

חדשות האגודה – מרץ 2024 The Israeli Society for Science Fiction and Fantasy

תל אביב: מועדון מרץ יעסוק בספרו זוכה פרס גפן של גארת ניקס "מוכרי הספרים השמאליים של לונדון". ויתקיים ביום חמישי 28.3, בשעה 19:30, בדירה בת"א. לקבלת המיקום יש להירשם במייל של דפנה קירש. בדף האירוע בפייסבוק.

<https://www.facebook.com/events/1041913523811981>

ירושלים: מועדון מרץ יעסוק בספרם של ד"ר תמר עילם-גינדין ומעיין אשכולי "המלכה". המועדון יתקיים ביום חמישי 28.3 בשעה 20:00, בדירה בירושלים. לקבלת המיקום יש להרשם בפתייל האוכל באירוע הפייסבוק. המועדון מוגבל ל-20 משתתפים. לפרטים על המפגשים של המועדון הקריאה ניתן להצטרף לקבוצת הפייסבוק:

<https://www.facebook.com/events/690079196174998>

או ליצור קשר במייל עם מרכזת המועדון בירושלים - **גלי אחיטוב**, ולהצטרף לקבוצת הוואטסאפ של המועדון.

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:

- Special Wartime Issue (#6): Some thoughts
- Book Review: Doomsday Book (1992) – by Connie Willis
- Film Review: Pod Generation (2023)

Our usual tidbits from the Web – NEXT TIME (sorry).

– Your editor, Leybl Botwinik

Special Wartime Issue #06

Dear Readers:

Almost 160 days have passed since the terrible events of October 7th (2023) when Hamas terrorists invaded the southern communities of Israel and carried out inhumane atrocities. There are 134 hostages still being held by them – and the World is not silent – No! They are blaming Israel for all the pain and suffering in the region...

Just a few weeks ago – while researching an entirely different issue (the Yiddish song "*Dona, Dona*"), I came upon a very interesting article about a Yiddish theatre piece written 90 years ago, in 1934 about a dystopian future for Mankind (and the Jewish people).

The article, by Debra Caplan, covers her 2019 translation of a 1934 Yiddish comedy theatre piece written in Warsaw: "*Di yidishe melukhe, oder, vaytsman der tsveyter*" (The Jewish country, or, Weizman the Second), by the poet and author, Aaron Zeitlin.

It was written as a satire of the times: Hitler was an up-and-coming European leader who wanted to destroy the Jews (he wrote "*Mein Kampf*" in 1925). Zeitlin's piece has Hitler organize all the leaders of the world in countries where Jews lived – for this 1934 version of the 'final solution' to the Jewish 'problem':

"The order is made: every Jew in the world is to be expelled to British Mandate Palestine, which has been jointly purchased by the global ambassadors so every country in the world can rid themselves of Jews forever. No country will engage with the Jewish land, Hitler promises. There will be no embassies, no trade partnerships, just isolation. "Us without them. Them without us," agree the ambassadors."

The article covers the play, and the notion – as Zeitlin portrays it in the piece – that the world cannot survive unless it has someone to blame for its many problems. Since the Jewish people have always been the most 'popular' scapegoats, it is eventually decided to bring the Jews back into the fold – and then everyone will be 'happy' (even the Jews, up to a point) ...

Interestingly enough, Charlie Chaplin is roped in with the Jews and exiled together with them, even though he insists that he is not Jewish. This satirical piece actually predates by 6 years, Charlie Chaplin's own 1940 satire of Hitler and the Nazis in "*The Great Dictator*"! (I wonder if Chaplin knew that he was a prominent figure in Zeitlin's Yiddish play...)



Charlie Chaplin in "*The Great Dictator*"

Of course, both satirical works (by Zeitlin in Yiddish and Chaplin in English) failed to predict the enormity of the destruction that Hitler and his tens of millions of henchmen and allies across Europe would inflict on the Jewish people and on the world.

While Science Fiction writers – or in their case, producers of fanciful fiction – may not be able to predict the future, their warnings should be heeded. We must never take lightly the claims of Hamas to "... repeat the October 7 massacre again and again", or to ignore their official charter to destroy Israel and kill Jews. Nor should we ignore the Holocaust denying Iranian regime – who is feverishly working to produce nuclear weapons – and other Muslim leaders who call for the destruction of Israel and America. These are not idle threats. It's too bad most of the leaders of the Free World do not believe what these terror regimes and their proxies say – and do.

Some people never learn ...

- See full article here: <https://web.uwm.edu/yiddish-stage/dystopia-on-the-verge-or-why-a-1934-yiddish-play-about-charlie-chaplin-still-matters>
- Chaplin's 1940 movie: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Great_Dictator
- The original 1934 play can be found in this Yiddish collection of Zeitlin's dramas: <https://archive.org/details/nybc200294/page/n8>

Letter from a reader:

Dear Mr. Botwinik:

It's been a while since I've written, but you and your fellow Israeli citizens have been in my thoughts as the Israel-Hamas War continues. I can hardly believe that it's been 100 days. Thank you for helping to ensure that people outside the country don't forget the horrors of war or the moral responsibility to oppose aggressions like those that catalyzed the conflict. I hope that you and your family and friends are relatively safe — and that the war ends soon. I shall continue to read the news that reaches the United States with you in mind — and in my heart.

Emanuel Lottem's article "*How 'Zion's Fiction' Was Born*" was an excellent retelling of the origin of the two anthologies edited by Lottem and Sheldon Teitelbaum. I've added the two books to my Amazon Wish List and plan to eventually buy and read the ebook editions. I was sorry to read that sales haven't been brisk, and I hope that the editors eventually publish a third anthology, thereby qualifying for a Hugo Award. "As for a third volume, inshallah," Lottem wrote. "If we do it, we will concentrate on those rare stories that deal in some way with the political and military exigencies of Israeli existence." That would only be appropriate given current events.

Your television and movie reviews offered interesting recommendations and commentary. While I've yet to see *Star Trek: Picard* or *Jules*, I've enjoyed *Foundation* so far. Your friend is correct: "The books were great," he said. "The series as well—but there isn't much in common between the two..." I also agree with your suggestion that, while Isaac Asimov's writing might not have been adapted note for note, many of the ideas remain. While at the recent *Doctor Who* convention Gallifrey One, I learned about *Picard* taking place in Los Angeles. I shall have to eventually watch the show!

Yet I'm curious: Are there any Israeli sf programs or movies of which people living elsewhere should be aware?

Putting it on a tight beam,
Heath Row

Thanks for your words of support. It's not an easy time in Israel – or for Jews worldwide, for that matter. But we've survived worse 😊.

As for Israeli SF TV/film, I'm not too familiar. I can only assume that there are some good and even excellent productions. Nothing, however, that I can point to specifically.

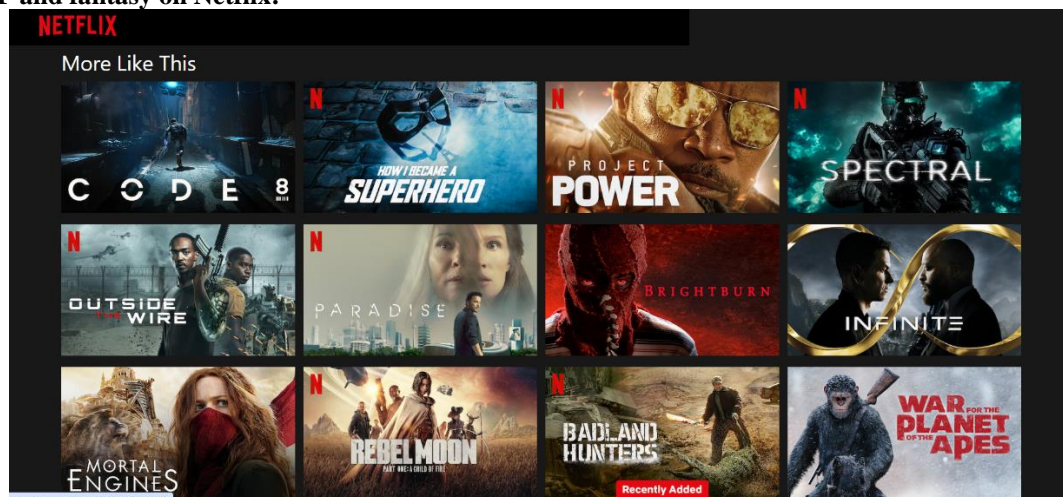
However, I searched IMDB (<https://www.imdb.com/search/title/?genres=fantasy&sort=year,desc&countries=IL>). This brought up many shorts – assuming student works from the various film schools in Israel. Also 1.5-hour long films.

On a side note, some of the film names are not exact translations. For example, #19: "Peaches and Cream": the original Hebrew says "katsefet veduvdevanim" ("קצפת ודובדבנים") – whose literal translation is "Whipped Cream and Cherries". They do that a lot in Israel 😊.

More about Israeli sf films:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:Israeli_science_fiction_films

Recent SF and fantasy on Netflix:



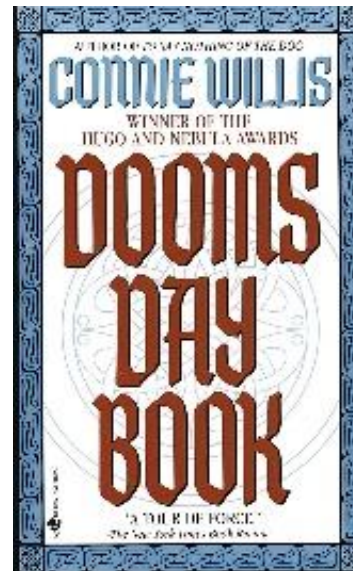
Doomsday Book (1992) – by Connie Willis

Reviewed by: **Leybl Botwinik**

I had never heard of Connie Willis before, but when I discovered that she is both a 11-time Hugo and a 7-time Nebula winner, and that the book I had in hand – “*Doomsday Book*” – was about time travelling historians, then I was immediately roped in.

After (and throughout) reading it though, I have mixed feelings about this one.

The 578-page 1992 novel is one of a series about Oxford time-traveling historians from, more or less, a few years ahead of our present time. In this one, a young female historian, Kivrin, is trained to travel to a period of English history, just prior to the Black Death (* bubonic plague pandemic occurring in Europe from 1346 to 1353). Unfortunately, a series of mishaps at the time-travel central, sends her to the brink of the epidemic, as a similar epidemic take place in our time – thus cutting her off from returning, as was planned.



Willis' story runs two timelines (and the relevant characters) simultaneously:

- 1) Kivrin's story, the unfortunate and unexpected circumstances of her situation (and what she encounters) – and her attempts to make it back to the pick-up point so she can return to her original time and space (she was only going to be there for a few weeks).
- 2) The story of the Oxford university Time-travelling central and the Chief Historian, Dunworthy, who is doing his all to discover where (when) Kivrin disappeared to, in order to get her back. This, while dealing with a sudden pandemic happening in modern day England that is hampering his efforts to fix the time glitch problem called a 'slippage'.

For Kivrin's period in the book, Willis takes the time and puts a great deal of effort to present us a detailed and thorough experience of what life was like in Christian England of the late 1340s. This is a serious expose of life in that period, including a very detailed presentation on the religious experience of the time.

In parallel with and in contrast to Kivrin's serious dilemma, dangers, and tribulations depicting the difficult life there and then, the modern world of the Oxford time-travelers is depicted as a humorous, often satirical, hodgepodge of entertaining intrigues, political machinations, etc.

The contrast is astounding. On the one hand, Williams has Kivrin, seriously fighting to survive in the past in one of the worst periods of English history. On the other hand, an almost tongue-in-cheek portrayal of Dunworthy who must deal with and overcome numerous, nonsensical individuals, bureaucracy, etc. as he does his utmost to fix the problem that got Kivrin lost in time in the first place.

It almost feels like two books in one. And it's quite long and at times tedious.

Personally, I'm not sure why the book has such rave reviews and received its Hugo and Nebula rewards. It is well written – no dispute about that. However, apart from the entertaining SF scenes that take place in modern Oxford with Dunworthy, Kivrin's experiences reads mostly like a history/anthropology/sociology/theology lesson.

I much prefer storylines where a modern person disrupts or abstains from disrupting history, like in Mark Twain's “*Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*”. See also, for example, my review of Orson Scott Card's “*Pastwatch: The Redemption of Christopher Columbus*” in the **May 2018 issue of CyberCozen**.

For more on the Willis' novel: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Doomsday_Book_\(novel\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Doomsday_Book_(novel))

From the office of the editor:

So, I seem to be on a kind'a losing streak vis-à-vis reviews this month:

1 - I wouldn't have given a Hugo to Willis for her "Doomsday Book" ...

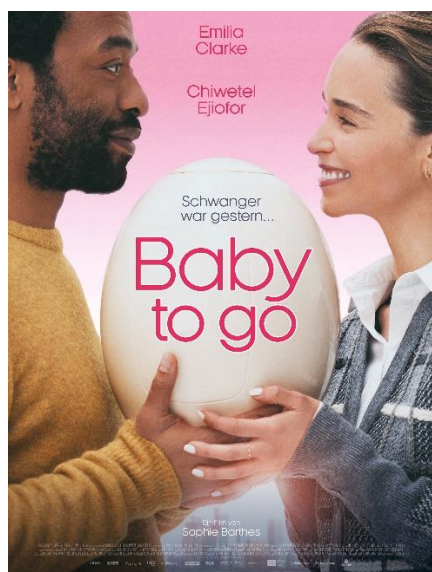
2 - ... the following movie has poor reviews (e.g. IMDB 5/10) but I liked it (would have given it at least a 7)

Movie Review: Pod Generation (2023)

Reviewed by: Leybl Botwinik

The story is about what's going to possibly happen in the near future: more and more women will opt for having invitro babies (not a new concept) and grow them outside of their bodies – something like what we once called 'test-tube babies' (*Also the name of a 'scandalous' 1948 film – see pic below) – but not just to 'start up' the process, but to take it all the way to birth.

In this film, the solution for busy women: an egg-shaped hard plastic 'pod' that contains all the required nutrients and monitoring technology for a parent to transport it around – without actually having it inside the female body. And of course, the partner (male or other female) – or anyone, for that matter – can babysit the pod, carry it around to work or on a trip, etc.



The Pod Generation
(2023 – foreign movie poster)



Test Tube Babies
(1948 adult only movie)

The movie is not spectacularly funny or 'insane'. There may be a certain amount of wokeism in the plot, and plenty of sharing of the baby experience by the male partner. Chiwetel Ejiofor who plays the father does a good job, in my mind (to the point where he seems to care more for the fetus than the 'mother' does) ...

Also, I wouldn't have chosen Emilia Clarke to play the mother, though she did a fair job. I did expect more intrigue, and more could have been done with the plot: someone stealing the pod; taking the wrong pod home after work; etc.; or something like a couple (not the main characters) deciding to grow a family of 7 pods at once; Someone complaining that they wanted a boy and not a girl and trying to return their pod with the fetus in it ... any number of more 'charged' moments. This film is very laid back...

All in all, though, I found the movie an enjoyable pastime.

* Test Tube Babies (1948 movie) https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0046416/plotsummary/?ref=tt_ov_pl

The Pod Generation (2023 movie): <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt15768848/>

Fun from the Web – NEXT TIME

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