

newsletter

The Bulletin of The Irish Science Fiction Association



August/September 1980

To quote Mr Mog Edwards - very small news this month. The midsummer(!) holiday exodus has left the meetings rather sparsely attended, and the feedback from the members has died away almost to a trickle.

We got a letter from Graham Andrews - the winner of this year's Aisling Gheal prize - in which he extended an open invitation to all ISFA members to visit the Belfast group. They meet in the Blackthorn Bar off Donegal Square. Some of us might well get up there at some stage over the next few months. If any member is interested in going, they could give their name / telephone no to the Secretary or any committee member.

With the letter, Graham sent me a list of addresses of SF bookshops which he has found useful. The selection in the Alchemist's Head should keep most people happy, but there are those who might like to note these addresses. They can be useful for the large 2nd hand sections, and for the absolutely latest American editions.

Andromeda Bookshop,
57 Summer Row,
Birmingham B31JJ
England.

Forbidden Planet,
23 Denmark St.,
London WC2 8NN.
England.

Pandora's Books Ltd,
Box 1298,
Altona, Manitoba R0G 0B4,
Canada.

and, for those who are interested in rare
(as opposed to 2nd hand)
Fantasy Centre,
157 Holloway Road,
London N7 8LX,
England.

MEETINGS

The June meeting had Frank Roche talking on Science Fiction and Socialism. I haven't got a report of the meeting, but from what I've heard, Frank spoke on those writers who, in their attempts to show a culture and society more in tune with their own social beliefs, availed of the opportunity offered by Science Fiction to present worlds separated from our own either by time or space. The talk, which was remarkably detailed, led to interesting questions and answers afterwards.

The July meeting was a book fair. It appears that at least one dealer turned up expecting to find thousands of SF books on offer. He didn't stay long.

The sale wasn't bad at all, considering both the small attendance and the amount of books on offer. Over £20 was raised, which brings me to another matter

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*                MEMBERSHIP DUES                *
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*                PAY UP                          *
*                NOW!!                          *
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*****
WE NEED THE MONEY.
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The record for the evening was an E. E. (Doc) Smith which was sold no less than three times. John McCartney was eventually stuck with it.

Wanted

The following books are WANTED. The price obviously depends on the buyer and seller - don't write to me.

The Iron Heel (Jack London)	Frank Roche
The Scarlet Plague (Jack London)	Niall Nolan
ANY Analogues	Paddy O'Connell - 973810 after 7 p.m.
A Mirror for Observers (Edgar Pangbourne)	John McCarthy
Star Conquerers	" "
The Stars Around Us (Hoskins)	" "
8 Keys to Eden (Mark Clifton)	" "

October the First is too Late

Fred Hoyle Penguin - 95p. + the usuals

This book is a 1980 reprint of a novel first released in 1966. Why this event took place at the earlier date is simply inexplicable; the reasons for its current release will remain forever a mystery.

What is the book about? For reasons explained at the end of the book, a sudden striking change overtakes the Earth: England is in 1966, the U.S. in 1750, Russia is in a post-nova state, Greece in 425 B.C., and so on. Travel from one location to another is perfectly easy to accomplish with suitable vehicles. Much of the book is involved with excruciatingly dull explorations of the various eras by a Nobel prizewinner and his pianist buddy. These two spend far too much time talking to one another, so that the reader should know what is going on, in the unlikely event that he should care. The characters themselves are indistinguishable, aside from the most obvious clues: one of them is the first-person narrator, and plays the piano. There are a few obviously grafted-on, yet entirely futile attempts to have one of them think or feel something vaguely ungermaine to the continuous flood of uninteresting background information that nearly overwhelms an infinitely patient reader, until the long-awaited final page. The only relief available short of heaving the tome against the wall are a half-dozen or so unconscious dangling modifiers and some truly breathtaking creative punctuation - wrought, one fears, by the typesetters rather than by the author.

Is the book entertaining? No! Worth buying? No! Would I recommend it to the hostages in Iran, who are by now no doubt bored silly by back issues of the Congressional Record? Well....no.

John McCarthy

INTERWORLD

Isidore Haiblum

Penguin £1.15 + punt/pound + literacy tax.

Isidore's first language, we are assured by the blurb, was Yiddish. This probably explains his rather charming use of English.

He has here attempted to write a science fiction novel after the style of Raymond Chandler - whose first language was not alone English - it was British English!

Isidore does not succeed in his simple aim. Not alone is the style but a poor imitation of Chandler's, the science fiction is no great shakes either.

The basic plot, for what it's worth, is of a private detective called Dunjer who loses a valuable commodity placed in his charge, and his attempts to get it back. The story moves swiftly through spurious rest homes/hospitals, apartment blocks, office blocks, and then, with the author probably getting as confused as I was, into "other dimensions".

Behind the detective yarn there lurks someone who speaks in capital letters. This being is apparently the central person in the story. It is probably my own fault that I am still not quite sure who/what he/she/it is. Some person in the back page blurb has the temerity to compare the author to the great

Zelazny. The nerve!

I conclude by saying that the book will be in the library, so that if anyone feels that this review is unnecessarily harsh, they may not alone say so - they can, if they wish, back up their views with points garnered from the actual text - they may READ the thing.

I won't - ever again.

Eoin C. Bairread.

The Demon of Scattery.

Poul Anderson & Mildred Downey Broxton.

with artwork by Alicia Austin.

Acc - \$4.95 (about 24.50 over here!!!!!!).

I don't know who Mildred Downey Broxton is, but she is no mean writer. Herself and Poul Anderson have combined in this, a grand story. The Scattery of the title is indeed the island on the Shannon.

The book isn't really Science Fiction; nor is it fantasy. It's a good old fashioned romance. Boy meets girl - boy loses girl - boy gets girl again. I could have wept for joy at the last bit. The only novel part is the fact that, due to his being a Viking who knew no better, boy lost girl because he done did a bad thing to her. However, when she realised that his heart was in the right place, SHE FORGAVE HIM, dear reader.

The little bit of fantasy is in the subplot of the Vikings having an unfortunate encounter with a dragon. The Lough Scattery Monster, or whatever. This was St Sennan's personal monster, and the bould saint riz it up. But the good guys won, and love triumphed over all.

I don't mean to knock it, no really I don't. It's just this urge that comes over me when I read Mills & Boon.

The book is in fact extremely well written. The action moves at a clipping pace, the thread of the narrative is never lost, and one's interest is always kept. That's not a bad recommendation, and, in comparison with some of other books reviewed in this issue - ...

enough said.

The illustrations are extremely well done. It is a pleasant change to have an illustrator who isn't suffering from an oral/anal mother complex, and who can draw as well.

Eoin C. Bairread

DIAPASON

Thomas Sullivan Condor Press - Cheap + VAT

This is a very difficult book to review, in view of its lack of quality, supported by artistic sincerity. It certainly isn't the worst book I've ever read, I'll say that much. The author tried very hard to avoid almost every possible cliché, and I guess he succeeded. However, he has not honed his skills to the point where he can create believably 3-D characterisations or an entertaining and thought-provoking plot. He tries, honest he does. But he tries so hard there is no

spark in his writing. On the other hand, it is neither pretentious nor offensive, as I consider such artistic abominations as Journey by Martha Randall, or Hot Sleep by Oscar Scott Card. In other words, it is memorable neither for its quality nor for its lack thereof. An accurate measure of its readability would be the fact that I bought it new, remaindered at the Banba, for 25p; and that it is only just over a year old. (I should point out that I have never heard of the publishers before, either.)

Potential? Well...no! Sullivan obviously has too much sincerity to become a hack, and not enough skill to become a professional. I rather doubt I'll ever see another of his books in print; but if I do, I'll buy it. But I probably won't read it.

John McCarthy.

VERTIGO

Bob Snaw Pan 95p. (U.K.)

The appeal of Shaw's books lies, I believe, in the nature of his basic presumptions. They are simple yet are shown to have a wide ranging effect on his characters and on the world in general. In The Two Timers it was time travel, in "One Million Tomorrows" immortality, in "Night walk" optical telepathy and in "Other Days, Other Eyes" (his best in my opinion) glass which slowed the passage of light through it.

In "Vertigo", however, if you will pardon the pun, he falls flat on his back. The presumption this time is an anti-gravity harness (where did I hear that before?, you will ask), but that is about as far as the Science Fiction in it goes. The harness is as common as the motor car, and its users follow much the same pattern of use. There are the good flyers, the bad ones and the teenage joyriders. The hero is an air policeman temporarily crippled after a tussle with one of these last. There are some interesting passages on how the world copes with this new type of traffic problem, but the book is mainly taken up with the morbid reflections of the main character. One keeps hoping he will remain in the bedroom to which he so often tends to escape.

I was even less impressed with this novel than with the short story which was its predecessor. Some fans say Shaw keeps getting better. Perhaps as a straight novelist he does, but he has had a tendency in successive works to move away from S.F. towards the straight. In this book he seems to use the S.F. and other situations merely as a vehicle for the deliberations of his characters, and not as an end in themselves. I have always enjoyed the imagery the author brings to simple themes and perhaps I will keep reading him in this vein. But I regard an author who removes the S from the F as being only half a man of letters so to speak.

Tony Browne.

SWORDS AND DEVILRY SWORDS AGAINST DEATH
SWORDS IN THE MIST

Fritz Leiber Mayflower all 93p.

These books are the first three volumes of the author's "Sword" series, in which he describes the adventures of two epic heroes - Prince Fafnir and the Gray Mouser.

They are based on collections of stories originally published in various American S.F. magazines during the 1960's - 1970's, and are now published in book form for the first time.

The author is well known as one of the best writers in the Science Fiction genre of "Swords and Sorcery", of which the leading British representative is Michael Moorcock.

He has been a veteran contributor to Wierd Tales from the 1930's onwards, and has influenced many later writers in the genre. His style is distinguished by a vivid power of evoking strange worlds and scenery, together with a strong vein of humour and dry wit that helps to balance the atmosphere of magic and terror.

Having read most of these stories when they appeared originally in "Fantastic" and "Fantasy & S.F." magazines, I am pleased to note their appearance in paperback, and would strongly recommend them to any ISFA member who enjoys reading in the "Swords and Sorcery" genre.

David Lass M.A. Dip. Lib.

THE FOUNTAINS OF PARADISE
 Arthur C. Clarke Pan.

As his (supposedly) last novel, Arthur Clarke's "The Fountains of Paradise" fails as a supreme last work.

Despite some good reviews, the book is without style or plot. I cannot find the plot, but this is what the blurb says.

F of P is an attempt to describe the construction of a Space Elevator by engineer and main character Vannevar Morgan. The trouble is that the only site available is a mountain in Taprobane, guarded by Buddhist monks.

or so it says. If this is the plot, it's very badly handled, the problem being resolved pretty early in the novel. The rest of the book is formless, plotless material.

The conflict that is supposed to be the root of the novel is weak, unconvincing and powerless.

Characters are very vague unimportant people, none of whom seem to have an integral place in the story. Apart from the shadows, only Morgan's character is seen clearly, and even that is not very well done. No reason is given for his actions, no thoughts of his own are evident. He seems to have a few well known friends who help him out with the elevator - he himself seems to do nothing.

Clarke's style is dull, mechanical prose best suited to descriptions of non-living things. The attempt to add meaning to the plot by introducing a sub plot(?) to mirror Morgan's life in that of an ancient local king fails because there are no parallels whatsoever.

All in all, a disappointment - especially for Clarke fans.

Sean Moraghan.

AMBULANCE SHIP
James White Ballantine \$1.95 + too much.

This book was a pleasure to read, and is another proof (not that one is needed) of the rare combination of imagination and skill which the author routinely employs.

The book in fact consists of three parts; it describes the further adventures of Dr Conway and his beloved companions Murchison and Prilicla. They are attached on a long term basis to the ship of the title, and quickly find themselves roaming the galaxy to the aid of incompletely destroyed spacecraft crews. The aliens involved, and their problems, can only be described as brilliant; without giving away too much I can say that the final adventure adds a whole new dimension to the concept of post-partum depression.

In other action, James handles most insightfully the very real problem of the non-medical part of the ship's crew. The captain, a Monitor Corps Major named Fletcher, is quite realistically resentful of his medical staff's operational authority, yet he restrains himself, and tries very hard to make his command feel and function like a single unit. To his credit, he doesn't seem to regard his post as career-unenhancing (U.S. Navy jargonese) as he could or should. He is clearly a professional, who puts the ship's mission above the more common pursuit of the flag rank. In spite of his disagreements with Conway & Co., he is very much a sympathetic character.

I have only one complaint about the book - it ended! sigh. In spite of this minor drawback (or perhaps not so minor) I highly recommend this book.

John McCarthy.

TWENTY HOUSES OF THE ZODIAC
edited by Maxim Jakubowski NEL £1.37

The editor has collected and translated 20 S.F. stories from 15 different countries, including not only w. Europe, U.K. & U.S.A., but also the U.S.S.R., South America, Japan and Australia. It includes some of the best known authors currently writing, as well as a few up and coming ones.

The same editor has just been appointed Director of Virgin Books, a subsidiary of the record company, which aims to specialise in S.F., Fantasy and the Occult & Supernatural, hence it should be worth following up by ISFA members.

David Lass M.A. Dip Lib

Reviews for the Newsletter are under the direction of the Librarian, and all correspondence - from publishers, reviewers or any other person - should be addressed to him.

NEW BOOKS

Andeson(Poul)	The People of the Wind
Anthony(Piers)	Chaining the Lady
Anthony(Piers)	Kirlian Quest
Antony(Piers)	vicinity Cluster
Bester(Alfred)	Starburst
Bova(Ben)	Kinsman
Dick(Philip)	Dr Futurity
Dick(Philip)	The Simulacra
Dick(Philip)	The Unteleported Man
Dick(Philip)	The Crack in Space
Dick(Philip)	The Man who Japed
Eklund(Gordon)	Binary Star 2
Haining(Peter)	The Future Makers(ed)
Howard(Robert E)	Three Bladed Doom
Hoyle(Fred + Geoff)	The Inferno
Koontz(Dean)	Demon Seed
Leiber(Fritz)	Swords Against Wizardry
Lord(Glenn)	The Book of Robert Howard
Meredith(Richard)	At the Narrow Passage
Meredith(Richard)	Vestiges of Time
Niven(Larry)	A Gift from Earth
Panshin(Alexei + Cory)	Earth Magic
Piper(H. Beam)	Four Day Planet /
	Lone Star Planet(1 book)
Roddenberry Gene	Startrek the Motion Picture
Silverberg(Robert)	To Open the Sky
Stableford(Brian)	wildblood's Empire
Stapleton(Olaf)	Sirius
Stapleton(Olaf)	Star Maker
Takei(George) + Asprin(Rob)	Mirror Friend, Mirror Foe
Wyndham(Jonn)	Jizzle
Wyndhem(Jonn)	The Kraken Wakes

 Meetings: August 31 - Summer Discussion.
 September 26 - The Search for Extra-Terrestrial Life
