

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

המועדון הקריאה יעסוק בספרו של דיוויד ברין, "אנשי הכבשן" (מודן, 2004). מנחה: רונית פוקס ביום חמישי, 30.12, בשעה 19:30. הקישור יתפרסם בדף האירוע בפייסבוק.

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:

- New series: Yiddish SF&F 101* – Part 1
- Update and yearly wrap-up from Israel's Space Agency "SpaceIL"
- Our usual, interesting tidbits from various websites.
- Your editor, Leybl Botwinik

**A new SF online Magazine in Hebrew was
launched in September 2020 called "Speculation
Magazine" or in Hebrew: "ספקולציה"**

https://speculation-magazine.com/?fbclid=IwAR0RdMYyOOktf04yJuhY_YMNyS5tAyNDTUrcyGYlqqsjs3B90GxsV7tTkSw

From our Readers:

Leybl - thanks for sending the latest CC issue - great material and fun reading ! I wonder why you termed the Dan Brown "Deception Point" book non-SF -- it sounds like there are some SF elements to it. I hope that you or someone else will be able to expound more details at some point in the future, please. Thank you also for the various science/"real" space news items.

Gary

Thanks for your feedback, Gary.

Dan Brown's book is a mystery-suspense, and could just as well have been about uncovering some ancient artifact and the effect the discovery could have on some political situation.

This story, however, is heavily based on the possible existence of ETs, as well as a deep look at the machinations (and budgetary squanders) of NASA. That was the 'SF angle' (or relationship).

For those who like a good thriller, plus lots of 'Science' (space, chemistry, and even marine biology) - it reads well and is thoroughly enjoyable.

There was one loose end that never reached a climax - which would be good for a follow-up story. I don't know if Brown wrote one or is planning one.

Leybl

Good day, Leybl. Before I get onto more work on the next issue of *Askance*, which should be finished over this coming Christmas weekend, here is a short letter of comment on the latest issue of *CyberCozen*.

Our science fiction world has lost two giants in the field recently. First it was Ben Bova, who passed away last week at the age of 88, and yesterday James Gunn died at the age of 97. I consider myself very fortunate to have spent time with both of these wonderful gentlemen. I first met them way back in the mid-70s at science fiction conventions, then saw them repeatedly over the years at even more conventions.

I enjoyed many fun and informative conversations with Bova over the years, mostly at Minicons in Minneapolis, but also elsewhere. Both were extremely knowledgeable about their craft, and I took part in Gunn's Symposium on Teaching Science Fiction at LoneStarCon III, the world SF convention in San Antonio, Texas. They will be greatly missed.

I may have to read *Deception Point* by Dan Brown. He is not exactly what many consider a member of the science fiction writing genre, but Brown does tell very entertaining stories: I have read both *The Da Vinci Code* and *Angels and Demons*, and they move right along at a brisk pace. The man does his research and blends the information very well into the storyline. It probably won't be too long when I should be able to find a copy of the new book at our local Half-Price Bookstore when I finally get over there.

Like a good boy, I have been keeping a low profile for the past nine months and shall continue to do so. Now that there are two Covid-19 vaccines being distributed in America, perhaps by late spring people can start getting out and about more often, but I suspect it will be more likely late summer or autumn before things return to "normal," or something that resembles normalcy.

Take care, and thank you again for the zine.

All the best,

John

Thanks for your comments John.

I'm sorry to hear about James Gunn. I'll make a note in the next issue.

You wrote "Gunn's Symposium on Teaching Science Fiction" - that goes to show the greatness of the man. Teaching is not just a profession, but more of a calling, and I believe very strongly in the teaching of SF because SF literature has a lot to teach us. Take care of yourself!

Yiddish SF&F 101* – Part 1

(*) The "<topic> 101" classification, for those not familiar with it, designates a beginners or intro course. See https://allthetropes.fandom.com/wiki/Subject_101

A brief look at some Yiddish Speculative, Science, and Fantasy Fiction of the last century or so.

– Leybl Botwinik

The material presented here is partly based on "*Yiddish, SF, & the Ashkenazic Tradition*". This was the topic of a lecture I presented back in 1997, to Aharon Sheer's now defunct Rehovot Science Fiction Club (whose flagship fanzine was *CyberCozen*!). The original material was updated in 2006, and I've since come across a lot of new material that I'm happy to share with you.

In addition, this being January – my birth month – I will be holding a series of Sunday ZOOM readings (with audience participation) of my recent award-winning Yiddish short story "Fli, Flaterl, Fli", that is a children's SF story about a visitor from beyond. The sessions will be held for Yiddish speakers, with translations in English or Hebrew, depending on the session – beginning Sunday January 10, 2021.

1) Introduction

Although I will be covering and delving deeper into both Yiddish SF and Yiddish Fantasy writing, this presentation will concentrate mostly on Yiddish SF literature – it being a virtually unexplored world (actually covering multiple worlds). In fact, when I say "SF", I mean to touch on both "Speculative Fiction" and "Science Fiction" – and whereas the "Science" oriented Yiddish literature has had even rarer coverage, as far as we know.

It may come as a surprise to many, that there exists an SF genre at all in Yiddish. Those that are familiar with Yiddish folklore and literature, however, will see this as just a natural extension of the Ashkenazic tradition of Fantasy story telling. This tradition may also be why there are so many Jewish SF writers. Let just two names remind us of that tradition: *The Golem* and *The Dybbuk* (but more about them, later).

This article will cover several sub-topics:

- A quick overview of the Ashkenazic Fantasy tradition which is the natural forerunner to SF in Yiddish
- A more in-depth study of Yiddish and SF

- Samplings of my own works
- Here and there, some interesting related tid-bits

However, before we begin **the first part** of our journey of Yiddish tall tales and mystical legends, I would like to make a short tangential leap to the side, and introduce an ever-present problem: the **definition** of Fantasy and Science Fiction. Clearly, the problem is deciding where to draw the line between Fantasy and Science Fiction. I beg your indulgence, as I refer to several scenes and stories, which you are probably familiar with. It will later become clear to you, as to how they relate to our topic:

- **Example #1: Time travel:** Is Twain's "A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's court" SF? For that matter, is the Rip Van Winkle story SF? Twain, for example, utilizes much satire and humour in his story, but he also introduces Science, Technology, and Innovation into his story of England in the Dark Ages.
- **Example #2: Flight and Space Flight:** Is Jules Verne's "From the Earth to the Moon" SF? It was, once. Today, to fly out into Space is Science Fact – and we do it better.
- **Example #3: Same story, different setting:** Compare the Western movie "High Noon" to the SF movie "Outland", starring Sean Connery as a Sheriff with a Laser-gun on a mining planet... is this SF? More recently, *Star Wars* was called out as a fancy adventure story of yore, just dressed up with fancy costumes and some strange ETs and robots. Even more recently, the *Star Wars* offshoot "The Mandalorian" is considered a high-tech 'Western' genre, as was the "Serenity" SF series.
- **Example #4:** Is B.F. Skinner's utopia in "Walden Two"- SF? - Are other Utopia stories SF too? Shangri-La & El Dorado?
- **Example #5:** Is Jonathan Swift's "Gulliver's Travels" SF? We find here the equivalent of Computers, Brain grafts, and the Evolution of Man and Beast.

Of course, there are many more such examples. Sometimes, the SF aspect of a story is quite subtle. Sometimes it is very clear.

Well, let's just consider the above, as food for thought, or maybe the cocktails, before the main courses...

2) SF and the Ashkenazic Tradition

Let's begin this part with a brief and obviously non-exhaustive look at the Ashkenazic tradition of **Fantasies, Legends, Mysticism**, etc. as a natural stepping stone for Yiddish SF. Of course, we should start at the very beginning, predating Ashkenazic history, -- in fact all of history.

One of the major sources of fantastic stories is, of course, the Bible. As we know, it has often inspired many a modern SF story, including, Yiddish SF stories.

Several examples, which come to mind, that are worthy of further discussion, aren't exactly within

the scope of this article. However, for the sake of completion, they should be mentioned:

- Miracles of Nature performed by the Almighty, including, of course, the Creation. Is Eve, for example, a kind of clone of Adam?
- Angels and Demons -- Are these Extra-terrestrials in the service of God?
- How SF-ish are the stories of Noah's Arc & the Tower of Babel - Technological and Engineering feats; Was the destruction of Sodom & Gomorrah some form of atomic Fusion or Fission? How was Elijah the Prophet transported away, and how does he teleport unto this very day? Where did the 10 lost tribes disappear to?

As Jews traveled from country to country -- in Good times and Bad, -- both personal experience and local folktales and legends of many peoples and cultures enriched the Jewish folklore repertoire. Thus, Jews picked up stories of Giants, Wizards, Witches, and magical kingdoms, mostly from the European folklore, but also some from the Middle and Far East.

We also find, among the Jewish folk legends and stories, tales familiar to non-Jews, but often retold and remodeled with Jewish values, or with a Jewish perspective. -- In any case, distanced as much as is possible from the original Pagan or Christian concepts. An example of this is the tall tale, a love story, "Briyo ve-Zimro"¹. Written approximately in the 1580, it takes place in some sort of parallel world where a Kingdom of Israel with Jerusalem as its capital has dealings with the Vatican in one of the scenes.

Obviously, with such rich sources of fantastic, miraculous, mystical figures and scenes, we will undoubtedly see the development of a deeply entrenched fantasy folklore, -- and eventually literature -- among the Jews in general, and later amongst the Ashkenazic Jews in particular.

The greatest number of magical and mystical stories, however, is specifically of Jewish content. If we could look at the many stories from an SF-perspective, we might have such a breakdown:

- **Flight/Space-Travel/Teleportation:** 1) The space-spanning miracles performed by Hassidic Rabbis: They can defy gravity and make their horse-drawn carriages fly; They can travel cross-country almost instantaneously; 2) There is a lot of 'space travel' in "Briyo ve-Zimro" -- at least as far as reaching and returning from Heaven is concerned.

¹ I did a 20-page study of this story for one of my Master's courses at Bar Ilan University, but haven't published it yet, and it's in Yiddish. I'll translate it one day... see also:

<https://www.encyclopedia.com/religion/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/briyo-ve-zimro>

- **Time-Travel:** Not only can the mystical Hassidic Rabbis get to where they are going in record-time, but they have been known to even stop time (not to mention Joshua's stopping the Sun in the Bible²);

The mystic Eliyahu Hanovi (Elijah the Prophet), Sore Bas Toyvim [an actual woman who lived in the 18th century, who was transformed by the great Yiddish writer, YL Perets into a semi-magical, almost 'fairy-godmother' in a Cinderella-like story he wrote], or the time-travelling Ahasfer who we'll meet up with later – and others who are ageless, or age slowly as they leap from century to century;

- **Telepathy & Foresight:** Many of these now legendary rabbis could 'read your thoughts' and predict future occurrences. There is many a story of their prescience – and it's said about certain Rabbis today too.

- **And more ...**

In the Ashkenazic tradition, reflected in the Yiddish and to some degree the early Hebrew literature, we also have two quite 'famous' stories or themes, which have influenced the Fantasy and SF world again and again. These are stories of possession and outer-body experiences, and giving 'Life' to an inanimate object. The first is, of course – from the Hebraic term "DYBBUK" which means that an extra-bodily spirit or energy has entered and possibly possessed someone's body. We have, for example the famous Yiddish movie "*Der Dybbuk*"³ from the play by Sh. Anski – interestingly enough, the other name it's known as "*Tsvishn 2 veltn*" – "*Between 2 Worlds*" says a lot too. This might be in

As we can see, there is a wealth of material in the Jewish folklore basket for a good writer to use as a source of Fantasy and Science Fiction. In the Ashkenazic tradition, in the Yiddish folklore and literature, there abound a multitude of stories and legends of mystic and supernatural forces, non-terrestrial creatures, etc...

We'll take a break now, and begin our discussion of Yiddish SF (Science fiction as well as Speculative Fiction) specifically in Part 2 – next time.

Leybl Botwinik is an award-winning SF&F Yiddish writer, songwriter, translator, and lecturer (BS in Computers-ConcordiaU, Montreal, and MA in Yiddish Lit-Bar IlanU, Israel) – and world expert on Yiddish animated films. He is also editor, since 2014, of Israel's longest running (since 1987) English language SF fanzine, *CyberCozen*.

Fun from the Web:

- **The UAE's 1st Mars probe will reach the Red Planet on Feb. 9**
<https://www.space.com/uae-mars-hope-mission-halfway-to-red-planet>
- **FROM CRISIS TO FLASHPOINT: CELEBRATING 80 YEARS OF THE FLASH**
<https://www.syfy.com/syfywire/from-crisis-to-flashpoint-celebrating-80-years-of-the-flash>

² <https://biblehub.com/joshua/10-13.htm>

³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Dybbuk **The classic film with subtitles:**
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tjv7O9sA1TQ>

the realm of mysticism and black magic, but again, at what point do we draw the line? Have we not seen numerous cases of SF stories/movies where people become 'possessed', either by ET aliens, or by humans with enhanced mind powers?

The second case, the story of the "GOLEM of Prague" was said to have inspired Mary Shelley's Frankenstein story. The Golem story is a sort of reverse of "*Der Dybbuk*": an inanimate statue brought to life in Prague in the 1600's to protect the Jewish community against anti-Semitic actions. However, the Golem lacks a soul and cannot be controlled -- a theme seen again and again in classical and modern SF with computers or robots running amok. Even the Golem story has several versions⁴.

By the way, -- it shouldn't happen to you, -- but if you ever get stuck with a Dybbuk problem, you might be able to solve it by creating a Golem, and transferring the unwanted, second spirit into the soulless Golem... Then again, that might be even more dangerous....

In any case, both of the stories deal with the use and misuse (or mismanagement, to be more precise) of mystic forces, specifically called up using rites of the Kabala. Now the Kabala is a study of powers better left untouched. I am no student of the Kabala, but I understand, that some of that study is based on numerology and astrology. How close or far then, is the mystic Numerology from the logic of Mathematics? Can we predict things mathematically? In the science of Statistics and Probabilities, we try to, don't we? Isn't that also one of the premises of Jewish SF master Isaac Asimov's epic "**Foundation**" series?

⁴ See this animation, translated from Yiddish into several languages:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N8gCIvFg11I&t=227s>

- **MEET THE ELECTRIC VEHICLE THAT DOESN'T NEED CHARGING AND DROVE RIGHT OUT OF BLADE RUNNER**
<https://www.syfy.com/syfywire/aptera-never-charge-solar-electric-vehicle>
- **COMICS WIRE: MARVEL BRINGS 'ALIEN' BACK TO LIFE**
<https://www.syfy.com/syfywire/comics-wire-marvel-alien-back-dc-multiverse-holiday-special>
- **INVESTIGATE A HARD-BOILED TYRELL CORPORATION MYSTERY IN FIRST LOOK AT 'BLADE RUNNER ORIGINS'**
<https://www.syfy.com/syfywire/blade-runner-origins-preview-titan-comics>
- **LEGACIES, RETURNS, AND FACING THE MUSIC: 19 SEQUELS THAT FANS WAITED A LONG, LONG TIME FOR**
<https://www.syfy.com/syfywire/long-awaited-sequels-tron-legacy>
- **WIRE BUZZ: MATRIX DOCUMENTARY TRAILER; BERLANTI, THE CW EYEING SPACE SERIES; BETA RAY BILL COMIC**
<https://www.syfy.com/syfywire/wire-buzz-glitch-in-the-matrix-doc-berlanti-disasters-beta-ray-bill>
- **Watch the 'Seven Minutes of Terror' Awaiting NASA's Perseverance on Its Martian Descent**
<https://gizmodo.com/watch-the-seven-minutes-of-terror-awaiting-nasas-perseverance-1845940371>
- **The Pop Culture Highlights and Lowlights of 2020**
<https://io9.gizmodo.com/the-pop-culture-highlights-and-lowlights-of-2020-1845894571>

FROM SpaceIL:

**** English version follows the Hebrew ****

שותפים יקרים, תלמידים, אנשי חינוך, ידידי העמותה, לקראת סופה של שנת 2020, אנחנו נרגשים לצאת ביחד איתכם למסע החדש שלנו, ולהשיק רשמית את בראשית2.

תודה לכל 500,000 הצופים שליוו אותנו בצורה מקוונת באירועי ההכרזה בתחילת החודש.

אירוע ההכרזה שודר מבית הנשיא במעמד הנשיא ראובן (רובי) ריבלין, שר המדע והטכנולוגיה יזהר שי, מנכ"ל עמותת SpaceIL שמעון שריד, מנכ"ל התעשייה האווירית, בועז לוי, מנכ"לית משרד המדע והטכנולוגיה, שי - לי שפיגלמן ומייסדי העמותה, כפיר דמרי ויריב בן.

האירוע סוקר על ידי גופי מדיה שונים בארץ, מצורפות מספר כתבות לדוגמא:

[לכתבה ב-Ynet](#)

[לכתבה במעריב](#)

[לכתבה של N12](#)

העשייה ההנדסית הולכת יד ביד עם העשייה החינוכית של העמותה ובמהלך הטקס לקחו חלק בני נוער, תלמידים וסטודנטים לצד מתנדבי העמותה במוקדי חינוך ברחבי הארץ: ירושלים, באר שבע, גבעתיים, ירכא ואשדוד, משם נאמה מלי מרטון, מתנדבת העמותה אשר הייתה ממקימי המערך החינוכי של SpaceIL.

המשימה עתידה להיות משוגרת בשנת 2024 ובמסגרתה תשוגר לירח חללית המורכבת ממערך של 3 חלליות - מקפת אחת ושתי נחתות שצפויות לבצע נחיתה באתרים שונים על הירח לצורך ביצוע ניסויים מדעיים. במקביל, החללית המקפת מיועדת להקיף את הירח לאורך מספר שנים ולבצע ניסויים מדעיים בשיתוף ילדים, סטודנטים ומדענים מרחבי העולם. [ליחצו כאן](#) כדי לצפות בסרטון הסבר על המשימה.
המשימה של בראשית2 התגבשה לאחר מחשבות ולקחים בעקבות משימת בראשית1. אם טרם צפיתם בסרטון המסכם של עשר שנים להיווסדות העמותה וסיכום המשימה של בראשית1, [מוזמנים להיכנס ללינק לצפייה](#).

בנוסף, המשימה תהיה בשיתוף פעולה בינלאומי עם מדינות נוספות ותאפשר לילדים וילדות בכל העולם לקחת חלק. רוצים לעזור לנו לקדם את המשימה ההנדסית והחינוכית שלנו? [היכנסו לאתר שלנו לתרומה לעמותה](#).

מובן שבמקביל העשייה החינוכית שלנו נמשכת! רוצים שנגיע גם אליכם להרצאה? [היכנסו לקישור](#) ואחד מהמרצים המתנדבים שלנו יצור אתכם קשר.

מאחלים לכם שנה אזרחית טובה ומקווים ששנת 2021 תהיה שנה מלאה בהגשמת חלומות!

כפיר דמרי וצוות Spacell

Dear Partners, Students, Educators, and Colleagues,

As 2020 draws to a close, we are excited to embark upon a new journey and officially launch Beresheet2.

We want to thank the 500,000 viewers who accompanied us online for the announcement events earlier this month.

The announcement ceremony was broadcast from the President's residence and attended by the President of Israel Reuven (Ruby) Rivlin, the Minister of Science and Technology Yizhar Shai, the CEO of Spacell Shimon Sarid, the CEO of IAI Boaz Levy, the Director-General of the Ministry of Science and Technology Shai-Lee Spiegelman and the Spacell's co-founders Kfir Damari and Yariv Bash.

The event was covered by several media entities in Israel and worldwide. Read the article in [The New York Times](#) and [Ynet](#).

The engineering of the spacecraft goes hand in hand with Spacell's educational endeavors. To that end, elementary school, high school, and university students took part in the ceremony along with the association's volunteers in educational centers around the country: Jerusalem, Be'er Sheva, Givatayim, Yarca, and Ashdod. Mali Marton, who co-established our educational department, represented Spacell's amazing volunteers and spoke about the work we are doing with children and young adults all around the country.

The mission will be launched in 2024 and it is planned to include 3 spacecrafts: an Orbiter and two Landers. The Landers will deploy to different sites on the moon in order to conduct scientific experiments. The Orbiter is intended to circle the moon for several years and conduct experiments in collaboration with children, students, and scientists from around the world. [Press here](#) to watch the explanatory video of the mission.

The mission of Beresheet2 was developed after a lot of consideration and conclusions drawn from Beresheet1. If you have yet to watch the video that portrays the last ten years since the founding of Spacell and the summary of the mission of Beresheet1, we invite you to watch it at [this link](#).

The Beresheet2 mission is going to be an international collaboration with different countries allowing children from all over the world to participate. Do you want to help us promote our engineering and educational missions, visit [our website and make a donation](#).

As always, our educational efforts continue alongside our mission. Do you also want to hear a lecture on Beresheet? [Click on the link](#) and one of our volunteer lecturers will contact you.

We wish you a Happy New Year and hope that 2021 will be filled with dreams that come true!

Kfir Damari and Spacell team

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

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Also (archived issues from 2014+) at: <http://fanac.org/fanzines/CyberCozen/>

And <http://efanzines.com/CyberCozen/index.htm>

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