

# newsletter



The Bulletin of The Irish Science Fiction Association

February/March 1982.

Welcome again to the Newsletter. This issue features that most controversial subject - your Top Ten Films, along with a discussion of Isaac Asimov's SF / Mystery novels and short stories, and the Good Doctor is himself the subject of the Outline as well.

On the Short Story Competition front, you'll be pleased to note that we've extended the closing date to 1st March. This is to allow for any late entries (Due to our beloved Post Office or otherwise!)

Library news: From 1st December, 1981, the fees for taking a book from the ISFA library have been increased by 100%! However, that's the first increase since about 1978 and only brings the charge up to 20p per book.

A few members have asked about Artwork in the Newsletter. With this in mind I've decided to put in a couple of small illustrations which, I hope, will add to the appeal of the Newsletter. So if there are any budding artists out there who want their name in print (this issue's art was done by Michael Fitzgerald) let me have the fruits of your labour before the end of March. Please make them small however - ideally 1/4 of an A4 page.

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## Recent Meetings:

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Although not quite a meeting, a group of film fans from the Association decided to go to "Heavy Metal" in early January. The reports from other members had mostly been favourable and we went there expecting a good film. This was what we got, and the general consensus from the Comic buffs that were present was that the Art was, on the whole, quite good. Unfortunately the film has now finished it's run in Dublin, but hopefully we may get it soon for our Video Club.

January: This meeting, which was the best attended for a couple of months, featured a talk on "Philosophy and Science Fiction" by Joe Kennedy. While this, at first glance, might seem pretty heavy the talk was quite the opposite and drew some fascinating conclusions. There was a short Question and Answer session afterwards. For those members who were unable to make it to the meeting, we will be printing the text of the talk in the next Newsletter. Finally, one of the visitors at this meeting had a slight accident when he cut his hand on a piece of glass. It required fourteen stitches and so I'm sure you'll join with the committee in wishing the person involved all the best. (Incidentally, the injured person was an artist but thankfully the injury was to his non-drawing hand!)

Upcoming Meetings:

February & March: The Book Auction planned for this meeting has been deferred until the March meeting. This is because we hope to have James White to give a talk at the March Meeting and he's promised to bring some books. However, before you make plans, please note that it is not certain that James will be coming in March. It all depends on the results of an eye operation due to take place in late February and I'm sure you'll join with the committee in wishing him a speedy recovery. Therefore, as of this moment we have nothing arranged for the February meeting but we hope that we may have a film, at the very least.

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## COMMENTS

In reply to Sean May's review of "Excalibur", I recieved the following letter:

Dear Mr. May,

I am writing to you in connection with your review of "Excalibur". I believe you missed the point of the film. The film is about Arthur and Excalibur but it is mainly about Merlin.

1. Arthur's voice was accurate for the period. I also feel that he gave a brilliant performance.
2. The whole film hinges on Merlin - if he fails the film fails. Boorman tried to get across the mystery, the sadness and the Pathos of the character.

I agree on some points: Helen Mirren was brilliant and Camelot looked lousy.

Yours, slightly annoyed,

Michael Fitzgerald.

Following a talk I had with Michael last month, he kindly gave me his thoughts on what SF is:

Science Fiction is old, you wouldn't believe how old. Didn't Daedalus and Icarus fly through the air long before Superman? Didn't Cyrano de Bregerac voyage to the Moon and the Sun in interplanetary vehicles? Then in the 19th Century two men came along - Jules Verne and Herbert George Wells. These two brought Science Fiction to the attention of the general reading public. Then came the golden age of the pulps and the emergence of the authors we all love and hate.

But what is Science Fiction? This has been a constant source of argument between writers and fans alike; at the December meeting alone, it was the indirect cause of an interesting and intellectually stimulating paper airplane fight, during which our beloved Brendan Ryder, esquire became the centre of Trekkie victimisation and comments such as "lousy commies" were hurled from side to side. (And they have the nerve to say that SF is dull! - ed.)

Now that we are over the background let us plunge into my definition of Science Fiction.

"A part of literature which relates to real people and emotions, which attempts to predict the future of mankind, the dangers, problems and the races we might encounter." You may or may not think this is a pretty comprehensive definition of SF, but SF is something more. At the risk of preaching to you I say this: we all have an imagination - some are more aware of it than others. Science Fiction stimulates this imagination and reflects this awareness.

I think at this point of the article I should say - if this does see print, aim all comments and paper airplanes at me, after all I wrote it. (Private note to Mr. Fitzgerald: It's good to be the editor!)

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Onto those fascinating votes for the Top Ten SF films of all time. The voting, while not great, was quite good with a wide range of ages and professions represented. I think it's a fair judge of what the ISFA thinks of the various attempts to produce a good SF film and I swear I didn't fiddle the results!

1. "2001, A Space Odyssey"
2. "Alien"
3. "King Kong" (1936 version)
4. "Silent Running"
5. "Close Encounters Of The Third Kind"
6. "Dark Star"
7. "Star Wars"
8. "Forbidden Planet"
9. "The Empire Strikes Back"
10. "Superman"

The voting itself was very close for the top three films and one vote either way could have swung it. It's also interesting to note the amount of films produced in the last ten years that have reached the Top Ten - the effects advances must have a lot to do with this.

As this poll has produced such interesting results, we've decided to run another on the Top Five SF novels. There's no hurry with the votes - get them to me in time for the August / September Newsletter (that is, of course, assuming you re-elect me as Secretary in May!)

Due to a shortage of space, the NEWS column will have to be held over till next n/l.

## *Outline* → Isaac Asimov

Isaac Asimov was born in Russia in 1920. shortly afterwards his parents emigrated to the United States where his father bought a small candy store in New York, and it was here that Asimov was to get his first taste of SF - reading 'forbidden' material from the magazine stand. (When his father found out and questioned him on it, Asimov pointed to the word 'science' in the title of "Astounding Science Fiction" magazine and said that it was teaching him science. His father, not speaking English too well, believed him!)

As with most SF fans, Asimov had an urge to write. His first attempts were in the back of school copybooks and it wasn't until his father bought him a battered typewriter that he really started to think seriously of writing. He sold his first story in 1939 and from then on became one of those many authors that John W. Campbell coaxed along. It was Campbell who sowed the seed for those two things Asimov will no doubt be remembered for - his "Foundation" series and his "Three Laws Of Robotics", as Asimov freely admits. Asimov has now written many SF books and he has won the coveted Hugo and Nebula awards many times, most recently for his novel, "The Gods Themselves" in which he introduces aliens for one of the few times in his stories. He has recently finished an autobiography which comes in two parts 1920 - 1954, and 1954 - 1978. Each book is in the region of 700 pages long and so you can see that Asimov is quite a person! If I was to attempt to cover him in any detail I'd need "Stargate", not the Newsletter!

This article will discuss the novels "The Caves Of Steel" and "The Naked Sun" along with the short story collection "Asimov's Mysteries".

When Isaac Asimov sets out to do something, he usually ends up doing it. So it was when he overheard someone say that no-one had ever written a Science Fiction mystery before, and so he set out to do one. The result is a very entertaining book called "The Caves Of Steel". The basic story involves a detective (Lije Baley) on the trail of the murderer of a Spacer who was also a specialist in Robotics. Asimov sets up his world thus: there are two sections of Humanity; one has stayed on Earth in a massive domed city (which we later find out to be the remnants of New York), the other section has gone to colonise Space. There is tension between the two sections and so the murder of a member of the Spacers will obviously be bad for relations. One of the reasons given for the Spacers shunning contact with earthmen is the many diseases present in the city, but the dislike probably goes deeper. Another factor is the higher technological achievements of the Spacers - one of the main characters in the book is a Robot (R. Daneel Olivaw) who is an assistant to Baley (this was requested by the Spacers, presumably to guarantee truthful results.)

The City is portrayed in some detail by Asimov - at various times during the book we get to travel on an ingenious transport system (The Strips), we get to eat in a Communal, and most importantly, we get to learn about the people. In a city as large as Asimov's, a very treasured item is privacy and the amount you get depends on your job. There is a system of grading called "Status" - it determines whether you get a seat on a crowded train or not, a decent meal, and good accommodation.

In 1957, Asimov wrote a sequel: "The Naked Sun" in which Baley again has to solve a murder, this time on Solaria, the home world of the Spacers. This novel is interesting in that it lets us see the effect wide open spaces have on a true 'city dweller' - it's a really severe form of agrophobia.

Throughout the two novels Asimov develops the relationship between the robot Olivaw and Baley. But when they meet first, Baley is, as most Earth people are, afraid of the robot. The robot gains his trust by quelling a crowd disturbance - he grabs a gun and threatens to shoot the first person to make trouble. This is in contradiction to the First Law Of Robotics, of course, and we start to wonder if the Solarians really are the monsters men make

them out to be. However, the trouble stops and when questioned about it, Olivaw says that he wouldn't have fired. Baley is not too sure, but as the novel goes on the robot gains his trust. Baley's fear of open spaces is inherent in another Asimov detective - Wendall Urth. He features in "Asimov's Mysteries" and is a classic 'Mad Professor' type, not leaving his apartment except under the most unusual circumstances. His usual price for solving a case is some item of value and rarity - he features in the stories "The Singing Bell" and "The Talking Stone" and his fee is one of the objects of the title. He features also in the story "The Key".

The other stories in the collection are mostly one offs, except for "Marooned Off Vesta" which has a sequel "Anniversary", both present in the book. Of the rest of the stories, my favourite is the rather corny but funny "Pate de Foie Gras" which is about a goose which lays golden eggs. It seems that the goose recieved a dose of radiation when an atomic bomb was exploded nearby (those were the days of continuous atomic bomb tests - the effects of radiation were not known.) In an effort to get rid of the heavy metals present in his system, the goose transmutes them to gold and lays eggs covered by a very thin layer of gold!

How good are Asimov's SF mysteries, then? Well, if we are to go by an unbiased observer (say, Asimov himself) we get: "The Caves Of Steel is a completely fair murder mystery, a thoroughgoing Science Fiction story, and an example of the perfect fusion of the two". I would finish by saying that the novels are entertaining and contain some excellent SF ideas, and the short stories are witty and, on the whole, enjoyable.

Article by: Brendan Ryder  
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## REVIEWS

"The Many -Coloured Land" -  
Julian May (Pan, 1982, £1.75,  
U.K., 410 pages.)

"Unique - Spellbinding -will eventually rival "Lord Of The Rings", "The Lensman series" and "The Foundation Trilogy". It says that, too, on the book. These are severe overstatements, unfair to everybody, particularly to younger readers. They do not have the background to see that such inflation is unnecessary, and that "...the Rings", "Lensman" and "Foundation" earned their status the hard way. High pressure can sell books. It cannot buy genuine merit. Or so I believe, foolish though I may be.

I would not dare to suggest that Pan do not know what they



are doing. I think Julian May does. His 1951 "Dune Roller" may ring a bell or two with our readers. If so, it places the first Channel buoy for them.

Naturally I do feel that I am a normal, balanced, fair-minded, almost 'well read' person, as hooked on the drug as most SF buffs are. This one is not SF, nor Sword And Sorcery, but it is in the grey zones' in between. The word I would use is Fantasy.

This tale begins in A.D. 2110, in the Post Intervention Milieu, to which the human race has (riskily) been admitted in advance of the full sociopolitical maturity necessary for membership. 'Why' is a mite unclear. The establishments of the Milieu, I think, feel we humans are unstable, but too dangerous to remain unsupervised. We in the "Black North" know well that conclusion. It makes us very irascible with the "El Stupidos" of Establishments. By 2140 or so, many of the human species began to feel 'restricted'. About 2034 Professor Theo Guderian, in France, demonstrated the timeportal device. It rapidly became clear that this was only a scientific curiosity, definitely only one way usable, a dead - end. However, Professor Guderian had gone further than anyone else in the galaxy in producing this device, so the specialists in many skills began to come to see it in action, and kept coming. One day, in the same fashion, school parties will be going to Polomar, and to other sites of scientific curiosity. Thus a practical use for 'the dingus' emerged.

It became an escape door for those who became 'restricted'. So began "The Road To Exile" and "The Saga Of The Exiles". They left, at first a trickle. Those wishing to use 'the door' came from on and off planet, and a varied and curious lot they were. They passed through into the one past era open to them, the Pliocene of Western Europe, six million years into

the past. No taxes, budgets, oil crises, general elections or whatever. No dinosaurs, either, and no establishments or restrictions.

The Door keeper was Guderians' widow. At first she had to pay the bills and needed the money. Then she was forced to use a set of severe screening criteria, and passers back went through only in groups of eight. In this yarn we follow the fortunes of one such group, Group Green. We watch the group assemble themselves, make preparations, learn to do basic cooperations, choose their equipment and enter the portal, some in very exotic dress, and each for their own reasons. They all have 'hang ups'. Naturally, things are not as expected. (Are they ever?) "The others" were there before humanity, the Tanu and the Firvulag had been there a long time. They were psionics, they were refugees from (another?) galaxy, they had regressed. They were mutually hostile. They fought, once yearly. They had a hymn; would you believe? - "the Londonderry Air"! They also used, (on humans) a torc, such as we have in the National Museum. Because of these aliens WE still celebrate May Day and Hallowe'en. There are traces of their presence in ten or so European folklores, or so Julian May will have us to believe.

The Pliocene of the Rhone and the Rhine of today is fairly well painted. I recall one well done backdrop of a fungus belt in the Schwartswald. What the author does to river Rhone is logical, but it may surprise some readers. What you make of Group Green is up to you. What a militant feminist in Greek Hopilate outfit, a Nun, a retired Palaeontologist, an ex-starship captain (cashiered), the widow of the professor and a love sick swain (who in 1932 would have joined the Foreign Legion) and the others will do to your concepts of psychology, I'll never know. The yarn's the thing. This one got me to suspend judgement,

enjoy a relaxing read, and I now await the issue of the sequel "The Golden Torc". If you want more, read it yourself! You could find it quite enjoyable. I did.

Reviewed by: Joe Nolan  
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"Cosmos" has now become the yardstick by which future science documentaries or attempts-to-explain-science-to-the-people will be measured. There are many reasons for the show's phenomenal success - it's excellent special effects, Carl Sagan's knowledge and interesting commentary, presentation and entertainment value. And it's music. Without fear of appearing smug or biased I think I can safely say that the selections of music used in the show were a contributory factor to the show's success. The staggering amount of mail praising the show and especially it's background music is proof of this. In no other television show has music been used so skilfully than in "Cosmos". Until recently, the only music available from the show was the Main Title (Heaven And Hell) and Alpha, both tracks by Vangelis and just out on a single. Well, now I am proud to report that there is an L.P. out, entitled, appropriately enough, "The Music Of Cosmos". This features some of the music used in the series - it would take several L.P.'s to have all of the music! - and all of the tracks are first class. It is divided up into sections; for example on Side One there is a section entitled Space/Time Continuum and this part contains three tracks - Heaven And Hell, Alpha, (Vangelis), and Shostakovich's Symphony Number 11 (or rather an extract from it). After the first section there is another one, subtitled Life. In this section you have Vivaldi's "The Four Seasons", and an electronic /synthesized piece by Tomita: The "Sea Named Solaris", to

name but two. Still on Side One, the last section is "The Harmony Of Nature" and this contains just one track, a beautiful piece of violin music from Bach's Partita Number 3 In D Minor for unaccompanied violin.

On Side Two then there are three more sections - Exploration, Cataclysm And Catastrophy, and Affirmation. Of this side, the best tracks are the "Russian Easter Festival Overture", Stravinsky's "the Rite Of Spring" and another, very poignant piece by Vangelis - "Entends-tu les chiens aboyer?" (Which is the French for "Can you hear the dogs barking?") The record is rather pricey (£6.99) but for this you get a feast of information on the music used in the series as well as a very colourful cover and inner sleeve. "Cosmos" though is an excellent record from start to finish; inside we are told that it is dedicated to "The Musicians Of Earth" - I cannot think of a finer tribute.

Reviewed by: Sean May.  
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"Roadmarks" - Roger Zelazny. (Orbit, about £2.11).

"Roadmarks" is a kind of time travel story which incorporates alternative history. It concerns the adventures of Red Dorakeen on the road and his attempts to avoid a band of assassins who persue him. This book marks a return to Zelazny best. it is very interesting and the idea of a road travelling through time and alternative histories is very well presented and totally believable although it is not fully realised in this novel.

My only real complaint about the book is Red Dorakeen. He is the usual standard character for a Zelazny book and by now the charcter is just a bit boring. I think a fresh approach to his main characters is required by Zelazny.

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"Roadmarks" is an excellent book and well worth reading and as a Zelazny devotee I look forward to future books and maybe a sequel to "Roadmarks".

Reviewed by: Michael Fitzgerald  
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"God Emperor Of Dune" - Frank Herbert (New English Library)

This book, as you might have guessed from the title, is the sequel to the 'Dune' trilogy. It shows us the planet Arrakis 3,000 years in the future and Leto is still alive. The boy twin, son of Paul Muad'dib, has become a monster something like a small sandworm. The real sandworms which were such an essential feature of Dune / Arrakis have all disappeared, along with the desert. The other character who survives from the old Dune days is Duncan Idaho. Leto has the Tleidku supply him with an endless series of Duncan Idaho clones simply because he likes their company. When they do attempt to kill him he simply orders another one. Leto's philosophy as expounded throughout the book in the epigraphs to the chapters is mostly incomprehensible but this is to be expected in a creature who is revered as a god throughout the inhabited galaxy. Leto is surrounded by characters who, apart from Duncan Idaho, lack the stature of the characters in the first three books of the series. Leto is so much larger than life that he dwarfs the merely human characters who are his temporary contemporaries except, again, for Duncan Idaho who has achieved a sort of immortality comparable to Leto's. This book, then, with two main characters and a host of lesser ones, is by no means as good as the

three novels it follows. This is the fate of nearly all sequels but the book is disappointing nonetheless. The planet Arrakis has changed beyond all recognition and there is only one artificially maintained desert, Leto's 'Soreen'. The proud Fremens we knew have become Leto's 'Museum Firemen', their degenerate descendants. It is as though Frank Herbert having destroyed the planet we knew also destroys the dramatic possibilities of what is left. It actually rains on Arrakis where before all was arid desert.

Read 'God Emperor Of Dune' by all means, if only to find out what happened to Leto and his planet, but be prepared for a disappointment. It is a good book but it suffers by comparison to the three books that precede.

Reviewed by: Mary Gallagher  
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(Editor's note: In one of the recent issues of Starburst magazine it was reported that Frank Herbert has been offered \$1,500,000 for a fifth Dune novel. As a friend of mine remarked: "That's one offer he can't turn dune!")



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