

newsletter

The Bulletin of The Irish Science Fiction Association



August / September 1981

Welcome to another newsletter. Once again we have committee changes - it seems as though we have some every month! The best job in the Association is available now - librarian (just imagine all those hundreds of books, waiting to be read!) Mary Gallagher, after a short stint in the post, has gone to live in Belgium. We wish her every success and thank her for her work. A more recent acquisition to the ISFA committee, Sharon O'Doherty, is off to Paris at the end of the month. Her post of Publicity Officer is now open, and we are urgently looking for someone for this post as the Aisling Gheal is due soon, and it must be promoted. Once again our thanks to Sharon for a job very well done and our best wishes to her.

We received correspondence from James White and Harry Harrison recently - both were very pleased with the new Stargate format and have promised to make it to a meeting early in the New Year.

Another letter received was from a French SF fan who was looking for a penpal in Ireland. His address is below and he says he'll answer all replies:

Pierre Berland,
239 Coruiche Kennedy,
13007 Marseille,
FRANCE.

RECENT MEETINGS:

August Meeting, 6th September: this is usually one of the low points of the year, as everyone is away on holidays. It made a pleasant change, therefore, to see a large turnout. I gave a short talk on the Star Trek con in Coventry and as a result have had a few enquiries as regards other conventions. The last page of the n/l has some details of the upcoming cons.

UPCOMING MEETINGS:

Due to the inability of the patrons to make any meetings before Christmas, our schedule has been altered slightly.

October Meeting: this will be a Book Auction, one of our most popular events. We hope to have a large supply of books so start saving now!

At the September meeting we hope to start a regular quiz game, based on 'Twenty Questions'. There will be two teams and it promises to be very interesting - at last there's a chance for you to show off your SF knowledge! The new 'bible' of SF - the Encyclopedia Of Science Fiction will be used to verify answers.

VIDEO CLUB: as promised last n/l here's more information. It will start in October, the second Sunday of the month, in the Parliament Inn, Parliament Street, Dublin 2. As explained, we do not know which film will be shown until it actually arrives in the post but if anyone who wishes to know before the night would phone me the Friday before (982594) I'll tell them.

FILMS

ADELPHI : 1/ OUTLAND 4/ TIME BANDITS (reviewed this issue)

CARLTON : 1/ EXCALIBUR 2/ RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARK (reviewed this issue) 3/ SUPERMAN II

ODEON : 2/ HAWK THE SLAYER with SATURN 3

METROPOLIS : 1/ THE HOWLING

CLASSIC (Harold's Cross) : STAR WARS (matinee Saturday and Sunday)

DON'T FORGET - IF YOU'VE SEEN IT, REVIEW IT!!!!!!

Raiders Of The Lost Ark :

This film has the ingredients of success - Harrison Ford (Han Solo of Star Wars), George Lucas (also of Star Wars and THX 1138) and Steven Spielberg (E.T., Jaws etc.) How could it go wrong? It doesn't! The hero, played by Ford, is Indiana Jones, an archeological professor who goes out of his way to get interesting items for his museum. So naturally when he hears that the famous Ark Of The Covenant has been found he decides to set out after it - even though it is the German army who have it! He sets into motion a most enjoyable series of events which are totally unbelievable - but then, this IS a fantasy! While it isn't strictly SF, the last few minutes are fantastical enough to qualify it as a borderline case.

FILM NEWS: A new Star Trek film is being made at the moment and it is due out in Summer next year. It has all the original cast but has a very small budget (only \$4,000,000 !) and there is a rumour that everyone's favourite alien, Spock, gets killed off. HOWEVER - it is only a physical death, whatever that may mean! (Info. George Takei, at Aucon '81)

T.V. & RADIO:

BBC have started a six part adaptation of John Wyndham's classic 'Day Of The Triffids'. It looks pretty good and it should be interesting to see how much it differs from the movie version. Thursdays, 8-30p.m. BEC 1.

UTV have two series on at the moment: Kinvig which seems a comedy based on Mercury (although how Mercury, with it's temperature, could play host to a comedy I don't know!). Also on is 'Spiderman' which is another American series along similar lines to 'The Incredible Hulk'. It is simply a detective series with the hero in Spiderman guise. Not really recommended.

RTE have the aforementioned 'Incredible Hulk' which strikes me as being the best of those type of programmes - Bill Bixby suits the part and helps make an unbelievable subject believable. They also have 'The Six Million Dollar Man'.

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In the letters page of the June 1977 Galaxy I came across the following:

"I ordered this so-called science fiction magazine for a thirteen year old grandson. I'm sure glad I looked it over before giving it to him. Your filthy dope-damaged brain should be put out of circulation.

Kindly eliminate my name from your circulation department and refund my monies prepaid. If not done promptly I shall seek the help of the postal authorities."

The editors reply was: "Can't we talk this over?"

Writers' Workshop Report

As most ISFA members will know, a SF writers' workshop was held under the direction of John McCarthy at the Waterford Regional Technical College during the first two weeks of August. While the turnout was a bit disappointing, those who attended were more than pleased with the workshop, and learned a great deal about the craft of SF writing.

During the first week, the workshop concerned itself with mastering the various technical aspects of writing: the hook, backfill, characterisation, dialogue, scene setting and so on. The attendees practiced each of these, and did a fair bit of writing themselves— which of course, is the whole idea of a writers' workshop. Through the use of examples provided by Barry Longyear, most of the concepts became easy to understand and master. One aspect did prove to be more difficult in practice, however: the concept of viewpoint character. Most of the weekend was spent making repeated mistakes until at last a hint of a breakthrough began to emerge. This allowed the second week to be spent on plotting, pacing, the actual formation of stories, and on learning the requirements and locations of the different SF short story markets which exist.

In view of the expressed though not experienced interest by many ISFA members (inter alia), it is tentatively planned to run a similar workshop next August, along with a more advanced one for this year's victims. Those interested should contact John McCarthy at 61 Lismore Park, Lisduggan, Waterford; and they should include a deposit to secure a lessening of the aforementioned tentativeness. There is no doubt that the workshop concept can be extremely valuable to anyone interested in developing their talents into professional skills.

REVIEWS

Science Fiction: its criticism and teaching - Patrick Parrinder

(London: Methuen, 1980. 166p. Available in both hardback and paperback. £5.95, £3.00ST)

The author has established his credentials as a serious writer on SF, his previous book a collection of critical essays on H.G. Wells. This book is aimed at both the generally educated SF enthusiast, and university students of literature interested in SF as a recent genre of academic study.

Within a compact size he has analysed the development of SF under its most relevant headings, such as definition of the genre, the scientific romance, sociology of SF, its function as social criticism and as a critique of the scientific outlook.

He also analyses the growth of SF studies as a scholarly discipline, mainly at American universities so far, with one or two courses being available at U.K. institutions. At the end of the book, there is a valuable bibliography, including reference items, works of literary criticism, theory and history, and studies of SF and other disciplines.

I found this a well written, highly informative book, and would strongly recommend it to any ISFA member who wishes to be informed about SF in all its aspects.

Reviewed by: David Iass, M.A., Dip. Lib.

In response to my appeal for a few reviews of films Declan Brennan kindly wrote the following report of "Time Bandits":

TIME BANDITS - Adelphi Cinema, Dublin.

I went to see 'Time Bandits' with your beloved Secretary (! ed.) last week. (He's a nice guy really.) Afterwards we had a heated discussion about the merits (which I suggested) and the demerits (which he suggested) of the film. You can ask Brendan about the faults if you like, because this is a review concentrating on the merits.

I must say that I haven't enjoyed a film so much in ages. Unlike such efforts as 'Close Encounters ...', it doesn't pretend to be deeply philosophical. In fact, it was exactly what you would expect from the Monty Python team - a joke from start to finish. Basically it's about a young boy who meets up with a group of dwarfs (dwarves if you're a Tolkien freak - ed.) in his room one night. These guys have stolen a map of all the holes God left in the Universe because he was in such a hurry to make it. They decide to use these holes to reach places in history where there is a lot of nandy booty to knock off.

Needless to say they have some interesting encounters along the way with such beings as an Ogre with back trouble, Napoleon who has a fixation about his height, the Devil who has an interest in micro-electronics and ... well, go see the film and find out for yourself. The film culminates with a great agro involving Knights, Archers, Cowboys, Tanks and laser bolts. Then the boy wakes up and thinks he's had a dream. I was afraid that this was going to be a repeat of 'The Wizard Of Oz', especially when he starts seeing resemblances between the people around him and the characters in his dream. Happily, however this analogy was shattered in an unexpected way.

The whole film struck me as one of my daydreams, only better. The impression is given of no cost having been spared in any of the scenes. Provided you accept it on its own terms and you're not square I think you should enjoy it.

Now in paperback, by Penguin, £1.25 U.K.

"The Book Of The Dun Cow" - Walter Wangerin, Jr. (Allen Lane, Hardback, 241 Pps. £4.95)

A first Novel, it appears to be a sort of precis of all the major Good Vs. Evil mythological cycles. The setting is this earth at a time when it is inhabited only by birds and animals and such. The Hero is one Chauntecleer, a rooster. The embodiment of evil is Wyrme, a gigantic serpent which crawls in permanent putrescence beneath the earth, it is the duty of the creatures of the surface to keep this evil penned in his subterranean prison. Wyrme does not like this and by bamboozling a foolish senescent rooster - aptly called Senex - his lever with this silly fowl is the fact that he has no male heir. Senex is promised an heir and renewed youth by the demon and by the power of Wyrme he lays an egg from which is hatched Cockatrice - half rooster, half snake. The cockatrice fathers a brood of serpents by his late father/mother's hens, these immediately destroy almost everything in the kingdom of the foolish rooster, whom the monster has killed. Some escape to Chauntecleer's coast and he prepares to withstand the attack of the black serpaents of the cockatrice, - the cleer has allies, Mundo Cane Dog, John Wesley Weasel, Pertolote the Hen, ants, mosquitoes and many other creatures. Pertolote is his newest and most favourite consort, a survivor of

the slaughter in Senex's realm.

Wyrn causes the rivers to flood and presses the attack on the animals lodged in Chauntecleer's coop-yard. In his moments of near despair and battle weariness the mysterious Dun-Cow comes to inspire him, Pertolote also acts as a support to him and the gallant Mundo Cane shines in the final battle, not a Ragnarok this, there is a victor.

I found this book altogether delightful. It is extremely well-written and capable of grasping the attention throughout its length, particularly if the reader can allow him/herself to remember a little of his/her childhood sense of wonder and adventure. (This is not, however, a juvenile book). Art note: The dust-jacket illustration, by James Marsh is particularly good. Get it (the book that is, not just the dust-jacket) and read it. I cannot recommend it enough.

Reviewed by: John McCarthy

"On Wings of Song" - Thomas M. Disch (Magnum)

This book makes a welcome change from the usual gloomy and catastrophic works we have come to expect from Disch. It concerns a future when human beings can separate themselves from their physical bodies and 'fly' by means of singing with the help of a special apparatus. Daniel Weinier, in spite of difficulties coming both from his environment and from his own limitations, is determined to fly. He is the main protagonist. We see him at the age of seven at the beginning of the first part of the book, and it is at the age of thirty at the beginning of the second part. His personality is strongly described by means of his reactions to what happens to him in his life.

Although the author never explains flight through song as described in this book - we are never told how it started, for instance - we soon come to accept it as a fact of life in this future. This is a measure of the artistry of the author. Other future innovations include a fool-proof method of keeping convicted prisoners in their prisons. They are made to swallow a lozenge which explodes in their stomach if they go too far from their prison. Daniel himself experiences this form of captivity when he is imprisoned at the age of fourteen. for circulating a seditious newspaper.

The gloomy and catastrophic Disch I mentioned before comes back in time for the epilogue but the book as a whole is fairly light-hearted. It is also well worth reading.

Reviewed by: Mary Callagher

"The Visitors" - Clifford D. Simak (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1980 U.K. £7.95 282p.)

This is the latest novel by one of the veteran American S.F. authors, who has won several Hugo and Nebula awards since he began his career in the 1930's.

It takes the classic theme of alien invaders on Earth, only this time they apparently have no outward hostile intentions. They merely settled down in giant black boxes, started eating trees and reproducing themselves!

There is a superb build-up of tension, set amidst a realistic 'hard' S.F. framework on Earth, with a remarkable dénouement, which shouldn't be revealed in advance. This is defin-

itely an excellent novel for all enthusiasts of this type of S.F. writing.

(Editor's note: This novel was originally published in 'Analog' magazine, October, November and December, 1979.)

Three Tomorrows: American, British, and Soviet Science Fiction - John Griffiths

(London: Macmillan, 1980. U.K. £10.00 Hardback 217p. Also in paperback - Papermac, £4.95)

The author is not a professional S.F. writer or an academic critic, but the 'chairman of a public relations firm, who has done BBC script writing and producing' according to the cover blurb.

Bearing this in mind, he has done a helpful survey of both the history and the main trends of S.F. writing in the three countries described in the title.

I found this a useful reference work to be consulted for information, and the serious S.F. reader will probably find some valuable background details, on particular points within its wide subject areas.

Both reviews by: David Lass, M.A., Dip. Lib., Founder Member I.S.F.A
and Hon. Librarian to the Bram Stoker Society

"In Joy Still Felt", the autobiography of Isaac Asimov, 1954-1978 - Isaac Asimov

(New York: Avon Books, 1980 \$9.95 828p.)

Being an Asimov fan I felt this book had to be a book worth getting. It was. It's just two of the Good Doctor's autobiography (part one being 'In Memory Yet Green') and deals with his life from the dates specified in the title (those dates are NOT, as some people imagine, his birth and death dates - he is still very much alive!)

It would be impossible to go into any detail about the book - for one, it is not meant to be reviewed as a classic but rather as an insight into the day to day life of one of S.F.'s leading writers. As such it is immensely entertaining, full of interesting anecdotes and descriptions of some of S.F.'s other 'big names' such as L. Sprague de Camp, Poul Anderson, John Campbell etc. You also get a look inside the workings of worldcon awards (like: did you know that when Asimov recieved the Nebula for his novel 'The Gods Themselves', he noticed that they had spelt his name wrong - Issac Asmimov!)

If you're an Asimov fan, it's invaluable. If you're not, it's still worth getting.

The Encyclopedia of science Fiction - edited by Peter Nicholls (London: Panther 1981 £4.95, 672 pages)

"It will become the bible for all Science Fiction fans" - Isaac Asimov

"The most valuable Science Fiction source book ever written" - Frank Herbert

"Truly superb... absorbing to read, comprehensive in its coverage, virtually faultless in its assessments" - Irish Times

"Magnificent... beautifully produced, excellently written" - Ian Watson, Oxford Times

"Definitive... excellent... indispensable" - Time Out

WINNER OF THE HUGO AWARD

"Invaluable" - Brendan Ryder, Irish Science Fiction Association

SCIENCE FICTION CONVENTIONS:

CHICON IV, 40th World Science Fiction Convention. Hyatt Regency Chicago Hotel, Chicago, Illinois. Writer CoH; A. Bertram Chandler, Artist CoH: Kelly Preas, Fan CoH: Lee Hoffman. Registration: Supporting - \$15 Attending - \$30. Write to: Chicon IV, P.O.Box A3120, Chicago. IL 60690. Sept. 2-6th. British Eastercon, Brighton 1982.

This will be held in the Metropole Hotel which should bring back memories for those who went on the ISFA trip to the Worldcon which was held in the same place. Having been one of them, I can thoroughly recommend the hotel and as for the convention- the guests are Angela Carter and Thomas M. Disch and they plan on having a very full programme. Contact the Secretary should you want more info.

Scouse con One, this is of special interest to ISFA members as Anne McCaffrey is one of the guests along with Dave Prowse. It will be held on February 13th and 14th in the Centre Hotel, Liverpool. Registration is £7.00 and room rates are Single £16.00 and Double £22.00 per night.

Shore Leave '82, the world's first non-stop Star Trek convention. To be held in the Ingram Hotel, Glasgow City Centre on the 2nd, 3rd and 4th of April, 1982. Guests are - oh, there are none! Well with 79 episodes and thirty films featuring the actors and actresses from Star Trek - who needs guests? Registration is £10.00 and cheques should be made payable to Sgian Dubh. More information and registration forms available from Lesley McCartney, 74 Castlefern Road, Fernhill, Rutherglen, Glasgow, Scotland. (SAE required).

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Aisling Gheal 1982

Entries are now being accepted - closing date 1st February, 1982. Entries MUST be typewritten, double spaced, and less than 12,000 words.

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