

First Contact

The Newsletter of the Irish Science Fiction Association

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Special "Life on Mars" Issue

We look at the details and the ramifications of what one **First Contact** editor is describing as the discovery of the decade.

Darn. I didn't mention the Eurocon, did I?

Special 'Eurocon in Dublin' issue

It's been a while in coming, but the details have (mostly) been nailed down. Read all about it inside. Actually, it's on this page and just a bit to your left, now that I think about it.

Actually, isn't it about time we recognised FTL for what it was?

Special 'FTL Remembered' issue

We look at the fiction of FTL, and ask whether it was worth all the hassle.

Of course, there's much more than just that.

Special Bumper Issue

More reviews, views, and news than ever before. Mostly.

Eurocon announces venue, date

It's been a while in coming, but Eurocon have finally nailed down a venue for the 1997 con, to be held in Dublin. An ecstatic me told **First Contact** exclusively that Dublin Castle would be the site for the 1997 Eurocon, which will be held on 25-27 October 1997.

The Guest of Honour has yet to be announced, but an author has been approached: it's hoped that our next issue will announce the lucky guest's name to the world.

Membership for the con currently costs €20 for the three days, but pre-supporters will be able to upgrade to full attending membership for €15. Further details can be got from Eurocon 97, PO Box 5130, Dublin 4. If you're e-mail enabled, a missive to rde@irelands-web.ie will get you all you need to know.

'Life on Mars' Announcement greeted with apathy

My first hint was the front page of *The Irish Times*: upon reading the monumental news I spent the rest of the day searching for more information, only to be disappointed. Most radio stations gave a brief mention, but overall coverage was ridiculous: *Sky News* didn't even consider it worth mentioning in their headlines. After a while – a week or so – it received greater coverage; both *Time* and *Newsweek* covered the story in some detail and – as was inevitable, I suppose – said exactly the same thing.

Fortunately, we still have the net, and full details were available for those willing to look for it. The best site was New Scientist's Planet Science (www.newscientist.com), which had coverage that was both comprehensive and cool. Check it out. I was going to write a "First Contact Guide to Polycyclic Aromatic Hydrocarbons," but that would be hubris in the extreme; would I really try to tell you all about a subject that I've been interested in for all of, oh, a week?

Editorial

I suppose you're all wondering why I asked you here, tonight. Mes amis. I must tell you that someone in this room... remembers FTL!

The magazine that we don't speak of in polite company is gone through in gory detail by Pádraig Holland this issue. All the stories dissected for your edification, elucidation and erudition. Well okay, maybe not erudition. Education, perhaps.

But reading (and typing, proofreading, re-reading and comparing) the article. I was struck by the fact that not everyone on the planet was involved in the production of FTL. Back in those heady days of meeting downstairs in the Oak to discuss the possibility of doing a magazine, it was viewed – by a young me, anyway – as a bit of a giggle, a chance to do something worthwhile while learning how pritt-stuck worked. It never occurred to me that anyone would *read* the damn thing.

But read it they did; and looking back it's an even greater shame that the ISFA can't afford to keep it going. This isn't a clarion call to the committee to find money that isn't there and launch another doomed venture, but simply a statement of regret.

Fortunately, all is not lost, and Albedo One is with us, edited and published by some of those very names that appeared in FTL.

So how essential is an Irish science fiction magazine? Well, very. Without a magazine, there's no outlet for SF from Ireland, a few stories in Interzone and the British/American small press notwithstanding. Without trying to sound like a Bord Fáilte ad, it must be said that Ireland has always been proud of its cultural heritage, and it seems not only reasonable but essential that a country with such a heritage be capable of bringing examples of the oldest type of fiction to a deserving and eager audience.

Reading Pádraig Holland's (perhaps slightly over-generous) article made me realise that a magazine like FTL – or Phase, or Albedo One – is doing a good and necessary thing. It's for that reason that I'm

publishing the article in its entirety: a trifle overlong for newsletter of this size, perhaps, but it's an article that's fascinating for those of us who worked on the magazine, and hopefully for those who haven't read what was coming out of Irish SF and the ISFA in past days. FTL is what the ISFA should – and does – aspire to, and I look forward to the days when we can greet the arrival of a quality (and, dare I say it, permanent) fiction magazine.

Contents

Oh, god. Not the contents, again. I always get this wrong. It's easier this issue because the FTL article deferred some of the shorter stuff, but it's still a pain in the nuts trying to get the page numbers right. I don't think I'll bother. You're smart; you'll figure it out.

Oh, all right then. But only because I've got some space to fill. Don't think I'll do this every month.

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First Contact was called that long before Rick Berman thought of it, and I'm buggered if I'm changing it so I can avoid a few benighted trekkies moaning about misrepresentation. I remember Octocon 2; I know what a bunch of misanthropes are out there, but I don't care. I'll state clearly in a loud steady voice that the work appearing herein – that's inside *First Contact* – is copyright ©1996 the guys that wrote it. Usual rules about unauthorised duplication are in effect, so don't do it.

News

Hugo Awards Announced

L.A.con III, the 54th World Science Fiction Convention presented the annual Hugo Awards for Achievement in Science Fiction and Fantasy, and the John W. Campbell Award for Best New Writer. I won't bore you with the ballot counts, but here's a complete list of this year's winners...

Best Novel

The Diamond Age, by Neal Stephenson

Best Novella

"The Death of Captain Future", by Allen Steele (Asimov's, October 1995)

Best Novelette

"Think Like a Dinosaur", by James Patrick Kelly (Asimov's, June 1995)

Best Short Story

"The Lincoln Train", by Maureen F. McHugh (Fantasy and Science Fiction, April 1995)

Best Non-Fiction Book

Science Fiction: The Illustrated Encyclopedia, by John Clute

Best Dramatic Presentation

"The Coming of Shadows" (Babylon 5) (Warner Brothers) J. Michael Straczynski, Douglas Netter, John Copeland, producers; J. Michael Straczynski, screenplay; Janet Greek, director (woohoo!)

Best Professional Editor

Gardner Dozois

Best Professional Artist

Bob Eggleton

Best Original Artwork

Dinotopia : The World Beneath, by James Gurney

Best Semi-Prozine

Locus, edited by Charles N. Brown

Best Fanzine

Ansible, edited by Dave Langford

Best Fan Writer

Dave Langford

Best Fan Artist

William Rotsler

John W. Campbell Award

David Feintuch

B5 in Bad Episode Shock

I'm as amazed as you are. "Grey 17 is Missing" sucked. It was the single finest example of a waste of a plot device ever seen by this reporter in many a millennium. With only a couple of episodes to go before the season finale, there are signs of frayed nerves in First Contact towers: will lit live up to expectations? Can there be two bad episodes in the one series? Actually, yes: the episode before – you'll forgive me if I can't remember the title – was pretty dire as well: the season's obligatory 'meaningful Dr. Franklin' episode. There can't possibly be three. Can there?

Comedycon – Planning Ahead

So is it Comedycon or Planet Sci-fi? Either way, with the 1997 convention still in planning, there are already announcements of guests for 1998. If you're not already signed up to see Robert Llewellyn in 1997, then by jingo you'll want to see David Prowse and Susan Gibney in 1998. Yeah, I had to ask who she was, too. Remember Leah Brahms in a couple of episodes of *The Next Generation*? 'Tis she. But myriads probably knew that already. Get a life.

Dream Corridor goes Quarterly

You mean you don't read the comic adaptations of stories by Harlan Ellison, in a publication overseen by the great man himself? Hie thee to a comic shop, and pick up a copy of this wonderful item. It's just come back from Dark Horse after a bit of a break with a new, quarterly schedule. Well worth checking out.

Comics

James Bacon

Spawn #50, Image, Todd McFarlane, £2.70

A special issue with extra pages and art by Todd McFarlane himself. Unfortunately, the story is also by McFarlane and is quite poor indeed.

Basically, Spawn's ex-wife's husband has a brain tumour and Spawn cures him. It took three pages to guess the plot. There is no imagination, no reaching for the boundaries of visual entertainment, no nothing. It pales in contrast to the first dozen or so issues, and even McFarlane's artwork is scrappy and unclear.

I cannot understand why anyone would celebrate the fiftieth issue of a comic with such a bad story. McFarlane's writing has always been dubious but since I haven't read an issue of *Spawn* since #25, I presume the huge decrease in quality I observed is not so evident to fans buying it every month. A pity, really.

Too Much Coffee Man Colour Special #1, Shannon Wheeler, £2.70

This comic consists of 32 one-page stories which originally appeared in the *Austin American Statesman*. The stories were so off-the-wall, bizarre and hilarious, it's totally amazing.

Our hero of the hour is Too Much Coffee Man, with his companions Too Much Espresso Guy and Too Much German White Chocolate Woman with Almonds. They don't save anybody or do anything particularly unnatural, but as a strip it takes a very good look at society, humanity and everyday life, throws it back and takes the total piss out of it.

Shannon Wheeler has a very sharp image of how things are, and the hopeless Too Much Coffee Man brings these images to life with amazing clarity and humour.

The attitude is mirrored in the merchandise page. It appears the Japanese bootlegged TMCM for an American Pop Culture t-shirt with the words "Person who Drinks Coffee Often" in Japanese. Shannon has bootlegged the bootleg and is offering the t-shirt for \$15. Cool or what?

Frank Frazetta's Death Dealer, Verotik, Danzig/Sharp, £6.50

Apart from the cover – which was done six years ago – and the original idea, Frank Frazetta has little to do with this comic. His name is prominent on the cover, though possibly to encourage the average dude to pay £6.50 for what is really nothing more than a below-average hack and slash, not much intelligence required, stupid sort of comic.

Liam Sharp's artwork is striking and at times quite beautiful, but it's let very heavily down by the lack of a truly entertaining story, which surprises me as Glenn Danzig is surely capable of producing a better story.

But when you consider the cover price of £6.50 it's totally unacceptable to consider this comic in any sense of the phrase value for money.

Grendel/Batman – Devil's Bones, DC Dark Horse, Matt Wagner, £4.15

As the Gotham Museum prepares to have an exhibition entitled "Gotham City Killers" which includes the skeleton of Hunter Rose, aka Grendel, another metallic Grendel appears on the scene, guns down 13 police officers and even escapes the Batman.

Matt Wagner has done an excellent job with this crossover, quite unsurprisingly when you consider that it was he who created Grendel in the first place.

The artwork is dark but exceptionally clear, with just the right amount of colour. The story is one which leaves the reader gagging for the next issue.

Gemini Blood, Helix, Hinz & Edwards, £2.05

The new Helix line of comics from DC hopes to do for science fiction comics what Vertigo has done for Horror: make money. The stories are creator-owned, and therefore a lot more imaginative than your usual superhero gig.

Hinz and Edwards' *Gemini Blood* appears to be a rather good read, with a neat first issue. The story goes that a dwarf has a team of specialists who have been hired by a mega-wealthy corporate dude who's under attack from a Paratwa assassin, someone who has rather unique abilities.

The story and plot are pretty solid and it has the making of a good series, although Helix have it listed as ongoing. How long the good stuff lasts is anybody's guess.



The Story So Far (part 3)

Adam Darcy

New Characters

Captain John Sheridan (Bruce Boxleitner): Sinclair's replacement is also a hero of the Earth-Minbari war. Sheridan scored Earth's only major victory in combat with the Minbari - he destroyed their flagship, the *Black Star*, and three other cruisers by setting fusion mines in the asteroid field between Jupiter and Mars. His appointment as commanding officer of Babylon 5 is seen as an affront to the Minbari, who call him "Star Killer". Sheridan's wife, Anna, was a member of an archaeological expedition to the Galactic Rim when her ship, the *Icarus*, disappeared. Sheridan has a penchant for conspiracy theories and has a desire to expose any truth, even if it is not politically convenient. He sees himself as a military man, not a diplomat, so he has promoted Ivanova to Commander, and delegated some of his diplomatic duties to her.

Lieutenant Warren Keffer (Robert Russler): A fighter pilot with Zeta squadron.

Zack Allen (Jeff Conaway): A security officer.

New Aliens

The Lumati: A xenophobic and supercilious race which has agreed to participate in the Babylon Project. The Lumati communicate with beings they consider inferior via a mental link with another race, who act as their spokesmen.

The Shadows: Human knowledge of this mysterious race is limited to rumours of "ghosts" lurking in hyperspace. There are Narn legends about them, and the Vorlons and Minbari seem to know more - but they are not ready to reveal it yet.

Season Two:

The Coming of Shadows

The Babylon Project was our last, best hope for peace. A self-contained world, five miles long, located in neutral territory. A place of commerce and diplomacy for a quarter of a million humans and aliens. A shining beacon in space...all alone in the night.

It was the dawn of the Third Age of Mankind, the year the Great War came upon us all. This is the story of the last of the Babylon stations. The year is 2259. The name of the place is Babylon 5. - Captain Sheridan.

Points of Departure

8th of January, 2259. Babylon 5 is in chaos - Sinclair has been chosen to be Earth's first Ambassador to Minbar. Garibaldi is still in a coma. G'Kar is missing, and Delenn is in her chrysalis. A renegade Minbari warship, the *Trigati*, has been hiding in hyperspace since the end of the war rather than surrender. It has been tracked to Babylon 5 space, and Captain John Sheridan is assigned command to try and resolve the situation. The present captain of the *Trigati*, Kalain, makes an attempt on Delenn's life, and is taken into custody, where he commits suicide.

Lennier is authorised to tell Sheridan the reason for the Minbari surrender: It was found that the collective soul of recent Minbari generations was becoming weak. When the Grey Council examined Sinclair during the Battle of the Line, they discovered that he had a Minbari soul, and realised that some souls were being reborn as humans. As it is forbidden for Minbari to kill other Minbari, the Grey Council ordered a surrender, but since this discovery would unravel the fabric of their society, it was kept secret.

The *Trigati* leaves hyperspace and deploys its fighters in retaliation for the death of Kalain. Realising that they are trying to provoke an attack and start

another war, Sheridan orders his Starfuries to hold their fire, and calls for assistance from another Minbari cruiser waiting in hyperspace, which destroys the *Trigati* when it refuses to surrender.

Lennier continues his vigil over Delenn, and regrets that he was not permitted to tell Sheridan of a prophecy that foretells of the return of a great Darkness, which will only be defeated if the Minbari and human races unite.

Revelations

G'Kar returns, having found evidence that an ancient enemy, described in the teachings of G'Uon, has reawakened on a planet at the Galactic Rim - Zhadum. His government sends a ship to investigate, but Londo has been asked to inform Morden of any news he receives about the Rim, and the Narn cruiser is destroyed by Morden's associates, the Shadows. Delenn emerges from her chrysalis, and now appears to be a human-Minbari hybrid, announcing that she is to be a bridge between the two races. Meanwhile, Dr. Franklin resorts to using the alien healing device he confiscated to revive Garibaldi. With the help of Talia, Garibaldi remembers who shot him - his second-in-command, Jack. When questioned, Jack just gives a "Be seeing you" salute, also used by Bester, which leads Garibaldi to link the assassination of President Santiago to the Psi-Corps. By the order of President Clark - who was endorsed by the Psi-Corps during the elections - Jack is sent back to Earth for trial. However, he transfers to another ship mid-route, and disappears.

The Geometry of Shadows

An order of Technomages - beings who combine the arts of science and illusion - gathers on the station, preparing to travel beyond the Rim to preserve their knowledge before the Darkness comes. The first Centauri Emperor received the blessing of three Technomages, and Londo tries to secure an endorsement to further his status. Eventually, the leader, Elric, tells him he sees Londo's hand reaching from the stars, and hears billions of voices calling his name.

"My followers?" Londo asks.

"Your victims," Elric replies.

A Distant Star

An Earth Force explorer ship is lost in hyperspace when an explosion blows out its navigation systems. B5's fighter squadrons mount a rescue attempt, but the leader of Zeta squadron, Galus, is destroyed by a Shadow craft. Keiffer witnesses the attack, but has no evidence to prove his story, and vows to find this "ghost in hyperspace".

The Long Dark

A hundred-year-old sleeper ship from Earth, the *Copernicus*, homes in on a signal from B5, and unwittingly brings aboard a soldier of Darkness, who was using the craft to return to its masters at Z'ha'dum.

A Spider in the Web

A representative from FutureCorp, who has a possible solution to the problems on Mars, is assassinated, apparently by an agent of the Free Mars movement. Talia receives some disturbing images from the killer's mind, and discovers that he was Abel Horn, the leader of Free Mars, who was killed during the rebellion. As he was dying, he was cybernetically altered and reprogrammed, with Psi-Corps assistance, to be an assassin. A subversive organisation, based in the San Diego wastelands and called Bureau 13, is behind the killing, and it has an agent known as "Control" on B5.

A Race Through Dark Places

Bester returns to B5 to expose an "underground railroad" for unregistered telepaths, run by Dr. Franklin. The telepaths' leader knew Jason Ironheart, and he convinces Talia of the corruption in Psi-Corps. By joining hands, the telepaths combine their powers (the real reason why Psi-Corps insists that telepaths wear gloves) and produce an illusion powerful enough to fool Bester into believing he has destroyed the operation.

The Coming of Shadows

G'Kar plots an assassination when the Centauri Emperor visits the station. However, he has come to apologise to the Narn for the atrocities committed by his family, but collapses before he can do so. G'Kar is willing to put his differences with the Centauri aside, but Londo has

joined forces with Lord Refa and a group of Centauri extremists, who wish to use Londo's new-found allies for their own ends. Londo asks Morden to have his associates attack the Narn listening post in quadrant 14. In response, the Narn government declares war. On Centauri Prime, Refa's allies assassinate the Prime Minister. Londo has a prophetic dream of his death: He is standing on Centauri Prime, now in ruins. A fleet of Shadow ships pass overhead. Then he is sitting on the Imperial throne, aged and wracked with a fit of coughing. An older G'Kar tries to strangle him, and they die with their hands around each other's throats.

Garibaldi receives a message from Sinclair, delivered by a Ranger, one of a group of humans and Minbari who are gathering information and preparing for the Great War. Sinclair tells Garibaldi to "stay close to the Vorlon, and watch the shadows - they move when you're not looking." Delenn also receives a copy of Sinclair's message from the Ranger.

As the Emperor dies, he whispers in Londo's ear. Londo announces that the Emperor has told him to return his people to the stars, but later confides to Refa that he actually said "You are both damned." Refa installs the late Emperor's nephew, Cartagia, as his faction's puppet ruler.

All Alone in the Night

Sheridan is abducted by an alien vessel while on a routine mission. In a delirium, he dreams of Ivanova with a raven on her shoulder, Garibaldi with a dove, and Kosh, who says "You have always been here".

Delenn is summoned before the Grey Council, which rebukes her for her transformation. She is removed of her title, and Neroon replaces her, giving the Warrior Caste a majority. However, Delenn is allowed to retain her position on Babylon 5.

When Sheridan is rescued and brought back to the station, he is visited by General Hague, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who tells him why he chose him to command B5. He is worried about the growing corruption in Earth's government, and wants Sheridan and the station's senior staff to help expose it, and the Psi-Corps link to the death of President Santiago.

Acts of Sacrifice

As the Narn-Centauri conflict intensifies, tension builds between both sides on the station, when five thousand Narn civilians are killed. G'Kar seeks help from the other races. Sheridan and Delenn can only offer unofficial help in the form of food, medical supplies, and

safe passage through the station for refugees.

Hunter, Prey

Earth Force Security Agent Cranston tracks a fugitive - Dr. Jacobs, former physician to President Clark - to the station. Sheridan is informed that the doctor has proof that Clark's viral infection was a ruse, giving weight to a link between Clark and the assassination of Luis Santiago. He enlists the help of Ambassador Kosh, who hides Jacobs in his ship.

Sheridan asks Kosh to teach him about the Vorlons, but he refuses. Instead, he offers to help Sheridan understand himself, until the captain is ready "to fight legends".

And Now For A Word

While an ISN crew is filming a documentary on B5, they witness a Narn ship destroy a Centauri freighter, which it claims was carrying arms. This leads to a confrontation between a Narn cruiser, a Centauri warship, and the space station, and seems to justify the Earth public's increasing lack of faith in the Babylon Project, and the recent budget cuts.

In the Shadow of Z'ha'dum

While searching through his wife's belongings, Sheridan finds a crew manifest for the *Icarus*. Garibaldi recognises one of the crewmen as Morden, and Sheridan interrogates him to determine the truth about the disappearance of the *Icarus*.

Meanwhile, Pierce Macabee is sent from the Ministry of Peace on Earth to recruit members for the Nightwatch, an organisation set up to maintain peace in human society. Zack Allen signs up.

Sheridan tricks Talia into scanning Morden, and she sees him darken to a silhouette, with flickering, shadowy figures around him. Delenn and Kosh reveal the truth to Sheridan to convince him to release Morden. She speaks of the First Ones, the ancient races of the Galaxy, who fought against the Shadows billions of years ago. When the Shadows struck again a thousand years ago, the remaining First Ones defeated them with the aid of the Minbari. All of the First Ones departed "beyond the veil of stars" after this conflict, with the exception of the Vorlons. Kosh hides in his encounter suit because, as a Vorlon, he would be recognised by "everyone".

When the *Icarus* was sent to Z'ha'dum to investigate the ruins of an ancient civilisation, it disturbed the

dormant Shadows, and Morden and others were taken and used as their agents. When Delenn sent Lennier to Kosh at the end of 2258, it was to ask if the Shadows had returned to Z'ha'dum, where they are biding their time before attacking. Since the Forces of Light are not yet ready to stand against the Shadows, Sheridan releases Morden to prevent a precipitation of the inevitable conflict. Sheridan asks that Kosh return the favour by training him to fight the Shadows. The Vorlon agrees.

Confessions and Lamentations

The Markabs are infected by a plague, which they call Drafa and consider to be a punishment for immorality. As Dr. Franklin searches for a cure, the Markabs isolate themselves in a cargo bay to pray, ministered to by Delenn and Lennier. Franklin finds a treatment, but is too late, and the Markab race is completely annihilated.

Divided Loyalties

Lyta Alexander, now a member of an anti-Psi-Corps movement, returns to B5 with information taken from a research centre on Mars. The Psi-Corps has developed a technique to implant an artificial personality in a person's mind to act as a sleeper spy. A member of B5's command staff has such an implant, and is code-named "Control". Lyta wants to project a password telepathically into their minds, which would make the implanted personality surface. Ivanova refuses, informing Sheridan of a secret she has been hiding - latent telepathic abilities. The entire staff is sent the password, including Ivanova, but the spy is discovered to be Talia, who tries to kill Lyta, and is sent to Earth. Lyta visits Kosh, telling him that no matter how much she was scanned, she never revealed what she saw in his mind. She asks to see him before she tries to go to the Vorlon's homeworld.

The Long, Twilight Struggle

The Narn, realising that they are losing the war, launch a last-ditch attack on a Centauri supply world, Gorash VII. The Centauri discover the plan, and have Londo send the Shadows to engage the Narn fleet, while Centauri ships attack Narn itself.

Draal projects his image to Sheridan, inviting him to visit him on Epsilon III with Delenn. He has explored the full capabilities of the machine in the planet, and it has rejuvenated him. He places the machine at Sheridan's disposal, to aid in the fight against the Shadows. When

Sheridan and Delenn leave, he calls for Zathras to assist in his preparations.

G'Kar receives news from a dying refugee that the Centauri are planning to attack Narn, and he tries to persuade War-Leader G'Sten to call off the attack on Gorash VII, but fails. The Narn ships are destroyed by five Shadow vessels, while the Centauri bombard the Narn homeworld with outlawed mass-drivers. Riots break out on B5 between the factions. Within four days, the Narn government surrenders, and G'Kar requests sanctuary on B5. Sheridan is introduced to the local Rangers, and Delenn declares that Babylon 5 must become a Fortress of Light when the Great War begins. She places Sheridan in joint command of the Rangers.

Comes the Inquisitor

The Vorlons call in an Inquisitor to determine if Delenn is suited to the path she has chosen. The Inquisitor is Sebastian, a human from 19th-century Earth. He tests her resolve by torturing her while questioning her reasons for seeing herself as being a "Chosen One".

The Narns on the station question G'Kar's leadership, as he tries to organise them into a resistance movement. They ask him to get word about their families from the homeworld, and Sheridan has the Rangers help him.

Lennier, worrying that Delenn may not survive the Inquisition, asks Sheridan to intervene. When he does so, he is overpowered by Sebastian. Delenn offers to sacrifice herself to save him, and this convinces Sebastian that they are indeed "the right people, in the right place, at the right time". Sheridan confronts Sebastian about a discovery he has made - that his disappearance from Earth coincides with the last of a series of murders in London. Sebastian admits to being Jack the Ripper, and says that his murderous crusade against immorality was the reason he was chosen as an Inquisitor.

The Fall of Night

As the Centauri invade Drazi and Pak'mara space, envoys from the Ministry of Peace, Frederick Lantz and Mr. Welles, arrive to investigate the situation. A Narn cruiser, which has managed to avoid the Centauri, comes to B5 for protection while it makes repairs. Mr. Welles calls a meeting of the local members of the Nightwatch, and rebukes Zack for failing to submit regular reports. He asks Zack to confirm reports of sedition on the part of a shopkeeper, and Zack reluctantly does so. Mr. Lantz is unwilling to talk to G'Kar, and is enraged to discover that Sheridan has been

conducting fighter training using Centauri models. He reveals that Earth is willing to sign a non-aggression treaty with the Centauri to ensure "peace in our time".

Keffer receives information about the Shadow ship he saw from the Delta squadron-leader, Mitch. Meanwhile, Welles offers Ivanova some incentives to join the Nightwatch - her own starship - but she declines. Welles is told about the Narn ship, and informs Londo. Sheridan refuses to surrender the vessel, and a Centauri cruiser arrives. As Zeta squadron escort the Narn cruiser to the jumpgate, the Centauri attack it and B5. Sheridan returns fire, and destroys the Centauri ship. While accompanying the Narn ship through hyperspace, Keffer picks up a signal leading him to a Shadow craft. He films the ship and ejects the system record with a homing beacon, before the Shadows destroy his Starfury.

The Centauri demand an apology from Sheridan, but on his way to the meeting, a Centauri plants a bomb on the core shuttle he is using. Sheridan jumps out before it explodes, and falls, almost weightless, towards the rapidly-spinning surface. Kosh is forced to leave his encounter suit to save him, and appears as a being of light. The Minbari recognise him as Valeria, the Narn as G'Lan, the Drazi as Droshalla, and the humans as an angel. Londo sees "nothing".

The appearance of this being of light is seen as a blessing, but all does not bode well for the coming year. The Shadows would have seen Kosh revealed, and Keffer's flight recording is broadcast on ISN. This could lead them to move earlier than they planned. The Centauri continue their expansion into the minor races' territories. Meanwhile, the Nightwatch is proving to be just one more of the sinister developments on Earth, as Zack is horrified when he sees the shopkeeper being arrested on his evidence.

The Stories of *FTL*

Pádraig Holland

March 1989 saw the publication of a magazine which had been needed in Ireland for at least a hundred years.

Its logo, *FTL*, was so over-killed by illustration that many people either misread it or took the other four words on the cover to be the magazine's title. If they did, they weren't far wrong. Those words were The Science Fiction Magazine.

Irish SF writers, you see, have long had a problem. The world doesn't believe in their existence.

Goodness knows, it doesn't take much arguing to convince the average reader that a lot of good horror and fantasy gets written in Ireland. Stoker. Yeats. Stephens and Dunsany spring to mind right away. But their reputations (and many others') are so mighty, and the international Celtic Twilight industry humming so strongly, that it gets forgotten that those people often wrote good SF as well.

Then there's mistaken identity. To get published, Irish SF writers needed the British or American magazines. Often they adopted the idioms of those countries so successfully that they were imagined to be British or American themselves.

So, *The Purple Cloud*, *The Mouse that Roared*, *Gulliver's Travels*, *The Diamond Lens* and *Sector General* were either seen as non-Irish or the work of individual geniuses rather than as a thriving and continuous school of literature.

FTL didn't change all that. But it did manage one thing; it gave Irish writers the chance to write Irish SF and related genres, in Irish settings and in an Irish idiom, with the support of a like-minded group of people. Irish SF became a real phenomenon rather than a patched-together Frankenstein.

Now that the ball is rolling, and Irish publishers have begun actively to seek out writers of SF, it is time to look at the forty-nine stories which made their appearance in *FTL*. Were they important? Did they launch careers? Were they any damn good?

Let's see.

Issue 1

"Illegal Alien" – Bobby McLaughlin

The longest story in issue 1 deals with an alien called Giac who finds himself stranded

in Dublin and strikes up something of a relationship with Julia, a local young wan. It's easily readable and the alien details – physical appearance, fear of cats, hallucinations after a shot of tea – are well up to standard. However, it is as a picture of Dublin's clubland/flatland/street that this story and its successors in *FTL* are best remembered.

"Sex in the Twenty-third Century" – Eileen Gormley

Randy young fellow is thawed out three hundred years after his death to a world where most of the population are beautiful begging for sex. Paradise? Of course it isn't. Eileen Gormley has worked this old theme to a new denouement which, while the story is good, comes a little too abruptly.

"Puppet" – David Egan

"Puppet" has an excellent structure, with clever counter-pointing of the poison of revenge and the actual poison plots in the story. There's plenty of old-fashioned space opera with all the robots and rockets and holograms anyone could wish for. Good, but five years on it has a dated feel.

Untitled story – Eileen Gormley

If she had titled it, she'd have blown the punchline. This is a shaggy-dog story. It's all about the efforts of some Brave New World dictatorship to keep people from smoking and, perhaps because it reflects the personal experience of the writer, is fresh and howlingly funny.

"Of Meat and Two Veg" – Robert Elliott

Iconoclastic, zany, funny, funny, funny and the best story in issue 1. A perfectly ordinary chap is told by a flying, talking, time-travelling carrot that he is its ancestor. He asks hopefully "is Janice the mother? Tall, red hair?" It's all like that. Excellent.

Issue 2

"A Wizard Called Edison," from the Tales of Bagnall Rimstaff – Des Doyle

The lead story was out and out high fantasy with just about every variation possible on wizards, sorcerers, ghosts, goblins and

witches. There are a couple of endearing central characters who carry the story along well. The story is told in a tavern around a roaring fire and the narrative regularly returns there, a device which usually fails but in this case keeps the action from flagging.

"Opium of the People" – David Egan

It seem the gremlins got in and cut this story short. I wish they hadn't. The opening, about a group of unemployed men falling into the clutches of a cult leader with weird technology at his disposal, was more than promising.

"The Elephant and the Beanstalk" – Robert Elliott

The first of four – count them, four – stories by Elliott in this issue. Elliott is one of those rare humorous writers who can maintain the comedy right through the piece, sentence after sentence descending to even more subliminal levels of the ridiculous. "Beanstalk" is a parody of the nursery tale, very well worked out.

"Wargames" – Robert Elliott

Far-future Olympic interplanetary champions earn their bronze, silver and gold by killing more people. The pace never lets up, the fun is frantic and there's plenty of irony there for those who read their stories twice.

"The Dripping Tap" – Robert Elliott

Elliott takes the phrase "Water Rights" literally and gives us a water lobby who defend the rights of water as hysterically as some animal libbers of the present defend animals. The hero/villain, natch, is a plumber, and the implications of the story are brilliantly worked out. It should be longer, though, and the opportunity for dialogue is poorly exploited.

"Symbiosis" – Robert Elliott

Really a short essay, it is clearly slapped in to fill space.

"Paranoia, Who Me?" – Ronan Fitzgerald

A short piece which addresses the reader directly in a ranting monotone – just as it should. I hasten to add, as it sets out to depict paranoia. Very successful on its own terms – gripping.

FTL 3

"Undertow" – David Murphy

The story is set in the stone age, and for all we know may have happened. Murphy's intention is to say that such things *did* happen and so myths were born. A Stone Age tribe encounters the ocean for the first time; in a twist which Arthur C. Clarke would relish, the tribal weakling tells the tide to go back just when it was about to anyway and becomes a deity. Good storyline and delicious Stone Age atmosphere.

"Protection" – David Egan

A Dublin traveller is marooned in a remote County Clare pub overnight by a vicious storm. As time goes by and the pints go down, the goings-on in the pub become weirder. Our traveller is with the fairies, benevolent ones as it turns out, and the storm does no harm to him. A good story, but I couldn't shake the feeling that it belonged in *Ireland's Own*.

"Half Life" – Sean Cleary

One of the most innovative ideas based on the population explosion I've encountered. There is a nuclear deterrent theme built in and the whole piece fairly bristles with good, original ideas. As a story it's unconvincing, but the ideas are too good to throw away and the author should consider a rewrite.

"The Impact of the Video" – Sacha Mahon

One of the best things SF does is to take a raging public debate and encapsulate its elements in a far-fetched tale, thereby crystallising them for study. Eerily, this piece about a video nasty which directly hypnotises its viewers to go out and kill foreshadows the debate, years on, which followed the Bolger murder case. Gripping and thought-provoking.

"The Dig" – Paul McKinley

The theme is as old as the hills, or at least as old as August 1944, but you don't realise until the end of the Dig that the civilisation being unearthed is our atomic-bombed one. Part of the reason is that the conflict between the main protagonist is an absorbing one: when you find out where the story went, you flick back and re-read. Good.

FTL 4 – Spring 1990

"A Brass Chair" – Nicholas Emmett

The story develops its menacing atmosphere in quiet, natural steps, and by the time you figure out that the evil which preys is

attracted by or identified with prowess in mathematics, it's too late to save the beloved child who is improving at same. I didn't understand the "chair" symbolism, but by the final, chilling paragraphs it didn't matter.

"The Great Green Hope" – Robert Neilson

Neilson's story about an alien fighting for the World Heavyweight Championship just rollicks along, with every conceivable joke about the condition of having three heads being cracked. The seedy promoters and resinous rings come vividly to life, and the final line is the best.

"The Hummingbirds" – Michael Carroll

Even this brief piece, about a bunch of ancient legends coming to life in the form of an invasion by modern civilisation, showed its author "had something." The hummingbirds of the title turn out to be helicopters. A good start.

"Uplands" – Dave Murphy

Setting your story on a strange, eerie planet full of runes, ancients, crows and scholars, and investing it with an upbeat moral to boot, runs a horrifying risk of being either twee or silly. Thankfully it isn't either, and the final injunction from the ancient to follow the Dreambeam is just as wonderful as it was meant to be.

Part 2 – A regular editor

Editors came and went at *FTL*. By issue 5, Michael Carroll had become editor number 3. He wasn't to last much longer than numbers 1 and 2, but when he stepped down as editor, he stayed on as fiction editor, which gave the fiction the continuity it badly needed.

FTL by now had a sort of freshness. It wasn't like an American mag, where the prolificacy of writing classes and summer schools had encouraged a formulaic approach and laid a dead hand on even the most original new writers. It wasn't like an English mag, still suffering the fallout from surrealism and too much literary pretension. *FTL* was fresh. It was also open-minded and welcomed from hard SF to high fantasy.

There were flaws, of course. It was always slightly dated: too many writers did their reading in the 1960s or 1970s or (the equivalent, it seems) got their SF from films and games and videos.

Then, like all amateur writers, they tended to be weak on narrative and characterisation,

and while this was often the reason for the freshness, it was often irritating, too.

There were stories, also, where a good knowledge of recent scientific research rather than the publicity puff from big-name companies could have served to create a more convincing story.

But these are, ultimately, minor flaws. The *FTL* stories were strong on atmosphere. They had local colour, they drew on the vast cultural background which lurks at the perimeter of the Irish vision, they were brave and deep and often funny. They exuded youth and a sense of community.

Issues 5, 6, 7 and 8 went as follows...

FTL 5

"The Mating of Igraine" – Helen Ryder

The female half of the duo who could, at times, claim to *be* Irish SF wrote about the birth of the soul as witnessed by two black-robed baddies on the astral plane. It's a short parable on the battle between good and evil and depends, as most such stories do, on the language being sufficient to carry the weird astral-plane atmosphere right through. Fortunately, Helen Ryder has the command of language, and the piece works perfectly.

"Malachi's Return" – John Kenny

This one elicited favourable comment from no less than David Brin. It's immensely ambitious: it uses the Catholic Church of the Irish 1950s as a model for some far-future global tyranny. The adventures of a rebellious computer hacker are intercut with contemporary newspaper reports and historical documents. It's too big a concept for a short story, but it comes close to being great.

"Hut Err" – Bobby McLaughlin

This one is linked with "Hut Two Err" in issue 6, and makes better sense when considered with it in tandem. It's about what a plant (alien) does to a young loser (male and human) in a sexual sense. The feverish urgency of a one-night stand is well conveyed.

"Transfer Dance" – Robert Neilson

A competent enough foray into Sword and Sorcery, if that's what you like. The source mythology is the Roman gladiatorial circus. It's overlong, but the ending is successful, as indeed is the alien-world creation.

"The Offending Word" – Michael Cullen

A reduction ad absurdum of the kind of PR which strikes out any word or phrase which might conceivably offend some minority pressure group. It's millennia hence and a politician called Haughey has the technology to reach millions of planets simultaneously by radio – but possibly offending words must be bleeped out. Needless to say, he says nothing. Ironic, funny, and not without depth.

FTL 6

"The Good Life" – John Kenny

A reworking, whether the author knows it or not, of the third book of *Gulliver's Travels*. How long should medical science keep the terminally ill alive? Forever, it seems. The contrast between the resignation of the victim and the growing distress of his family is poignant, and the slide towards horror is inexorable. A strong piece.

"Hut Two Err" – Bobby McLaughlin

The orgasms of issue 5 are followed by the travails of pregnancy with all its strange moods and surreal levels of emotion. It's all happening to a man, and the ultimate, deadly birth is that of a vicious plant, but this a close and detailed look at what pregnancy does to change human beings for better or worse. Brilliant.

"Shelter" – David Murphy

The Irish preoccupation with the aftermath of the Bomb (it can be found in George Bernard Shaw, Flann O'Brien, Leonard Wibberly and most of *FTL*) follows an affluent Dublin couple into their atomic shelter while letting us know about their neighbours, who do not have a shelter. The very word itself, shelter, takes on layers of meaning as the physical disintegration of those locked out is compared with the moral disintegration of those inside. Thoughtful and strong.

"Just a Zone at Twilight" – Michael Cullen

Michael Cullen spins a light fantasy on how Rod Serling, creator of *The Twilight Zone*, got all those zany plots. The Cullen version has it that Serling was driven bananas by lift attendants and whatnot pushing their ideas, and actually got his stuff by wandering a huge house representing his imagination. In reality the situation was the very reverse, but that doesn't detract from this whimsical little piece.

FTL 7

"Headhunting" – Robert Neilson

Terminator-style supercops slug it out with heavily-armed villains in the 22nd-century version of Ballymun. The action is convincing, and Neilson makes more of souls slipping from body to body than he did in "Transfer Dance." Worth a read and re-read.

"When Evening Falls" – John Kenny

Right in the middle of everything we find a genuinely touching love story. A couple of clones, Lisa and Damon, lacking either normal human experience or the capacity to appreciate it, eventually find themselves through a blend of romantic expression and romantic love. The end is menacing; deprive people of normal expression, it seems to say, and the day of reckoning will come.

"A Fitch in Time" – Des Doyle

Competent, amusing ramble through a high fantasy world of dwarves, princes, castles, dungeons and the rest. The heroic dwarf is a chronic alcoholic, but he still contrives to save the prince. It adds nothing to the genre, but fairly meets the standard.

FTL 8

"Hide Your Face" – Michael Cullen

One of the Rock 'n' Rollish horror stories which Cullen did better as time went on. This one was slightly too elaborate to work; still, combining high-class horror with a convincing picture of everyday Dublin is a difficult row to hoe, and he gets pretty close.

"Sight Out of Mind" – Michael Carroll

Another hellishly difficult theme. A 1970s teenager wakes up in the body of his married, settled, prosperous 1990s self. His reactions, and the subtle differences in his surroundings (well, *I* wouldn't have thought of giving him a problem figuring out what a channel zapper was) are clever and convincing, and the story is very strong.

"The Price of Your Dreams" – Saille Maonaigh

This author appeared in *FTL* once and once only, and had to share and issue with two of the magazine's great successes, so judgment is difficult. A young man consults a witch about the price mentioned in the title and gets an answer to be dreaded. It ends too abruptly but is otherwise competent.

"Dour" – Derek O'Neill

Yet another post-holocaust story; this time about a young primitive undergoing rites of passage under the guidance of somebody who might be either an Ossianic sage or a tough Christian Brother. It draws very neatly on Irish tradition, real and imaginary, and while the storyline is predictable, the background is fresh and original.

Part 3 – *FTL* the Prozone

In the Summer of 1991, *FTL* effectively became a prozone. It was fully printed, on glossy paper, A4 size, and came across as an alternative to *Interzone* or *Back Brain Recluse*. Such a move required that the stories be of high standard; in retrospect, the surprising thing is how often they actually were.

The stories were different, too. Fantasy, humour and Sword-and-Sorcery were pushed into the background to make way for deeper incursions into horror and the macabre. The Aisling Gheal winner made an appearance. It became policy to have four longish stories per issue rather than the previous mix of allsorts. The art, especially the cover art, was especially good and generally appropriate to the story.

Sadly, there was no hope of financial success. *Exiro*, launched in Northern Ireland almost a decade before, had folded after three issues despite a brilliant media blitz and feature stories from some of the biggest names around. *Interzone* was known to survive on generous Arts Council grants. How on earth could *FTL*, with its unknown writers and few hundred subscribers, hope to make it where the giants had failed?

It gave it a good try, of course. The clichés were avoided or well hidden, the mix was varied apart from a slight preoccupation with the interface between life and death (and machines or processes operating there) and the non-fiction sections were sound. Nevertheless, *FTL* did not live to see 1992.

Was it worth it? *FTL* cost a lot, both in cash and internal disagreement. Yet when it finally returned whence it came, a little bit of history had been made. Several writers, including Michael Cullen, Robert Neilson and Michael Cullen, launched mini-careers in its pages – and all the indications since are that those careers will continue on into the big, real world. SF acquired a truly Irish identity which had previously been confined to Belfast.

More importantly, perhaps, there is *something* there which can be pointed out in years to come. When the grizzled veterans of SF collect at their Marscons and Mooncons thirty years from now, the talk will be of the days which were *FTL* – and scarce, dog-eared, well-thumbed copies will change hands at prices which currently represent a year's wages.

There was an *FTL*, you see. It became the face and voice of Irish Science Fiction. And we were there to see it.

***FTL* 9 – Summer 1991**

"Illegal Alien Goes Out" – Bobby McLaughlin

Last appearance from Bobby. The now-familiar alien Giac goes out on the town and blunders into the gay scene when his date disappears. The dialogue is good, but the story reads like what it is, an unfinished chapter from something intended to be longer, much longer.

"The Hospital of Saint Alsace" – Michael Cullen

After numerous tries, Cullen clicked in a big way with this story of a box which takes its owner on something too deep to be covered by the term time-travel – spiritual journey might be more accurate. There are immensely macabre and realistic scenes from the fever hospitals and lunatic asylums of the last century, and these are by no means spoilt by the twentieth-century knowledge and outlook of the protagonist. Cullen's technique of shuffling his scenes through each other completely draws the reader into a world more terrible than our own and, ultimately, shows us that it *is* our own.

"Clocks" – KLM

KLM used to be a Dutch airline. Here it writes a very Victorian story about a gentleman who loves an actress from afar. The No Man's Land of romantic love and depraved sexual fantasy is well evoked, and the endless chiming clocks and bells create an atmosphere which is both timeless and obsessed with the terrible passing of time.

"Life Wish" – Robert S. Neilson

Here, Neilson tells an extremely elaborate tale of cryogenically preserved bodies on a seed ship bound for a distant planetary system. The action begins when something goes wrong, the bodies begin to thaw and the

disembodied spirit of the expedition leader wanders the ship, his own past life, and a domain belonging to the dead. Strong, well worked out and finished, convincing, and all in all, the FTL story most likely to achieve international publication.

FTL 10 – Autumn 1991

“Lease of Life” – Dave Murphy

Only half this story actually appeared due to some cock-up or other, but I got to read the whole thing when it later appeared in another Irish magazine: how’s that for market penetration? A teacher who, with good reason, doesn’t like his pupils uses a machine to draw off their life energy and achieve immortality. Worth a read, even if the potentially most interesting part, what happens *after* he grasps the new life, is skimped.

“Choice of Thought” – Anne-Marie Nugent

The last female-written story ever in *FTL*. It’s a 1984ish piece about thought police who spy on people through their library choice of reading. What makes the story good is the astute recognition that this kind of thing will be feasible when all reading is by PC. What makes it weak, though not exactly bad, is the lack of enough personal detail to make the central policeman’s ultimate joining of the rebels a convincing one.

“Return of the Wanderers” – Michael Carroll

Who shot JR? Remember Zig and Zag? Know what people mean by calling Harry Secombe the ex-goon? The electronic media are so transient in essence that a story based on a TV programme is likely to have as little impact as a strand of cooked spaghetti even a year on. Still, this is a Carroll story, so the narrative drive keeps you from wondering too much what a Wanderly Wagon could be.

“Love Bites” – Michael Cullen

Cullen’s opening remark – that the piece should be read to the accompaniment of rock music, should be taken to heart. The story of a woman’s slide from moral and spiritual zombidom to the actual thing, against a constantly changing background of television, urban life, film-making criminal justice and you name it, comes across like a three-minute pop video. Quite atmospheric and thought-provoking, too.

FTL 11 – Winter 1991

“Without Honour” – Robert Neilson

FTL writers, and their successors in the Phase mags, have a particular fetish for stories set in bleak concrete-encased futures where human personalities are stamped out either by vicious police or sheer ennui. In this story, it’s the latter. The futuristic bleakness is well maintained; again, Neilson’s protagonist seeks his destiny in a gray area between life and death, and again, the decision is not an easy one.

“Gligots” – Brendan Farrell

The Aisling Gheal winner. This story alone would justify whatever time, tears and spondulics are necessary to run the contest. It’s a simple tale (but only on the surface) which exactly catches the workings of a child’s imagination. The “Gligots” are landscape details which literally come to life and reveal the secrets of the universe, and the whole thing has the force of an ancient fable.

“The Chase” – Robert Craven

An all-out horror story with some of the strongest imagery I’ve ever come across. A detective is shot during the arrest of the criminal who murdered his daughter and finds himself pursuing this Jack the Ripper character across the astral plane. There are graveyards and moorlands and ultimately the daughter herself, who confronts her parent with even greater horrors than he had imagined, about himself. The imagery makes the story worthwhile, but I had to read it twice to understand the ending.

“They Can’t Take That Away From Me” – John FitzPatrick

And they can’t. A machine is for sale which can return the user to the best moments of his life and keep him there. Unfortunately, some very unpleasant gangsters know about it, and there are all sorts of shenanigans. The scientific exposition is a bit too obvious, and the gangster bit is overdone, but the idea is good and the plot is sound. Reasonable SF.

Conclusion

Someday, he said hopefully, there will be an anthology entitled *The Best of FTL* which will sell 100,000 copies and be translated into 18 languages. On the premise that the dozen best will be chosen, here is my personal line-out:

1. "Of Meat and Two Veg" – Robert Elliott
2. "Hut Err" series – Bobby McLaughlin
3. "The Impact of the Video" – Sacha Mahon
4. "The Great Green Hope" – Robert Neilson

5. "The Maging of Igraine" – Helen Ryder
6. "The Good Life" – John Kenny
7. "When Evening Falls" – John Kenny
8. "Sight Out of Mind" – Michael Carroll
9. "The Hospital of Saint Alsace" – Michael Cullen
10. "Life Wish" – Robert Neilson
11. "Undertow" – David Murphy
12. "Gligots" – Brendan Farrell

At least six others would stand a chance. It's a matter of drawing the line somewhere. What is clear is that *FTL* served its purpose, and the future may tell us just how well.

Is there a brave soul out there who would volunteer to read all the fiction from the now-defunct *Phase* magazines? The idea is that you would then write an article similar to Pádraig Holland's review of *FTL*. Magazines will be supplied, if needed. There aren't that many stories to read, so the proposed article wouldn't take too much time. Get in before the rush! Ring Dave at 8438017.

Con Report

Albacon '96, Central Hotel, Glasgow, 26-29 July

Albacon is the main SF convention in Scotland, and has been running for many years. This year's was a four-day event, running from Friday 26th July to Monday 29th, in the Central Hotel, Glasgow. There were main and alternate programmes, which had videos for 40% of the time. There was also a games room, a workshop and an art show. There were also three dedicated video rooms: Kids' TV, Media Break videos and Cult TV. If TV is your stuff then you'd be chuffed.

The Guest of Honour was David Gerrold, who has worked for *Star Trek* and *Babylon 5* as well as a ton of other stuff. There were also a host of literary guests, including Maggie Furey, Terry Pratchett, Peter Morwood and Diane Duane, comics dudes Robie Morrison and Frank Quitley and artist and illustrator David A. Hardy.

The Central Hotel is quite grand, and the perfect venue for the con. A special bedroom deal of £22 pp per night (usually £70) and bar deal – 20% off all drinks – were on offer.

I arrived on Friday, and must say that although there was a lot going on, not many people were about. I suppose they were at work. Anyhow, I thoroughly enjoyed the day's programming, a lot of which centred on Space, and by the evening the two con bars and con lounge were bustling with people.

Saturday was a fantastic day, culminating in a costume party at 6:30 and then a huge ceilidh. There were only nine entries for the costume party, but the four that won were definitely deserving. The ceilidh was an inspired event, many present wore kilts and a number of them took great exception to being labelled puffs. A caller instructed all on the floor how to dance, the music began and the dance floor became a sea of whirling bodies and flailing arms. As the night wore on, the band sped up both the music and the drinking. It ended around 2am and then a huge throng adjourned to the bar to avail of cheap beer and free opinions.

Sunday was a good day too. Some of the events were great, including "Bizarre Coincidences," a 2000AD quiz, a "Waverider Update" and an amazing art and book auction, including original B5 scripts going for £40 a piece.

The Scots are a very warm people, very friendly and helpful. There was a fun atmosphere about the place, and things were relaxed most of the time.

About 400 people attended, and although I left on Sunday I'm sure that Monday was enjoyable too.

A true success.

James Bacon.