

# FIRST CONTACT

NEWSLETTER OF THE IRISH SCIENCE FICTION ASSOCIATION



## Editorial

And so I come to the end of my tenure as editor of the newsletter. It's been twelve issues, and twelve months. I've served, if that's the right word, under three chairmen. When I first took over from Brendan the prospect of doing even six months seemed daunting (especially when photocopiers broke down, or printers refused to print). Now, of course, it doesn't seem that long. Even if the newsletter reverts to being a couple of sheets of bare news, I like to think that I gave the membership an idea of what could be achieved. If there is someone out there who wants to take on the editorship, then I hope I have set some kind of standard.

My thanks, as always, go to the reviewers, who produce the backbone of the magazine. If only items of news came in as regularly as the reviews, then the news section would be in a healthier state.

Thanks to all the other contributors over the twelve months, and to Robert Elliott and Michael Carroll, and anyone else out there who did something to help.

The interview with Michael, by the way, is being held over until the next issue so as to be closer to the publication date of his first novel.

I know that Michael O'Connor and James Mason wouldn't forgive me if I didn't mention their new video, a report from Timewarp, over which they have toiled for many's a long minute or two. It's available from this meeting, and a trailer will be shown for it.

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Editor: Michael Cullen  
Thanks to: Robert Elliott and Michael Carroll

Published by  
The Irish Science  
Fiction Association  
Box 3762  
Dublin 6

Well, it's out of my hands now. I've done the best I can, I've sweated nights pasting, I've typed my fingers to the bone, I've carried a box of photocopied pages from town to Ranelagh until my arms felt like lead. If this sounds like your idea of a good time then why not apply in writing for the post of editor of the newsletter. Please. Go on. You know you want to.

Opinions expressed are those of the individual contributors, and not those of the ISFA, except where stated.

## NEWS

### Hawking to Appear on Next Gen

The world renowned scientist Stephen Hawking, author of the bestselling *Brief History of Time*, is to appear in the new series of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*.

In the episode Hawking is quizzed, along with Newton and Einstein, on questions of science by Wesley Crusher. Hawking was approached while in Hollywood to help launch the Steven Spielberg film version of his book.

### Jurassic Park versus Action Hero

The Steven Spielberg movie is now due to open in the US on June 11. Its main rival for the summer audience, *The Last Action Hero*, with Arnold Schwarzenegger, will make history by being the first product ever to be advertised in space. The film's logo will be painted on the side of an unmanned NASA rocket launched this month.

### Jordan to Direct Interview

Neil Jordan, fresh from his Oscar win for *The Crying Game*, will direct the adaptation of Anne Rice's *Interview with the Vampire*. Brad Pitt may take on the role of the narrator, and Daniel Day-Lewis that of Lestat.

### New King Movie

Two long-awaited returns to the screen this month. Stephen King's name hasn't been on a movie stand since *Sleepwalkers*, and George Romero, well, it's been a long time. Now Romero has adapted and directs *The Dark Half*, based on King's novel about writing, the nature of evil, and sparrows. Timothy Hutton is the

writer of horror fiction who discovers that a relative is trying to get in touch.

### Nebula Results

#### Novel

*Doomsday Book* - Connie Willis

#### Novella

*City of Truth* - James Morrow

#### Novelette

*Danny Goes to Mars* - Pamela Sargent

#### Short Story

*Even the Queen* - Connie Willis

### Grandmaster: Frederik Pohl

## ISFA NEWS

Membership will go up to £13 per annum as of the start of this month.

The May meeting is also the last chance you'll get to join Octocon at the reduced rate. Remember, the event is happening over the Halloween weekend, and there'll be zillions of guests, the most special of whom is Storm Constantine.

The June meeting will be a *Prisoner* night.

### Phase Two

*Phase Two - The Comic*, a magazine of collaborations between the workshop artists and writers, will be available at the June meeting.

*Phase Two* includes an introduction by Steve Dillon.

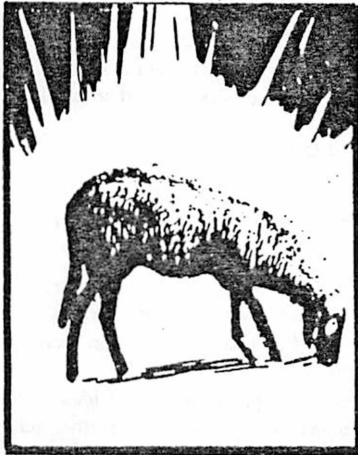
There will be a preview launch in the Ha'penny Bridge Inn, Wellington Quay, on Monday May 17 at 8.30pm. A free copy will be presented to everyone in attendance on production of an up-to-date ISFA card.

On these pages are some of the excellent drawings from *Phase Two*.

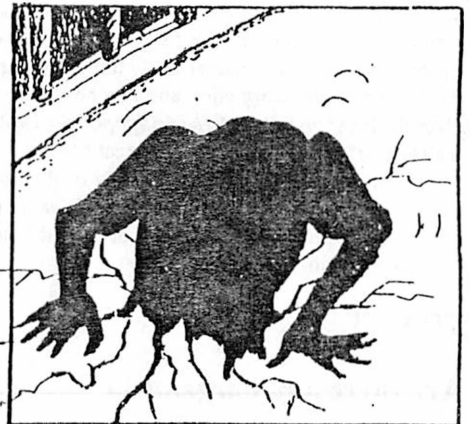
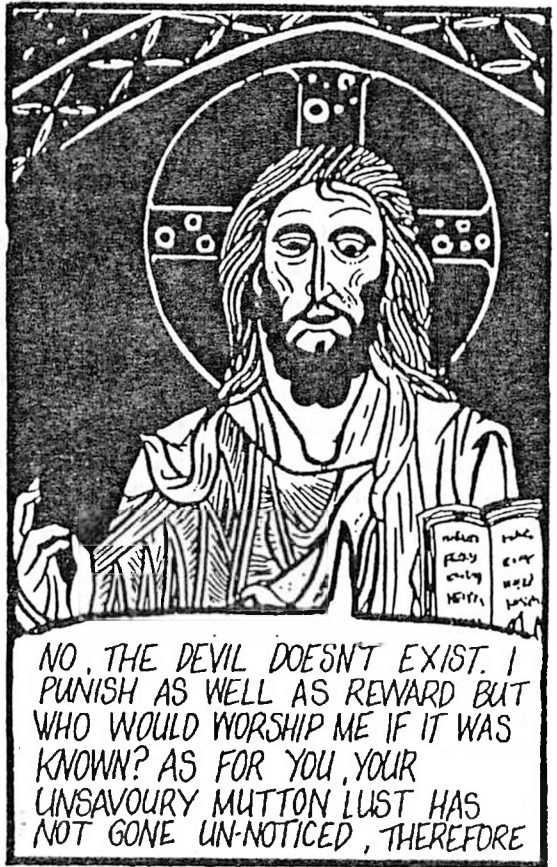
Five stories have already been selected for *Phase Three - The Aisling Gheal Special*.

# P2 PHASE TWO

Dead Sheep      Jim McLoughlin



Dead Sheep      Jim McLoughlin



Shape Thing      Claire Godkin

# JUDGE FOR YOURSELF

By James Bacon

The idea behind this column is that once you've read it you would try, read, go to, or voice your opinion on whatever was mentioned. It's no good reading a review on a book if you never intend to read it. So once you've read the column say something, read the book, go to the place mentioned, think about what was said, put pen to paper and complain. What is wanted is a reaction, and that is what a column is meant to do.

## BOOKS

### THE ANTIPOPE THE BRENTFORD TRIANGLE Robert Rankin

These books are for people who like good humour with their science fiction. They are only the first two of four, and they are easily related to.

The stories are set in Brentford, and describe the actions of people living there, usually in response to something which is about to cause the end of the world as we know it.

This might sound like a well used idea, but the manner in which the world is saved and of course the people who save it is hilariously funny. Robert Rankin is a master storyteller, and anyone who just gives the first two pages of *The Antipope* a read will realise what they have found is a great book.

Also for those who might have already read these books, you'll be able to meet Robert Rankin in person at Octocon, at which you'll also be able to join his fan club, Sprout Lore.

## TRAVEL

### Are there any bargains in

## Belfast?

Last month some friends and I went to the North to see if we could pick up any gems. [What's wrong with the jewellers down here? - ed]

There are two comic shops in Belfast, one big and one small, but both are fully stocked and have a very wide selection of back issues, at incredibly cheap prices. They are The Talisman and Dark Horizons. A must for any comics fans who are looking to fill gaps in their collections.

There is also the Dungeon, an RPG/model shop, with everything from Tardises to tanks, from ceno-bites to cruisers, and loads of *Star Trek* models and paraphernalia. Apart from the cheapness of items in all three shops, the staff are most approachable, and are willing to chat about everything and anything. In my view Belfast is well worth a visit, there are many large bookshops, and two very good second hand bookshops as well. With the money the way it is you're sure to pick up a bargain, no matter what your taste, and still it's a good day out. Don't worry about security as if anything we got assistance from the RUC and we were only stopped seven times.

## THE ISFA

### Where's me shit stirring stick?

Bloody hell, it goes up nearly every year, we're in a recession you know, what will they do with it, why? This was my first reaction to the new increase of cost of membership.

But when I thought about it, the idea of the ISFA having some money to actually further science fiction in Ireland isn't such a bad one, and although I haven't a notion what they will do, it probably could bring in more members. I'm sure our committee will spend our money wisely. So in my view, after a lot of reconciliation it ain't such a bad idea [I'm not sure "reconciliation" is exactly the word you're looking for, James. But then again after correcting your rotten spelling for the past 500 words I'm sure I don't give a shit - ed]

If you are a member you will have gotten a copy of the draft constitution. It seems we're in a constitutional crisis - we don't have one. Anyway I read it

and sent in my comments to the committee. This is your only chance to do something with the constitution, so write in if you like it, and if you don't send in your alternatives. And when it comes to the vote, do vote, don't squander your right by not voting.

when they write books for others and read comics themselves. Maybe there is more to these comic things than seems at first. That's all for this month. See you next month [Maybe - ed], and don't forget to do something.

FIN

## DID YOU KNOW?

That both Michael Scott and Michael Carroll are avid comic readers. Doesn't this say something

### Trinity Treasure Trove

Would you like to be able to borrow any of your favourite authors' books without having to pay a penny, or waiting until a friend buys them? Unlimited access to any book you have ever dreamt of reading - a reader's wet dream. There is such a Mecca, writes *Maura McHugh*. And you do not have to cross burning deserts or evade Nazis with Indiana Jones-like skill; you just need to be a student at Trinity College, Dublin (of course, this could be just as difficult as evading the Nazis while swinging from a rope with your girlfriend around your neck and trying to hold on to you hat.)

Trinity College is one of the three libraries in the UK and Ireland which is designated a Copyright Library. This means that a copy of any book published in Ireland or the UK will end up in TCD. Thanks to this Pandora's Box, I have been able to read the newest Constantine book, and am currently working my way through Robert Jordan's excellent fantasy series.

The Online Catalogue makes it very easy to find the call-number for whatever novel you want. Out of idle curiosity I looked up a few names: Philip K Dick was clocked at 109 books in the Trinity Treasure Trove, David Eddings at 32, John Brunner at 51, Harlan Ellison at 21, and H P Lovecraft at 18. Every name in the sf/fantasy/horror universe I could think of was pin the library - it made my fingers itch to think of them lying in the dusty bookstacks, untouched and unopened. I guess I'll have to read as many of the virginal books as possible. Ah, it's a tough job, but someone's got to do it.

## FILMS

### TOYS

Staring Robin Williams, Joan Cusack, Robin Wright

Directed by Barry Levinson.

*Toys* is a film that I've been waiting for for a long time. It's been advertised in the UCI since before Christmas, and ever weeksince I've eagerly scanned *The Irish Times* on Friday morning hoping, all the time in vain, for its appearance.

Well, friends, it finally arrived. And it's excellent. When Leslie Zevo's father dies, Zevo *Toys* is left to his Uncle Leland to run. Uncle Leland, a three-star general in the US Army, sees lots of cutie toys and decides to make a few war toys. Leslie sees this, and tries to stop him. Leland demurs, and starts on his own, secret project. Is this sinister? Is it nasty? Of course it is. And it's up to Leslie and his sister Alsatia to stop him.

*Toys* is a fantasy of caricatures. Soldiers are dedicated to war, toymakers are children at heart. All this adds to the films, erm, charm (God, that makes it sound awful), and what is left is a feast for the eyes, ears and certain parts of the pancreas.

OK. It's cute, charming, engaging and all those other words that are usually used to describe a Disney film about a dog. Nonetheless, *Toys* is a film nonpareil, whatever that means, and essential viewing. I enjoyed it even more the second time, and plan on seeing it a third.

*Toys* is undoubtedly the best film to come out this year.

## LETTERS

### Medved - The Response

Dear Michael

The ramblings of Michael Medved....never has so much ink been spilled over something so unoriginal, so illogical, so arse-numbingly

repetitious and boring and just plain stupid.

He takes the same old line as many others in the past; especially those cretins who suddenly start listening to rock lyrics in their forties and realise for the first time what their children are hearing. Tipper Gore, the anti-satanic twits who dissect heavy metal played backwards, the preachers who condemned Elvis, etc etc.

I had this discussion recently with a woman who took a Guns'n'Roses LP off her son because she didn't like the lyrics. I personally wouldn't bother myself listening to bands with such minimal amounts of talent, but if the kid likes it, what the hell? It beats Kylie and Jason for originality at least.

The point is that she had never heard such lyrics back in the sixties and early seventies when she was growing up. I tried to remind her of some of the Stones' songs, and even gave her a blast from the Velvet's *Venus in Furs* ("taste the whip not given lightly, taste the whip not given in love..") but it was a waste of time. She had genuinely never heard any of it.

He has the same selective memories of childhood and the same attachment to values derived from his childhood as those other arch-hypocrites, Thatcher and Reagan. He uses those values to judge what he currently wants to see; the distinction is important. He pans mainstream Hollywood for sex, violence and "bad values" - whatever those are.

I bet you anything that he will not comment on foreign films; even the most depraved of them.

For example (and none of these are depraved!); the glorious opening fuck in *Betty Blue* (I have known Betty for one week. We make love every night); the obsession with the sex act in *Ai No Corrida*; any of the violent scenes in anything by Kurosawa; even the moral ambiguity in *Raiders of the Lost Ark*.

And why won't he? Because he has the typical Hollywood inferiority complex about foreign movies, especially if they are French. Because he thinks that Spielberg, Lucas et al are great because they make hero movies with good old-fashioned family values. Because he forgets that the greatest criticism of Hollywood is that it can produce some absolutely stupendous stuff but actually spends so much time making crap.

Letters continued on page 12



## *Blade Runner The Director's Cut* A Review in Three Parts By Martin Brady

### The Book:

Philip K Dick, arguably one of the finest sf writers of the twentieth century still manages to live on in our imagination. Like many great writers, fame followed after his death. Undeniably, he was a writer who was ahead of his time. His apocalyptic view of the world in his book *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* was stunning in its depth.

The setting for the book was New San Francisco. On the news for this city, the weatherman advised people to stay out of the radioactive hotspots. He was a writer who used humour sparingly but very effectively; a man who was economic in his choice of words and knew when to give a scene that necessary punch. Above all else, Philip K Dick was a damn fine storyteller.

Primarily, the book deals with the identity of the main character, Rick Deckard. He is a man racked with guilt, so much so that he had given up being a Blade Runner once before. Having been forced to return to the turgid world of hunting down and killing Replicants, he realises that he is a killer in a world which is already dying.

Animal life is almost extinct and is an extremely rare commodity. Those who can afford pets, whether real or elaborate impersonations, treat them with a royal respect. They are a reminder of paradise lost. Rick dreams of owning his own real pet once more. Even though the Replicants are alive, they are regarded as pariahs, lower in caste than living creatures. "More human than human itself" is the

Tyrell Corporation's motto for the next generation of Replicants, the Nexus 6, and this worries real people.

The crux of the story is the nature of human emotions, and the perceived ability to care, or empathise. The replicants are regarded as emotionally devoid people, in effect contemporary sociopaths.

As Rick confronts the Nexus 6, he realises that he is killing genetically engineered people who do have emotions. They are no less caring than Rick is; perhaps more so in some cases. Philip K Dick pushes his story to its ultimate conclusion, asking many harrowing questions of the reader implicitly...If humanity is so caring, how come it has destroyed its own world? Why is the Tyrell Corporation allowed to successively refine replicants for slave labour? And of course, wouldn't a replicant make the best Blade Runner?

The book ends on a wonderfully philosophical note. Better let you read it. If you haven't, it's a must.

### The Mogulised Movie:

When *Blade Runner* was first released, it was a financial flop. My memories of the movie were of sitting in a scantily filled Adelphi 1 theatre. In the back seats, a group of young girls giggled excitedly when they saw Rick (Harrison Ford) seduce the demure Replicant, Rachel (Sean Young).

At the outset, the film was introverted and depressing, interspersed with voiceovers to get the viewers up to speed on the story; most unlike Ridley Scott to use such a crude plot device. Continual sheets of rain added to the bleakness of city life in New San

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**Personally, I think that *Blade Runner* is a pale reflection of Dick's book but as a film in its own right it is a thrilling spectacle. However, too much emphasis was placed on the violence for the sake of it; as is Hollywood's ubiquitous trademark (even more so in the 90s)**

Francisco. Today, video-watching fans as opposed to moviegoing fans have made *Blade Runner* a cult movie. The reasons are not hard to find. Rick Deckard is played utterly convincingly by Harrison Ford, as are all of the other characters. It is also generally acknowledged that Ridley Scott had a strong inner vision for the movie and he made the actors and actresses repeat their scenes many times, causing some off the screen friction.

One senses that there was an element of perfectionism in Ridley Scott's direction. He wanted this movie to be special.

Personally, I think that *Blade Runner* is a pale reflection of Dick's book but as a film in its own right it is a thrilling spectacle. However, too much emphasis was placed on the violence for the sake of it; as is Hollywood's ubiquitous trademark (even more so in the 90s).

The relationship between Rick and Rachel was confused to say the least. Rick's pain was not examined nor was there any attempt to explain it. This is really the crux of the original story. Rick saw his love for Rachel as a form of absolution for the crimes that he would commit against her kind. There is also the complex nature of Rachel's love for Rick. It is a great deal more involved than just

simple animal passion. Rachel loves him and yet hates him at the same time.

In the book Rick was married, and this theme is not examined either. There was also the element of Rick's confused religious beliefs and the question of the usefulness and validity of it in his dying world. Not there either... So what is it that made the movie so successful? The award-winning sets, of course. As with all of Ridley Scott's early movies, he relied heavily on the backdrop to achieve his visual impact. These days, he's more interested in ingratiating the viewers with his characters, as was so ably demonstrated by his recent movie *Thelma and Louise*.

Ridley Scott, it seems, has backed away from fantasy/sci-fi and is firmly rooted in the here and now. Notwithstanding, *Blade Runner* has very strong characterisations too. All of the acting performances were convincing and unambiguous. But there are flaws with the movie itself; for example the ending. It's totally out of context with the rest of the movie. Where did all those mountains, clear blue skies and that environmentally friendly car come from (not to mention the comforting soundtrack)? Emotional programming was used on the audience to end the movie on an upbeat note.

Part of the reason for its success was that the movie

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showed the prurient flipside of sci-fi gloss. Ridley's movie admitted that you can live in a technologically advanced society and still be in a dreadful mess. Its message runs against the clean-cut, homogeneous hero-types of sci-fi purported by popular TV shows like *Star Trek*, where the goodies and the baddies are clearly differentiated: almost signposted by their dialogue, the types of costumes they wear, and the aggressive/passive tone of their voices.

In *Blade Runner* nothing is so clear cut. Rick Deckard has a strong sex drive, he drinks more than he should, and sometimes he looks like hell. The hero of the story, if you can call him that, guns down (Replicant) women when they are running away. One can almost empathise (no pun intended) with the enslaved Replicants and their predicament. From an environmental point of view, *Blade Runner* is a true vision of where the world is going: dreadfully downhill. Environmental pollution, destruction of the rain forests, polluted oceans, CFCs; the list as you all know is endless.

Ten years ago, the story seemed outlandish. Now it holds an unsavoury truth. The movie is also in stark contrast to the money-spinning adventure in space *Star Wars*. Rick Deckard does not have the power of the force on his side. There are no such elaborate plot devices going for him and he's not going to save the universe by a long shot. However, he works at a job which he doesn't like at all, but he's good at it and it pays well. *Blade Runner* is a warning, a flashing beacon amid a sea of Utopian technological optimism.

It is a message for us all to take heed of. It could be our future. It's a movie which has gestated in the mind of many sf writers since its release. For example William Gibson's *Neuromancer* clearly has the stylish marking of *Blade Runner* on it.

Above all else, the movie is a state of mind, almost to the point where it has been romanticised by fans; emulating the clothing styles in particular. It has a definite look and feel which lasts. People like to emulate it. Cyberpunk is one of its progeny. It lives on in forms which are manifestly diverse, and has become an influence.

Friday, March 5, 11:15pm, Adelphi 1, *Blade Runner The Director's Cut* was shown by the Irish Film Festival.

Not surprisingly, it was sold out and it was hot in the theatre; crammed to capacity (unlike my first cinematic viewing of it!) I had my own vision of what changes would be made and (not surprisingly) they weren't there. Gradually it emerged that the differences between the two movies are very slight (the running time is even shorter) but don't be fooled by my comment.

In terms of what message the film holds, the differences are quite radical, especially to the ending which is a lot more powerful although shockingly abrupt. In the cut, events are not so clear any more, leaving more up to the mind of the viewer. Immediately after the movie I was disappointed, I'd wanted more...but once I got used to the new ending, I realised it was better by a long shot. I kept thinking And then what happened? It's hard to review the movie without giving away the small changes so all I'll say is See it whenever/wherever you get the chance. It's well worth watching again and again and again (in either form)...

MARTIN BRADY JNR

Now for some serious analysis of his ramblings. I commend to you (especially all of you who read books in the seventies) Robert Pirsig's latest, *Lila - An enquiry into morals*.

In this he sets out a whole philosophy, an anthropology, a sociology. He calls it his "Metaphysics of Quality".

I don't want to spoil it on you but there is a vital concept which explains Medved and his ilk perfectly.

Pirsig defines "Static quality" as that set of fixed values in a society which lends it a stability, a bit like a skeleton in a body. He then defines "Dynamic quality" as the thrusting forward of those no longer satisfied with the status quo: the pioneers, the rebels. Without static values the society will break down before it gets a decent shot at progress; without dynamic values it will stagnate before it makes progress. You can't have one, you can't have one, you can't have one without the other. Point made? [No - ed]

Now your question: the killing of the hero.

Again Medved talks bunk. Kevin Costner as hero?

How about the rooftop scene in the *Untouchables* where he shags Connery's killer over the edge? I don't recall Clint taking that much law into his own hands when he had a killer in his power.

And your own examples of heroes? Tom Cruise as hero? That is like calling Aussie soaps "great television". I find soap operas obscene in their blandness, their puerile plots and their pathetic acting. The equally pathetic dialogue doesn't help of course.

Of course Hollywood hasn't killed the hero. It has simply brought him/her up to date. Let's face it folks: most people these days have more on their minds than getting them cows down the trail. Come to think of it, most people had a lot more on their minds even in Medved's so-called Golden Age. Which made the movies of the old days either wonderful escapist entertainment or cynical propaganda, take your pick.

Final bit - promise! Medved is a threat because he is of the system, because he is "one of us" to the Hollywood clique and his open condemnation of the system tears them all apart.

If he can say these things about us, goes the thinking, how many others among us feel the same? How many others will "come out"? Who can we trust? Might be a good serious novel in there somewhere!

Yours sincerely

Declan Fox  
Newtownstewart  
County Tyrone

## Timewarp News

30 Beverly Downs  
Knocklyon Road  
Templeogue  
Dublin 16

Dear Robert

Many thanks for the ISFA's help at Timewarp last March. We had over 1,100 people there, and raised nearly £4,000 for Our Lady's Hospital for Sick Children.

Timewarp 2 is going ahead, but not until 1995. There are no details at the moment, but we're taking deposits from anyone who wishes to book in advance. The convention will again be in the Grand Hotel, Malahide, and will take place on the 4th and 5th March.

Brendan Ryder  
Timewarp

# Aisling Gheal 1993

There seems to be a pool of advice welling up for entrants to this year's Aisling Gheal short story competition, and as always I'm prepared to add my bucketful.

Here is my recipe for success:

## **Be your own boss.**

Fiction is a place where you are God. Anything can happen there. No-one can bully you into conforming, no-one can shout you down. The only limits are those you impose on yourself.

Write about things you're interested in. You can go through your whole life thinking you should really write a story about South America, even though you have no interest in the place. Meanwhile, you have a great love for steam trains, but you reckon that writing about them would be a cop out, it would be too easy. And so a potentially great writer about steam trains becomes a writer of worthless fiction about South America.

**Work to your strengths, and  
downplay your weaknesses.**

**And so a potentially great  
writer about steam trains  
becomes a writer of  
worthless fiction about  
South America**

If you have written a good comic story, but you don't know how to approach a serious one, go with the comedy. I know there's a little demon on your shoulder who says "You should broaden your horizons", but that's a fallacy. You will only become rounded by concentrating on what you do best, doing it as best you can, and then building outwards from that. For instance, I find that I can express emotions more freely if I write a story in the first person. For a long time I thought that writing in the first person, therefore, was a sort of "treat" that I could reserve for every third or fourth story, the others being "work", in the third person. But that's like someone who finds in school that they are good at running, and therefore they should take up throwing the javelin. By the time they have become mediocre javelin throwers all the runners will have moved on to the next stage, and they will be left behind.

## **Don't Try to Cram Everything into the Story**

The beginning writer, feeling that they may only have one shot at stardom, will often try to write the best story ever written, a story that answers all the questions of the universe. What they end up with is of course a big sticky mess. Start small. Take a single situation, a single character, and explore it in a straightforward way. The dreaded notion of "theme" that was drummed into you at school is valid for all stories. What it means in plain English is that a writer is a conscious human being, and in

**Because there is such compression, there is no time in a story for small talk. Everything in the story must be there for a purpose**

writing a story is actually trying to say something. This is a truism. All stories say something, even if that something is "this writer doesn't have a whole lot of interest in what he's writing about."

**Don't think that you can invest mundane things with new meaning just by describing them in detail.**

This is very often tedious for the reader, who is left wondering where the story is. A story, ideally, should be about interesting events, told in a plain manner. Rather than the other way around.

**Concentrate on the Central Issues**

In a short story you have to describe characters and events in very few words. If you think of real life as a football match, then a story is the edited highlights. Because there is such compression, there is no time in a story for small talk. Everything in the story must be there for a purpose. By excising what isn't necessary, what is waffle, this can be achieved more easily than it sounds. For instance, you have two people talking in a pub, and the gist of what they say is that one wants the other to kill his wife. There's no need for two hundred words of "How's it going" and "Did you see the match last night?" and "God, that's a grand old pint". Life's too short. Cut to the quick. The words you're looking for are "I want you to kill my wife."

**Zoom in on what is important, and out on what isn't**

In other words, a story should be life looked at through a microscope, rather than a telescope. It's no good describing the complete destruction of an entire city if the reader is left with no impression whatever of what that might mean. You need to close in on something that will convey a sense of loss. For instance, think of Charles Foster Kane in *Citizen Kane*, who made millions, lived in a mansion, and yet on his deathbed whose only symbol of happiness was a worthless remnant of his youth, a sled.

The reason why films like *Friday the 13th* and *A Nightmare on Elm Street* fail to make much of an impression beyond immediate revulsion is the reason why so many stories also fail. They kill off the least important characters, and preserve the most important. Any sense of horror can only be achieved if the opposite is the case. An excellent example comes from the film *Fried Green Tomatoes*, where the character is introduced of a young man who is a great friend of the narrator. She hero worships him, and he is seen as a witty, fun-loving person. It is the sort of introduction which might be given to the star player in a miniseries, and we fully expect that this man will play an important part in the plot. What happens, about three minutes after his first appearance, is that the man dies. Because our expectations have been confounded, because we have been given an opportunity to like him, we can share in the loss and horror of the narrator.

**Finally: keep it simple.**

Write as you speak. Reading a good short story should be like meeting an interesting person, someone who relates to you something interesting that happened to him.

# A few words from the Chairman

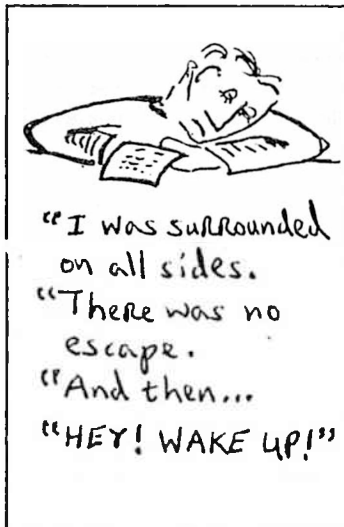
You'll find in this issue quite a bit about the Aisling Gheal competition. We could have left it at just printing the rules; but why do that, when a few moments and a couple of thousand words can make the world a better place? Heed these sage words, and you too can have a fruitful life, writing short stories that aren't complete crap.

Well, OK, you need more than this sage advice. Nor do I mean to imply that without them you won't be able to write. But as a former judge, I can say in a loud, clear voice, head held aloft as I enunciate, "most of the writers need help."

I speak not of the style; elsewhere in this periodical you'll find our beloved editor's words on that very topic. I propose instead to comment on those aspects of the story which cause the judges sleepless nights through blinding headaches. That cause, years hence, poor judges to wake up from their fitful napping, screaming in terror as they shout the name of a particularly bad story. Most people think that the reason stories are given to the judges to promote impartiality. Verily, I say thee nay. It's to protect the lives of those unfortunate entrants who, were their identities known, would die horrible deaths with the words "nine-pin dot matrix" carved into their foreheads.

But enough of that later. First of all, I'm delighted to present the Robert Elliott guide to Short Story Writing.

## Rule 1 - Read the Rules



OK. So it's obvious. But I'd like you take this one stage further; apply them. The phrase "typed, double-spaced, one side of the page only" is traditional in writing, both for competitions and publication. I, and indeed this year's judges, would be grateful if people would, just this once, take this literally. "Ah, sure", quoth the masses, "Isn't it more environmentally friendly to use single spacing, and type on both sides?" Of course it is. Not, however, as environmentally friendly as not entering at all. We don't demand this eco-nasty rule because we think the weather's too cold; rather it's so the judges don't go blind reading fifty badly-laid out stories in a row.

## Rule 2 - Get a new printer ribbon.

Remember that because there's more than one

judge, your story will have to be photocopied. This is not going to do much for the quality of the type, and if it was iffy to begin with, you're in trouble. If judges find themselves extrapolating about what that next word probably is, it's a fair bet they'll get it wrong, and think you're totally unable to write. Remember also that if you're using a word processor, twelve point courier is the font of choice. Not six point Times Roman, which looks very nice in its place. Its place, however, is not in a short story competition. Remember also that draft mode is not what you want. NLQ is your only man.

### **Rule 3 - Get a proof-reader**

Those who know me may have noticed on occasion my annoyance about the fact that ninety per cent of the population is unable to punctuate. If you plan on getting anywhere in any aspect of writing further than the bin, learn to punctuate. It wouldn't hurt if you could spell too, and knowledge of the basic rules of grammar and syntax is generally considered to be a Good Thing. If I read one more story where somebody says "Its simple - their are only two choices...", I'll find out who the author is and break all his/her windows with her/his severed arm.

### **Rule 4 - Read something relevant**

You'd be surprised how much this can help. Just because you think it's a brilliant idea doesn't mean eight million people before you haven't thought the same thing. The perennial shaggy god stories pop up all the time, with the two sole survivors, A'dahm

and Eephe of a crash landing on the planet Echdun. You can also forget about the gosh-is-this-not-reality-after-all?-I-must-be-in-a-VR-machine/on-psychootropic-drugs/have-had-my-brain-tampered-with-by aliens. I mean, come on. That's so cliched it's even come up on *Star Trek*. All you fantasy fans needn't bother assembling a band of characters and getting a quest together, either. No happy elves, grumpy Orcs or dead-magician's-inept-apprentice-who-finds-out-he's-the-long-lost-heir-to-the-throne-of-Trilogia.

### **Rule 5 - Get the science right**

Some points to remember - laser guns don't have recoil, you can't walk on the surface of Jupiter, Andromeda is more than a week away at sublight speeds. Having said that, it's perfectly OK to bend or break the laws of physics as long as you do it consistently and for a purpose. Sloppy science may be forgivable if the subject is somewhat esoteric (although if it is you shouldn't use it), but bear in mind that all the judges are prolific readers of science fiction. They'll probably know when you mess up. And while it may cause them some small amusement when you speak of the speed of antimatter, you won't be doing yourself any favours.

That's basically it. If you bear the above points in mind, the judges will be better disposed towards considering your story favourably. Remember, we only use humans as judges, and as such they will give higher marks to stories that don't make them wince in anguish or squint at unintelligible text.

**There now follow the official rules of the Aisling Gheal competition,  
for you to cut out and keep**



# AISLING GHEAL 1993

The Aisling Gheal Award is Ireland's most prestigious short-story competition, and a new cycle begins here and now... The judges have been chosen, the trophy has been polished and the ISFA's penny jar has been emptied.

You may enter as many times as you like, as long as the submission fee of IR£2.50 is included for each story. Stories should be handed (in a sealed envelope) to a member of the ISFA committee, who will pass it on to the competition mediator, or posted to:

**Aisling Gheal Competition, ISFA, Box 3762, Dublin 6, Ireland.**

## Rules:

1. Submissions must be between 1500 and 6000 words, typed, double-spaced, on one side of the paper, with the title and page number appearing on every page.
2. Submissions must include (on the title page or first page) the author's name (or pseudonym), an address at which the author may be contacted, the title of the work and an approximate word count. Submissions must *not* include the author's name at the top of every page.
3. Submissions must be the author's own work, and not in any way derived from another work.
4. Submissions must be Science Fiction, Fantasy, Horror or a related sub-genre, must not have been previously published, and must not be currently under consideration by a publisher.
5. Each story submission must be accompanied by the competition fee, which is **IR£2.50** (used to cover postage and duplication costs).
6. The decisions of the judges will be final, and no correspondence will be entered into.
7. A submission to the competition automatically implies acceptance of these rules.
8. The closing date for the competition is **Tuesday 3rd of August, 1993**. Entries will not be accepted after this date.
9. The competition is open only to Irish citizens and members of the Irish Science Fiction Association.

## Notes:

Copyright remains with the author at all times. Submissions are non-returnable, but those not scheduled for publication will be destroyed, unless the author gives permission *in writing* that the story may be kept on the ISFA's files for possible future publication.

There will be four judges, each of whom is well-read in Science Fiction, Fantasy, Horror and related genres. They will not confer on the submissions, nor will they discuss the merits of any submission with any outside party (including the mediator and the ISFA committee).

The judges will be asked to mark each story in terms of Plot, Credibility, Characterisation, Pace, Dialogue, and Presentation. They will each fill out a critique form for every story.

Each submission envelope will be handed *unopened* to the mediator, who will make four photocopies of each story (one for each judge). Authors' names and addresses will be removed from each photocopy. Only the mediator will be aware of the author's identity.

The mediator will write to the author confirming receipt of the submission within ten days of receipt.

A short-list of the top five stories will appear in the October '93 edition of *First Contact*, and the winners will be announced at Octocon '93.

Once the competition has ended (i.e., after Octocon '93), the mediator will post out the completed critique forms to each entrant.

## REVIEWS

### Reviews by Chris O'Connell

#### THE LOSERS

David Eddings  
Grafton, pp298, £4.99

#### THE FACE OF THE WATERS

Robert Silverberg  
Grafton, pp428, £4.99

#### A TIME OF EXILE

Katherine Kerr  
Grafton, pp476, £4.99

What on earth did social workers ever do to David Eddings? He probably tried to shift one at a Christmas party and was refused. I've no complaints on that score. So whence all the vitriol, the allegations of incompetence, the scorn. He refers to them as girls who can't type.

The title, *Losers*, is used to describe a certain band of people who are definitely children of the welfare state. Everybody is in receipt of some form of allowance, of on some programme of therapy, or both. If you're not on a programme, the social workers will put you on one.

These observations are made by one Raphael Taylor, an all-American kid who is unhappily castrated [Is there any other reaction? - ed] in a car accident. Hiding out from his former life, he moves to a

**Fantasy novels should always be sensual, capable of transporting you to the very worlds described within. No problem with this lady, she could easily make you forget your mundane existence, if you have one.**

certain town, and begins to observe the losers. Of course he cannot remain aloof forever, but for most

of the story is content to watch from afar, and listen on his police-band radio.

Don't see much substance to this. I'm a great fan of Robert Silverberg for many reasons. His characters are usually believable and easy to visualise. When you find yourself hoping that a certain person will die or not die during a story, I consider that is the mark of a good writer. Mostly his storyline is consistent and well-paced.

In this particular story a group of islanders are forced to leave home by the Gillies, a native race. Setting sail á la Columbus, they attempt to find a new home. They approach various other islands in the hope that space will be found for them. For various reasons they end up searching for a particular area called the Face of the Waters.

Obviously I can't give away too much detail without ruining the story, but it should be of interest to people who don't require "hard" science fiction. There are four previous books featuring the Kingdom of Devery. I'm a bit vague about the chronology, but rest assured, Katherine Kerr is not. She conveniently provides a note on pronunciation, a map of the provinces, and a family tree at the start of this, the first book of the Warlords Cycle.

Some people will find this useful as the theme of reincarnation features prominently in the series. Fantasy novels should always be sensual, capable of transporting you to the very worlds described within. No problem with this lady, she could easily make you forget your mundane existence, if you have one.

Main characters are Rhodry, half-elven and hence of suspicious longevity; Aderyn, a dweemerman (a type of magician); Jill, and Dallandra. Sundry others are similar to our own little people. There are heroes and villains, battles, swordsmen, allies etc, all the action one would ever need. Look out for more in the series, and read *Daggerspell*, *Darkspell*, *Dawnspell*, and *Dragonspell* if you haven't already done so.

CHRIS O'CONNELL

### Reviews by Paul McKinley

#### FALLEN ANGELS

Larry Niven, Jerry Pouruelle, and Michael Flynn  
Baen, pp394, £5.99

## THE MOAT AROUND MURCHESON'S EYE

Larry Niven and Jerry Pournelle  
Harper Collins, pp402, £14.99

## WORLDS ENOUGH AND TIME

Joe Haldeman  
New English Library, pp332, £15.50 hb

I'm given to understand that Larry Niven damaged his image by being rude to a fan at a Worldcon a couple of years ago. If so, this book could be considered as a sort of damage-control exercise. Set in a near future ice age America, it essentially concerns itself with the attempts of a group of sf fans to rescue and hide a couple of stranded spaceship pilots from a totalitarian anti-technology government.

Throughout the novel the fans are presented as likable, intelligent, and resourceful, almost sickeningly so; while the government agents on their trail are mostly self-seeking incompetents. Pournelle's anti-Green sentiments also come to the fore (readers of his non-fiction collection *A Step Farther Out* will find no surprises there) with groups like "Friends of Earth and Man" (hmm...sounds familiar) presented

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as a bunch of woolly-minded buffoons. Having said that, it's nice to see someone speaking against the radical greens who'd have us all living like 18th-century peasants!

As you'd expect from these authors, the science is very strong: there is some evidence to suggest that we would currently be in the grip of a new ice age without industrial pollution [Actually I'm told by the geological pixies that live at the bottom of the garden that we're still in the last ice age, pollution or no - ed], and the Phoenix spacecraft is a real

project (anyone who'd like details of an advanced version called the Delta Clipper can borrow my copy of *Spaceflight* magazine).

Though I suspect that most of the actual writing was done by Flynn, it is very much in the style of Larry Niven, so the characters are reasonably fleshed out, and the plot whizzes along at a cracking pace. If you

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can tolerate the sycophantic fawning to sf fandom and the polarisation of pro and anti technology views this is a very enjoyable read.

*The Moat Around Murcheson's Eye* is set about 25 years after the vents of the 1974 novel *The Moat in God's Eye*, and follows the adventures of pilot Kevin Brenner and trader Horace Bury who, for reasons too complex to go into here, are operating as intelligence agents for the Empire of Man.

I can't say too much without giving away a lot of the plot but suffice it to say that events precipitate a second expedition to the alien Mote system. The original Mote novel was an exercise in designing truly alien aliens, and consequently spent a lot of time on the Mote's biology and culture. Much of that is taken for granted in this book, which concentrates more on whiz-bang action/adventure.

Pournelle has said that they left 50,000 words of space battle description out of *The Mote in God's Eye* as the novel was too long - I think they found a home for them in this sequel.

It's by no means a bad book but it's not a patch on its predecessor, and it has the feel of something written more for money than enjoyment. That's a slightly unfair statement, because the original is an exciting and complex story full of tension and sharp characterisation produced when Niven was at his peak, with his "sense of wonder" in full working order. The authors would be hard-pressed to match

it with any sequel - and sure enough, they haven't. It's an enjoyable adventure yarn, even though it occasionally sports the clumsy plot device of having characters tell each other what's happening in several pages of dense prose. Worth getting if you've read *The Mote in God's Eye*, but wait for the paperback, and don't expect anything new or original.

*Note:* For those of you who like to create mental images as you read, stop a moment to get a really strong one of Horace Bury's ship. The characters spend a lot of time there.

Another sequel. This time the long-awaited completion of the *Worlds* trilogy. It continues the story of Marianne O'Hara, who leave the orbiting colony of New New York to visit late 21st-Century Earth just in time for a cataclysmic war in *Worlds* (1981), then helps build a starship to escape the shatter Solar System in *Worlds Apart* (1984).

**For those of you who like to create mental images as you read, stop a moment to get a really strong one of Horace Bury's ship. The characters spend a lot of time there**

*Worlds Enough and Time* covers the starship's 60-year journey to a new planet circling Epsilon, and the trials and tribulations experienced en route.

The story is told in the same style as the previous novels, part third person narrator, and part first person letters and diary extracts. the narration provides an overview while the letters and diary extracts, with the emotions and minutiae of daily life, makes for strong three-dimensional characters you can believe in and feel for.

In fact, the novels almost amount to a "future biography" of the character Marianne O'Hara. Almost. During the course of the colonist's journey a sequence of unlikely plot devices cut communications with New New York, and endanger the starship. Ah, I thought, this is going to be similar to the first

Worlds book, where Haldeman spoiled a perfectly good "slice of life" novel by adding excessive amounts of adventure and danger to the plot. Well, at least I'd have something to complain about in the review. Wrong. When colonists reached their new world I realised I'd have a LOT to complain about

**It's obvious that Haldeman was running well over his deadline, because he didn't bother to finish the book. He simply took the last couple of chapters of his earlier novel *Mindbridge*, and grafted them onto *Worlds Enough***

in the review.

It's obvious that Haldeman was running well over his deadline, because he didn't bother to finish the book. He simply took the last couple of chapters of his earlier novel *Mindbridge*, and grafted them onto *Worlds Enough*. The story takes a complete left turn as he introduces enigmatic all-powerful aliens who have been watching humanity for centuries to judge whether they should be allowed to join the interstellar community of races. This just does not fit with the person and intimate story of Marianne we've been presented with for two and a half books! Even then, it's not done well. The aliens use Marianne as a test sample of humanity, but if they've been watching everybody for years why should they need to? The same ideas were handled much better in *Mindbridge*.

Having waited nine years for the past part of this story I found it a very great disappointment, and I'm angry with Haldeman for trying to flog this second-hand rubbish as the conclusion to the *Worlds* trilogy. Oh yeah, and the cover sucks too.

PAUL MCKINLEY

**SHADOWS IN THE WATCHGATE**  
Mike Jefferies

Grafton, pp368, £4.99

If you like action, continuous action then Mike Jefferies supplies it in this book. It is a horror book, and while he gives background information, plus a quite reliable cast of characters, I found that he made too much horror, and about halfway through I found my attention beginning to flag.

The story is good, and the characters interesting. However, his hero is rather insipid, and I think his heroine needs a bit of spice. The library custodian had too small a part - he could have had a greater role, and perhaps balance out the weak hero.

The story is set in Norwich, and the opening introduces the reader to ancient horror. The plot carries us along as an old taxidermist, Ludo Strewth, raises evil from the dead and breathes life into his stuffed animals. They go out at night and create havoc; they

**The exhibits form battle scenes from the Crimea in 1815, and other old battles captured in the stuffed uniforms of the soldiers, and horses' skins**

particularly want to capture the beautiful American model Tuppence Trilby for their master. From the Elm Hill Museum comes help in the form of the cavalry.

The exhibits form battle scenes from the Crimea in 1815, and other old battles captured in the stuffed uniforms of the soldiers, and horses' skins. These were essentially good people, and come to life to fight the evil raised by the taxidermist from an ancient book with an ancient chant. Of course the heroine and the hero save the day, but I think that the book would have been better without them.

I liked Ludo Strewth, and Theopus, custodian of the ancient texts, whose character was thrown away. I would have liked to have read the story of these two as antagonists. Are the readers of fiction so jaded in their tastes that they need to have a beautiful heroine and a handsome hero in order to make a worthwhile story? I think not.

Mike Jefferies can write terrific horror, as the beginning of this book shows, but if he gave us ordinary heroes and heroines, with less of the scare tactics, I would enjoy it much more.

**Mike Jefferies can write terrific horror, as the beginning of this book shows, but if he gave us ordinary heroes and heroines, with less of the scare tactics, I would enjoy it much more**

NU LYONS

### **SIGN FOR THE SACRED**

Storm Constantine

Headline, pp373, £8.99

I have been a great fan of Ms Constantine's work since I read the first book of her *Wreththu* trilogy, so I seized this, her eighth book as soon as was possible. Always concerned with the human spirit, in this novel Constantine turns her hand to examining Church practices. She evokes a complex and three-dimensional religion called the Church of Ixnarity, which is the dominant faith in Gleberunc, the world she creates.

However, the Cult of Jeopardy (named after its leader Resenense Jeopardy) now threatens the old religion with its heretical views. Constantine has a larger cast of characters in this novel than in her other books, and because of this she sometimes spreads herself a bit thin. Despite this, we are presented with a coherent and thought-provoking story, one which examines the need for belief in people's lives, and the extent to which people will go to follow a character who is charismatic and rebellious.

The most important story is told by Lucien Earthlight, who used to be a Vibrancer in the Ixnarity religion. His story is told intermittently through the novel, and it traces his beginnings in the Church, his meeting with Jeopardy, his subsequent

departure from Ixmartyr, and his quest to find Jeopardy again. Also told are the various quests of other characters to find the new religion.

The ending of the book is not as satisfying as I would like, but it is an interesting novel, one which is well worth reading. However, those wishing to read Ms Constantine for the first time would be better off reading the *Wreath* trilogy or *Burying the Shadow*, before venturing into this territory.

MAURA McHUGH

### THE CALL OF EARTH

Orson Scott Card

Legend, pp304, £8.99

In this, the second volume of his new series, *Homecoming*, Card continues the story of Harmony and the Oversoul. The Oversoul feels that it is time for humans to return to Earth because it fears that it can no longer fulfil its purpose as guardian. Word gets to General Vozmuzhalnoy Vozmozhno (Moozh when he can't hear) of the Gorayni about

**Upon arrival the General gives his troops orders to slay all the mercenaries that they find in the city**

the current vulnerability of the greatest city on the Western Shore. He achieves a "friendly" invasion of Basilica. Upon arrival the General gives his troops orders to slay all the mercenaries that they find in the city. Thus he earns the gratitude and wariness of Basilica.

The General's background is a lot like that of Marko Ramius in *The Hunt for Red October*, in that they are both orphans of their tribe. This book doesn't deal as much with Nafai, his brothers and father, as the last, but deals more with Lady Rasa, her daughters and nieces. In fact the parts of Issib and his father can only be described as cameos.

Overall a good read, with every character having depth and life on each page. The book is also filled with interaction between several strong-willed peo-

ple, including the Oversoul.

GARY LYONS

### HIDDEN ECHOES

Mike Jefferies

Grafton, pp336, £8.99

Having never read any of Mike Jefferies' work before, it was with a certain anticipation that I reached for his latest book *Hidden Echoes*. I would not be so eager in the future.

Though a fairly well-written book, I found it to be too predictable, and a rehash of ideas I've read before (for example, *The Walker Between the Worlds*). In this novel the Diviners in the City of

**Luckily the City of Time (kind of like a copyright library) receives a copy of every book written**

Time, led by Tholocus, "the Clockmaster of Eternity", are worried by the increasing number of Doorcracks appearing in the boundaries between the worlds. Earth is considered Paradise because it was sealed off from the other worlds from the beginning of time.

Luckily the City of Time (kind of like a copyright library) receives a copy of every book written, and they notice the work of Denso Alburton, a fantasy novelist, and Maya Capthorne, an environmental scientist, which seem to predict what is happening to the worlds. Both are summoned to the City of Time to try and avert what the Diviners believe will be a disaster once all the creatures from the other worlds flood into Earth.

Jefferies is very good at evoking the world of Bendran, where the City of Time exists, and his ideas about the Journeyman and the Waymasters are particularly innovative. However, as I said above, the plot is predictable, and the romance in the book is so naïve that it appears to be lifted right out of a Mills and Boon novel. "I will always love you as long as I live," cries the heroine towards the end of the book. Pass the bucket.

MAURA McHUGH

Harlan Ellison is really two writers. There is the essayist, who is always readable, consistently informative about the writing game, the movies, his own fascinating life. Then there is Ellison the author. In this role he has soared to great heights of insight and innovation, but he has also produced some of the most overblown and mind-numbingly dense prose ever written.

## Harlan Ellison

# The Beast That Shouted

By Michael Cullen

His fiction is a minefield. If you want to read him, and you should, then you are advised to stick to the path of recommended stories. Otherwise you risk reading some of his bad ones, and being put off him for good, and missing out on some of the most creative work ever done in science fiction.

Perhaps the reason why he is better as an essayist is because he likes to write fast. This means that he draws all sorts of references and allusions into his writing, goes off on tangents and sometimes doesn't come back, and generally messes around. When you know basically what he's talking about, as you do in the non-fiction, then this can be a good thing. But in fiction, it's often an indulgence.

One of Ellison's greatest attributes as a writer is his frankness. In what was billed as his "most controversial essay EVER" in the *Isaac Asimov Magazine* of August 1990, he reported on a survey he'd done of writers' bad experiences with fans. He started with his own gripes: how for years he was sent anonymous letters like the following, after a friend and fellow writer died:

"I understand James Blish died. You know he was a publicity flack for the tobacco industry for many years and I understand he died of cancer of the throat. That's real poetic justice, don't you think? One more of your phonies down, pretty soon it will be your turn."

By chance Ellison found out who the writer was, and gave him a phone call. Since then the culprit has had to change his number several times. There was another fan who took out subscriptions in Ellison's name to more than fifty magazines. Another, in 1960, told the police that Ellison's New York apartment was full of drugs.

Ellison describes the reaction he got when he read the author's letters of reply to his survey at a convention:

"As time went by, and name after name came before them, as incident of awfulness followed incident upon anecdote, the room fell silent...the timorous, nervous laughter that had accompanied

the telling of the first few stories, even that had ceased. At one table a woman was crying, her head laid down across her arms on the tabletop. At another table a man kept striking the padded seat of his chair, over and over, hardly seeming to know he was doing it. A woman was in the rear, moaning stop it, stop it, please stop it."

Long before I discovered any of his essays, I used to read Harlan Ellison collections simply for the introductions. If there were a few good stories as well then that was a bonus, but it has always been a feature of his books that the introduction is not a mere formality, and will go on for up to fifty pages.

In 1970 Ellison published a collection of television columns called *The Glass Teat*. These columns, originally from the *Los Angeles Free Press*, are still readable today even though they are about programmes like *The Smothers Brothers* and the *Mod Squad* and *77 Sunset Strip*.

Ellison wrote about television as an insider. He was still writing for television: episodes for *Star Trek*, *Burke's Law*, and *The Outer Limits*.

"Come with me now as I hew out of a mountain of Jell-O, a structure of cowardice. Observe, if you will, two men - Leonard Goldberg and Elton H Rule - the former, head of programming at ABC-TV, the latter, president of that network, who crutch along in spines of rubber, trembling timorously from lack of any discernible courage, so motivated by lack of understanding as to what 'serving the public good' means, that they crawl crablike across a terrain of fear and hypocrisy," was a typical outburst in these columns.

"Harlan Ellison has the face of a tough inner-city kid," Stephen King wrote in *Danse Macabre*. "Con-

fident enough in himself to be kind in most cases, but more than able to fuck you over if you give him any shit."

King named one of his chapters *The Glass Teat, or, This Monster Was Brought to You by Gainesburgers*, and said of the collection "if you've not read it, be aware that it comes recommended as a kind of compass with this particular stretch of the territory. I read the book with amazed absorption three years ago, the fact that Ellison had devoted valuable time

and space to such forgettable series of yesteryear as *Alias Smith and Jones* barely obtruding on a total volcanic effect that made me suspect I was experiencing something roughly similar to a six-hour rant delivered by Fidel Castro." "Ellison's fiction," King goes on to say, "is and always has been a nervous bundle of contradictions."

For the record, the following would be some of my recommended short stories by Harlan Ellison. The first five are dynamite - read them.

"Jeffy is Five"; "One Life, Furnished in Early Poverty"; "O Ye of Little Faith"; "A boy and his dog"; "All the Birds Come Home to Roost"; "Repent, Harlequin, Said the Ticktockman"; "Croatoan"; "The Beast that Shouted Love at the Heart of the World"; "Shattered, Like a Glass Goblin".

One of the features in Ellison's stories is his attention to the naming of parts. He revels in precise description, and in the beauty of words. He always gives the impression that he knows things, that he is letting you in on something. He has an aura of experience that makes him the closest thing





the sf world has to Henry Miller.

In "The Beast that Shouted Love", he writes "crouched down in deeper magenta washings that concealed his arched form, the maniac waited. He was a dragon, squat and round in the torso, tapered ropey tail tucked under his body; the small, thick osseous shields rising perpendicularly from the arched back, running down to the end of the tail, tips pointing upwards; his taloned shorter arms folded across his massive chest. He had the seven-headed dog faces of an ancient Cerberus. Each head watched, waiting, hungry, insane."

A choice and fairly typical bit of Ellison prose comes from the introduction to his collection of essays *Harlan Ellison's Watching*. It describes his early infatuation with the cinema, and what would happen if his guardians found him there:

"And now, to be usherhandled up the aisle, my ear pinched excruciatingly, my dear sweet Granny kvetching along behind, intoning half-Yiddish gurdyloos about my certain future as either a demented hunchback bell-ringer, or a Cossack love-slave...how ignominious!

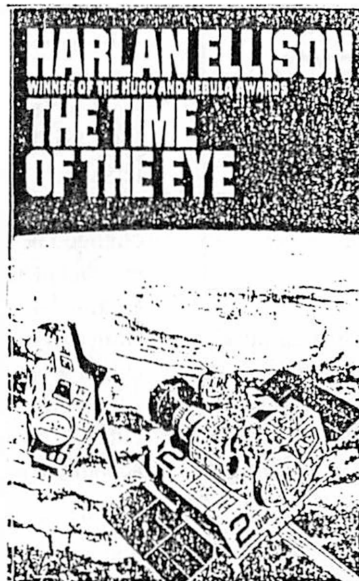
"I was, of course, dragged the three blocks back to the House of Pain, my wrist caught in a lobster-grip so maliciously tight that it would have drawn

clucks of admiration from SWAT teams and Argentinian death squads..

"Brandishing a Swingline Stapler with which she threatened to attach me permanently to the mattress, I was once again divested of my clothing, and condemned to a state of supine anguish with threats of a 'k-nok in the kopf' if I so much as hyperventilated too loudly."

And here's an example, from the award-winning "Jeffty is Five", of how he uses his powers of recall to augment his fiction:

"When I was five, a Clark Bar was as fat around as the gripping end of a Louisville Slugger, and pretty nearly six inches long, and they used real chocolate to coat it in, and it crunched very nicely when you bit into the center, and the paper it came wrapped in smelled fresh and good when you peeled off one end to hold the bar so it wouldn't melt onto your fingers. Today, a Clark Bar is as thin as a credit card, they use something artificial and awful-tasting instead of pure chocolate, the thing is soft and soggy, it costs fifteen or twenty cents instead of a decent, correct nickel, and they wrap it so you think it's the same size it was twenty years ago, only it isn't, it's slim and ugly and nasty-tasting and not worth a penny, much less fifteen or twenty cents."



## Ellison II: An appraisal by Robert Elliott

Harlan Ellison has written and edited over fifty books. Having searched for many years, I've been able to find twenty-four. The rest, I can't get. This is a bit of a bummer, as Harlan is one of the best writers in the world in any genre, and is essential reading for everyone.

There are many things about Harlan Ellison worth mentioning. He's won more Hugo awards than anyone else\*, he edited *Dangerous Visions*, an anthology which redefined the science fiction short story, and his work on television has, for some small moments

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when his episodes aired, raised such mindless television programmes as *Star Trek* to greatness. For me, however, he'll always be the man who appeared on the American version of *Blind Date*. When the filming

finished, they burnt the tape.

We all know that there's a lot of crap on television. Some of us even rail against its inane content on occasion. Only Harlan Ellison has, for the last thirty years, warned us against its evil. But no mindless zealot he; through his column, *Harlan Ellison's Watching* in the *Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*, he tells of its good points, and, up to recently, he still contributed to the medium. Since his stint as creative consultant on the new *Twilight Zone*, however, we've not been blessed with his input. And though this is a great loss, I can't find it in my heart to blame him. Why? Does anybody remember a series called *The Starlost*?

Ellison wrote the pilot for the series, about a generation ship on its journey through space. He designed a huge spaceship very much in the Chris Foss mould, and set up the characters. These were well written, with a good, tight plot. When it was handed in, it was changed beyond recognition by the producers. What is left was reshowed recently on Channel 4. It stinks. To high heaven. If you want to read the original, try and find a book called *Phoenix Without Ashes*, by Harlan Ellison and Ed Bryant. You'll find therein not only a good story but details of Ellison's account of his encounter with the producers.

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\*except Charles Brown, who won more for his magazine *Locus*. We don't include that because not only did the magazine win them, not the editor, but it doesn't make Harlan sound as impressive.

This is but one example. He wrote an episode of *The Young Lawyers* called *The Whimper of Whipped Dogs* (nothing to do with his short story of the same name), which was also turned to garbage. And so on, ad nauseam.

Basically, Ellison's fiction is excellent. But his non-fiction, and in particular, his writing on television, is beyond compare. His non-

**This article, as I go over it now, reads like a eulogy of my best friend being read in front of his parents**

fiction has appeared in eight books so far, and I would urge everyone to find and read this books. In particular, *The Glass Teat*, *The Other Glass Teat* and *Harlan Ellison's Watching* are essential reading for anyone interested in television. Okay, so the first two are over twenty years old, but it's a sign of his ability as a writer that they're just as entertaining and relevant today as they were when he wrote the columns for the *Los Angeles Free Press* 10, those many years ago.

This article, as I go over it now, reads like a eulogy of my best friend being read in front of his parents. Well, I've never met Harlan Ellison, and he's not dead. He is, however, an excellent writer, and one whose work isn't nearly as available as it ought to be. The only book currently available is *Dangerous Visions*, but if you wend your way towards *Forbidden Planet*, you'll find a few copies of *Harlan Ellison's Watching*. Buy it.

## COMICS

### KNIGHTS OF PENDRAGON WARHEADS MOTORMOUTH & KILLPOWER Marvel Comics

If you are looking for deep, meaningful stories, with a grandiose social commentary, then these are not for you. However, if you wish to be entertained, and kept amused, then I can highly recommend these releases from Marvel. They are parts of ongoing series, all being related to the evil Mys-TECH.

*Knights* deals with a bunch of techno-knights of the round table battling the evils of one Baron Blood - baddie extraordinaire and bloodsucker to boot! Yep, the arch-villain is a vampire. And he's thrown his lot in with Mys-TECH just for good measure.

*Warheads* concerns a unit of troops that Mys-TECH uses to explore time-rifts, called war-heads (oddly enough), who appear disgruntled with the manner in which they are used. In this issue they are duped into attempting to kill a demon-lord in his own dimension by a rogue Mys-TECH director, who is being controlled by the demon's son.

Finally, *Motormouth & Killpower* concerns two time-travelling, dimension-hopping, fun-loving Faith No More fans who find themselves caught up in the power struggle between an evil wizard and the downtrodden population of a barbarian fantasy planet, which they have visited before, unbeknownst to themselves! These comics are packed with brilliant artwork, and some very amusing scenes, and make great light entertainment. They are chock-a-block with action and adventure, big guns, and even bigger egos. They are full of heroes in the old-fashioned sense of the word, and are capable of returning the reader to his or her childhood.

Move over Judge Dredd, some less boring good dudes just hit town! (Okay, I'll come quietly Judge, honest.)

PAUL FELDWICK

# The Embrace

by Dorian Gray

"Hello, Sally," remarked an amused voice, above and beside the child. Sally looked up, and smiled happily.

"Uncle Joe! Where have you been? I haven't seen you in ages!"

The man beside her smiled back. "Oh - here and there," he replied. "Here, come into the park. I've got something for you."

"You have? What is it? Show me!" she demanded.

"All in good time." He sounded amused again, but then, Uncle Joe always sounded amused.

They went into the park, and sat on a bench in one of the more secluded parts. Uncle Joe put his arm around Sally's shoulders, and she looked up at him, trustingly. He was still smiling, but - she frowned, suddenly just the tiniest bit nervous - there seemed to be an awful lot of teeth in his smile...

He leaned closer, and now the nervousness turned abruptly to fear, as she saw the teeth, and remembered...

"No!" she screamed. "No, Uncle Joe! Go 'way. You're awful, you hurt me! Go away!" She struggled, trying to get away from him. He stared into her eyes.

"Be still," he said softly, and she had to stop struggling. Terrified now, she drew breath for another scream.

"Sally," he said, softly, warningly, his eyes never leaving hers. "Sally, don't make me angry. Don't you love your Uncle Joe? I'm hungry, Sally darling - you want to feed me, don't you?"

"I...want...to..." she murmured faintly, turning her head away.

"That's my girl," Uncle Joe agreed, and then she felt the familiar pain in her neck. She moaned - then relaxed into the soothing pleasure that came after, drifting in it, hardly aware when he lifted his head.

She rolled limply towards him, unable to support herself, and knew only vaguely that he'd caught her with one hand, and was raising the other to his lips. She could hardly see him any more; he was lost in a sort of dark-red fuzziness...

She felt something against her face, something warm trickling into her mouth. As she swallowed, awareness returned - agonisingly. She tried to scream, but only managed a kind of whimper. But despite the pain, she couldn't bear for it to stop, either, and she reached up with both hands to hold Uncle Joe's wrist to her lips, greedily drinking the blood he gave. All too soon, though, he pulled his wrist away.

He smiled, nastily. "You're one of us, now," he whispered. "Welcome to the night, child..."

reviews of whatever I'd read recently. I'm glad to say that the standard's slightly higher now, and we've received nothing but praise for Michael's work on the newsletter (that's a lie, but he's leaving, so we'll be nice). But seriously, folks, Michael's brought the newsletter to the standard it currently enjoys, and it's a standard we hope to maintain.

Finally, a wee reminder to those of you living outside Dublin that review copies are available; just send us your name, address and membership number, and we'll send one out to you. If you sent in your name already, be patient. There's a book on its way as soon as I can't count the number of requests on one hand. Any day now.



### The Alchemists Head

Paul Sheridan

## Committee Bit

Remember last month (or the month before. Some time, anyway), when I mentioned that we'd like to hold a weekend workshop for the writers and artists? Now's your chance to voice your enthusiasm for the project. All we're looking for now is people interested; if we don't get enough people interested (ten each for the writers' and artists' workshops), then we'll have to scrap the idea. The idea, in case you're interested, is that the writers/artists in question pays for their accomodation and meals, and occupy an hotel or something for a couple of days. If you're interested, let us know. Note that we're just looking for interest at the moment; it doesn't mean you'll get a place if either workshop is oversubscribed.

If you cast your mind back once more to last month (I'm sure it's last month this time), you'll remember that we promised a financial statement this issue. Well, we lied. It took a tad longer than anticipated to get the books in order, so it'll appear next issue instead. And we mean it this time.

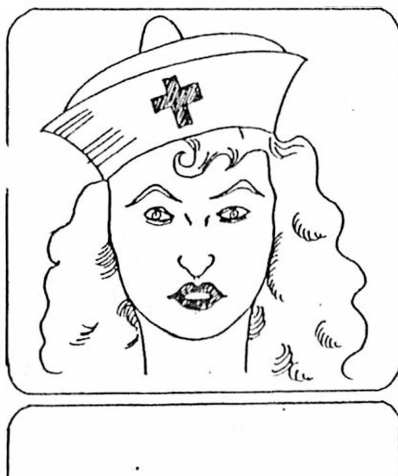
Next, we must once more bid a tearful adieu to a committee member. God, at this rate I'll be the only one left; I hope it's nothing I said. Anyway, Peter McCanney, the committee's tallest member, is no longer part of our merry troupe. Peter finds himself too busy as an up-and-coming artist to be able to devote time to the committee, so it looks like we're down to four. You know what this means; the overworked committee now officially the extremely overworked committee. Therefore, we need volunteers. Not necessarily for committee posts; just people willing to lend a hand now and then. Committee members can look forward to constant petty abuse from people who don't know what they're talking about, while volunteers will get a job that's not quite as thankless. Actually, it's not that bad; I've been told that it's a very rewarding job.

Speaking of volunteers needed, does anybody want to edit this thing? All you need is a PC, some free time and the ability to fill twenty-four pages a month. This is Michael Cullen's last newsletter, and yet another tearful goodbye is on the cards. Gosh, I remember those halcyon days of yore when I was pushed to fill four pages in the first few issues; they were normally filled with fifty-word book

# Phase Two



**The Devil You Know** Johnny Rothwell



**Madle and Grodur** Nu Lyons/Derek Kelly

## ISFA Membership Application Form

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone \_\_\_\_\_

(Work) \_\_\_\_\_

Have you previously been a member of the ISFA? \_\_\_\_\_

Membership costs £13 per annum

Cheques and postal orders should be crossed and made payable to ISFA, and sent to

The Irish Science Fiction Association  
P O Box 3762  
Dublin 6

## Artists and Writers Workshop

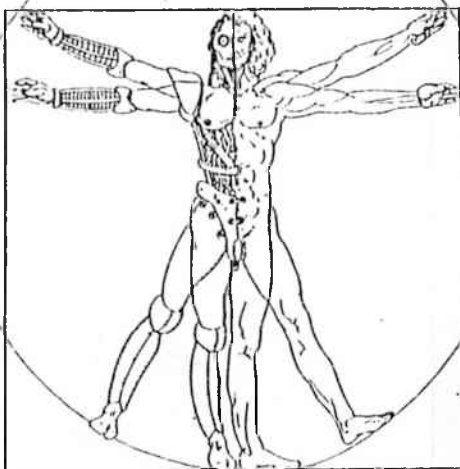
The Irish Science Fiction Association has secured a new venue for the Artists and Writers Workshop. Meetings will now take place in a private room on the top floor of the Ha'penny Bridge Inn, 42 Wellington Quay (just down from the Ha'penny Bridge), Dublin 2. Current projects include:

- \* Stories and art for the ISFA Workshop magazine *Phase N*
- \* Cover designs and line drawings for *First Contact*, the newsletter of the ISFA

Next workshop: Monday December 17 at 8pm. This will be a special to launch the comic *Phase Two*.



Cover Art by Paul Sheridan



Next month

Lisa Tuttle interview

plus all the usual news and reviews



Phase Two, the comic from the Artists and Writers workshop will be launched on 17th. May at 8 p.m. in the upstairs room of the Halfpenny Bridge Inn. This is an adult comic and all adults are invited to the launch. Come and bring your friends.

Those members of the ISFA who present their card will be able to pick up their individual copy while a limited number will be available for purchase.

As this is a once-off comic it may be of interest to collectors.

Tell your friends and colleagues about the launch.

There will be bar facilities available on the night so come along and talk to your friends over a drink.