developing technology.

This does raise the question, though, of what counts as "equivalent to our modern society"? What about Felix Gilman's Ararat, China Miéville's Bas-Lag, Graydon Saunders's Commonweal, Poul Anderson's "Operation Chaos", Randall Garrett's "Lord Darcy", Dave van Domelen's "Academy of Superheroes"? What do we need for a setting to be recognizably modern? Bureaucracy? Mass production? Labor unions? Printing? Telecommunications? Evidence-based medicine? Peer-reviewed journals? Fiat currency? Representative government? Do any of Steven Brust's "Dragaera" novels fit the description? What about Terry Pratchett's "Discworld"? Melissa Scott's "Five Twelfths of Heaven"? Alter S. Reiss's "Recalled to Service"? The term "gaslamp fantasy" has been used to describe mid-to-late-19th-century-equivalent societies with magic (certainly Susanna Clarke's "Jonathan Strange and Mister Norrell" would be better described as "gaslamp" than "municipal", for one... although it rather antedates the gaslamp era!); where does 'gaslamp' end and "municipal" begin? And what counts as "magic", anyway? And how much detail do you need?

All these are questions for other essays, and perhaps other essayists.

Which works of municipal fantasy do you think I've omitted?

Bibliography for this essay. Sort of.

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

For Comments: E-mail: leybl_botwinik@yahoo.com. Tel: Leybl Botwinik 054-537-7729
 Editor: Leybl Botwinik. Founding Editor: Aharon Sheer (ל"ר). Logo by: Miriam Ben-Loulu (ל"ר).
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