

First Contact

The Newsletter of the Irish Science Fiction Association

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We're Moving (again)

Gosh, it seems like it's only been a couple of months since we moved into Brogan's, and we're on the move again. Doesn't time fly? Any rumours that we're doing this so *they* won't find us are completely untrue, and are not to be repeated in public, but you can say it all you like in the new venue. What is it, you say? Well, me hearties, it's none other than Cooper's, on Upper Abbey Street. Wend your merry way along on Tuesday, 5th March at eight (or thereabouts; you know how reliable these things are). If you're very nice, we might even introduce you to Gill Alderman, who'll be along to talk about her new book, her old books, and whatever else people ask her about. So remember :

The place : **Coopers**, Abbey Street (beside the Liffey Street intersection)

The time : 8:00pm, 5th March.

The guest : **Gill Alderman**

The eighth Fibonacci number : **21**

Bob Shaw Dies

Bob Shaw died earlier this month – on 11th February – as a result of a heart attack. Bob last appeared in Ireland at the ISFA's SFEX art exhibition in Bewley's a few years ago. As well as a wonderful novelist – *Who Goes Here* and *The Ragged Astronauts* are two of my favourites – he was well known for his very funny 'serious scientific talks,' which he gave at British and World conventions. We'll have a longer tribute to Bob in next month's issue.

New Doctor Who

We have, it seems, an eighth Doctor Who. Step forward **Paul McGann**, who was previously seen (though not by me) in *The Monocled Mutineer* and *Withnail and I*, is currently in Vancouver shooting the two-hour TV movie (which is, of course, ninety minutes long). He was also in *Alien*³, but we'll forgive him for that. The movie was written by **Matthew Jacobs**, whom you may know though his suitably-weird 1988 film *Paperhouse*.

contd. on page 3...

Editorial

If you weren't at the AGM, where were you? You missed a fun-filled evening, with not nearly as much abuse being hurled as is traditional, but also flying in the face of tradition, we got a new committee who weren't coerced into the job on the night. So I bid a hearty welcome to John Kenny, Dave Murphy, Peter McClean, Bob Neilson and Brendan Ryder. Most of those guys have been on the committee before, so they no what they're letting themselves in for, and on behalf of the entire editorial staff of **First Contact** (which is just me, come to think of it), I wish them every success during the coming year.

Of course, the fact that we have a voluntary committee is no reason to sit back and relax; your ideas and suggestions are, I'm sure, as welcome as ever. I don't really want to waste another editorial on the subject, so I'll just say that if you've got something to say, either say it to the new committee or use the letters page in this noble organ.

But on to other topics. This month sees someone other than I make an observation on the state of SF at the moment. Sydney Venner may be familiar to y'all through his fiction in *Albedo One*, and this month he gives out about the perception among fandom of what exactly constitutes SF. I found it an interesting piece inasmuch as I disagreed with practically every word of the piece. Does this mean I'm one of the old guard? One of the very people about whom he complains? Possibly. However, I'm not going to use this space to attempt to refute his arguments, I'd rather leave that up to you. Of course, if you agree with him, your comments are doubly welcome; I'm always happy to hear an opinion other than my own. The fact that you're reading this means that you're an SF fan, and one with your own opinion on what exactly science fiction is. I'm not talking about anything as trite as the age-old 'definition of SF' debate, but certainly we all know what we consider to be SF, and what we think of definitely outside the genre. Let me know what you think.

Robert Elliott
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Man of Destiny Productions

presents

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I think the haiku in last month's indicia may have given one or two of you the impression that we're going to start publishing poetry. Not a chance. Well, maybe *some* poetry; but only if your poem begins with the words "There once was a man from..." If you do submit one of these, which must be five lines long, you can rest assured that it will (like all the stuff that appears herein) be ©1996 whoever writes it.

First Contact is ©1996 the Irish Science Fiction Association. I suppose I should put "all rights reserved" even though the phrase hasn't had any legal meaning since the Berne convention. Ah.

CopyrightCon. What a weekend that was.

News

New Doctor Who (contd. from page one)

It'll also star **Sylvester McCoy** in a little more than the originally-planned regeneration scene, and we can look forward to the new Doctor facing off against The Master.

Babylon 5 Coming, er, soon

What, you say? No specific date? Nope. Channel Four aren't even telling their own publicity machine until two weeks before air-time, so it looks as if they're planning on doing something big. Maybe even – dare we think it? – showing the programme at a decent hour!

The Wasp Factory – The Movie

Mr. **Iain Banks**, author of *The Wasp Factory*, is reported to be highly pissed at the prospect of his tome being turned into a movie. Apparently, he sold the rights many years ago on the understanding that it be set in Scotland, but when the company to whom he sold it – Strongbow – went bust, they were taken over by Banshee, a company determined to set the movie in America. It may not happen, but it looks as if Banksie may have to grin and bear it.

Movie News

So Who'll Play Miles?

It's been optioned for a while, but it now looks as if plans are afoot to make **Lois McMaster Bujold's** wonderful *The Warrior's Apprentice* into a

movie. It could be cool, but it'll probably be disastrous. Either way, make sure you read the book. It's cool.

Frakes to Direct STVIII

It's been confirmed; **Jonathan Frakes** will direct the eighth *Star Trek* movie. The first film to be wholly without the original crew, it's unlikely that he'll make a movie as bad as *Generations* (not an issue goes by without my getting a dig in somewhere); the TNG and DS9 episodes he directed ranged from pretty good to really cool. By the way, did anyone spot him in *Cybil* the other week? He played **Jonathan Frakes**, and managed to sound like the nerdiest trekkie you know. Now, there's an idea for a competition.

Metropolis : The Remake

I have a vague recollection of reporting this before as a rumour, but it's been confirmed; **Ridley Scott** will be remaking *Metropolis*. I hope someone goes and remakes *Blade Runner* on the bastard.

Saved by the Val

There's hope for the movie of Wells' *Island of Doctor Moreau*, after alleged director **Richard Stanley** walked off the set, reportedly over artistic differences between himself and star **Val Kilmer**. **John Frankenheimer** will take over at the helm. Stanley, you'll remember, was responsible for such atrocities as *Hardware* and *Dust Devil*.

Mars Attacks gets Expensive

However apocryphal the tale of **Roberto Rodriguez** making *El*

Mariachi on \$7,000 (and I have my doubts), there must be a few executives out there who're wishing that helmer Tim Burton would show similar frugality on his latest opus, *Mars Attacks*. The budget currently stands at \$120million. Most of the spondies will be going on computer-generated special effects. Burton is also currently producing *The Corpse Bride*, a film about a man who gets a stiffie.

Say It Ain't So...

I've seen some lousy sequels in my time, but none filled me with dread (okay, except maybe *Robocop 2*) as a rumour I've been hearing a lot lately. John Landis, 'tis whispered, is set to make *The Blues Brothers 2000*. I think I'm gonna barf.

Book News

X-Files Across the Board

In what may be an unprecedented success, this week's best-seller lists contained no fewer than five *X-Files* books, with at least one in each category (paperback fiction & non-fiction, hardback fiction and non-fiction). Interestingly, *The X-Files Book of the Unexplained* made it into the Irish top five of Hardback fiction, despite its non-fiction status.

More Trek Novelists

What is it about appearing in *Star Trek* that makes actors think they can write? So far, we've seen William Shatner, George Takei and Nichelle Nichols from the original series write or co-write novels, and now they're to

be joined by Jonathan Frakes and LeVar Burton. Will they be writing the books themselves? Stranger things have happened.

Other Stuff SF Predicts...

In a move designed to prevent the spread of AIDS and other STDs, the South African has taken the unique step of equipping Johannesburg's cab drivers with a large supply of condoms for distribution to their fares, as well as advice on safe sex. I thought this was interesting in that it's another example of a science fiction movie – in this case, *Total Recall*, predicting modern-day events. You'll recall Arnie climbing into a Johnny cab...

We are Not Alone

I can only quote this one verbatim, from *The Irish Times* of 27th January...
MONTPELLIER – French police and psychiatrists were helping a man with his inquiries after he sought their help in tracing his lost vehicle – a space ship in which he landed on earth 350 years ago. Stephane (27), told police on Wednesday that the vehicle was black, but he had mislaid its registration number. He urgently needed it to return to his own planet, he said.

With the space ship the journey would take just two days, Stephane said, adding he needed to return to his own planet because he had left his guitar there. (AFP)

Hugs to the eagle eye of Pádraig Ó Méalóid.

THE MEMBERS ARE OUT THERE. AREN'T THEY?

It's been a while since we had a really good turnout for monthly meetings of the ISFA. There's no point at this stage trying to decide why. It's a fact. Let's put it in the past and get on with the future.

HOW? Well first off we need the support of the membership. Both existing and potential. Usually the only people who see this journal are paid-up members and strays who wander into the (poorly-attended) meetings. If you're not one of those and have unexpectedly received this through the post, then you are the prime target of this plea.

Please re-join the Association. Next month. At the March meeting.

I can hear you thinking why. Why should I bother? What has the ISFA done for me? What can it do for me?

Fair question. In the past you will have been promised everything from free tee shirts to four magazines a year as part of the package. Unfortunately not all of these promises were kept. One of the on-going bones of contention has been the magazine question. Well, forget it. Magazines, FTL or Phase or whatever it might be titled, will no longer be part of the package. But neither will a charge of £13. As of now the ISFA will provide to members twelve newsletters per year, twelve meetings per year and a ten percent discount for the asking at Dandelion Books. If anything else develops we'll let you know.

But - there had to be one didn't there - given the reduction of our aims, we feel it only right to also reduce our charges. So, with immediate effect, the membership fee will be pegged back to a tenner.

We would hope to make it worth your while to re-join, or merely to show up at meetings. In March we've got resident authors Gill Alderman and Maggie Furey coming along to talk to us. In April we will have a 'Top Ten of SF', hosted by well-known author Michael Scott. Why not come along and tell us what your favourite (SF) things are? And maybe argue for some of your favourites to be included in the overall Ten Best.

Other meetings this year will feature A Table Quiz, a Book Auction, a talk on the Apollo moon shots, another on Newgrange, an Internet evening, Card Games (Magic, Star Wars), more author nights.

Sound good? I think it does. And we've got a really good new room for our meetings in Coopers in Lr Abbey St., near the corner of Liffey St. The consensus of opinion is that it's the best room we've ever had. The downside is that to hold onto the room we need a good turn out at the meetings. To guarantee that we need your support. It's your Association (or it will be when you pay your sub). We'd like to see you next month and every month. Come along and give it a try, whether you've been coming regularly or not over the past year. We hope you'll like it. We'll certainly do our best to give you the opportunity to enjoy yourself.

See you there?

Comics Review

James Bacon

Lobo/Judge Dredd – Psycho Bikers Vs the Mutants from Hell, Grant/Wagner
Two formats : DC Squarebound, \$4.95 & Fleetway Magazine, £2.95

Lobo uses a dimension jump to get to Mega City One in order to kill a mutant who escaped him. He ends up on Dredd's side, shooting down a mutant rebellion.

I really take pity on the Americans who read this or any other DC version of Judge Dredd, because it's shite. John Wagner and Alan Grant do no justice to the two characters they created. The story is boring and simplistic, the two characters make Sindy look more interesting. The artwork is passable, but it's let down badly by the crap story. I'm disappointed, as I have enjoyed many excellent Judge Dredd stories and one or two very good Lobo stories as well, but this comic doesn't come near any of them.

If you want to read a Lobo story, pick up the graphic novel *Lobo* by Bisley & Grant, and if you want a good Dredd story, pick up the monthly *Best of Judge Dredd*, you won't feel so financially raped.

Star Wars – Heir to the Empire, adaptation of Timothy Zahn's novel; Baron/Blatine/Blanchard, Dark Horse, \$2.95

I read Timothy Zahn's novel when it came out, and I was highly impressed by his stuff, now with *Star Wars* in a boom, Dark Horse have adapted the novel, the first of three, into a six-part mini-series, and they haven't done a disastrous job.

I enjoyed reading it, possibly because I haven't read the book for a while, as it has great depth and is reminiscent of the movies, flicking from one scene to another, giving just the right amount of space to get one interested and up to speed.

The story is set five years after the destruction of the Death Star. Han Solo and Leia Organa are expecting twins, the government of the Republic is set up but is facing problems of its own, Luke is a Jedi Knight and one of the Emperor's greatest warlords is gathering together the remnants of the fleet to do serious battle. Cool.

The artwork is like Ian Gibson's from 2000AD, and although it doesn't look exactly as I envisaged, it's pretty good, with lots of frames, trying to squeeze in as much information as possible.

It's possibly the best *Star Wars* comic on the market, and not surprising considering Zahn's story-telling ability. It's well-adapted, and keeps closely to the book which has already been a best-seller.

Vamps – Hollywood and Vein, Lee/Simpson, Vertigo, \$2.95

This is the second *Vamps* mini-series, the first being hugely popular, and a return visit from the voracious girls with fangs was definitely in order.

The comic is about the exploits of five very sexy female vampires, one of whom wants to be a movie star. In this, the first issue, they start to manipulate their way towards their goal, but there are a few men on the scene who know the vamps quite well, one of whom has a male vampire held captive.

Will Simpson's artwork is quite good, he captures the female form stunningly. However, the story so far isn't as snappy as the first series. Lee herself has been trying to sell some comic stories to the various people in Hollywood for the big screen. She hasn't had much luck but she's experienced the more sleazy side of Hollywood first hand and now she wants to use her comic story as a vehicle to show the average punter how unscrupulous show business actually is. It works to a degree, but it's more unbelievable than the first series and I think it loses out because of that fact, although Simpson's art makes up for the dodgy bits. It's a pity the cover artist, Phil Winslade, doesn't know how to draw a lifelike woman; the return of Brian Bolland would increase the attractiveness of this comic for sure and probably increase sales too, but as usual it's the dollar that counts, and Winslade is cheaper than Bolland.

Sleazy business can be found in comics too, you know.

Star Wars – Empire's End, Veitch/Bakie, Dark Horse, \$2.95

This is the conclusion of the *Dark Empire* saga, and it takes up where *Dark Empire II* #6 left off. That's all the *Dark Empire* series and this have in common.

Jim Bakie is a dubious artist at the best of times, and here he has the added difficulty of taking over for someone else who is used to drawing the technology of *Star Wars*, Cam Kennedy, and he fails hopelessly. His artwork lacks detail and accuracy, with obvious mistakes left unchecked. The story drags and I doubt he took notice when he was shown the *Dark Empire* comics, more maybe he didn't bother to look at them at all.

As for Veitch's writing, he is expected to do in two issues what he previously did with in six. It's like watching *Star Wars* and *The Empire Strikes Back*, and then being handed a twenty-five minute *Return of the Jedi*. It sucks.

There is no depth to the story, with the action being glanced over at high speed. When *Dark Empire* first came out it had a bi-monthly release, no luxury here and it shows.

Bad management has ensured that this comic will be shite, but marketing has shown that the thousands who bought *Dark Empire I* and *II* will want to complete the saga they have collected for four years. Money-grabbing, low-down cowboys are obviously at the helm of this disaster.

Although not directly connected to the comic, but aptly displaying the attitude of the boys in control, a fan received a very evasive and smug reply when he asked seven questions about continuity mistakes and editing errors within the comics. Just goes to show that in the barrel that is Dark Horse there are a few bad apples.

Put Your Raygun to My Head

Sydney Venner

How many times have you heard that hoary old chestnut ‘...but it’s not science fiction.’? Fandom’s sentinels jealously guard every page, rayguns primed, ready to blast any unfortunate author who doesn’t deliver on the Golden Rules.

The Rules state that if a story is hardware-driven, that’s fine – it’s science fiction. If the SF element is *pivotal* to the characters’ actions and/or development, that’s fine too – it’s still science fiction. But if an upstart comes along and dares to write about human relationships in what is *perceived* as a mere science fiction setting... well! Throw him out! Open the pod-bay doors, HAL! Out with the interlopers who break our commandments.

How long ago were the Rules written? The thirties? The fifties? How ironic that science fiction, of all things, should be hidebound by its past. Let me give you an example. You’re watching your favourite TV series. The main plot is something wacko about a shipful of two-headed aardvarks running amok, threatening the life-support systems – it’s plot 3B; we’ve seen it before, we all know how it’s going to work out in the end. The subplot is about the relationship between Captain Ricard and Ensign Flusher. Things are just getting interesting. The captain is about to delve into his own past, to say something about some formative experience from way back, when the subplot runs out of its allotted time and it’s back to the photon tube, folks. Pity about the poignancy, pity about the piquant, wistful ways in which the old and the young learn from each other...

Have you seen that episode? I haven’t bothered to watch the programme since that fateful hatchet job on a semi-decent plot. But then, I hear you cry, that’s nothing to do with SF – it’s the TV moguls saying to hell with subtlety, give us some action or the fans will switch channels. Ah yes, but it’s not the producers, it’s the science fiction mentality that led to the curtailing of the personal element outlined in the above plot.

I’m not advocating opening up emotions in the sledgehammer way that soaps deal with them. You know: ‘Okay, we got a twenty-seven minute episode. Let’s go for an emotional peak every nine minutes. Three different emotions: sadness, joy and, let me see, rage! Yeah! Let’s end with rage, that’ll hook ‘em!’ I’m not advocating, not even talking about, space-opera either. I’m talking about imaginative *freedom*. I’m talking about being unfettered by ‘You must do this,’ or ‘You have got to do that.’

Let me give you part of another plot – from a short story written by yours truly, a mere cobbler at the feet of fiction. The story is about a boy-girl

relationship on a space station. The girl has a steel spine so she can't bend her back – a fact crucial to the development of the plot. As far as I'm concerned the story *is* science fiction, not just in its setting and because of the artificial spine. What happens when I submit it? All hell breaks loose: 'It's not science fiction.' 'Try Woman's Daily.' 'You can't set it on a space station.'

Why can't I set it on a space station? I can set it in a halting site in Ballydehob, a mud hut in Outer Mongolia, an office on the 106th floor of the World Trade Centre. If I turn it to fantasy, or throw in a time machine, I can set it in prehistoric times, medieval times, present times or future times. I can set it in any culture – past, present or future – why? Because the main plot is universal, that's why. Oh, excuse me, I forgot I can't set it on a space station. Universal emotions cease to exist when you enter a space station.

Space stations are sacrosanct, you see. Matter of fact, all of space is sacrosanct. Not just outer space but inner space too – the inner bit between the ears of science fiction people who believe SF itself is sacrosanct. Not all, happily, are like that. The brave editor of an *experimental* SF magazine in England has taken the story and will publish it in his next issue. There's hope yet.

This writer would like to see SF grow up, throw away its shackles and stop being so self-conscious. This writer would like to read, and write, *science fiction* where the human condition is paramount – an ambition distinctly dodgy, if not heretical, in the eyes of many of the faithful. They see such ambitions as basically contradictory. They're wrong. Why write anything else when you want to write *science fiction* that deals with piffling issues like despair, loss, contentment, pleasure, heartache, winsomeness, love, loneliness, melancholy, joy...

Eurocon '97

As everyone is doubtless aware at this stage, 1997 will see Dublin hold the European Science Fiction Convention. This will also be the eighth Octocon, and logistically will prove to be the most complex science fiction convention the country has seen.

This is where you come in. Yeah, *you*. We want your skills, your typing ability, your computer, your sister, whatever. Basically, we want your time.

If you can help in any way (and trust us, you can) we'll be holding a general meeting some time in March for anyone interested in helping, joining or just finding out what it's all about. So be sure to pick up First Contact in the science fiction establishment of your choice (assuming you're not a member. You should be. I'll hassle you about that later), and come along. If you can't make it, feel free to e-mail rde@irelands-web.ie or write to us care of the ISFA (we'll tell you our PO Box number next month).

ISFA AGM

Tuesday, 30th January, Brogan's Pub

In the setting that by now must be familiar to the tens of people who've negotiated their way through the maze that is access to the lower half of Brogan's on Dame Street, the AGM took place on the last Tuesday in January, attended by about fifteen people (which isn't bad by AGM standards; percentagewise at least).

Present for the committee were Conor Stevens (chairman) and Vincent Canning (secretary), with the sisters Cassidy unable to attend; the meeting was chaired by Your Humble Servant, as the committee obviously thought themselves incapable of the degree of rudeness required; the phrase 'shut up' or one of its equivalents is required, on average, every thirty seconds.

Stuff that was covered in the meeting is as follows...

Membership : this was down drastically on last year, with the ISFA having fifty members as of the AGM, approximately thirty-five fewer than last year.

Spondies : Due to the absence from the meeting of the treasurer, no exact figures were available, but Vincent was able to give approximates; the coffers held about £150, with the money through the year going for the most part on the newsletter; it costs about £30 a month to print and post to the members.

Magazines : or, What magazines? There seemed to be some confusion as to whether there was a separate bank account set up to take care of publishing *Phase*; it was mentioned last year that such an account was extant, but if there was, the current committee were given no details. There was no magazine this year simply because the money wasn't there to pay for it; apparently *Phase One* has been ready to go to press as soon as advertising could be secured, but despite Vincent wandering around the city a number of times, nothing could be got. It was decided by a unanimous vote to scrap any mention of the *Phase* magazine as part of membership next year, and to continue publication of such a magazine only when it becomes financially viable.

Constitution : Yes, we have no constitution. Even though I actually wrote the damn thing many yahren ago I, like everyone else who's had to deal with it over the years, found it to be of no help; in fact, it proved to be a hindrance to getting things done on occasion. By unanimous vote, it's now in indefinite abeyance.

Committee : Hooray! We have a committee. This year, all present managed to eschew the farcical elections of a core few who proceeded to co-opt whomever they liked, in favour of an almost-unanimous (to the one abstainer : shame on you) vote for the block election of John Kenny, Robert "I'll never join a committee" Neilson, Peter McClean, Dave Murphy and Brendan Ryder.

Other stuff : well, there wasn't that much else. The usual suspects had many an opinion on many a subject (to preserve his anonymity Pádraig shall remain nameless), and in general it was considered to be a constructive meeting – more so than there's been in a number of years – with all present contributing cogent arguments. The only downer was the lack of bloodshed.

Robert Elliott

Crazy Diamonds

A small-press review column

Dave Murphy

The Edge - no it's not U2, it's vol 2 no 1 of an English magazine which went dormant some time ago. Now it's back promising, yes promising, a bi-monthly publishing schedule. Editor Graham Evans says he has stories forthcoming from Christopher Fowler, Simon Clarke and Gary Kilworth, among others. Sounds tasty, so what about the fiction in the first issue of the relaunched magazine?

John Shirley's "A Walk through Beirut" is a cyberpunk tale set in New York in 2022. It's over-written and is also too long, and the shock tactics of lazy similes like "happy as a fag priest french-kissing Jesus" just don't compensate for the overall lack of characterisation. Shirley bites off more than a short story can chew with a plot that's top-heavy with every cyberpunk cliché you can think of. Apparently he's a novelist - it shows, and perhaps he'd be better off sticking to the longer format. Paul di Filippo's "Fantasy Trilogy" is indicative of a type of writing too commonly found in the small-press. It's idea-driven with little by way of quality and unlcavened by humour or characterisation. Part 2 of the trilogy is tediousness personified. Best of a bad lot is the third and final story, Keith Brook's "Brain Jive". Here the central characters are well-drawn in terms of their predicament and how they deal with it

The fiction is not the best then, which is a pity considering all three contributors have novels under their belts. Still, it's a maiden issue (sort of) so we'll keep our fingers crossed for better stuff in the future. On the plus side, there is a fine interview with Christopher Fowler and the film and book reviews are wide-ranging and comprehensive. The quality of reproduction is good throughout the magazine in terms of photographs, book covers and artwork though the darker tones don't reproduce too well. One hint on submissions: the editor doesn't seem too keen on stories that are too short. **The Edge** is £1.95 for one issue (A4 format, 32 pages). Available from 1 Nichols Court, Belle Vue, Chelmsford, Essex, CM2 0BS

Sierra Heaven - a new publication this. Editor Alex Brady (he of **Cerebretron** fame) bravely suggests that he will consider submissions of up to 20,000 words - an unusual, though welcome, departure for the small press. On the other hand, he also accepts 'short shorts' of less than 250 words. There are twenty of these in the first issue - dipping into them makes for a welcome bit of fun reading. As for 'proper' stories, there are seven. William Meikle's "In the Coils of the Serpent" is a fine one to kick off with. Irish readers will be

familiar with Meikle from the pages of **albedo one**. This story is another good example of how to write a short story from a Scotsman who seems to be everywhere in the small press these days. Next up comes DF Lewis with "The Tallest King" - an acquired taste, our Des, in the eyes of many. Other stories are: "Teething Problems", a rather disappointing piece from Robert Glass, "War Story" by Garrie Hall, "Spring Cleaning" by Geoffrey Duncan Blogg (that just has to be a pseudonym), and two fantasies: "Eating Blood" by Chris Paul, and "A Prince of Time" - a meaty, well-written tale from the pen of John Light.

There is a good mix here. The editor sensibly seems to be striving for, and achieving, the right balance in terms of themes and genres. As for non-fiction, the ubiquitous Bob Neilson contributes book reviews as well as a compelling interview with Robert Holdstock. There is also a small-press review section and (of course) an article on *The X-Files*. **Sierra Heaven** is priced at £3.45 (incl. p+p) for 56 A4pages. It's worth it. Buy it from: 29 Harrier Way, Evelyn Mews, Beckton, London E6 4YP.

Next up, let's turn the pages of **Grotesque #9**, another welcome issue from David Logan up in Norn Iron. It opens with a Rhys Hughes story, "The Semi-precious Isle", that starts off trying to be funny but succeeds only in being embarrassing. It does improve a little towards the middle and end but the opening is, to say the least, off-putting. Also rather juvenile is Wendy Down's "Out from the Shadows", though it's reasonably well-written with a nice turn of phrase. Much better is Gavin Williams' "Vigilante" - strong on atmosphere, a good read. William Meikle is also represented here (the title is so convoluted I won't mention it). As usual for Meikle, the story is excellent. David Logan himself contributes a fine, intriguing tale very much set in an Irish milieu.

There are three other stories: the obligatory Des Lewis ("The Christmas Angel"), David Rathcliffe's "Sophisticated Neon" and Pamela Yeagar's "The Fields of Mariah" - this last would have been a lot better had anyone ever explained to the author that there's such a thing as subtlety. **Grotesque** seems to have a policy of encouraging dark-tinged horror tales, hence the title. The trouble with such a narrow policy is that it spawns stories like "Sophisticated Neon", and the less said of that the better.

Other than the fiction, you get a small-press review and an editorial. £2.80 for 52 A4 pages. From: 39 Brooke Avenue (off Barn Road), Carrickfergus, Co Antrim, NI, BT38 7TE.

Finally, **Dragon's Breath** is a two-page (A4 size, jam-packed with information) monthly guide to the alternative small-press in the UK. It prides itself on being real coooool and comes with plenty of attitude, threatening all sorts of hexes on those foolish enough to criticise it. Well worth a look.

Television Review

Robert Elliott

If you've been paying any attention at all over the last year, you can't really have failed to notice that I'm a bit of a fan of *The X-Files*. One of the elements that I like is the conspiracy bit; where the government isn't treated as being apple pie-eating, flag-waving patriots. So you'd think I'd automatically be inclined to like another program with similar elements. Well, I'm beginning to discover that it *is* possible to have too much of a good thing.

Take *Nowhere Man* (Sky One), for example. It's the story of Thomas Veil, a photographer who one day finds himself 'erased;' he has no life left to call his own. No records exist, his friends don't know him, and even his wife doesn't recognise him; in fact, she seems to be married to someone else.

Behind all this, we have... who? We don't know, and neither does Thomas. All he knows is that they're after the negative to a photograph he took, and they seem to be willing to do anything to get it. Consequently, Veil is constantly on the move, staying one step ahead of whoever they are.

Sound familiar? The show's creator, Laurence Herzog, admits to being inspired by *The Prisoner*, but denies that there's much of a connection to *The Fugitive*. 'Bollocks,' says I, the connection is fraggin' obvious. This leads to the obvious danger; will Veil spend each week entering a small town, where he helps a little old lady across the road, reconcile the sheriff with his seemingly-bad-but-really-misunderstood teenage son, rescue a cat from a tree and leave three seconds before the bad guys arrive? Fortunately, we've only seen that once or twice, but that doesn't mean the show is perfect.

The main problem is that Herzog doesn't seem to have much of an idea where the programme is going. We've given hints, but a lot of them seem to be contradictory. The bad guys constantly know where he is, but he manages to escape every week. Half the time they want his negatives, half the time they want him dead.

Nowhere Man is not without its plot holes, or its character inconsistencies. Veil, played by Bruce Greenwood, is the only regular, and he spends all his time mistrusting the good guys and trusting the bad guys; it might make for good drama, but it gets really annoying really quickly. Having said that, though, I find *Nowhere Man* an entertaining series, and I'll continue to watch it in the hope that it gets better.

The 'watch and hope' attitude is one I've also adopted for *VR5* (Sky One), and it's lucky I did; I was on the verge of giving up when it suddenly got better.

This is a story about the people as much as the events in which they become involved. A full two-thirds of the novel is spent delineating the backgrounds of the musicians and the machinations of those around them to involve them in the project. Naturally, the record company execs are the bad guys and if I have one, albeit minor, crib it is that the main villain of the piece is kept very much in the background and given a very low profile. At the end he is the only main character whose motivation is not thoroughly explored and therefore convincing. But only because everyone else is so beautifully rounded.

I could not recommend this novel more highly. Five stars.

If I see *The Truth Is Out There* splashed across the cover of one more magazine, I'm going to scream. Yeah, yeah, I know it's a great tag line, but the fact is you can get too much of a good thing. And, believe it or not, that even applies to fans of *The X-Files*. So is it likely, with that attitude, that I'm going to enjoy a book with that as its title?

If that book happens to be *The Truth is Out There – The Official Guide to The X-Files* by Brian Lowry (HarperCollins, tpb, £9.99, pp277), the answer is a resounding yes. I will stick my prejudice into some place it won't show, won't embarrass me and won't make me walk funny and pore over its pages like an escapee from Weight Watchers in Willy Wonka's Chocolate Factory.

Not only is there an excellent episode guide, crammed with as much information as anyone this side of obsession could want, but there is an in-depth look at how Chris Carter dreamed the show up and what it took to get it on air. There's a healthy look behind the scenes and a glimpse at the production methods. The actors are profiled as are their characters. Even the most intense (nerdish) X-Philes are catered for with a stream of trivia and answers to questions the most fanatical would have. It is, in addition, well-illustrated with a plethora of black and white photographs, many of them published for the first time.

In essence, this is the perfect bedside companion for the casual fan and probably a 'must-have' for the totally committed, as there is a good deal of material that just won't be found elsewhere. For those who like the programme and would like to know more about it, this is about the perfect weight. Enough data to be satisfying without the need to wade through mountains of detail suitable only to those obsessives who really need to know Scully's shoe size. By the way, I don't think it's in here. For sparing us that, and for the quality of the presentation and content, this scores a resounding four stars.

Cue music. Is that score an oblique hint at that elusive shoe size? Is the author of this column an abductee attempting to send messages to Mulder regarding the whereabouts of his sister? Is HarperCollins in league with the smoking man?

Get a life. *The Lies Are Out There Too.*

A while ago I had the pleasure of reading the novelisation of the film, *Species*. Now, I've followed that with a romp through the graphic novelisation (comic). Not having seen the movie it's impossible for me to judge the loyalty of either version to the original. However I recognise all the major action sequences from the novel and the plot has indeed been accurately rendered into graphic form. But, as was probably the case with the movie itself, the comic version lacks any depth of characterisation beyond

the initial caricatures of Anthropologist, Geneticist, Empath and Hunter/Killer who man the team that is central to the action.

If you managed to miss the plot synopsis elsewhere, *Species* (Boxtree Graphic Novel, £8.99) is the story of an alien/human DNA blend which is bred in secret by the US government which escapes and must be hunted down before it can reproduce.

Execution of the story is competent, the artwork is of a similar quality if a bit casual. The best thing about the whole production is the cover and it was drawn by a different artist from the insides. In fact the people who wrote and drew this graphic novel are so unimportant, they weren't even credited on the cover.

This graphic novel adds nothing extra to the product range, as the film has already handled the visualisation of the characters and the pictorialisation of the set-piece violence, and the book has embroidered the characters and filled in the background detail. *Species*, the movie, was not really good enough, of its type, to warrant such detailed exploitation and regurgitation. All concerned should have saved their energy and you should save your hard-earned. One star. For the cover.

What is it about me and graphic novels? Somehow they always seem to come to me in (mis-)matched pairs. The second member of the team this time is *The Adventures of Cyclops and Phoenix* (Boxtree, Graphic Novel, £8.99) and it's a winner. Everything about it exudes the quality that *Species* lacked. Even down to the paper, which is glossy throughout.

As the cover points out, unnecessarily to the aficionado, this is an X-Men adventure. On the first day of their honeymoon, the minds of Scott and Jean Summers, are plucked from their bodies and transported a thousand years into the future. In this time humanity's last hope, the Clan Askani, is under final assault by the forces of Apocalypse, the most powerful mutant the world has ever known, whose mind and soul have passed from body to body down through the centuries, growing ever more knowledgeable and powerful. It is he who has led mutantkind to domination of the planet. It is he who has relegated mere humans to an existence no better than slavery. Scott and Jean are the last hope for mankind. But.

The bodies they inhabit in the future have almost no powers. If they are to defeat the might of Apocalypse it will be through guile and the power of their commitment to justice. And as if a diminution of their powers were not handicap enough, they must also look after their son, a child who will be/has been transported to the future in the hope that a cure can be found for the techno-organic virus that is slowly transforming his body from flesh to cyborg to robot.

The Adventures of Cyclops and Phoenix shows the comic book form raised to the level of art. This is what the graphic novel was meant to be, not a bastardised retelling of a story designed for another medium, executed by guns-for-hire, nor the cobbled together, episodic mess that results from slapping together tenuously-linked issues of a comic series. This is a discrete story in four episodes that shows little evidence of its genesis in a comic book. The writer, Scott Lobdell, and artist, Gene Ha, are talented and dedicated; this is not just a series of panels dashed off to meet a deadline. And it shows. A definite four stars.

Vampire novels are two a penny these days. They're even writing them for kids now. So it's good to be able to report on one where the writer has used some of that rare commodity, imagination, and that even rarer one, invention. *Rulers of Darkness* by Stephen Spruill (Coronet, pb, £5.99, pp390) is that singularly uncommon beast, the vampire novel with an original twist.

Merrick Chapman is a police detective in Washington DC. When a young girl is found murdered with her throat torn out and her blood drained, he knows that it can be nothing other than a vampire. Is it, he wonders, the same one he drove out of the city twelve years previously? If it is, this time, he determines, he will make sure the killer dies.

So why, when he discovers evidence which would likely prove beyond a reasonable doubt that the murderer is possessed of superhuman powers, does he destroy it? There lies the crux of the matter. For Merrick Chapman is himself a vampire, or hemophage as Spruill calls them, virtually immortal and driven to feast on human blood by a recessive gene which causes a rare form of childhood leukaemia. Only sufferers who are fed blood during their illness survive to become vampires. To live forever. To kill.

Chapman's ex-girlfriend, the renowned haematologist Dr. Katherine O'Keefe, is called onto the case when traces of blood with unusual properties is found at the scene of the crime. Chapman knows that the blood is that of the killer and that if Katie can discover the secret of the blood it will prove the existence of hemophages - a discovery which will doubtless result in panic amongst ordinary humans and a concerted attempt by them to hunt down and destroy the predatory hemophages.

Though difficult in the extreme, Stephen Spruill manages to create a sympathetic character who is also a superhuman killer, who finds himself driven by an irrepressible urge to drink human blood regularly. Even though he has trained himself in the art of transfusing blood, rather than drinking it hot from the neck of a deceased victim, the kill is also a vital ingredient to that which he must satisfy. No other hemophage has been able to overcome that urge. So Chapman has set himself the task of hunting them down, whilst keeping their very existence secret, for the obvious reason of self-preservation.

Rulers of Darkness is that rare commodity, the book which succeeds on every level, *by the standards it sets for itself*. I look forward to Spruill's next offering and would not be at all surprised if it featured the tragic, but increasingly human, Merrick Chapman. For now I will content myself with dishing out another five stars. Twice in the same month. I must be going soft. Bring on *Species II*.

Well, no-one else bothered, so here's some fiction from your editor...

"Look! Up in the sky!"

"Is it a bird?"

"Is it a plane?"

"No! It's..."

"It's Shoemaker-Levy 10!"

"Oh, bugger."

FIVE STARS GOOD, NO STARS BAD

Book reviews by Robert Neilson

If there was a prize for the most unimaginatively-titled biography ever, *Star Trek Creator - The Authorized Biography of Gene Roddenberry* by David Alexander (Bantam, pb, £12.99, pp599) would certainly be high in any list of nominees. Unfortunately the lack of imagination stretches beyond the covers and permeates the style and content.

I suppose this is one of the problems with 'authorised' biographies. There is little chance of controversy and less chance that the writer will be given an opportunity to produce anything other than an incomplete ramble through the facts that the subject is prepared to have aired. Now I'm not saying that *Star Trek Creator* (that title makes me shudder every time) is not without its revelations, nor does it portray Gene Roddenberry in a completely flattering light, but the fact is, all the opinions expressed in the book are generally supportive of Roddenberry's world view. Where the subject himself has made a negative observation regarding his character or the manner in which he handled certain situations, there is always the feeling that mitigating circumstances are being espoused by the author, or there is a comment from another source which excuses him for his actions. Why, I wonder, did the author deem it unnecessary to interview those who violently disagreed with Roddenberry on any number of matters? Or if he did interview them, why is there no mention of their side of the story?

In many ways this is an exhaustive work, but given the breath of the subject's achievements, it must necessarily treat certain areas in less than exhaustive detail. Much of the text is drawn directly from memos and letters penned by Roddenberry and these give an honest insight into their writer. But it is difficult to see why the author, David Alexander, has chosen to enumerate every single script Roddenberry wrote or claimed a credit for, prior to *Star Trek* while, by comparison, ignoring that depth of detail in the area where it would surely be appreciated most by the book's target audience.

Admittedly, Alexander does a fine job in demonstrating his growth as a writer and the major influences on his work. His correspondence with Erle Stanley Gardner, at that time one of the most successful writers on the planet, gives an intimate insight into a formative relationship. But when it sours, there is almost no reflection. Was this a feature of the biographer or the subject? It's hard to tell. Roddenberry's correspondence with Isaac Asimov is also informative and it is nice to see that one of the true icons of serious (?) science fiction had such esteem for the TV show.

But as with Gardner, there is little with regard to the down side of his relationships with Harlan Ellison and David Gerrold, both of whom worked on scripting episodes of the show and both of whom had serious differences with him. It would have been invigorating to hear Ellison's side of things (particularly) in his own, doubtless vitriolic, style. And surely Gerrold, who is held in high esteem by *Star Trek* fans, does not deserve to be dismissed as he is as virtually important.

In many ways the people for whom this book was designed have already formed their opinions of Gene Roddenberry (*Star Trek* icon and minor deity), and nothing either a reviewer or a biographer might have to say is likely to sway that opinion. What

you get in *Star Trek Creator* is a very linear account of the man's life, told with a favourable bias. It's interesting, readable and informative but in the end raises as many questions as it answers. Though never a *Star Trek* fan personally, I put this biography down wishing it had been two hundred pages longer. But they were the two hundred pages which would have removed the word authorized from the title and might have prevented the book from ever being written, never mind published. Three stars.

How much effect can the star of a film have on the eventual personality of the character he plays? That may sound like a stupid question to ask in a review of a book, but when the book is the novelisation of the movie of William Gibson's short story *Johnny Mnemonic* by Terry Bisson (Voyager, pb, £4.99, pp246) and the star is Keanu Reeves, I think the query is justified. The cover of the novel is dominated by the aforementioned Mr. Reeves' mugshot and you are left in no doubt that Keanu is Johnny. I'm sure that's not going to cause problems for the enormous cinema audience and I'm just as sure Reeves will do a fine job, but I could not help but hear, in my head, Reeves' distinctive tones whenever Johnny speaks in the book. And that's the problem as I see it.

Reeves has a very distinctive voice that is an acute distillation of his (on-screen) personality. Perhaps (and I suspect this may be the case) this screen persona is pretty much an accurate reflection of Reeves the person. I have heard him quoted as saying in his early days that he was none too bright, just said the words and got on with it, or words to that effect. And I can't help agreeing with that sentiment. No matter how cool and on the ball the characters he plays, I can't help feeling that underneath it all they are more than a little confused and getting by on bluster and the good fortune that seems to regularly accompany well-meaning idiots.

So right from the outset I was getting the impression that Johnny was not exactly a rocket scientist. Not having read the original short story I'm left in the dark as to whether this impression is created by Gibson in the original story, or in his screenplay for the movie, or by Bisson in the novelisation. God forbid it is merely the face of Reeves on the cover allied to my own prejudices.

And the novel itself? Superb rendition of an action piece with convincing realisation of a grim future society which has already begun to crumble under pressure of its own soullessness. The pace is unflagging and the invention is on a par with the best in the genre. Don't go looking for even the minor intellectualisations of Gibson's own work. This is aimed directly at the mass market and makes no excuses for itself. Falls into the category which used to be known as a thundering good read which, as a genre, will probably be lampooned in twenty years by the successors to Eric Idle and Michael Palin. But right now, it unpretentiously delivers the excitement quota. Four star entertainment.

The Girl who Heard Dragons by Anne McCaffrey (Corgi, pb, £4.99, pp383) caused a few problems in the States when it was published originally. It seems that the publishers were not really clear on the cover about the fact that this was not a new Dragon book and there were a number of unhappy punters who felt they had been misled. And if they had bought this expecting a Dragonfest, I'm not surprised. *The Girl Who Heard Dragons* is a short story collection containing only one piece out of fifteen featuring the famous fire-breathers.

One annoying facet of the collection is that there is no mention of previous history for any of the stories included nor is there (with one exception) any reference to when the stories were written. Some of them feel right up to the minute while others express attitudes that would suggest they might date from a previous decade. In fact, one of the best of the stories here is the exception, the one which we are informed was written in 1956.

The reason for the mention of the date is that the 'science' fictional element of the story has been overtaken by actual science. The Greatest Love is the story of sisters-in-law, one of whom is artificially impregnated with the sperm of the others' husband (rapid intake of breath, widening of the eyes, even in these enlightened times), her brother. Despite the fact that this is no longer science fiction, it more than justifies its inclusion. The title story is a pleasing addition to the Pern canon and all fifteen are written in that deceptively easy style that demonstrates Anne McCaffrey's mastery of the written word.

All the well-known and loved facets of McCaffrey's work are here in abundance. Space Opera, ESP, dragons, horses and ordinary people, but each with that overlay of charm and romance which permeate all her work. The best of these demand to be read, the others are still worth the price of admission on their own. Four stars.

Phil Rickman may have created his own sub-genre with his latest novel - that of Gothic Rock 'n Roll Horror. Not to mention the fantasy Druid/Celt/ Monk theme. Hell, you can even throw in haunted house and demonic possession, ESP and messages from beyond the grave. December (Pan, pb, £5.99. pp658) could be described as the horror novel with everything. And that includes brilliant characterisation and a superb plot.

So, what else does he need? Publicity, I guess. If enough people can get to hear about this novel, and read it, word of mouth alone will carry Phil Rickman all the way to stardom. If this book had been written by an acknowledged name such as Stephen King or Dean Koontz, it would be guaranteed to lodge in the upper reaches of the best-sellers list for months. The asking prices for their next manuscripts would soar to even more astronomical heights. And Phil?

If there's any justice in the world at all, Phil Rickman will become the next big thing in horror, at least on this side of the Atlantic. He may be just a little too British for Yankee tastes. There might be just too much of the wild Celtic magic about his work for them to relate to. But it does have rock 'n roll.

On the night John Lennon was murdered, in December 1980, an English band, put together by a record company specifically for the purpose, was recording an album based on Welsh legend in a studio that was converted from an ancient abbey. The hero of the legends on which the album was based had reputedly died in the abbey. You can almost hear the sleazy record company executive say "Oh, by the way, the abbey's haunted, as well." Which is one of the main reasons why the band is comprised of these particular personalities. They have at least one thing in common: each of them is psychic.

The recording session breaks up in tragedy and the tapes of the session are destroyed. Or are they? Fourteen years later, someone digs up the tapes. If the band can be coerced into getting back together and finishing the recording - in the abbey of course - there could be a lot of money to be made. Never mind the fact that the abbey is likely to kill them.

Sidney Bloom (Daryl Hannah) is a bit of a computer nerd, and, through means by which she isn't certain, finds herself able to enter VR5, a level of virtual reality far and above anything thought to be currently available. She programmes a setting into the computer, phones someone, and once the right connection is made both parties are interacting in VR. However, when the contactee hangs up, he or she is left with no memory of the experience, only an unconscious feeling about what happened. Sidney has no idea what this is, but it's not long before she finds herself working for The Committee, a group of people with a suitably naff, spy-like title who, you guessed it, secretly run things and conspire to be... good? Bad? We're not sure.

The main problem with this programme is that the computer scenes are, not to put too fine a point on it, pure shite. Totally unbelievable. The creators/writers seem to have taken a very interesting premise – the possible use of VR as a psychological aid – and taken it to ridiculous extremes. Sidney's contact from The Committee, Oliver, is sympathetic towards her (as was his predecessor, who died mysteriously), in a move which seems just a bit *too* contrived. I mean, what kind of arseholes are running this organisation, that they take one of their most important agents and give her two dodgy contacts in a row? All in all, up until recently I'd dismissed VR5 as mindless crap, with lousy plots and dumb ideas that relied too heavily on the computer graphics and VR scenes.

All that changed last week, though, with – and I kid you not – the return of our protagonist's sister Samantha, whom we thought we'd never see. Wow, *déjà vu*. But unlikely parallels with *The X-Files* aside, the programme, in one episode, turned from a silly series with no direction into something that looks like it has a future. I'm not saying that the programme has undergone some apotheosis that makes it wonderful, but it definitely shows a lot more promise than it did. I'll stick with it for the rest of the series, and I suggest you do too.

And finally, to that much-maligned programme, *Earth 2* (yet again, Sky One). Admitting that I watch this show is not unlike telling people that I enjoy farting in church; people give me strange looks, and suggest that I talk to someone. Nonetheless, I say in a loud, steady voice that I really like *Earth 2*, and consider it a darn shame that it was cancelled.

Earth 2 chronicles the lives of the people in Eden Project, a plan to colonise a planet that has similar conditions to Earth (hence the nifty name). However, when they reached orbit their ship was sabotaged, and all were forced into escape pods, and landed on the planet with little by way of supplies. There, they meet the Tereans (pardon the spelling, which is probably wrong). This humanoid species seems to have a bond with the Earth that is very reminiscent of the Gaia hypothesis. The Tereans somehow cure the child

Ulysses Adare of his crippling disease, and thus give him a link to the planet not unlike their own. The Tereans then suggest – they communicate through dreams – that Eden Project might like to relocate to New Pacifica, on the other side of the continent. Thus our merry band spends each week wandering across the land, discovering new hazards. And not all of these are indigenous. We find out that the planet was used by Earth as a dumping ground for criminals, who were shot to the planet in stasis, and are around to cause all sorts of trouble. There's also – don't you just know it – The Council, a shadowy, mysterious® group of people who want to work the planet to their own ends.

Earth 2 is, quite simply, wonderful. It has its faults, notably a few stereotypical characters and clichéd use of kids as plot devices for causing trouble. However, the strengths of the show far outweigh these minor annoyances (which, in recent weeks, have been diminishing, although True Danziger proves that a stupid name doesn't mean you won't cause trouble). Quite simply, watch this show. Then write to the producers and tell them you want another series. I know I do.

Next Month

Next month in the ISFA

As you've doubtless already read elsewhere in this wonderful magazine, next month sees the ISFA change its venue for the monthly meetings. As was also mentioned, next month we're fortunate to be able to welcome **Gill Alderman** along to tell us about her new book. So be in **Coopers** on Abbey Street on **March 5th** at **8:00** (or **thereabouts**). You know it makes sense.

Next Month in First Contact

All that stuff I promised would be in this month, and more besides. As well as cool reviews of books, cool cinema reviews, cool reviews... hang on. There's got to be more than reviews. Oh, yeah. I've been checking out Dublin's cybercafés, and I'll let you know... damn, that's a review as well. Well, lots of other stuff. News, for example. And fiction. I don't know who's writing it yet, but come heck or high water **First Contact** will continue in its brief to bring you, the reader, the latest in fiction from the latest in writers. Oh, and another of those nifty 'top ten books' lists that I really like, even though Lois McMaster Bujold and David Brin have been severely under-mentioned so far.

So, to sum up: there'll be stuff, with lots of interesting reviews of more stuff, and news on stuff that's happening. You won't want to miss it. Really.

Another Book Review

Broken Heroes, David Murphy, Albedo One Publications, £2.95, pp76

Okay, okay. It's been out a while, and I'm only getting around to publishing the review now. It's been on the hard disk for ages (except this opening paragraph, obviously), but I apologise to all the nice people at Albedo One for the delay; especially as I'm sure that most of you nice people out there already have a copy of this short story collection, and are already aware of how good it is.

As you doubtless already know (and therefore annoyed at me for repeating), *Albedo One* is an Irish-produced magazine that's been going for a number of years, and is generally regarded as our last, best hope for Irish short fiction. Now the nice people involved have brought out *Broken Heroes*, a collection of short stories by one author, David Murphy; one of the stories has previously appeared in the magazine, but the other seven will be new to most readers, although three were first published in *P7L* 10, those many years ago.

First up is "Lost Notes," a story which, we are informed, won the 1995 Maurice Walsh Memorial Award for Short Stories. Philistine that I am, I've never heard of this award, but can see why the story was chosen; "Lost Notes" is a wonderful story, and my favourite in this collection. It's for this reason that I think the story should have been last; it's an award-winning story, and I can't be the only one who thinks it the best. This story should have crowned the collection; however good the rest of the stories – and there's no doubting the quality of the other six on offer here – they'll inevitably compared to the first. "The Tip and Tell Man," the story that rounds off the collection, is the weakest on offer, and is not a good one on which to finish.

Murphy as a style of his own, and one that is definitely suited to the short story. My one criticism is that his style is *too* constant; it suits most of the stories, but "Undertow," for example, doesn't work simply because the narrative style doesn't suit the subject matter. Other stories, however – notably "Flying Kites" and "Broken Heroes" – are excellent examples of how short stories should be written, and are stories that would hold their heads high in any short story collection published today.

Overall, *Broken Heroes* is a fine collection. It has suffers somewhat from its presentation; instead of being square-bound, it's stapled, and is offered more as a magazine than a book. The collection is illustrated most ably by Paul Sheridan, whose consistency in structure gives the collection more coherence, enhancing what is unquestionably a worthwhile collection.

Broken Heroes is available in the proverbial Good Bookstores Everywhere, or alternatively from Albedo One Publications, 8 Commons Road, Loughlinstown, Co. Dublin.

Robert Elliott


Available free (!) - just send an IRC to Zinc Kat, c/o Pigasus Press, 13 Hazely Combe, Arreton, Isle of Wight, PO30 3AJ.

Here are the names and addresses of some current UK small-press magazines. Details of price per single copy plus last published issue (where known) are shown:

- Black Tears** #8 - £1.75 A Bradley, 28 Treaty St, Islington, London N1
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