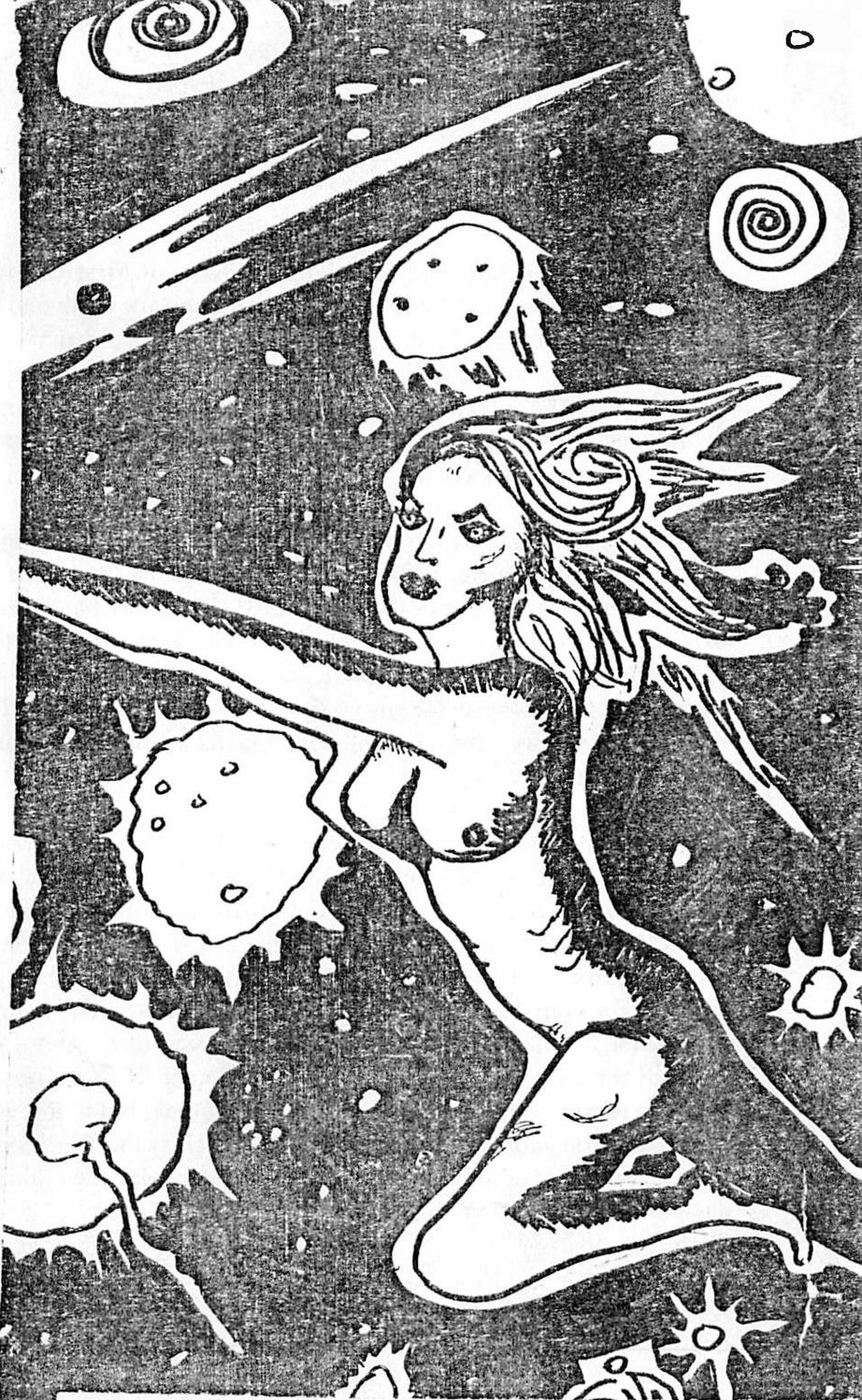




FIRST CONTACT



The Monthly Newsletter of the Irish Science Fiction Association
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Editorial

Welcome, albeit belatedly, to the February issue of **First Contact**. Or the March issue. Whatever. Basically, due to circumstances beyond the control of all (me especially), there was no **First Contact** in February, so you are now the proud owner of a double-sized, really cool March issue by way of recompense. The fact that it's now approaching the end of the month can't actually help any, but the fault lies entirely with me and my computer, so my most abject apologies to all.

But let us speak no more of the inadequacies of editors. Let us instead ponder the joy and security to be had in the knowledge that once again, the ISFA has its committee. For the next twelve months, we have a new Fantastic Four. Helmed by Conor Stephens and ably assisted by Katherine and Ruth Cassidy and Vincent Canning, once again the good ship ISFA is in clear waters. I apologise for any misspellings in their names, and indeed for the dire metaphors. But what the hell. This is a time for celebration, not recriminations.

Continuing on our 'good news' theme, the ISFA now has its very own page on the Web; all you net surfers out there with access can drop in on <http://arrogant.itc.icl.ie> any time. For setting this up, we must tip our hat to Padraig O hIccadha, and we thank him from the bottom of our demodulators. What's on the page? I've no idea. I guess you'll all have to find out for yourselves. In celebration of our new-found on-line service, I've decided to devote half a page or so to some of the more interesting areas of the world that are on the Web or the net. If *Star Trek* or *Lost in Space* is what you're looking for, you're out of luck, but if you want decent information on good television programmes such as the *X-Files* or *Babylon 5*, or just reviews of and discussion of plain old books, then this is the half-page or so for you. If you've got a modem. Which I don't.

Sigh.

Robert, Man of Destiny
Editor

Questionnaire Results

If you cast your minds back to the last newsletter, you'll remember the questionnaire that we included for your perusal and feedback. Our thanks must go to the twenty people who filled them out, and voila. The results.

	Yes	No
Should the Newsletter be...		
Monthly, pp24, photocopied, c.£8.40 p/a	80%	20%
Bi-monthly, pp52, photocopied, c.£6.00 p/a	30%	65%
Should the magazine be...		
Quarterly, similar to Phase, £6.00 extra	35%	60%
twice-yearly, as above, £3.00 extra	70%	25%
No Newsletter, but a quarterly magazine incorporating elements of Phase & N/1, £10.00	10%	85%
Howzabout the meetings...		
General monthly, 50p members, £1.00 non-members	100%	0%
Artists/Writers monthly workshop, no charge	80%	20%

So there you have it. The monthly format for the newsletter would seem to be the most popular, with only a couple of people wanting to abandon it infavour of a twice-yearly magazine. I was a bit surprised with the reaction to the magazine, though; it seems that a semi-annual format there is what's wanted. A couple of people wanted no magazines at all, just the newsletter.

As for the meetings, everyone was in favour of the monthly general meeting, with most wanting the workshops as well. Six people, however, suggested a 50p charge to non-members for the workshops as well.

Suggestions were a bit thin on the ground, but a number of people mentioned the need for a membership drive.

Finally, hugs and kisses to those three people who volunteered to help but didn't write their name on the form.

Thanks once again to all those who filled out the questionnaire. If you volunteered to help, I've passed your names on to the committee.

Robert Elliott

Ballot counter.

Today I finished what is a very fine novel by a writer with the potential to become one of that small band of BIG NAMES whose laundry lists will sell for six figure sums. That man is W.A. HARBINSON and the book on which I am basing my prediction is called INCEPTION (NEL, PAPERBACK, UK£5.99, 490pp). But why oh why did some prat at NEL insist on a patently silly blurb from James Herbert. 'I am in awe of this man,' it says.

Bollox, I say.

It very nearly put me off picking up the novel in the first place. Now, James Herbert might well be in awe of this man, but I doubt it. This sort of OTT silliness should be kept for American publications or Hollywood movie, press releases. It merely serves to trivialise its subject; to make the reader doubt the sentiment because it is so patently un-believable.

And the book? INCEPTION is part one of PROJEKT SAUCER, the story of THE MOST TERRIFYING, AWESOME CONSPIRACY IN HUMAN HISTORY (more OTT rubbish, this time from the back cover). I really have to say that this type of tabloid sensationalism is likely to do more harm than good to INCEPTION. If it pulls in the readers this type of thing normally attracts, they just plain won't like it.

INCEPTION is a thoughtful, journalistic, realistic novel moulded somewhat in the style of Frederick Forsyth (Colin Wilson says so on the back so it must be right). It is a great story, built up over a number of years, concerning one man's inhuman search for scientific perfection and another's search for him.

The span of the novel is immense, with this first novel in the trilogy taking us from the turn of the century up to 1946. John Wilson is the epitome of the cold, calculating scientist who will stop at nothing in pursuit of his goals. He starts out designing dirigibles but his final aim is always to develop the ultimate flying machine, a flying saucer. Though brilliant, his designs are far ahead of their time and the US Government, cast in the usual blundering role, fail to see their potential and refuse to support him. So Wilson takes his project as far as he can in the States then decamps for Germany in the 1930s.

Mike Bradley's obsession is John Wilson. The more he learns of the man's work the more Bradley is convinced that Wilson is a true genius and head and shoulders above his peers. Such a man is dangerous, particularly one who will work with the Nazis to fulfil his own ends. Picking up Wilson's trail in 1931, Bradley pursues him over the following fifteen years, never once catching even a glimpse of Wilson's face. The race is on to stop Wilson from developing the ultimate weapon in time to alter the course of the Second World War.

INCEPTION is simply brilliant, even if it does flag a little in the middle. For six quid you can buy yourself a gripping thriller backed by a panoramic history lesson. Were the Nazis responsible for the flying saucer scares of the past fifty years? Read Projekt Saucer and find out. If INCEPTION is anything to go by, there's another couple of great novels on the way from W.A. Harbinson.

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Cover by Sid Daly, under the heavy
influence of Black Sabbath.

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Can we go now?*

Coming up at six minutes past the hour, we'll have Howard with the weather. But for now, we've just time for an ad break. Actually, let's go with the...

News

Comics News

Forward the Marvelution

After its recent move to buy out rivals Malibu Comics, Marvel have set on the next step of their Marvelution; they're cancelling about twenty-five of their titles. These include all the Punisher titles (not before time), Nova and a host of other books. Fan reaction to the cancellation has been lacklustre; no-one seems to care, which is probably indicative of the fact that a lot of those titles should have been cancelled long ago.

In another interesting move, Marvel accidentally announced that from June, an exclusive distribution arrangement will come into effect. This basically means that your local comics shop will have two weekly deliveries; one for Marvel and one for everyone else. Marvel weren't planning on announcing this yet; a memo accidentally got sent to some distributors ahead of time informing them of the fact. Why all the secrecy? The gods only know.

Filmy Bits

Burton on the Cards

Tim Burton upset years of tradition when he came up with the idea for his new movie. *Mars Attacks* is based on the Topps set of trading cards of the same name, so now perhaps we can look forward to the trading cards based on the game based on the trading cards. You

think it's improbable? Then you obviously haven't read Leonore Fleicher's novel *Mary Shelly's Frankenstein*.

Sagan Film

Carl Sagan BhA's 1985 novel, *Contact*, is to be made into a big-budget movie starring Jodie Foster and directed by George Miller, the man who made *Mad Max*. Don't expect to see the film before the middle of next year.

Pulp Science Fiction

Although raving about *Pulp Fiction* is a horribly trendy thing to do at the moment, it was still probably the best film of last year, so the news that Quentin Tarantino's new movie is to be science fiction can only be a cause for leaps of joy. *From Dusk 'til Dawn*, a vampire/sf flick, will be executive produced by Tarantino and directed by Roberto Rodriguez, the man behind the wonderful *El Mariachi*.

As for Tarantino's own directorial outings, he's let it be known that he'd like to direct the forthcoming *Man from UNCLE* movie.

Anime Stuff

Oh My Goddess! Released

After much waiting (by me, anyway) those lovely people at Anime Projects have just released the first OAV from Kosuke Fujishima's wonderful *Oh My*

Saucer full of Secrets

Reviews by Bob Neilson

NICHOLAS SALAMAN'S novel THE GARDEN OF EARTHLY DELIGHTS takes its title from a painting by Hieronymous Bosch. The painting is a strange melange of the wondrous, the beautiful, the sublime, the odd, the terrifying and the repugnant. It is a testament to the breath of imagination not just of one man but of mankind. That it was allowed to survive the moralistic posturings of four hundred years of religious dynasties is a testament to the obvious genius of the painter.

Nicholas Salaman has taken the creation of this painting and set it as the centre piece of a short period of history that has all the hallmarks of a dark fantasy invented by a master of his craft. Yet the novel is based upon truth. It is only in the normality of the innocent protagonists, acting as contrast to the monstrous perpetrators of spiritual insanity who people the rest of the work, that the author has utilized pure invention. Of the major characters only the lovers around whom the action revolves have any innate goodness; the rest, those based upon real people, are virtual monsters, the type that only the perverted pressures of the real world can create.

Julius, an orphan and a bastard, is apprenticed to the painter Hieronymous Bosch. His master is not a well man and, sensing that the end is near, reveals to Julius an uncompleted masterwork THE GARDEN OF EARTHLY DELIGHTS. The painting is in three parts but a portion of the third scene is incomplete. Bosch tells Julius that he must complete the work.

The apprentice is eighteen and though skilled is overwhelmed by the task of completing this work of greatness. But after his master's death the painting disappears and no one will admit to even knowing of its existence.

In quick succession poor Julius is railroaded into marriage by a merchant's daughter, reacquainted with the painting, supplied with a small income from an unknown source and moves from his home to the nearby town of Rensburg, which is in the throes of a religious upheaval.

The themes that Salaman has woven into the broad canvas of this novel revolve around love, desire, betrayal, lust (for both power and physical gratification) and the weakness that is at the core of man (both spiritual and moral). He has used his historical horror fable to point up universal truths. But unless you wish to hold up his mirror and stare into the ugliness he reflects from our very souls, then I suggest you pass up this most insightful novel.

Those who feel strong enough to survive this careful dissection of the worst (and parts of the best) of what we are will find THE GARDEN OF EARTHLY DELIGHTS published by FLAMINGO at £6.99 sterling. A light read it is not.

You know those author blurbs on the front covers of novels? The ones that say things like - 'Comparable to Tolkien at his Best' or 'I have seen the future of SF and his/her name is blah!' Is it just me, or do they piss off most readers?

accept an enormous bulk of conjecture, and they quibble only about details, as in "why does God let babies suffer?" The last paragraph of Farrand's acknowledgements is "And finally, as always, I am forever grateful to you, Jesus Christ, for your kindness, your generosity, and your love." Spooky, or what?

Other interesting fact: Fans of most speculative fictions will gloss over inconsistencies, because the important thing is the point that is being made. A real giant ape would need legs of steel just to stand up, but King Kong isn't about physics, it's about science tampering with the animal kingdom. A flying body needs some method of propulsion, but Superman is really (if you look hard enough) about the possibilities for strength in the weakest of individuals. Doesn't the preoccupation with getting things right suggest that in Star Trek there is no central message, that it's all surface?

Ensign Michael Cullen (Retd.)

COMING SOON!

The Nitpickers' Guide to Markie Post-Era Night Court, Freehold Squeeze Midget, pb, pp357, £2.99

"In one episode Bull gets hit by lightning while on the roof. Apart from the fact that a municipal building should have a lightning rod, we have seen previously that the building next door is higher, and therefore the lightning should be attracted to it instead."

"There are two doors to Harry's office, and whenever anyone tries to get in they can. Shouldn't a judge of all people know that he should keep his doors locked?"

"One man who is brought before the court for a third offence of indecent exposure is let off with a warning. Under section three, subsection fifteen of the 1959 Criminal Reform Act, shouldn't a prison sentence be mandatory in this instance?"

ETC..

Welcome to a new half-page filler that may or may not be a regular article, depending whether people think it's useless. Basically, the science fiction film is the perfect home for the silly movie credit; my favourite credit is actually in nearly every movie, but I include it here as the first credit as I think it's so cool. To kick off, we present the film *Spaced Invaders* (AKA *Martians!!!*), a severely underrated and incredibly funny movie.

And so, *First Contact* proudly presents... the silly credits from *Spaced Invaders*. At least, the ones I thought were silly.

2nd 2nd Assistant Director
Martian Anatomical Consultant
Paint Designed by
Honey Wagon Driver
Psycho-Acoustic Phenomena

Alexandra E. Perce
Kenny Myers
Steve Wang
Clifford J. Parker
JCH Audio Engineering.

So there you have it. More next month if I find a suitably entertaining movie.
But probably not.

Goddess, currently being printed by Dark Horse comics. Of all the UK Anime houses, Anime Projects have consistently held the record for best releases, including *Bubblegum Crisis* and *Urusei Yatsura*, both of which are essential watching for any SF fan.

Anime UK Relaunched

In order to confuse those of us who've been buying it for ages, Anime UK magazine has just released its first issue. Not a reprint, but apparently they want to hook all those people who are only now realising how cool a lot of anime is. You listening out there? It's good stuff. Stop hassling me for printing anime reviews.

TV News

Universal Soldier on TV

The latest hit movie to be turned into a TV series is *Universal Soldier*, albeit without (surprise, surprise) Jean Claude van Damme or Dolph Lundgren. If the TV execs follow their usual pattern, they'll rip all originality out of the show (not that there was much to begin with), and having eviscerated it will bring out a bland, inane piece of unwatchable television that'll make your brain bleed. Can you tell I've just seen the pilot for *Robocop*?

Lex Luthor Returns

If you cast your mind back to the last episode of season one of *Lois and Clark : The New Adventures of Superman*, you'll remember Lex Luthor falling off a really tall building. You'll also remember thinking "he's not dead."

Well, me hearties, you were right. However, he was severely injured, so he'll be sporting a new look for his reappearance. The new, slaphead version of Lex will be in line with the comics where Lexy has been less than hirsute for years, but it seems like a mindless bit of unnecessary continuity to me. And will Denise Crosby still hang around?

Miskelaneous Stuff

Diskworld on CD

Currently taking the games world by storm is a graphical adventure based on Terry Pratchett's *Diskworld*. Given the subject matter, it's hardly surprising that they decided to name it "Terry Pratchett's *Diskworld*." Although it's being mentioned everywhere as the first computer adaptation, Terry Pratchett's *Diskworld* is in fact the sequel. Not that one can compare a 1985 (I think) Spectrum text adventure — even one written by the legendary Fergus McNeil — to six hundred megabytes of sound 'n' vision, and with such luminaries as Jon Pertwee, Eric Idle and Tony Robinson lending their vocal chords to the proceedings.

Top Ten Books

For those of you who take an interest in such things, the top five paperbacks in *Forbidden Planet*, Dublin, last month were...

1. *Star Trek : Voyager Novelisation* -- L.A. Graf
2. *Babylon 5 : Voices* -- John Vornholt
3. *The X-Files : Goblins* -- Charles Grant
4. *Rama Revealed* -- Clarke & Lee
5. *China Mountain Xiang* -- Maureen F. McHugh

Three out of five are media-based; doesn't anyone read real books any more?

Anyway, the top five hardbacks (same venue, same month) are...

1. The Diamond Age -- Neal Stephenson
2. Lord of Chaos -- Robert Jordan
3. Odds and Gods -- Tom Holt
4. All Good Things... -- Michael Jan Friedman
5. Diamond Mask -- Julian May

We should be grateful, I suppose, that there's only one Star Trek book there.

Fan News

Yeah, so fanboy news is horribly tacky, but that's why we're here.

Sensor Arrives (finally)

Anyone who's been in a conversation with Brendan Ryder in the last six years will doubtless be aware that his fanzine has been on the way. Well, rejoice, my brethern, for Issue One arriveth! Brendan's in a unique position in Irish science fiction; not only has he been administering the ISFA for the last few months, but he's a former chairman, and has been more than instrumental in shaping the ISFA over the years. Logically, therefore, his views on the subject should be well worth hearing. Interested? It'll cost you an A4 SAE to get a copy. Send those envelopes to

**Brendan Ryder,
30 Beverly Downs,
Knocklyon Road,
Dublin 16.**

Sproutlore Lives

Those of you who cast your mind back many moons will remember a wee organisation called Sproutlore, dedicated to the life and work of one Robert Rankin. If you're one of the poor few who joined, received one magazine and then was left destitute, worry no more. For none other a personage and James Bacon has resurrected the organisation, and has already brought out one nifty-looking magazine.

If you're interested in joining -- and let's face it, Robert Rankin is one of the best -- then you'll need to send an SAE to

Sproutlore

**The Now-Official Robert Rankin
Fan Club**

**211 Blackhorse Avenue
Dublin 7.**

You know it makes sense. Sort of.

While I think of it...

While perusing the fanzine section of a local comics shop recently, I came across some new stuff I hadn't encountered before. Cunningly hidden among the *Albedo 1s* and the *PFJs* was a wee magazine called *Darklands* (nothing to do with Nicholas Royle's collections of the same name), an offering from the UCD Science Fiction and Fantasy Society. A photo-copied, A4 jobbie, a mere 50p will get you sixteen pages. I won't claim it's brilliant, but it's certainly worth the spondies for fiction, reviews and a nifty little crossword I wish I'd made up myself.

obsessive. If the examples above had been pointed out to the directors concerned, their response would have been "So what?" Much better are the examples of skewed logic:

"The automatic doors display an amazing degree of sensitivity in this episode. When Spock becomes infected he flees to Briefing Room 2 for a place to cry. He barely gets inside the doors when they close. Then he leans back against the doors and they stay closed! How did they know to do this? Did they sense that he was in emotional turmoil and needed their support?" (The Naked Time)

"While attempting to convince the good Kirk to get back into the transporter, Spock makes an odd statement. He says 'I have a human half you see as well as an alien half, submerged, constantly at war with each other.' Did he just call his Vulcan half 'alien'? I thought Spock prided himself on his Vulcan heritage. Wouldn't he be more likely to identify his human half as alien?"

Best of all are those observations which can also be applied to other space operas. My favourite is this one:

"There is no 'up' in space. Yet when once spacecraft meets another, both are usually facing each other at exactly the same level. This would occur only if space exploration occurred on a single place - much like sailing a ship in the ocean." (Trek Silliness[sic])

One major flaw in the book is Farrand's reliance on the videotapes he bought as virtually his only source. He does go into great detail about what he sees, but he also says in the

chapter on "Charlie X": "This episode is filled with moments well played by the actor who portrays Charlie Evans", without bothering to find out that actor's name. Little credit is given to anyone, except Gene. They are all "the creators".

There's no point in going too deeply into the reason for this book's existence, of course. As yet, the legion of Trekkers aren't recruiting door to door, or setting up shop in Middle Abbey Street and offering free Gullibility Tests. For the moment, and as long as they keep to themselves, they can be treated like the harmless eccentrics that they are. Just check on them occasionally to make sure that they don't hurt themselves.

A niggling little complaint about the whole shebang is that in the parallel universe of the Star Trek fan you're allowed to point out small flaws, but you have to just accept the big ones. There is a conspiracy of silence when it comes to the following:

How much does the Enterprise mission cost, and who's paying for it? Why don't they curse, smoke, and have pin-ups on their walls like the real navy (on which so much else is based)? Why do so many aliens have two arms and two legs? Why is English so widely used in the Galaxy, and why hasn't it evolved in 300 years? Why are there no brand names on equipment? Eh? Tell me that, o sages of the Federation!

Interesting fact: You don't have to be a rocket scientist to note the similarity between Trek fandom and members of, say, the Catholic Church. They both

it's safe for me to do a little nitpicking of my own.

Here's an example of what Phil Farrand considers to be an inconsistency (in discussing *Star Trek IV: The Voyage Home*):

"Just before leaving Vulcan, Saavik takes the time to tell Kirk how valiantly his son, David, died. She claims she hasn't had the chance until now. Kirk has been on this planet for three months. Even if she wasn't in the area, don't the phones work on Vulcan?"

One might well ask "If you accept dilithium crystals, miniskirt uniforms, and the fact that none of the best-loved characters ever dies permanently, are you really on firm enough ground to wonder (for instance) why the turbolifts change position on the bridge?"

But of course you are. And perhaps even in the most devoted of Trekkers, the Trekkie, there is a glimmer of doubt. It is as if they are saying "I may have made myself look foolish by dressing up as my favourite character, but have I not also pointed out Spock's outdated reference to flypaper in *The Corbomite Maneuver*?"

Now, here's the dilemma. If you challenge Trekkers as to why they are playing out these fantasies, they will say "It's all just a bit of harmless fun," and indeed it is. So why go to all this trouble? Could it be that some Trekkies are more willing to question Kirk's cavalier attitude to the Prime Directive than they are to question why their friends are learning Klingon?

It's not enough these days to say that Trekkers don't have a life. Boy Trekkers meet girl Trekkers, and some of them have Trek marriages. There is a vague sort of community in Trekdom. But as with all communities, they need to hang on to their sense of humour, and their voices of dissent.

Star Trek really doesn't bear that much scrutiny. The underlying fact of *Star Trek* is that it's not real, and never will be. If "the creators", as Farrand lumps together the many artists and craftsmen involved with the series, noticed an inconsistency, they simply made up something to explain it.

Most of the "nits" that are seized on can be put down to continuity errors, prop failure, or the demands of a tight shooting schedule. These are the most forgivable, and the least entertaining. Here are a selection:

"During the fight, Kirk gets several cuts on his face. Yet, on the bridge afterward, only his hand is bandaged." (*Where No Man Has Gone Before*)

"The dancer at the beginning of the show never strikes her finger cymbals together. Are they just for show?" (*Wolf in the Fold*)

"During the transport of the captain at the end of the show, the creators used Scott's hands for the close-up on the transporter controls. The gold braid shows a rank of lieutenant commander, but the guy working the controls is only a lieutenant." (*The Tholian Web*)

While it might entertain anxious children in a dentist's waiting room, this kind of stuff does nothing to help the Trekker's reputation as an über-

Fighting the Good (or bad) Fight: A Personal History of Role-Playing in Ireland

Maura McHugh

Role-playing in Ireland has changed a lot since I was in my teens in a small town in Ireland in the 80s, wishing I knew someone who gamed so that I could too. I tried my hand at a few of the "Solo Adventure" books (turn to page 20...Description: The last thing you see before you die writhing in pain is the massive, slithering form of the Yokalit Beast) but they were too easy and didn't really involve me in any immediate fashion. Plus, it didn't help that I was a girl, because, somehow, this was something I shouldn't be interested in. It wasn't until I went to the USA for the summer in 1987 that I was introduced to that role-playing institution: Dungeons and Dragons. I met a group of mad people who gamed weekly and they managed to haul me in on one of their games - I was immediately addicted.

A whole new universe opened before me: one filled with dank and dimly-lit dungeons, daring escapades, horrible monsters, vast treasures, and magical weapons. Not forgetting frequent deaths. My first DM (Dungeon Master - the person who controls the game) was one of the sadistic types and enjoyed putting 1st level characters up against such high level nasties as Mind Flayers - it was fun but didn't lead to a long-lived character. I also discovered other role-playing systems: science fiction, fantasy as well as horror and began to branch out.

Back in Ireland I found it much more difficult to gain entrance to a gaming group. I knew they were out there, somewhere, I

just didn't know how to get to them. At this point I was in College in Galway, just when the shops were beginning to stock reasonable amounts of SF/Fantasy/Horror books and occasionally the odd role-playing manual could be seen on their shelves, only to disappear quickly. Then three things happened that changed everything: a Role-Playing society started in my college, and Octocon and Gealcon made their first appearance. Overnight the whole scene seemed to revolutionise. It was easy to find a regular gaming group through the society and soon I was playing "Advanced Dungeons and Dragons", "Paranoia", "Cyberpunk", and "Call of Cthulu" - just to name a few. Colleges are hotbeds of role-playing activity, and most of them have a society dedicated to this pastime in one guise or another, Galway was just slower than most.

Another reason for the rapid growth of role-playing in Ireland was the sudden burst in speciality shops around the country. Dublin had always been the role-playing centre of the universe for those of us outside the pale, and with the arrival of the Virgin Megastore, gamers were finally given a large, central location with a good selection of gaming systems. In the late 80s and early 90s, more shops opened up which were dedicated to SF/Fantasy/Horror enthusiasts, and this gave gamers locations to meet and arrange games. Last year in Galway the first shop dedicated to role-playing opened: "Games People Play" and it has been doing a brisk trade ever since. More and more Colleges held

gaming conventions, and they still do. Warpccon is being held in Cork on January 28-29th, Leprecon is on in Trinity College in Dubin on February 10-11th, Lugcon is on March 24th-March 26th in the University of Limerick, and of course, the big event of the year: Gaelcon, (October 28-30th) the role-player's Mecca. Even Octocon realised the importance of gaming and had a role-playing room for the first time last year.

Role-playing systems have also undergone a drastic change. New products flood into the shops constantly, and there are numerous magazines dedicated to gaming. Of course, shrewd marketing types saw an opportunity and the gaming spin-offs started: the short stories, the books, the t-shirts, the calendars, the dice sets, the beads, and most recently, the card games (more of that next month) [*how did you know?* - RDE]. A lot of the new systems coming out, such as White Wolf's products, now concentrate less on the game mechanics and more on the role-playing aspects of the game. The better gamers take their assumed personalities very seriously, and enjoy getting into character as much as possible. This urge has led to the other phenomenon - Live Action Role Playing, or a LARP.

These are not so common as they require more people than would be normal in a gaming group, and a lot of space. The one I belong to operates out of Trinity on a Saturday night. The game is based on White Wolf's very popular Vampire game, and can have up to 30-60 "vampires" running around on any one night. The game tends to be very free-form and this allows for some truly great role-playing and for totally weird plots to unfold. Of course, there is mediocre role-playing too. Some

people take their characters more seriously than others, so the amount of vampires in costume varies quite widely. At one of the first showings of "Interview with the Vampire" in Dublin six member of the LARP went to the film in full costume, however, very few people took any notice.

The main objective of all of these different forms of role-playing is to have fun, and I have had some of the best and worst times of my life while playing a Mage/Thief in Ravenloft, a Cybersolo in a futuristic New York, a Private Detective in 1930s Chicago, and a Vampire in present-day New York and Dublin. Gamers usually evolve into Game Masters (although some shouldn't!) and I have also enjoyed the pleasure of designing a scenario that your players both love and hate (they hate it when it's difficult but they love it when they win through). There is very little that beats the satisfaction of watching your players' faces go pale when you describe their latest encounter.

Currently the role-playing scene couldn't be healthier in Ireland, and not just in Dublin. Better still, the amount of women now involved in role-playing has grown considerably and we are no longer stared at as a kind of bizarre rarity in shops and at conventions. Dismiss the notion of the average role-player as an anti-social teenaged boy who acts out his anarchist fantasies in dark rooms with other like-minded youngsters. I have seen role-players in every age category, and most gamers I know swear they will never stop (I guess their children will find a gaming group pretty easily). Certainly I see no reason to stop role-playing after nearly a decade; as with many things, the longer you game, the more you enjoy it.

China Mountain Zhang revolves around the character, Zhang, an ABC (American Born Chinese) who initially works as a technician in New York before getting fired for turning down his boss's daughter as a marital prospect. You see, Zhang is gay, and in this future where the communist Chinese have conquered America and to be a straight, Mao-loving Chinese citizen is the ultimate ideal, being gay is a serious offence. So, the book follows Zhang's search to find his identity in his travels from New York, to Baffin Island in Canada, to China and back to America. Using Zhang as the centre, Ms. McHugh weaves a story around him, and interlaces it with many marvellous characters such as Angel, a woman who races Kites (human-powered flyers) over New York, or Martine, Alexi and Aron who are pioneers trying to make a life in the rough conditions of Mars. This is a powerfully compelling story, and once started it is impossible to put down. It is a wonderful mixture of SF, Cyberpunk, Spiritual Quest and Coming-of-Age. And you don't have to take my word for it: this book has won 3 major awards and was nominated for a Hugo and a Nebula - it has been showered with enough praise to make an egomaniac blush. Of course, being a McHugh, it doesn't surprise she's so good. Buy it, you won't be sorry.

Maura McHugh

Quis Nitpicket Nitpiques?

The Nitpicker's Guide For Classic Trekkers, Phil Farrand, Titan, pb,

pp393, £7.99

In space no one can hear you scream - Bollocks!

The classic nitpick, the one that makes pedants point at the screen during *Star Wars* and say "but you wouldn't hear those explosions in space!" has always bothered me. First of all, the camera is not supposed to be a person. A real person would not be able to zoom in, and jump cut. If the camera can subvert reality by doing these things, then the rest is so many horsefeathers. Even if you treat the camera as a person, who says you can't hear in space? As far as I know, no-one has ever taken off their space helmet to find out. The idea of space being silent relies on the idea of space being empty. But it isn't empty if it contains an observer (see *Falling Tree in Forest* with Optional Audience scenario). Who knows if the particles thrown out by the explosion of the Death Star wouldn't themselves carry the sound of the explosion?

Anyway, *Classic Trekkers* is a well-written, well-researched, and engaging book. That's to someone like me who has a passing acquaintance with the popular sci-fi televisual entertainment in question. Fans of the original series who want to know more will find not only the nitpicks but also, for every episode, a synopsis, trivia questions, and a list of transmission cuts. Real Trekkers, if they don't know about the book already, will have read the first two lines of this review, dropped the newsletter, and rushed off to find a copy.

Since all the real Trekkers are gone,

in interesting times, you know.

For the first chapter or so, the style of writing comes across as quite terse, and as such the reader relies more on the artwork than is usual for a graphic novel. However, after a chapter or two, when one gets used to the short sentences, it becomes much more readable, and indeed holds together as an entity very well.

The artwork, however, is less than inspired. Even if we ignore the large Italian flag on the cover on the basis that orange ink is very expensive these days, the internal artwork, by a chap named Eoin Coveney, seems to have been done with no regard for the project whatsoever. He has a somewhat limited grasp of ancient costume, and seems to be under the impression that five thousand years of sartorial evolution involves no more than changing the design on the t-shirts everyone wears. He seems to be convinced that there was quite a lot of inbreeding going on in these fair isles, as practically every character looks the same. Coveney also suffers from an inability to draw action; any scenes of violence look remarkably static. Also, for some reason, he's under the impression that swords can only be used once; every second corpse has a broadsword sticking up in the air out of its back.

When one reads this book, one gets the distinct impression that it's aimed at two distinct markets; school children and Americans. It's bound to succeed in both markets; as a history book, it's informative and entertaining. Each chapter is prefaced

by a couple of pages of text giving the background for the period, and the stories themselves revolve around normal characters who lived in that time, making it eminently more readable. Americans will love it for several reasons; it's about Ireland, Will Eisner's introduction uses phrases like 'a quaint, charming, fairy-tale land' and there's a final page by a guy called Dudley Stewart (whoever the hell he is) from Dublin, Ireland telling us all about the labour of love that is this book. It's deeply unconvincing, and an annoying end to what otherwise comes across as a sincere attempt at relating Irish history.

Overall, Ireland, A Graphic History is an book that will appeal to all who want to learn, or indeed anyone who just likes a good, well-told story. For those of us whose knowledge of the history of the island stops at the Synod of Rathbrassil it's informative, as well, while avoiding the dangerous routes of being dry or condescending. All in all, a worthy read you can't help learning from and enjoying.

Robert Elliott

China Mountain Zhang, Maureen F. McHugh, Orbit, UK£5.99, pp313.

Ever since I read this novel last year I have been telling everyone I know who reads SF to read this book, as it ranks as the one of the best books I read in 1994. Thankfully, Orbit have had the good sense to bring it out on this side of the Atlantic so now all of you can go out and buy it. Yes, it is that good. And, it was a first novel.

TV Review

Space Precinct, Sky 1, Sundays, 8:00
Robocop, Sky 1; not sure. Actually, haven't a clue.

We're in a bit of a boom at the moment as far as SF TV is concerned; with the exception of the cancelling of the wonderful *Adventures of Brisco County, Jr.*, all seems well in the world. Not only are *The X-Files* and *Babylon 5* currently breaking all quality records, but with an extra TV movie being made of *Alien Nation* (based on Peter David's novel *Body and Soul*) and the traditional *Star Trek* franchise (currently *Deep Space Nine*, with *Voyager* forthcoming) it seems that things couldn't be much better in the land of TV. We've even got nifty anthology shows like *Tales from the Crypt* something that looks really cool, the new *Outer Limits*.

Into this scene walk two new series; Gerry Anderson's much-heralded *Space Precinct*, and the latest incarnation of *Robocop*.

Let's look at *Space Precinct* first. It's being described as *Hill Street Blues* in space, and this is obviously how the programme was first pitched, as there's a lot of effort gone into giving it that Hill Street look. However, there's a lot more to the tone of the show than that, and Anderson's makeup jobs have done a lot to give the show a distinct look. It's a running comment about *Star Trek* the aliens are all humans with funny noses, and *Space Precinct* attempts to offset such criticism by using much heavier makeup. Unfortunately, it doesn't always work, and we're left a lot of the time with aliens that look like muppets.

The main problem with *Space Precinct* is that of the script. It's generally wise to wait a few episodes before looking at the scripts; after all, the pilot is there more to introduce characters than anything else. However, the script for this pilot was a little lame. As well as following our heroes throughout their working day, we get to see them at home, having personal crises that no-one's really interested in at this stage. And, of course, there's the two good-looking cops who initially don't like each other, but will probably be shagging each other by the end of the first season. One thing to be grateful for, though, is that apart from one particularly obnoxious family of whom we can hope to see but little there seems to be a dearth of cute kids. Be warned, though; the show does have a blue alien babe with a pineal eye she uses for telekinetically moving around hats; nice work if you can get it.

There are a lot of positive things to be said about *Space Precinct*, and very few negative ones, which is quite bemusing as the show isn't that great. Throughout the programme, one is constantly reminded that it's a Gerry Anderson show. It uses computer models, which are quite nifty, but nothing near the things we've seen in *Babylon 5* or even *seaQuest DSV*. However, the computer models are quite decent, and so we're left wondering why he bothered with some extremely cheesy-looking miniatures when it would have been a lot more effective for him to simply put another few twenty pences into his

computer. Still, it is Gerry Anderson we're talking about here. Maybe he isn't happy unless he's surrounded by crappy models. Basically, if you're looking for hi-tech, ultra-cool, on-the-edge science fiction, watch *Babylon 5*. If you want an excellent example of a series about cops in space, then watch *Star Cops* on video; it's still the best there is. If you expect nothing more than a quite hour of mindless entertainment that doesn't pretend to be anything else, then Space Precinct might be worth a watch.

But what of *Robocop*? Therein lies a different story. *Robocop*, I should point out, is my all-time favourite movie. I consider it a triumph on every level; I shall hear nothing said against it. And so, having been disappointed by one sequel and outraged by the second, I approached the pilot of the new series with trepidation. Actually, let's be honest. I was scared. What could they do to my Robocop?

Well, they could totally eviscerate him for a start. You know that biiiiiig fucking gun that he carries everywhere inside his leg? We'll apparently, it's there for shooting furniture. The first time with see Robo's weapon in action (as it were), he brilliantly takes out a chandelier and a sideboard, using these handy household items to disable baddies. I was depressed. Let's rewind a bit. The series began as did the first film, with a media break. Neither this nor the ads that followed were as well done as in the film, but good enough to prove encouraging. Then, in comes Robocop, serving the public trust, protecting the innocent and kicking arse. It looked like we were in for a good one. Then, the stunning realisation. Robocop doesn't shoot people. Nor do any of the

cops. Nor, incidentally, do either of the cute kids who infest the programme.

The greatest tragedy about *Robocop* is that during its ninety-minute pilot episode, Robocop and the rest of the police are in it for about half the programme. And when they aren't, it's like a completely different programme. The supporting cast were all wonderful. The mad scientist was brilliant. The writing was sharper, and there were some of the finest and silliest visual gags that I've ever seen in a serious programme. Unfortunately, every time Robocop or the OCP hired help make an appearance, it goes back to being a big robot beating up on the bad guys without ever hurting them.

Going back to the days of *The A-Team* (and before), there have been complaints about the levels violence of violence in programmes that are being aimed at a family audience. As a prime-time programme, *Robocop* obviously has its concerns about such things. However, the answer is not to take out all the blood and leave in all the explosions, especially when you're basing the show on a film that carried an 18s certificate when it appeared in the cinema (and a PG minus when it appeared on UTV, the bastards). I really hope that *Robocop* gets better. It's doing a lot right; as I said, it contains some scenes that are worth treasuring. Even when Robocop is on-screen, attempts are made to tie him in with the movies; in fact, an awful lot of scenes will seem very familiar to anyone who's watched the movies. Ultimately, though, *Robocop : The TV Series* is a betrayal of the entire concept of Robocop. It didn't even have the guy who said "I'd buy that for a dollar."

plots are deftly interwoven, though the characterisation is not great — the women are only there to spout airheaded philosophies and provide sexual solace for the male characters. The Backdrop of an environmentally ravaged Earth is realistic, not the usual "Save the Earth" theme (though this is sometimes alluded to). Also, Farkas' blindsight is original — he "sees" objects as bizarre collections of geometric shapes. However, Silverberg seems to have tried to add a Cyberpunk edge to what is basically a hard SF story, and he has not quite succeeded. The characters and dialogue just do not have the streetwise cool that you would find in, say a Gibson novel. Nor does the book have the cosmic scope necessary to make it a classic hard SF novel. Despite this, it is a worthwhile read.

Adam Darcy

Faust Among Equals, Tom Holt, Orbit, pb, £4.99, pp292

Faust. You know, the guy who sold his soul to the Devil. Well, he has escaped from Hell - sorry, Hell Holdings inc. (it's under new management) - and Hell, naturally enough, wants him back. So who do you send to recapture the most wanted man in history? Why the best bounty hunter of all time, Kurt "Mad Dog" Lundqvist. Thus begins a crazy chase though time and space as "Lucky" George Faust manages to stay at least one step ahead of Lundqvist at all times.

Any book that can successfully combine Faust, Leonardo da Vinci,

EuroBosch (a nightmarish interpretation of EuroDisney designed by Heironymous Bosch), assorted bird-headed fiends and God has got to be worth reading at least once. I thoroughly enjoyed reading this book and look forward to reading more Tom Holt in the future. My only criticism is that I found myself expecting to find a comic reference to something or someone on every page, as the book is so widely littered with such references. But this is just a minor flaw in an otherwise hugely enjoyable book. If you need a good laugh, I strongly recommend reading *Faust Among Equals*.

Theresa O'Connor

Ireland, A Graphic History, Morgan Llywelyn & Michael Scott, Element/Gill & Macmillan, £9.99, pp176

OK, so strictly speaking this isn't an SF or fantasy book. However, I thought it was worth reviewing anyway because of its authors, and because anything that covers five thousand years of history has to contain more than a little of legend. The fact that the book is history oriented rather than a straight narrative means that it's different in structure from most graphic novels in that there's considerably less speech from the characters. However, each chapter — there are thirteen, each covering a different time frame — has its own pair of young lovers. What gives the book its charm is that one of these usually dies horribly, reflecting the somewhat eventful history of this land. We're not the only ones living

and more immersed in the strange fate decreed for him by the mysterious Illuminati.

One of the golden rules of writing historical fantasy is don't mix metaphors. You don't say "The dragon roared like an untuned 68' Chevy" you say "the dragon roared with the sound of far-off thunder" because none of the characters should know what an untuned 68' Chevy sounds like. Well, Popes... breaks this rule with a vengeance. Written for the most part in the stilted style of 19th century romances, the characters will suddenly start talking to each other in song titles or break into impromptu James Brown impressions. The characters themselves are never played for laughs but rather the author 'tips us the wink' every now and then that this is supposed to be a light fantasy. This is a very quirky little work and defies easy description but the episodic nature of the narrative, with each chapter recounting a different period and adventure in Slovo's life, prevents the reader being overwhelmed by the unusual style. If you like alternative historical fantasy with a touch of the surreal then this will be right up your alley.

Paul McKinley.

Hot Sky at Midnight, Robert Silverberg, HarperCollins, hb, £15.99, pp327

It is more than one hundred years in the future, and the damage done to our native ecosystem since the Industrial Revolution is beyond repair. Earth is becoming uninhabitable — the ozone

layer has been almost totally depleted, the Greenhouse Effect has caused devastating changes in the climate, the atmosphere is a toxic, unbreatheable soup of pollutants, and rapidly-mutating bacteria and algae give rise to monstrous plagues. The most optimistic of estimates gives the human race six more generations before extinction. Drastic solutions are required.

Some believe the artificial worlds in orbit around Earth to be the only acceptable hope. Once such world is Valparaiso Nuevo, a sanctuary for fugitives — here, even the androids take bribes. Victor Farkas has tracked one Dr. Wu, a brilliant Chinese geneticist, to this satellite. Wu's illicit experiments into prenatal genetic surgery resulted in Farkas' total absence of eyes, but were successful in enhancing human perception — Farkas "sees" through blindsight, the ability to sense the existence of objects in space. This capability becomes more than a curiosity with the development of the faster-than-light drive which, as a side-effect, distorts visual perception — hence, the crew of a spacecraft sent to form an extrasolar colony would need blindsight. Meanwhile, genetic engineers have found a radical third solution — a complete genetic restructuring of humanity to adapt to the polluted environment, essentially, the construction of a new species.

I have never read any of Robert Silverberg's novels before, and this was a good introduction. It is well-written and the various plots and sub-

Con Review

Timewarp 2, The Grand Hotel, Malahide, 11-12 March, 1995

Star Trek conventions are always an eye-opener. Just when you think you know the monomaniacal depths to which your average trekkie can sink, they do something unprecedented and bizarre. Observing humanity like this can be worth the price of admission alone, but in the case of Timewarp, it happened to be a damn fine con as well.

First of all, let me say that most of what I observed at the con was in the dealers' room, where I was working at the weekend. However, as there's usually little else happening at a *Trek* con if you're not interested in watching *Star Trek : Voyager* for the gazillionth time or learning Klingon, this is where I usually spend most of my time at these things anyway. And, of course, I got to sneak away from vending my wares any time something interesting was happening. Such was my duty to you, the reader. That you could know what happened.

My first attempt at this con report was a dry, serious document that related impartially my opinion on the running of the con. It analysed the reactions of the guests and fans to whom I spoke, and it finished up with a carefully-considered opinion of the weekend.

It didn't contain the word 'sad.'

Welcome to the second draft.

The highlight of the convention for me was undoubtedly the fact that the attendees were even more spectacularly trekkish than at any other convention I've ever been to. Granted, I haven't been

to that many *Trek* cons, but these guys were something else. For the rest of my days, I'll be haunted by the scene in the bog, where I was minding my own business while behind me a Klingon practiced his growling in a full-length mirror. You can't make this shit up, I believe someone once said.

The dealers' room was the best I've ever seen at an Irish convention, and provided a happy balance between tacky *Trek* merchandise and tacky, non-*Trek* merchandise. An excellent addition to the room was the Armagh Planetarium, where once could sample the delights of astronauts' ice cream, and annoy the stallholder by asking him did he have any posters of the 'Enterprise' (this happened several times while I was standing there). There were other stands from America and Britain, and while we all had a certain amount of the same stuff, there was enough variety that no one stand was really redundant.

Of the video programme, I am alas unable to give a report on first-hand, but everyone seemed happy at the opportunity of seeing the pilot to *Star Trek : Voyager*. There were a lot of episodes starring the guest of honour, Majel Barrett Roddenberry, which was probably necessary, if unfortunate in that they were usually the worst episodes. Still, who am I to complain?

Of Maj herself, I saw little. She appeared in the dealers' room several times (she owns a shop that had a table there) to drum up business, and pissed off all the

other dealers by not signing copies of *Gene Roddenberry's Lost Universe* (on which she apparently did some plot development) unless they were bought on her table. Speaking as a dealer, I have nothing further to say about the woman unless it's bad, so I'll forbear.

One of the highlights of the convention — and I never thought I'd say this — was the masquerade. Interestingly, the best costumes of there were of two Narns (or is that two Narn?) from *Babylon 5*, and no-one seemed to mind people entering costumes from a superior show. Close behind the Narn was an excellent Minbari costume, but for those of a more traditional bent there were still enough Ferengi, Borg and regular starfleet personnel wandering around to make the evening colourful.

Other events of which I heard in passing were the Klingon language classes and the wargaming room. Of the former I heard little, but the wargame was

oversubscribed something like ten times, so there were a lot of disappointed Khans out there. Nonetheless, by all accounts it was a well-run game, and those who watched seemed to have a much fun as the participants.

Generally, Timewarp was an excellent example of convention running. The committee looked really cool with their headsets, events ran more or less on time and a lot of lessons were learned at the previous Timewarp, as the management for such high-profile events as the *Voyager* showing and autograph sessions was a lot less stressful for all concerned. Having guys in charge of security who were a little more relaxed was a major bonus as well.

All in all, the only complaint I have about the weekend is that the committee wouldn't let me use the registration computer to play Doom.

Robert Elliott

Warpcon 5, 27th-29th January, UCC

Organised by University College, Cork's Wargaming and Roleplaying Society, in a nutshell this convention was a high-quality, low-budget, loadsafun weekend. Only six pounds for the three days, and a mere £2.50 for one day. Anybody who enjoys any type of game should go along. There were tournaments with Sam Chupp, GOH, and events from pub quizzes to Star Trek : The Drinking Game. For convention goers, this is a must.

The next games con is in the University of Limerick from 24th to 26th March. Details from

Lugcon Director

C/o Students' Union

University of Limerick

Limerick.

See you there, if you dare.

Phil O'Connor

mistress of the shorter review.

Book Reviews

Angel, Garry Kilworth, Gollancz, pb, pp286, £4.99

Armageddon has come and gone and nobody noticed. A few demons escaping the defeat of the forces of evil fled to earth (losing almost all their powers) to hide from the Angel Nethru who has decided to show a little initiative by hunting them down and exterminating them with holy fire. Unfortunately Angels don't take much notice of anything as mundane as mortals so a lot of people tend to get caught up in Nethru's burning ambitions. Among them are the wife and daughter of a 'no-nonsense' San Francisco cop called Dave Peters. Swearing revenge on the unknown arsonist Dave and his partner attempt to track down their immortal and invulnerable foe. And therein lies the main flaw with "Angel". While the demons are simply strong, quick and tough to kill, Nethru is invulnerable. Understandably this puts him a little out of the league of a couple of street cops. Kilworth seems to realise this about two thirds of the way through the book and in a bit of a Duck-eggs-machine (Deus ex machina) strips Nethru of his angelic powers leaving him open to a rather predictable end. This is the first Kilworth novel I've seen for ages and though billed under 'horror' nothing particularly horrible happens except for a brief description of a torture inflicted upon the protagonist in his youth by some toughs. Lots of people get burned to

death of course but all that happens 'off-stage'. In fact "Angel" reads very like a supernatural version of "The Streets of San Francisco" with the hero as a younger and slightly more sexually active version of Karl Malden. There are a few complications thrown in such as the pyromaniac girlfriend Dave Peters picks up or the sleazy, revenge obsessed parole officer, but nothing much is done with them. Like so many novels "Angel" starts off well but (perhaps because of an attack of deadline-itis) trails away into cliché. Entertaining but not earth-shattering. **Paul McKinley.**

Popes and Phantoms, John Whitbourne, Gollancz, pb, pp287, £5.99.

Admiral Slovo is the prototype renaissance man - soldier of fortune, pirate, philosopher and pawn of the Illuminati. Set in and around 15th Century Italy, then the centre of the civilised world, *Popes and Phantoms* tells the life story of the central character. Interwoven with the factual aspects of Borgia Popes, Turkish conquests and classical art of the era is a whimsical tale of secret conspiracies, vengeful ghosts, mythical creatures and dead gods. Starting with Slovo's early adventures as a pirate captain haunted by the ghosts of his victims we follow his career through trader and odd-job-man for the Popes as he becomes more

Steerpike Specks

This is the first in a series of columns in which I, or others like me will sound off about this and that. Please feel free to write in with your pet hate. To kick off, one lucky reader will draw first blood on the most recent Octocon committee, whose bumbling efforts at con-holding left most of us in confusion. Over to you Anon.

The more seasoned of us will have noticed that the last Octocon Committee upset an awful lot of people. The less observant only need look at this list: Octocon have had a major row with the Royal Marine Hotel, Cortex have been banned for making a small and not very funny joke, Mascon were subject to pressure, numbers were down, dealers were dissatisfied and some individuals felt the con was lacking in a great many areas.

Of course this is a purely subjective view. The Octocon Committee and the guests had a wonderful time.

They had private room parties with presentations to the guests, free drink all weekend and dinner in what I believe was a lovely restaurant. We of course had to pay for everything. And sit through more bloody panels. Its just our tough luck we are not in the inner circle.

This year we have Timewarp 2 , Worldcon and lots of smaller cons are happening. All of them are generating a great deal of interest except Octocon 6 and the reason is simple: we have seen it unchanged for five years. Octocon has become somewhat stale.

The Octocon committee better think long and hard about this years con because O5 left a bitter aftertaste. We, the paying punters, demand a good con and by Gaia the committee better give us one or they may find we have voted with our feet.

Steerpike

Submissions (desperately) wanted

So you think you've got what it takes to write for the Irish Science Fiction Association, eh? Well, mateys, go ahead and prove it. I dare ya. Go on. Send me anything. A letter. An article. A list of the days on which you wore purple socks. Why? Because I'm merely an editor. It's my job to get the best available talent, and from where I'm sitting that looks like you. Without you, people across the world will be starved of your opinion. They'll wander through their humdrum lives, never knowing what you thought of that latest book. Why you agreed with me when I said Generations was shite.

So go on. I'll consider anything that doesn't have anything nasty to say about *The X-Files*.

Comics Reviews

Preacher #1, Vertigo, Ennis & Dillon, £2.70

Happy Birthday Martha Washington, Dark Horse, Miller & Gibbons, £2.70

Bone #18, Cartoon Books, Jeff Smith, £2.70

After their long run on Vertigo's excellent *Hellblazer*, Garth Ennis and Steve Dillon have moved onto pastures new; *Preacher*. Their own creation, *Preacher* is the story of Jesse Custer, a minister in a small Texas town who has a bit of a shady past. In fact, his past is shadier than most, and he does nothing to redeem himself when, in the middle of a sermon, he gets possessed (or something) and destroys the entire town, reducing its entire population to bones.

Of course, there's more to it than that. When one adds in the preacher's ex-girlfriend, the crazyish guy from whom she hitched a lift and the paranoid sheriff with a thing about 'n----- Martians' and you've got quite a melting pot of fragile psyches and unique personalities. Then, of course, there's the mysterious creature that escaped from heaven, and the mystic gunslinger...

For the first issue of a comic, *Preacher* #1 certainly packs it in. Since its inception, the Vertigo line has done more for serious comics than anything to come out of a major company (probably ever), and *Preacher* continues that attempt at bringing quality comics to people who are more interested in storylines than spandex costumes.

Ennis' writing is very different from the style we're used to on *Hellblazer*; he's obviously decided 'to hell with propriety' (not that he was that worried about it on *Hellblazer*), and his more liberal use of harsh language, for example, means that

the word 'fuck' appears on nearly every page, as opposed to only once during the entire *Hellblazer* run. The story itself is much more gruesome as well, and Dillon aided and abetted with diligence to ensure that none of the more gory scenes were left to the imagination.

So are Garth 'n' Steve trying to shock use here? Ennis says no in his afterword, but I'm not sure I entirely believe him. Still, Ennis is an excellent writer, and as long as the story holds up, I say let his motivations be his own. I doubt many people will be shocked by this story, but anyone who spends their hard-earned shekels on it will unquestionably have an entertaining read on their hands.

Frank Miller seems to be coming back lately, with both *Sin City* and Martha Washington appearing for regular mini-series over the past year or so. Latest of these, and hot on the heels of *Sin City's The Babe Wore Red*, is *Happy Birthday Martha Washington*, the third book of our eponymous heroine as she fights evil, both within and without her own ranks.

Like *The Babe Wore Red*, this is an anthology book, with three short short stories. Consequently, it's much better if taken as a sequel, as there's little by way of background, and anyone using this as an introduction to the world of *Give Me Liberty* would be left with a lot of inferring to do. Having said that, the stories are strong enough to be read without the benefit of notes, and each of them is a

worthy example of that much under-used art form, the comics short short story.

Happy Birthday... follows pretty much from the previous series, *Martha Washington Goes to War*, in that it's more of a war story than the first series, which concentrated on the vendetta between Washington and one of her fellow officers. Here, we're given three glimpses into Washington's life as a soldier, and Miller's mastery of the art of comic book storytelling means that all of the inanities of war can be summed up in a few pages. Miller's Captain Kurtz, a quite blatant Captain America clone, is wonderfully depicted, both as an icon and as a man. While simultaneously taking the piss and showing how such a man can become an icon in the first place, Miller turned what could have been a light, throwaway yarn into one of the more essential reads this month. If you haven't read *Give Me Liberty* yet, go out and buy the collection now. If you have, then doubtless you'll already own *Happy Birthday Martha Washington*.

Last, but by no means least, is *Bone*. The creation of Jeff Smith, *Bone* is a strange comic that defies description, which means that I'm going to have an interesting time over the next couple of hundred words. Nonetheless, it's such a wonderfully silly comic that for you lot, I'm willing to make the effort.

Basically, the hero of our story is Fone Bone. Along with his cousins, Phoney Bone (a Ferengi by any other name) and Smiley Bone (who's a trifle simpler than most), Bone was kicked out of his village of Boneville after some indiscretions on the part of Phoney Bone, and after they separated, they each found their way into

a mysterious forest, full of strange goings on.

Bone is a black and white, somewhat sporadic title from Cartoon Books, Jeff Smith's own company. The artwork is quite simplistic but very well drawn, and the story is, not to put too fine a point on it, brilliant. Possibly the funniest thing in comics today.

The current issue of this book concentrates on Phoney Bone, and his attempt at recouping some of the losses he made in the Great Cow Race (you had to be there). Having annoyed the entire village with his attempted fix, only Lucius, the owner of the local tavern, stops the town from ripping him apart. And he's only doing this because he has a bet that Phoney can't run the tavern better than he. Don't expect earth-shattering storylines here; all you're getting is pure silliness.

For some reason, I've heard a lot of people comparing *Bone* to *Cerebus*, and the comparison puzzles me somewhat, as I can't really see it. Sure, both are black and white, independent comics that happen to show most of the giant publishers what real stories are about, but beyond that, there's little. Except, of course, that both stories have been mapped out, and some issues can't be read by themselves unless you're prepared to be bemused.

There are presently two compilations of *Bone* available comprising the first twelve issues. I would urge all and sundry to go out and buy them now, and then run to your favourite comics shop and ask them very nicely to keep by a copy of *Bone* whenever it comes in. It's bi-monthlyish. And it's brilliant.

Robert Elliott

numerous references to McKinley Station in TNG. In Richard O'Brien's movie Shock Treatment there is a character called Nation McKinley. Also, in TNG Colm Meaney plays transporter chief O'Brien. Not only that, but Richard O'Brien played a small role in the movie Flash Gordon, which starred Timothy Dalton as Prince Barin. Dalton also starred in Rocketeer, alongside Bill Campbell, who played Okona in TNG's "The Outrageous Okona."

The evidence is overwhelming, and there can only be one conclusion: *Star Trek: The Next Generation* is completely ripped off from *Blake's Seven*.

Octocon 5 - The Video

Directed by Michael O'Connor, Edited by James Mason, Starring lots of people who probably didn't want to be on camera.

Octocon last year was interesting for many reasons, not all of them to do with science fiction. Although most people enjoyed themselves immensely, there were one or two grumbles and hints of dark thoughts to be found if one searched hard enough. And did those nice boys and girls at Mascon dig? Well, yes.

If you've ever seen a Mascon video before, you'll know what to expect. A couple of ads for people from whom they could con the price of a drink, some really nifty animations courtesy of the Mascon Amiga (albeit sans toaster for the moment; I don't doubt it's coming), and lots of footage of people making total idiots out of themselves.

The really surprising thing about this video is its length; at clocking in at around half an hour, it's much shorter than any of their previous offerings, and indeed they've done trailers in the past that approach this length. The reason for this, I've been told, is really tight editing; not an ounce of waffle makes it onto the final tape. And while this isn't exactly true, James Mason did a damn fine job of distilling the hours of footage into something watchable. All previous Octocon videos have had a fair amount of crap on them, but as Mascon get the hang of the editing, a lot of the self-

indulgence that was there in previous years has been exorcised, leaving a much tighter, more watchable video.

All of which, of course, is bugger all use if it doesn't tell us what happened at the con. So how do Mascon stand up to this daunting task? Basically, they do all right. A lot of stuff was left out, presumably so that more time could be devoted to The Cortex Incident which has since become the stuff of legend. Lots of people were asked for their opinions, and few were shy; I myself offered a few humble words, and came out on tape looking like a complete git. Who says the camera never lies, eh?

As a fair and accurate recording of all that went on at the con, the video is a bit lacking. However, as an entertaining reminder of a lot of the stuff that happened, shown in a relaxed, visually excellent format, Octocon 5 : The Video succeeds admirably.

If you're interested in a copy, send a fiver in the currency of your choice (as long as it's Irish) to

*Mascon International,
C/o 12 Marino Green
Marino
Dublin 3.*

STAR TREK: BLAKE

by Michael Carroll

Spoiler warning: This article discusses certain plot points of Star Trek: Generations. If you have not seen this film, read no further.

Whilst watching "Blake" (the final episode of Blake's Seven) recently, I was struck by the incredible number of similarities to Star Trek: Generations, and the general similarities between the two series.

The most obvious similarity is the reappearance of Roj Blake. After an absence of twenty-five episodes, and with an almost entirely new crew and a new ship, Blake's return is jarring. Blake "disappeared" at the end of the second season, at which point the show took a completely different turn. Watching Gareth Thomas reprise the role, and seeing him act alongside Stephen Pacey as Tarrant (who was more or less Blake's replacement) gave me the same sense of nostalgia as seeing Kirk and Picard together: a joining of the old and the new.

The second most obvious similarity is the crash-landing of the Scorpio. We see the ship ploughing into the ground, and some of the shots are almost identical to the landing of the Enterprise's saucer section. In both cases, the ship is rendered completely inoperative by the crash.

Other similarities: Avon's extremely emotional reaction when he discovers that Blake has betrayed them. Throughout the series, Avon remained impassive, almost completely emotionless, and yet here he reacts uncharacteristically with pure emotion. Just like Data in Generations. Though the reasons are different, the end product is the same. On a similar note, Vila also has an uncharacteristic response: he reacts with violence and courage after Dayna is shot.

Some more general points: Both *Star Trek: Generations* and *Blake's Seven* are swarming with references to The Federation. Both *Star Trek: The Next Generation* and *Blake's Seven* have had a very under-utilised telepathic alien as part of the regular crew (Troi and Cally), and a security officer who gets killed early on (Yar and Gan - well, he was the closest to a security officer the *Liberator* had). Both shows have had a season end with a war about to commence, and the word "Fire!" (TNG's "Best of Both Worlds Part 1", and BS's "Star One"). Michelle Scarabelli played Ensign Jenna D'Sora in TNG's "In Theory." The TNG spin-off series, *Deep Space Nine*, features Andrew Robinson as Garak ... Robinson is best-known for his role as a psychopath called Scorpio in *Dirty Harry*. Malcolm MacDowell (who plays Tolian Soran in *Generations*) is a British actor, as are most of the actors in *Blake's Seven*.

But most damning of all ... *Blake's Seven* was created by Terry Nation. There are

Every month, we'll be asking someone interesting for their all time top ten books. First off, we have **Michael Scott**, author of far too many books for me to list here.

Read Me

It started out innocently enough, a group of SF readers comparing books, making recommendations, slagging off authors and plots. And, as is often the case, the conversation grew heated, and ended with Robert Elliott throwing down the gauntlet: "Give us your top ten then..." This is based on the assumption that writers read (I know some who can barely read) and that they read a lot. Usually, writers are writing and never approach the voracious appetite of many fans. Putting down a favourite ten requires a thick skin, brass neck and other deformities. So here they are, in no particular order, except that they be in easy reach...

1. **Andre Norton's Witch World**, volumes 1 to six — especially *Three Against the Witch World* (OK, so I know there are six here, but they are one series... and I'm making my calculation using a Pentium processor). I know this series has dated and that the writing is sometimes not very good, but the imagery, the imagination...

2. **Marion Zimmer Bradley's Darkover Novels**. Some are brilliant (*Two to Conquer*, *Heritage of Hastur*, *Stormqueen*), others are less successful. I find the later collaborations simply do not catch the sheer awe-inspiring power of the earlier works.

3. **Thomas Burnett Swann**. An extraordinary and sometimes underrated writer. His *Day of the Minotaur* and *Weirwood* are superb re-workings of classical folklore. If you like Charles de Lint, check out Swann.

4. **David Gemmell**. I like Gemmell's writing. Simple as that. Simple plots, strong writing, real characters (OK, so I didn't like *Lion of Macedon* and *Dark Prince*, but on-one's perfect).

5. **Katherine Kurtz**. The original *Camber* series (*Camber of Culdi*, *Saint Camber* and *Camber the Heretic*) and the first *Deryni* series (*Rising*, *Checkmate* and *High...*). Here the fantasy is so good it approaches mythic folklore. I can still remember the impression they made on me when I first read them.

6. **John Whitbourn**. *A Dangerous Energy* and *Popes and Phantoms*. Absolutely brilliant. Read them. "This looks weird and bizarre," Padraig O Unpronouncible Name said, handing me *Popes*... "Right up your street."

Twenty-four hours later, I was recommending it to everyone I knew, and made a special trip into the city to by the author's first book.

7. **Chelsea Quinn Yarboro.** *The Count de Saint Germaine* series. The best vampire series. Full stop. Brilliantly researched. Superb characters with the finest fictional vampire after the much overworked Dracula. The first books were written before Anne Wrice wrote *Interview...* The Count de Saint Germaine is a far more interesting and fully-rounded character than Lestat.

8. **Robert McCammon.** *Swan Song* and *They Thirst*. I prefer *Swan Song* to King's *The Stand*, which unfortunately eclipsed it somewhat, and *They Thirst* is a brilliant twist on the vampire theme, a reworking of Matheson's *I am Legend* (Made into a movie as *The Omega Man*).

9. **Harry Harrison,** *Stainless Steel Rat*. I was once sent out of class for reading one of the early Rats behind a maths book. The teacher knew something was wrong when I started laughing uncontrollably. Maths was never this funny.

10. I've reached ten and I haven't even started yet. I haven't mentioned authors like Mike Resnick, Patrick Tilley, David Brin, CJ Cherryh, Mary Gentle, Orson Scott Card...

Last one: The very first science fiction book I ever read: *Pilgrimage to Earth* by Robert Sheckley. The much-tattered edition I have was published in 1959 by Corgi books for 2'6. I include it here without apology.

Next month : somebody else's list. By the way, I want yours as well. Your ten favourite books, and a few words on each. Is that too much to ask? The best entries will be rewarded with publication and their name in huge, ten-point type. At least. Eleven if you've any Lois McMaster Bujold books on your list.

My thanks must go to Pádraig Ó Méalóid for spotting the following review of *The Princess Bride* in the Irish Times, dated March 18...

A real gem. William Goldman wrote the screenplay from his own medieval-fairytale novel and Rob Reiner directs with a great comic touch, helped by perfect performances from the likes of Wallace Shawn, Mandy Patinkin as the flaxen-haired princess and Peter Falk. Pretend you're taping it for the kids.

Hugh Linehan

he becomes almost aimless when he loses Lestat, and this brings the atmosphere down a couple of notches. Because, believe it or not, it's Tom Cruise who carries the film, something I'd never have thought possible. Unfortunately, Armand (Antonio Banderas), Lestat's "replacement" as Louis' mentor is not nearly as interesting, and Stephen Rea as the supposedly brutal Santiago is, with the exception of one scene, laughable. Kirstin Dunst as Louis' twelve-year-old companion Claudia really does get into the spirit of her character, it's just that the character wasn't everything she could have been.

Stan Winston's special effects are truly wonderful, mainly because for the most part they're almost invisible (except for one very wobbly sequence where Santiago "walks up a wall"), and the make-up is also very impressive: no inch-long fangs and bland white faces here, I'm pleased to note.

You'll notice how I haven't mentioned anything about Rice's original condemnation of the casting of Cruise, that's because you can read about it in every other review of the movie. As far as I'm concerned, Interview with the

Vampire should stand or fall on its own merits. There's not much else I can say about the film without spoiling it, but I would certainly recommend it as a night out at the cinema, but don't go expecting a typical Tom Cruise movie, not even a typical vampire movie: this is far, far better than it might have been. Who'd have thought that Tom Cruise could play anyone other than Tom Cruise?

Michael Carroll

**Interview With the Vampire --
The Soundtrack**
Geffen Records, £13.99 (CD)

From the haunting 'Born to Darkness' to the dramatic 'Escape to Paris,' from the frenzy of 'Abduction and Absolution' to the beautiful 'Madeleine's Lament,' Elliot Goldenthal has perfectly captured the atmosphere of the entire movie in his music. Each piece could almost tell the story itself, without the need for pictures, it is so well suited to the scene. And then we have Guns 'n' Roses with their cover of 'Sympathy for the Devil.' How does this fit in, I hear you ask. Well, obviously you have not yet seen the film. Believe me, this song belongs in the film!

Theresa O'Connor

black so we had no trouble identifying him as the villain.

The humour was good, especially in the first sequence on board the Enterprise 'B', but who gave that young man the captain's chair? It was inconceivable that anyone so easily intimidated and indecisive, not to mention being a little slow of the mark, could attain the rank he did. Bust him back to ensign I say, and give him a desk job.

The plot called for the loss of Kirk and the Enterprise 'D' (stand by for a 'great new design' and allied merchandising). I'm sorry to admit I was more touched by the fate of the ship than I was about Kirk's demise and that was a pity. I don't think Shatner or Stewart could be faulted, it's the job of the director to create moods and the death of Kirk lacked the passing such a great character should have.

As well as the old cast, female characters were a little neglected too, but it must have been a nightmare to try and give everybody a good scene. I've heard comments that *Generations* was a good TV two-parter, and I'd go along with that. Some of my favourite episodes of the series are two-parters so I won't complain too much, I will look forward to the next one though, when things will hopefully have settled down. Until then goodbye to the Classic series and to Captain Kirk. It was a good day to die.

Sharon O'Doherty

First Contact, March 1995 Page 20

Interview with the Vampire

Directed by Neil Jordan

*Starring Tom Cruise, Brad Pitt,
Christian Slater*

It's been a long time since I read Anne Rice's novel, so it's difficult to make comparisons, which is just as well because a film like this should be reviewed for what it is, not for what it's based on. As a vampire movie, it works quite well, certainly a lot better than Coppola's Stoker's *Dracula*. Brad Pitt is convincing as the tortured plantation owner Louis, who gives up his miserable life to join the ranks of the undead. Louis' guide is the vampire Lestat — vicious, arrogant, selfish and just plain not very nice — played with remarkable subtlety by Tom Cruise.

The movie is narrated by Louis, sitting in a bare room, telling his story to reporter Christian Slater, and it is here that the movie falls down. A voice-over throughout the movie is one thing, but the jumps back and forth from New Orleans of two hundred years ago to San Francisco of today are jarring, reminding us that Louis is telling a story, and hence that we are merely watching a film.

The single overriding theme is Louis' attempt to hold on to the last traces of his humanity while his vampiric body cries out for human blood, and Brad Pitt manages to convey this torment very well, but

Letters

Dear First Contact,

It is only in the absence of a committee that I realise fully how much effort Paul Sheridan, James Peart, Rory Lennon and Ceri Beasley put into the ISFA, and how little thanks they got from people like me. It came as no surprise to me that no-one was willing to form a new committee when the only feedback the '94 committee received seemed to be negative. So I would like to take the opportunity to express my gratitude to them for making my first year as an ISFA member very enjoyable.

The achievements of last year should be built upon. The newsletters and magazines were done very professionally. These and the monthly meetings provided a forum for Irish SF fandom which I had not realised was needed until I experienced them. It would be a pity, therefore, to see the ISFA founder over the next few months just as it was beginning (as Paul Sheridan put it at one of the monthly meetings) "to go places."

Which begs the question: if I am so concerned, why don't I do something about it and volunteer for the committee? If the worst came to the worst and the dissolution of the ISFA was imminent, I hope I would. But I have absolutely no experience of such matters, and it would not merely like throwing myself into the deep end — more like throwing myself into the Marianas Trench.

This brings me to the main point of the letter. It may be presumptions of me, but I have heard similar views expressed by other members. What I suggest is this: a committee would always be formed with two incumbent members and two new

members, that is, each member of the committee would have a two-year term, and at each AGM only two members would be elected. This would ensure continuity in the driving force of the ISFA, and make it easier for the new committee members to learn the ropes (though I do realise that two members of the '94 committee were willing to assist the new committee — had it been formed — for two months). It is not fair to have each committee start from scratch, and usually in these situations they make the same mistakes as their predecessors.

Yours sincerely,
Adam Darcy
Rathfarnham,
Dublin 14

I'm sure your kind words on last year's committee are appreciated; any of us who formerly served will tell you how much any encouragement is welcomed. As for joining the committee; thankfully, we're once again in possession of four hardy volunteers, so the problem is averted (once again) for at least another year. There are more ways to help the ISFA than joining the committee; you've started yourself with a book review for this issue; I hope I see more from you. Remember; articles for the newsletter, fiction and artwork for the magazines are always welcome, especially from newer members. Along with the meetings, the publications are the only way people hear about the ISFA, and I'd like to see as many people as possible writing for them. The problem with having a two-year committee post is that most people aren't willing to stand for two years. There was

a time (many year ago) when the committee was the same for about four years, but in the last three or four years people seem to have taken a lot less time to become disillusioned, and so it's become the norm to stand for only one year. I hope this changes this year; the new committee is just that, no-one's been on it before, so we may see sweeping changes and the start of a new dynasty. One can only hope. RDE.

Dear Bob,

I write to you concerning the January newsletter.

Twelve months ago, the newsletter started to improve in production quality, also the content improved in a sense, as I enjoy photographs and seeing the covers of books reviewed. But at the same time that my visual pleasure went up my mental pleasure went down as certain pieces became boring and the amount of news became less.

Then Wham! It's January again and what's happened, well we're back to a photocopied Newsletter which is too short as (although I don't like to admit it) I liked it a lot. No photos or covers of books or illustrations which I also liked.

Being the inquisitive sort that I am, I went for the jugular and asked the Administrator, Mr. Brendan Ryder, what the story was.

Seemingly not only was the last Chairwoman efficient and effective, she was mightily resourceful, as she was getting circa £200 worth of printing done for around £26.50. So that was why we were receiving an excellently-produced Newsletter. Also, it actually cost Mr. Ryder more to produce the photocopied job, so thanks are due to Mrs. Beasley (Ceri) as she lifted the image of the ISFA's

newsletter, for a year at least.

So Bob, I forgive you for the production quality but I won't if the content isn't up to the standard I expect. I enjoyed the Newsletter, but I was surprised to see no letters in it as I am aware of three that were sent in, I'm also aware that the previous committee were in possession of at least one of those letters, which didn't see print because it was too late for the December issue, but would have been printed otherwise, so why weren't they in the January issue?

I have lots of other things to say, but I won't bother as it won't do much good, and my blade is always there, with a sharp cutting edge at the ready!

Don't fuck it up.

James Bacon

My thanks for your kind words on the Newsletter; glad you enjoyed it. As you said, it looked excellent last year under the auspices of Ceri and the gang, and it's unfortunate that the deal Ceri secured is no longer available to us. However, we'll keep on truckin', and keep looking for ways to improve the Newsletter, both in production values and content.

As for your mysterious missing letters; the reason why they weren't printed is that I never got them. I wouldn't go reading too much into this, I can assure you that there's no conspiracy afoot to silence the views of the members. Inevitably when a new committee takes over things get temporarily mislaid, a situation that this year was exacerbated by the absence of any new committee for a couple of months. They missing letters will turn up; in the mean time I would ask anyone who didn't see their letters in print to write again; we'd love to hear from you (again).

RDE

Film Reviews

Star Trek : Generations

Star Trek entered a new era with *Star Trek : Generations*, a movie publicity would have us believe marries the old and the new but which effectively waves a languid hand of farewell to those of the classic generation and eagerly embraces the new.

The plot involves the Nexus, a stellar cloud of joy which when it catches one, subjects one to a life of wonderful, contented fulfillment. Unfortunately, though, it has a destructive effect on ships, planets, etc. which happen across its path.

The story opens on the Enterprise 'B'. The inaugural voyage of the ship (which of course is in no condition for active duty) is interrupted by a distress call and in the course of the rescue, Kirk sacrifices himself for the ship. The Nexus, content with its dose of carbon-based life forms and starship (it took some of engineering with it) goes on its merry way. The survivors of the rescue include some of Guinan's race and include Soran, who is desperate to go back to his now non-existent ship. Eighty years later we encounter him again, and find that the Nexus has had such a profound effect on him that he longs to become a permanent resident. The problem is to actually

catch up with the Nexus, so Soran invents a machine which will attract it to him. This will place populated planets in the immediate vicinity in danger of destruction, so the Enterprise 'D' is called on to save the system.

Star Trek : Generations is an enjoyable yarn, supported by excellent special effects but it lacks the maturity of some of the previous movies, such as *Khan*, *Voyage Home* and *Undiscovered Country*. Several sub-plots run through the main storyline, and are concerned mostly with the development of Next Generation characters, which don't balance easily with the rather light Nexus plot. These included the death of Picard's brother and nephew, thus putting the pressure on the captain to continue the family line. And Data asking Geordi to install the emotion chip his father had intended to have. Brent Spiner plays Data's wildly fluctuating emotions brilliantly and at times hilariously, but did Data need emotions? Surely one of the most interesting aspects of Data was that like Spock, the audience were obliged through the strong, underplayed performances of the actors to endow the character with an emotional reaction, real or imagined.

Malcom McDowell as Soran was no Khan but good. Luckily he wore