

newsletter



The Bulletin of The Irish Science Fiction Association

January/February 1980

Hurray! Hurray! For the first time in months we do NOT - repeat DO NOT - have any committee changes to report. This insidious stability will have to stop. We just can't go on like this.

Due to a most unfortunate mix-up with the printers we were unable to bring you the latest edition of STARGATE last month. It is now available, and if you haven't got your copy yet, tell a committee member. As well as this newsletter and STARGATE, a new Library catalog(ue) is available this month, so we really have an embarrassment of riches. It never rains....etc. A special word of thanks is due to Rita, who took on a monumental task, at very short notice, and did it excellently. It is hoped that future Stargates will not be quite so behind schedule.

We would like to remind members that the Aisling Gael prize for the best work in SF is to be awarded at the annual dinner. The prize will be given on the basis of votes cast by ISFA members, the entry receiving the most votes, obviously, winning. "What", you may ask, "what type of SF work is eligible?" "Anything!", we reply, "Absolutely anything". "except startrek - the movie" the Chairman is heard to mutter in small letters.

It is hoped that the annual general meeting will be held as usual in April/May/June. We'll let you know. It has been suggested that the meeting NOT take place on Saturday afternoon in a hotel, as it has up to now, but that an evening meeting might be more suitable. If members have any views on the matter we'd be glad to hear them.

We'd like to remind you again about ALSACON. It's being held in Scotland at Easter, and details may be had from Brendan.

There are still some ISFA calendars left. Pierce or Arthur will be only too glad to sell you one - or more if you want.

MEETINGS

DECEMBER

The December meeting, held earlier than usual because of various festivities, was given over to suggestions for/criticisms of the ISFA. After a somewhat slow start, the affair got really moving, and, surprisingly enough, there was almost no acrimony. The suggestions were of a high standard, and were all duly noted by the secretary. We decided to give you a summary, and to say what was decided on them at the last committee meeting.

- 1) Yearlong calendar of events. See below.
- 2) Advertising in libraries. We are getting a small version of the poster duplicated, and this will be circulated to libraries in the greater Dublin area.
- 3) Newsagents to stock Stargate. We have approached Ensons, who have a nationwide distribution network, and

asked them to take a number of Stargates. We await their reply.

4) Improvement in Stargates. This will almost certainly be essential if we do get Easons, or some other agency, to distribute Stargate. The initial cost, however, is prohibitive. The present Stargate cost almost all the ISFA's remaining budget for this year. We have enough to cover the short-story competition, but not much else. However, as I said, the upmarketing of Stargate remains a definite longterm goal.

5) Form various sub-committees. This will depend on interest amongst members. It appears that enough people want a Startrek group, and that one looks fairly likely (right-ed.). As for the rest - tell us, if you have any ideas. We'll tell you if we have any.

6) Postal membership. We already have several rural members. An attempt will be made to attract some more. It is obviously ludicrous that the IRISH science fiction association is really the DSFA. Surely there are people in Cork, Galway, not to mention Belfast, who read science fiction. We have made contact already with someone in Belfast who is interested in setting up an SF group in that city.

There were several other suggestions of a general nature which should be thought about in the future. Outings, debates, more member contact, fancy dress parties - all are good ideas, needing a greater or lesser amount of work to make them work.

JANUARY

The January meeting was intended to be by Harry Harrison. He couldn't make it, and Brendan Ryder filled the gap with a talk on Startrek which he should have given at an earlier meeting.

He traced the early history of the series which, more than any other, has brought SF to an incredibly large body of people, and made the greater part of the TV owning world aware of the genre.

The series really began in the mind of Gene Roddenberry, an NBC scriptwriter, in 1959. After 4 years he finally had created the world of Star Trek, basing all his seeming far-out ideas on real technology. The ideas used were so good that several research institutions actually rang up to ask how Roddenberry had actually found out such well-guarded secrets.

The captain's name was originally to have been April, then it was changed to Pike; finally it was settled as James T. Kirk. (What's the T for-ed.) The first officer was initially a woman. She was soon overshadowed, however, by a Vulcan named Mr. Spock. Over the years, other characters appeared, and - if successful - stayed.

The first episode - 'The Cage' was screened in 1964, and rejected by NBC. They did, however, agree to a second plot program. This episode - 'Where No Man Has Gone Before' was a success, and, in February 1966 NBC announced the new series, scheduled for transmission that Autumn, and called 'Star Trek'.

We were also fortunate to get a talk from Nick Bunnell on H.G. Wells. Nick gave a potted biography of the man, both as an early 'socialist' and as one of the earliest Science Fiction writers.

REVIEWS

The Mouse That Roared
 The Mouse on the Moon
 The Mouse on Wall Street.

all by Leonard Wibberly Bantam Books.

These three books by Dublin born Leonard Wibberly are all outstandingly funny accounts of the adventures of the fictional Duchy of Grand Fenwick, a 3 by 5 mile nation located between France and Switzerland. The country was founded in the 15th century by some renegade English mercenaries, and has remained almost unchanged until this day. There are no cars in the country, only one road, and the soldiers wear chainmail and carry longbows. The government is modelled on the current British system of a constitutional monarchy, although there is no House of Lords. The main characters in the Duchy are the Duchess Gloriana XII, her prime minister - the Count of Mountjoy, the opposition leader David Bentner and the consort Tully Bascomb. With this background, we can now discuss the books individually.

The first book starts with an economic crisis in the Duchy - there has been introduced in the U.S.A. a Californian wine which plagiarises the Duchy's only export - Pinot Grand Fenwick. When repeated protests to the U.S.A. bring only silence, Mountjoy suggests that they declare war, fully intending to loose and be rehabilitated with millions by the end of the week. An invasion force is sent to New York when the declaration of war is ignored as well, led by the not yet consort - Bascomb. Unluckily, he and his men land in the middle of a practice air-raid, and capture a Columbia professor - Dr. Theodore Kokinty - and his new super-weapon - the Q-bomb. You should be aware that only Mountjoy was aware of the plan to loose the war, everyone else expected to avenge the national honour, etc. So when the Q-bomb, Kokinty, and a few other prisoners are brought back to the Duchy unnoticed by U.S. intelligence, the war is as good a won. The U.S. capitulates within a week, Mountjoy has a fit, and things go on from there.

The second book concerns Mountjoy's attempts to obtain a loan from the U.S. for a Russian Sable coat for Gloriana, and to put plumbing in the castle. Not wishing to be quite so blunt about it, he asks for the money to send a rocket to the moon. As it happens, the Council of Freemen insist that the moon project actually occur. Mountjoy is forced to agree, and matters get under way, led by Dr. Kokinty (who was a native of Grand Fenwick after all, having emigrated with his parents when still a baby). Using a hoyshead of Pinot Grand Fenwick, and some iron filings, a second-hand Saturn rocket and nozzles made of shower-heads, the rocket actually goes off to the moon, much to the consternation of the Russians, and of the Americans. Complications add to the general hilarity of the situation.

Part of the peace treaty after the war with the U.S.A. was the provision that the U.S. provide a factory in the States to manufacture Pinot Grand Fenwick flavoured chewing gum. This does not prove to be a lucrative project until many years later, as Americans start to switch from cigarettes to chewing gum, as recounted in 'The Mouse on Wall Street'. When profits suddenly skyrocket, the new inflow of money nearly ruins the Grand Fenwick economy. Eventually the next dividend is given to the Duchess to get rid of. She decides to put it

into stocks, hoping to loose every penny. Naturally, her investments do quite well - so much so that she turns \$5,000,000 into \$1,000,000,000 within a few months. Again, complications add to a most amusing story, and one which is well worth reading.

A few general comments. The first two books were made into films. I can't remember many of the characters, but I believe Peter Sellers played Mountjoy (he did! and Peter Ustinov played Bascomb - ed.). Wibberley makes good use of clichés and stereotypes, which serve to sharpen the humour to a well honed point. He also makes a few predictions (quite accidentally, I'm sure) which are amazingly accurate: he forecasts the development of the neutron bomb in 1954, and in 1952 he correctly picks 20th July 1959 as the day of the first moon landing.

All in all, these books are outstanding light entertainment, and well worth reading by anyone - SF addicts or not.

John McCarthy.

BINARY STAR 2

According to the publishers, this book consists of "two great novellas in a single volume". This is something of an exaggeration.

Novella one: The Twilight River ; by Gordon Eklund

This "star" is primitive, and fairly dim. Stock characters, rough-hewn from the purest unadulterated cardboard of the early 1940s' pulps, fail to achieve credibility. The writing style might get you pass marks on a primary school essay, but not a lot more than that. From a professional writer like Eklund, I find this inexcusable, and totally unacceptable. He can (and has in the past) produced work that is so very much better. I think he saw the chance to make a quick easy buck, and dug a discarded childhood effort out of the thrash trunk in the attic. Shame on you, Gordon!

Novella two: The Tery ; by F. Paul Wilson.

This is not bad at all. Spider Robinson once said most appropriately that binary systems tend to have one bright and one dim star, and so far, this binary is right in the groove. The story: Take a planet colonised once upon a time by some class of Terran Empire, and then left alone to moulder for a few hundred years (sounds familiar, doesn't it?). End up with two main species: primitive humans, who have developed socially, if not physically, to the approximate level of 14th century Europe; and Terries --- sort of hairy apes, hunted and hated by the humans as horrible and revolting monsters, who however seem to be a lot more human, or anyway much nicer people, than their (officially) human enemies. They also talk. Not that that means a lot nowadays.

Basically, this story is one of a struggle for acceptance, for recognition of human (being?) rights. It could be taken as an analogy of Black USA, at least in part. There is a nice theological twist at the end.

Both novellas are illustrated by Steven Fabian in dim

shades of grey on grey. It is hard to see enough of the drawings to tell if they are any good or not. If I were this artist, I'd be en route to the publisher's office with blood in my eye and a well-honed axe in my hand. This sort of shit can only harm an artist's reputation.
Bobby MacLaughlin

The Earthsea Trilogy : Ursula Le Guin.

1) A Wizard of Earthsea

This book tells the first great adventure of Sparrowhawk when he was a young man. All the books are set in an archipelago called Earthsea. Sparrowhawk lived in a small village in Gont, one of the islands. The village witch taught him a few simple charms and spells, and when the village is invaded by Kargish warriors, he defeats them by calling up a mist.

This caused his father to think that Sparrowhawk would make a good magician, and so he sent him to Roke, where the School of Magicians was. Sparrowhawk learned a lot about being a magician, but he met a boy called Jasper of whom he was very jealous. Jasper challenged him to work a spell, and Sparrowhawk said he could conjure up the spirits of the dead. Jasper said he couldn't; Sparrowhawk got so angry that he swore he would do it. He succeeded in calling up a spirit, but when he had called it up, some sort of creature jumped through from the world of the dead to his world. It attacked him, and left him badly injured before escaping.

He was brought back to the school close to death, but recovered slowly. When he was recovering, he resolved to go to kill the creature. It was very dangerous because it took over other peoples' minds and bodies, and used them for its own purposes. When it had finished using them it discarded them as empty shells. The rest of the book is spent on his on his journey looking for the creature. He travelled mainly by sea, accompanied by his friend Vetch, who helped him when the creature attacked him. After a long search he finds the creature and destroys it, ending book 1.

2) The Tombs of Atuan.

This second book follows the life of Tenar, or Arha - as she has become known, who was believed to be a reincarnation of the One Priestess. She was taken from her parents and went to live near the Tombs of Atuan with the other priestesses. Until she was about eighteen, she lived there, leading a dull and boring life, as she was completely cut off from the outside world. This part of the book drags a bit until she gets permission to enter the tombs. This was her right; no one could enter the tombs except her. The tombs were vast underground catacombs, and she spent a lot of time wandering in them. One day she found Sparrowhawk, who was trapped in the tombs, searching for the lost half of the ring of Erreth-Akbe. She has the lost half, and Sparrowhawk mends it. He wants to bring her away from the Tombs, because he knows that she is not really sure whether she believed in what she was doing or not. Just as he is bringing her out there is an earthquake, and the

Tombs are destroyed. This is the climax of the second book. Tenar escapes with Sparrowhawk, and the journey for a few days until they reach the sea. Sparrowhawk says he will bring her to Havnor, where she will be safe. This ends book 2.

3) The Farthest Shore.

This book begins with Sparrowhawk as the Archmage - the head of the magicians of Roke. He is now an old man, and is worried because he hears that people are forgetting the spells that had been passed down from father to son for hundreds of years. There seems to be a kind of apathy spreading through Earthsea. No one can remember the old skills and crafts, and the people who knew them have gone mad. Sparrowhawk meets a young man called Arren, and they decide to go on a voyage together, to see what the cause can be. They sail away together, far from Roke, and visit several islands on the outskirts of Earthsea. One of the places they visit is Havnor, where hardly anyone is able to cope with their life. They go to a family which used to have a great tradition of dyeing, and find that the woman who used to do it, and her son, are now completely crazy. This could well be compared to the world of today, with its portrayal of the gradual decline of a whole race, and growing dependence on drugs, etc. Sparrowhawk and Arren leave the inhabited islands, and travel further out until they reach the land of the dead, where they meet Erroth-Akbe, the ancient lord who used to own the amulet Sparrowhawk found. They also meet the dyemaker's son, called Cob.

Cob started all the evil by trying to get to the land of the dead. He was now dead, but was stuck halfway between the two worlds, rather like the creature Sparrowhawk killed in book one. The evil power of death is sucking him into it, as well as spreading the apathy of the dead throughout Earthsea. Sparrowhawk resolves to stop the evil from spreading by using all his power to seal the gap. Because Cob created the leak, Sparrowhawk and Arren were able to enter the land of the Dead, which they could not have done ordinarily. Sparrowhawk summons up all his power, and manages to seal the gap. After he has done this he is absolutely exhausted, and Arren is very worried about him. They meet a dragon called Kalessin who offers them a lift back to Roke. Later, when Sparrowhawk comes to Havnor for Arren's crowning as King of All the Isles, he decides to over the sea again to the West, and no one sees him again.
Lucy Wilshe

Master of Hawks; by Linda E. Bushyeager. DELL \$1.95

This swords and sorcery story is set in a post-nuclear devastation England, and concerns itself with the struggle between the Kingdom of York and the Faral Empire. The general officers of both armies are sorcerers, and telepaths are ten a penny. These telepaths are tuned to various birds, animals and so on. The hero, Hawk, is a bird-path and the heroine, Roslyn, is gifted with a very effective sixth-sense early warning system. She is also immune to magic.

Much of the action is concerned with the action of the Yorkises to forge an alliance with the Sylvan, a forrest-dwelling race of humanoids who exert telepathic influence over plants. (I wish I could get them to have a word with the weeds in my garden).

The book is readable, if unremarkable, and doesn't add much to the genre. Don't bust your ass trying to get a copy.

The Makeshift God; Russel M. Griffin. DELL \$1.95

The starting point of this story is the year 2193. America is divided into several countries, the East and South being dominated by Arabs, and the South - The Sunbelt Confederacy - by native elements.

The hero is a professor of English and Linguistics, whose main field is that of European Culture, and who is about to be sacked, as this topic is becoming increasingly unpopular in the Arab-orientated section of the continent.

Meanwhile, outside the Galaxy.... An interstellar probe has reached Sirius, and has sent back a vid-cast showing the planet Albet. The folks back home are surprised to see humanoids on the screen, and even more flabbergasted to see one unmistakably human individual. This person commences to address the probe in Latin, French and Middle-English. Our hero, Arthur Crine, is kidnapped by the Sunbelt Confederacy and asked, may ordered, to translate the words of the figure in the vid-cast. By deduction he comes to the conclusion that the person is John Battadeus, the Wandering Jew! Crine goes to the planet with a search party, and so the story works out with the Earth people becoming amused in a web of local politics and religion - the whole thing ending in mayhem.

This reviewer has no hesitation in recommending this book, the plot is good, the characterisation also, and it is highly humorous in places
Frank Roche.

The Inferno; Fred + Geoff Hoyle. Penguin books: 35p. + vat.

This rather doubtful father/son team are not exactly the best writers around, but they're not uncomfortable.

Those who like their S.F. with lashings of scientific jargon will probably enjoy this book. Unfortunately, there is very little in the book besides the jargon. The plot is virtually non-existent, the characters seem to have escaped from Madame Tussauds. The 'plot' (and I apologise for using that word) concerns a scientist-person who finds out accidentally by some fluke that the world will be virtually destroyed in ten days by a flame of radiation zooming towards us, and what he does to stop the panic.

It is a simple story, and O.K. to read. The blurb says that it is "an adventure story with a new twist to the post-holocaust survival motif". Whether that describes the efforts of the authors to survive the book, or the world to survive the radiation, will never be known.

Night of Light, Philip Jose Farmer. Berkeley: \$1.50

Not bad, I thought, when I first began this book. But while reading it my thoughts began to change. It has to be one of the worst pieces of drivel I have read in my life.

The story has a hero who is billed as a galactic tramp and wife-murderer. My personal view is that he acts more like a

stuffed rabbit. He is staying on Dante's Joy, a planet outside of our galaxy. Every seven years there occurs on this planet a metabolic change in the atmosphere, causing all those who aren't in induced sleep to freak around doing what their souls dictate to them - undertones of the hippy era? Those who survive the seven days and seven nights are hailed as gods.

A complicated mishmash of rival worshippers, jocks, and priests and half-formed pieces of skin. It has to be read to be believed.
Sammy Seeger.

• Literary Criticism about Robert Heinlein in the ISFA

If you stand and think, you will probably agree with me that at almost any ISFA meeting, you will find someone telling someone else how much they dislike Heinlein's work - yet I don't believe I have seen any reviews of any of his books in any ISFA publication. Why is this the case? It certainly isn't through lack of material, for Heinlein's output over the years has been prodigious, quantitatively speaking. Certainly he is recognised as a guiding light in the field; many books by other authors are fairly clearly designed at least in part to comment on his views on moral issues. For instance, the blurb on the back of the 1975 Orbit edition of *The Forever War* by Joe Haldeman states that "the war is the opposite of the one Heinlein glorified in *'Starship Troopers'* - bloody, cruel and meaningless."

The question isn't really why so many people disagree with Heinlein's outlooks - it is why all these voriferous people have decided to voice their objections in S.F. literature. One possible reason could be that while they have to accept his assumptions, they don't like the conclusions their reasoning makes them hold, which are, of course, are quite similar to Heinlein's. I think this is probably an adequate explanation. Now I am going to state the many objections I have heard, and refute them myself. I would like to encourage anyone who does have fairly strong views on Heinlein's work to put them into print. I believe that a good amount of useful and revealing discussion could result, which could prove to be very entertaining as well.

To put the cat among the pigeons, I will now give a review of one of my favourite Heinlein books (I, at least, will admit to enjoying a lot of his work, which is more than all the voriferous Heinlein readers will do at the meetings. Star boast.

This book is a quasi-juvenile, dating from 1954. I first read it in 1958, and enjoyed it then. Now that I am nearly 22 years older, I can still enjoy it, though for quite different reasons. This is one good mark of professional writing: a work that can appeal to many different types of reader. (That I am a much different type of reader at 29 than I was at 7, I hope at least a tiny minority of my friends will concede, in spite of my professed enjoyment of Heinlein.) But to attach the label of 'professional' to Robert Heinlein is not very useful, for even his most dogged detractors will not accuse him of unprofessionalism.

Anyhow, about the book. It concerns the adventures of a 400-odd year old intelligent alien called Lumax, who was captured by a crewman of one of man's first FTL-ships in the

early years of space exploration. Lumox was kept as a pet by the crewman's family down through the generations. During the two centuries or so after Lumox's arrival on Earth, it was quickly discovered that our Galaxy was inhabited by an enormous variety of alien societies, so the presence of Lumox in the hero's back garden for a few hundred years did not do much to excite the curiosity of the neighbours. Then, as the story opens, Lumox decides to go for a walk. A great deal of humorous scene-setting takes place until he is recaptured at the end of the first chapter. Then the problem becomes what to do about the beast - due to Lumox's alien origin the Department of Special Affairs intervenes. Events continue on from there, as a hostile alien ship arrives on the scene, looking for a kidnapped member of its race's royal family.

I could go on about the interweaving of a vast amount of detail, but it is well worth reading by any ISFA member from 7 up. I'd rather talk about technique. There are very many viewpoint characters, especially for a kids' book. Yet there is no confusion in the reader. All the characterisations, even of fringe-action stereotypes, are very strong and well worth study. Much of the book is tongue-in-cheek - when I was seven, it was merely great fun from cover to cover; now I can see the dry humour, and see how (as I said above) a well crafted novel can appeal to many tastes. There are sections that strike a more mature reader (again assuming such a concession from my friends) which are not explicitly funny, but can still bring a smile to my face. From the point of view of technique the book is an absolute marvel of fine craftsmanship; in other words plot, details, characterisations and narrative style are all so beautifully interwoven that it should be a prime example to the writers' workshop of how to write for a broad audience. As for the moral of the story - well, I don't really say. But it might be this: there are a lot of things in life that can be exciting and funny and still be important. This idea has been noticeably absent in many other outlooks, as I think anyone would have to sadly agree. Would I recommend this book to anyone. Well! yes, I'd recommend it to EVERYONE, of reader or not, between the age of reason and advanced senility.

So. There's a Heinlein book reviewed. I hope this prove sufficient incentive to some of the resident ISFA Heinlein bashers to come out of the closet. Discussions of his work at the meetings have led me to believe that his very ability to convince (or propagandise) his audience, particularly the younger among them, is the cause of their great hostility. Well, let's see what values he tries to put across, why they may not be appropriate outside fictionalised constructs of life. I for one would welcome a greater examination of his work by those who claim to have such strong feelings about it.

John McCarthy.

Destinies Vol 1, No 3 (April/June 79)

This is a magazine in book format, and rightly so, because it is one to buy and treasure. The contents are roughly half stories, half articles, with profuse illustrations by various artists, all beautifully produced, and doing full justice to the material. Articles cover, among other things, how a hopeful individual may qualify for a place in orbit on a

spaceship in an L5 colony; things we can do once we get there, possible goals in space industrialisation, etc., etc., with a gorgeous editorial by James Ben tying it all together. There is also part three of a five part series by Paul Anderson on Imaginary Science in SF, which is an absolute must for any being with the faintest interest in writing science fiction. Some of the stories I liked a lot, some not. I won't detail plots or give away endings. They were all well and professionally written, and as such deserve taking a look and making your choice. You maybe won't like all of them either, but the ones you do like you'll love.

buy this book. You won't regret the money.
Sobby MacLaughlin

Wildblood Empire ; Brian M. Stableford; Dmighn - 99p. + vat.

The book consists mainly of a group of cardboard cutouts who feel rather unwanted and out of place on the colony of Annet, on which they have been sent to report. After all they weren't there of their own free will, but they still get caught up in local affairs after a meeting in a graveyard.

The colony, Annet (Possidon/Wildblood) is populated by a horde of junky half-wits. The whole place is quickly deteriorating in the hands of an individual named Philip, and his left-hand man, Zarneski. All the forces are working to do each other in, and it all builds up to a wonderful climax which I can't tell you about, for the very good reason that it was too boring to remember. The story is jarred by a series of unbelievable events, and a stupid code is also thrown in for bad luck. Skulking in the background there always seems to be the fellow called Wildblood, who was the unfortunate cause of the colony.

Not recommended for a true Brian M. Stableford fan.
Sobby Stelfer

Four Day Planet + Lone Star Planet ; H. Dean Piper ACE \$2.25

The first of these stories is set on a planet called Ferris. The main industry of this highly uncongenial place is the export of a type of large-molecule wax which they extract from a certain type of sea-monster which they slaughter with gay abandon using 500mm cannon.

Good old thud and blunder as the monster hunters fight the local nasties who have gained control of both the hunters' co-operative and the municipality. The hero is the boy reporter on the local paper - the Ferris Times (Prop./Ed. - his father; other staff - 1 one-legged ex-hunter). There is also the local resistance men and the friendly neighbourhood wine and IS, IN ACTUAL FACT.... If you can't spot the 'kicker' in record time, I think you should stick to reading NBP in future.

The second story is about a planet which has been settled by Texans - God save the mark! They are a very independent people and will not join the Solar League, thereby placing themselves in danger of being overwhelmed by the nasty dog-like s'Grauff. The hero, Stephen Silk, is sent to New Texas by the Solar League as its ambassador. With his expertise with his

pistol he proves himself a good ol' boy, endears himself to the local power wielders and eventually saves the planet from the nasty doggies. What a load of crap!

Guts ; Byron Preiss ACE \$1.75 An illustrated novel.

More crap. Set in 1995, it concerns the 'story' of a latter-day jester who gets involved in some clandestine time travel, and finds himself in opposition to the government which is trying to brainwash everyone into passivity. His allies are a couple of old-time rock'n'roll musicians, and the daughter of one of them, her name is Jessica, and she shows him the way through the dangers of the big city. (Someone should have a word with the illustrators about the way her anatomy dimensions vary alarmingly from picture to picture).

It's a lousy book, and, what's worse, it is only the first episode of a serial. Somehow I don't think I'll be scouting the bookshops for the sequel(s).
Frank Roche

Sirius; Olaf Stapledon. Penguin Books

This is an imaginative and, at times, moving novel, which tells the story of a girl and her dog. Set in the nineteen twenties & thirties, the action takes place mainly in a farming community in North Wales. The apparently traditional setting is injected with science fiction by the fact that Sirius, the dog in question, is no ordinary dog, but a super-canine with a large brain, comparable to that of a human with above-average intelligence.

The dog has been bred and developed as part of an experiment by the girl's father, an eminent scientist. (the author gives us little indication of how this was achieved!) To complete the experiment psychologically and sociologically the dog is brought up as a fully-participating member of the scientists' family. The account of the unorthodox rearing of the dog-child makes absorbing reading. He encounters difficulties (a lack of dexterity) and triumphs (mastering the three r's), and he establishes a deep and at times exasperating friendship with his foster-sister Plaxy. So deep is this relationship that at times throughout their young lives both girl and dog find themselves struggling to maintain their separate identities.

As an adult, Sirius finds himself in a situation familiar enough to those who have formed part of minority or unrepresented groups over the years. He yearns for the right, and the means, to determine his own destiny, but is forced by circumstances to play out the relatively minor role expected of him by human society.

As war sweeps across Europe, and bombing raids on Britain commence, the novel reaches its climax. A family tragedy occurs, and, finding themselves increasingly alienated from members of their own species, Plaxy and Sirius are drawn closer together in their isolation, loneliness and love for one another. In a world of prejudice and intolerance, their relationship leads finally to tragedy.

First published in 1944, the novel was quite probably ahead of its time. The style of the author has not dated,

except in a few minor respects, which in fact serve to emphasise the spirit of the times. The story is gently and sensitively handled, and at times the style is reminiscent of Daniel Keyes in "Flowers for Algernon". I would recommend the book to readers of pretty well any age group, and it by no means a novel for Science Fiction readers only.

B. Anthony

The Simulacra . 75p. + vat + ?
 The Crack in Space . 74p. + vat + ??
 Dr.(sic) Futurity . 85p + vat + ???
 The Man Who Japed . 85p. + vat + ????
 all by Philip K. Dick. all from Magnum Books

Magnum Books have brought out this long needed selection of books by a writer who has been responsible for as much good S.F. as any. The books need not be read together; the styles vary from book to book, but of one thing you may be sure: you are guaranteed a good read.

The Simulacra and The Crack in Space are perhaps the closest in both theme and style. Both concern future societies where the lot of the ordinary individual is anything but good. This sensitive handling of what has been called 'the masses' is something which distinguishes Dick from a lot of other authors - even those of supposedly 'socialist' views. The man seems to both like and understand ordinary people. It is not, perhaps, giving away too much if I say that Dick, an eternal optimist, has endings which both show his essentially hopeful picture of the future, and his realisation that it is US who must make that future for ourselves.

Dr Futurity is set in the very far distant future, and in it Dick examines a society which is both hidebound and overpopulated. He also discusses an attitude to death which is very far removed from that of 20th century civilisation. He handles this subject in a way which is surprisingly entertaining, so much so that you could read this book and not be aware at all that some very fundamental beliefs are being challenged.

The Man who Japed was, for me, the most difficult book to finish. The hero is far less ambiguously drawn than in the other books, and this makes it less demanding, but also less satisfactory. It is, none the less, a fine read.

Edin C. Baird

FUTURE MEETINGS

March: Harry Harrison. April: Dr. David Fagan on the search for extraterrestrial life. May: Anne McCaffrey. June: Frank Roche on Science Fiction and Socialism. New calendar after the AGM.