

newsletter

The Bulletin of The Irish Science Fiction Association



AUGUST / SEPTEMBER, 1982

This issue of the N/L features some interesting material. For those who may have missed it, the OUTLINE features our esteemed Patron, James White. The text is reproduced from Stargate, no. 2, which if memory serves me right, appeared in early 1977 (when some of our members were only just out of short trousers!) The reviews from David Lass are much appreciated - supplied at very short notice, they enabled me to set the N/L out for the July meeting. Thanks also to Joe Nolan for his reviews and other contributions.

STARGATE no. 11

Contributions for the next issue of our magazine would be very welcome. They can take the form of reviews, Letters Of Comment, Artwork, or Short Stories. To enable us to set them typed up, the closing date for contributions is mid-September, but the sooner we set them, the sooner the magazine will be out! The date we hope to have it out by is early December, and it features: an interview with Glasgow's SF author Chris Boyce, James White's talk on how to treat ill aliens (and how to tell if they're ill or not!), plus the second and third placed stories in this years Aislinn Gheal competition. AND MUCH MORE!

NEW VENUE

Forget about the Lincoln Inn! The ISFA's new meeting place, thanks to the good work of David Lass, is:

The Pembroke, 31 Lwr. Pembroke Street, Dublin 2.

The way to get to it is very simple. Leaving St. Stephen's Green, going along Bassett Street, it is the second major turn on the right. You can't miss it! The lounge downstairs is where our meetings will be held, on the traditional day of the last Sunday of the month. The next meetings are:

Sunday, August 29th. This will be a video film. While too early to give a title as yet, we can guarantee a good night! If the title makes a big difference, ring me nearer the date.

Sunday, September 26th. This is certain! It will be a quiz given by Stephen Walsh. The prize will be a gift token to that worthy establishment, the Alchemist's Head.

L5 SOCIETY

PROMOTING SPACE DEVELOPMENT

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COMMENTS

((This issue we have a slightly different type of letter. I won't say any more, just get straight into it!))

Crock Na Mona,
Belfast.

20.6.82.

Dear Brendan,

I have been authorised to inform you that at a fortuitous meeting at the recent Divish DiaboliCan between Professor Shawe Clove, Dublin Institute of Advanced Studies, and Doctor Dabblor Fusse, Dean of the Department of Arcane Physics, University of En-Dor, Trebiyonde, with a few others and self present, the ISFA membership was invited to assist in a completely new field of Scientific Investigation, one which promises to lead to exciting new advances in Space Technology.

A recent major breakthrough at Industrial Bio-Culture's Aerobic Diffusion Lab was due to the accidental in-circuiting of a high-gain Photon Multiplier with a Schmidt camera, an Industrial Laser-Beam-Splitter assembly, image projector, a Spectrograph plus other hardware. The result (at once dubbed 'A Hollow-hes Hologram'!) had obvious relevance in Collapsar Chemistry; via the Crystallattice Failure-Monitoring of Lysergic substances with as yet unexplored ramifications through Ethyl Alcohol, Nitrocellulose, yeasts and the fermentation processes to Human Neurology and Biology.

Certain obscure effects already observed, duplicated elsewhere and now under intense initial investigation are seen as having import and immediate application in gravity and propulsion fields. There is a high urgency to collecting and co-relating relevant data from all sources and persons having a wide, relevant and personal experience of related phenomena. This is where the membership can actively assist. The trawl for data is to begin at once. A Special Control Centre has been set up to co-ordinate and classify the incoming data. It has already been decided to 'classify' using a variant of the four-letter system used in the Sector General series by our esteemed patron James White to codify intelligent life-forms.

I saw at once that ISFA members, due to their assiduous, single-minded and unique experiences with diverse compounds having 'lift-off' potential, could make a firm, early, significant and perhaps decisive input to the Programme. I agreed to bring the matter to attention, being well aware of our collective dissatisfaction with the lack of Space Progress.

As we all realise, this has been quite recklessly and unjustifiably obstructed by the precocious, parsimonious and prestigitatory fiscal policies of past and incumbent Western National administrations.

The incipient green-house effects, defoliation, galling pollution and Pandemics now threatening planet Earth make a viable Space Drive (one of some orders of magnitude superior to those at present on offer, or in the pipeline) a vital necessity to our collective survival, and expansion into space.

There now exists a new, and perhaps final, chance to achieve a fresh, definitive departure in Space Technology. For that reason, members are urged strongly to assist the new research achieve early and maximum potential by inputting those vital, unique and personal contributions.

It is hoped, Brendan, that you will agree to collect and transmit these to the address I enclose, under the special mailing label. We are

requested to do it this way to achieve orderly and manageable reception and processing of the data. There is also a (necessary) element of 'security' to protect the location of the Data Control Centre.

Looking forward to your willing co-operation.

I remain,

Yours in fellowship,

G.A.R. Moyle

Finally, a few short comments:

David Lass: "I would be interested in seeing a sub group of the Association formed concentrating on Sword & Sorcery - the group could meet every fortnight in the Pembroke, and report its activities to the general meeting on the last Sunday of the month." Anybody interested?

Mannix Bennett: "When are we going to hear the end of this 'Excalibur' s&f?!"

FILM REVIEW

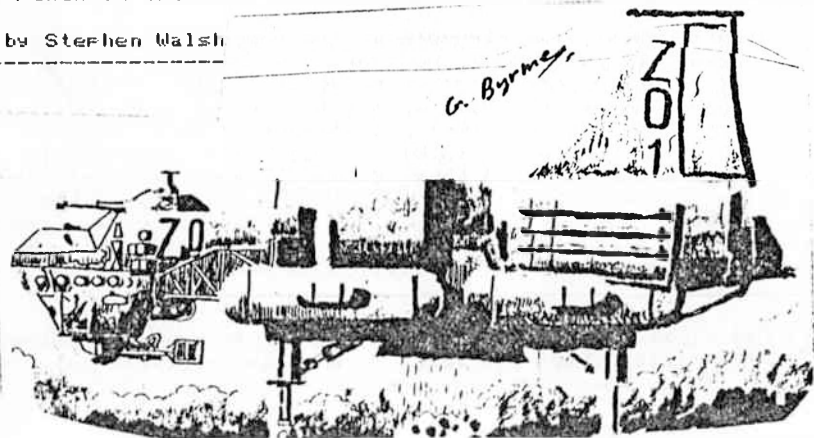
"Escape From New York" (John Carpenter, 1981)

I eagerly awaited this film's arrival in Dublin ever since I saw a trailer a few months ago, and I must say it was worth the wait. Briefly put, the premise is this - it is 1997 and the U.S.A.'s crime rate has risen to such proportions that all of Manhattan Island is a walled off prison, with a security base on Liberty Island keeping an eye on everything. Anyway, a carrying the President to a vital summit conference goes down inside the prison. Enter Snake Plissken (Kurt Russell) to set him out.

It's a very exciting film and the tableau of of decaying New York never fails to amaze. This is a large scale film and the sets depicting the streets and buildings and the models depicting New York as a whole are excellent. The buildings themselves suggest decay to the audience. As usual in Carpenter's films, gore is lovingly dished out, but this adds to, rather than detracts from, the picture Carpenter is painting.

It has been suggested that this film is, in fact, a sharp satire on New York as it is today. I wouldn't know, but if it is anything remotely like this I'll be steering clear of the place! Anyway, for a fast, thrilling punch in the face of a film this one doesn't miss. See it!

Reviewed by Stephen Walsh



Outline James White

As many of you will remember, our Patron James White recently paid a visit to one of our monthly meetings and delighted us by chatting informally about his career as a writer.

Born in Belfast in 1928, James is still a native of that city and now lives there with his wife and children.

Science fiction, for James, has always been a spare-time occupation - his full time job being publicity officer for Short Brothers and Harland Ltd., the local aircraft company, where he has worked for the past 17 years.

Starting out as an avid reader of science fiction, James became a fan and then a writer.

"Underneath every fan is a writer trying to get out," he says.

Among his friends during the early days were Walter Willis and Bob Shaw who were also members of the Belfast Sf Fan Club. As far as James was concerned they were all brilliant except him.

Brilliant or not, James published his first Sf story "Assisted Passage" in 1952. He was rewarded with the princely sum of £10 (25/- per 1000 words) by Ted Carnell, the editor of the British Sf magazine "New Worlds". The story had taken him six months to write and his friends were generally enthusiastic though not too kind. This factor, James maintains, has helped him to keep an unswelled head. Actually, Ian McAuley (James' best friend) is probably his severest critic.

Another story was submitted to "Analog" but rejected. However, James recalls that a rejection slip from "Analog" was much nicer than an acceptance slip from Carnell since he would go into a great deal of detailed criticism.

Undaunted, James continued to write. He also got married and his wife used to keep a watchful eye on progress. Such threats as '5000 words before supper, or you won't get any' kept him bashing away at the typewriter.

Writing had always been a hobby but when his children came along, the hobby became a voluntary form of overtime. The first baby girl evicted him from the spare room and books and typewriter were consigned to the garden shed.

There wasn't much of a struggle at the beginning since his first four stories were all accepted. However, the conditions under which James was forced to write left a lot to be desired. The shed was very cold in Winter. Even though he had an oil heater, it took twenty minutes to warm the air enough so that his glasses didn't steam up in his own breath. Another problem in Winter was stiff fingers which had to be coaxed into typing on cold keys. Summer offered other problems. As his children grew up, they used to play around the shed. Also, the aforementioned 'study' became a haven for numerous insects. The occasional and unfortunate spider used to find himself flattened between key and paper - an irritation to our James and also, no doubt, to the spider.

James had always wanted to be a doctor but, for various reasons, he was unable to finish his studies. More than probably, his interest in

medicine led him to writing his best known works - the Sector General trilogy - "Hospital Station", "Star Surgeon" and "Major Operation". These books deal in considerable and often humorous detail with the medical and psychological problems of a hospital in space whose staff of human and non-human doctors has to diagnose and treat extra-terrestrial patients of all shapes and sizes. Because he abhors violence in any form, James took great delight in writing these books and found that he could pose some interesting medical problems to boot. Many compliments were forthcoming. Medical men told him that his described techniques were correct - in theory, that is, since none of them had actually performed the operations themselves. One letter came from the Athenian club in London, and another - from a German - began Herr Doktor White.

Although having no medical training as such, James actually had some nursing training. While an apprentice shop assistant with Colliers (the tailors) he did a Home First Aid course and achieved a Red Cross First Aid Certificate. The course even included how to wash a baby and James gave a hilarious account of his first attempts.

Ideas for stories come from the most unexpected sources. One idea struck him when he was making his way to work in the rain. He noticed, sitting in the gutter, an old dog which was quite content to sit and whine while the rain splashed about it. Even though the beast could have gone to the shelter of a nearby doorway, it didn't move. Canine martyrdom, no doubt! Once, when stuck with the problem of how to logically refoliate a dead world, Ian McAuley came to the rescue by suggesting the method. James had left one man alive and protected from the destruction. When he was able to set foot upon the planet again he just happened to find some grass seeds lodged in the turn-ups of his trousers!

James feels he was most influenced by the work of writers Murray Leinster, E.E. Smith, Robert Heinlein and Isaac Asimov. Because he has no time to spend reading other writers, he is not really up to date with SF trends. He just writes the stuff now, he says, and apparently is a very slow writer who keeps his head down to the task in hand.

For James White the SF story is a problem story. He knows the end before he begins and has the task of setting it up. One has to find characters who will advance the story as quickly as possible but without resorting to cheating.

Research is very important. James keeps abreast of science by reading scientific journals and the press. For "Watch Below" he arranged to be shown over a tanker which was under construction. The original idea came from a mining disaster where six or seven people were trapped a mile down. The authorities first of all drilled a hole one inch in diameter for air, water and communications and then set about the task of digging the men out. Broadly speaking, this turned into what James describes as a shabby dog story.

Since the first story was published in "New Worlds", James has produced nearly 60 stories of various lengths including 9 novels and five short story collections which have seen book and magazine publication, or have been anthologised in Europe, North and South America and in Japan.

Books already published on both sides of the Atlantic include "The

Secret Visitors", "Second Endings", "Deadly Litter", "Open Prison", "The Aliens Among Us", "The Watch Below", "Monsters and MeSdics" and "All Judgement Fled" - which won the Europe Award as the best English language science fiction novel published in the preceding three years. Other works include "Tomorrow Is Too Far Away", "Dark Inferno" and "The Dream Millennium".

Thank you for visiting us James and giving us an insight into an SF writer's background. Here's to the next time you come and see us! Let's hope it will be soon.

REVIEWS

"Space Weapons, Space war - The Hardware For The War To Come" - John W. Macvey, NEL paperback 1982, £UK 1.75 286 pages.

Now that the Malvinas are the Falklands again, and the nearest thing to a war in space is in abeyance, we can all return to less deadly occasions and considerations. This, by John Macvey is one such. This is one for your own reference shelf, but would hold a special interest for those ISFA members who try to write SF. As a possible source of idea-ware, or more usefully, a "guidebook" to help contain the "idea-development" closer to the edge of the known in science and technology.

A lot of ground is covered, perhaps not for the first time as far as ISFA people are concerned. Nevertheless, a lot of it may come to in print for the first time. Some of the chapter headings may point to what I mean. (1) Why War? (3) The Unseen Eye (4) Hostiles Approaching (5) Basic Defence (8) The Heat Ray (10) Attack By Stealth (13) The Battle Of the Beams (16) Tricks, Tactics and Strategies, etc.

The last sentence in the book is "Quite assuredly, we are NOT alone!". I found this a levelheaded dissertation. The whole field of Space War is here between these covers from now to 2001AD. There is one other thing. It is the tyrowriters 'Basic Handbook' to the topic. Primary one stuff. A "Sea anchor on reality". It is NOT "Principals of Strategy". (I suppose you/we have to write that ourselves!) I'm glad I found it.

"The Manna Machine" G. Sassoon and R. Dale. Illustrated by M. Riches; a Granada paperback 1980. 274 pages. It was UK £1.25.

First a note to the under eighteens. DON'T bring this one to school! It could land you in front of (1) a Board Of Inquiry - in this country that's almost as bad as a kangaroo court, and (2) either A the Guillotine or B a theological firing squad. Either way, you'd be dead. Next a note to those who attend meetings and, on those dull nights, need a subject to debate. This is it. It takes the lid off a whole kettle of pirana fish! According to the blurb on the back cover:-

- (1) The Lord God Of Israel was an Extra-Terrestrial Visitor
- (2) The Kabbalah is the operating manual for a nuclear powered "field kitchen", sent down from the mother ship
- (3) The Manna was an amoeboid substance such as scientists today are working towards. They might make it by 2001AD - I dunno!
- (4) "Only NOW" have we the technological know-how to begin to grasp the basic ideas (We don't even have the power pack yet!)
- (5) As far as most folk in this country are concerned, it's a diabolical attack on 'Religion', the Establishment, or God, or all three!
- (6) As far as SF buffs are concerned, it's verryinteresting.
- (7) If you 'try to write', the illustrations of the machines innards, flow diagram, and hydroponictankase set-up will give a new slant on (some) "Generation ship" technology. Problem - put it to work in a

story.

It's very interesting, a bit repetitive in places, could be heavy going for some. There's one section I passed over to later. Link this one to "The Space ships of Ezekiel", then step back, heaven knows what could climb out! - or who it would eat.

Lastly, another Granada Paperback, like above.

"The New Apocrypha" by John Sladek, 1978, was UK £1.50.

This is "a guide to the strange sciences and occult beliefs" of the recent and more remote past. It is another one for the reference shelf, it ranges from Lost Atlantis through I Ching, via Zen macrobiotics to perpetual motion and the Last Trumpets. It strives to illustrate just what people CAN bring themselves to believe. It may be of no interest to you whatever. However, it's the last one in the stack. I have now caught up on a years cached readings. That explains why I am only getting to them now. Over the summer I have to stockpile anew.

Reviews by Joe Nolan

"Vallis" - Philip K. Dick. London: Corsi paperbacks, 227 pages, UK £1.25p

Following on my brief tribute to the memory of the late Philip K. Dick, given at the ISFA meeting last March 28th, here is review of his most recent novel to be published in the UK.

The initials stand for "Vast Active Living Intelligence System", which acts as a dominant alien force in the novel, beaming bits of living information cells to humanity.

This process started at the time of the Pharaoh Ikhnoton, and has continued until the present day, using various real life persons to continue bearing its message.

The hero living in contemporary U.S.A. is named "Horselover Fat", which is a witty translation of the author's name from the Greek "Philosofos", and the German "Dick".

He undergoes all sorts of mind-bending adventures, recalling the experiences of the previous novel "A Scanner Darkly" and showing influences from the "Illuminatus" trilogy of Shea and Wilson.

The book is highly complex to read, since it includes learned digressions from sources of ancient and modern philosophers, but these are summarised in a 52 point appendix at the end, which gives the main concepts discussed in the novel. I would strongly recommend it to any fans of the author, as one of his most challenging and stimulating works.



The Alchemist's Head

10 EAST ESSEX STREET, DUBLIN 2, IRELAND

LIST OF BESTSELLERS FOR
JUNE / JULY, 1982

1. Courts of Chaos - Roger Zelazny
2. Hiero's Journey - Lanier
3. Gateway &
Beyond the Blue Event Horizon - F. Pohl
4. Illuminatus - Shea & Wilson
5. Ambulance Ship - James White
6. Midnight at the Well Of Souls - Jack Chalker
7. The Sirans of Titan - K. Vonnegut, Jr.
8. The Technicolour Time Machine - H. Harrison
9. The Chronicles of Thomas Covenant - S. Donaldson
10. Dragonsinger - Anne McCaffrey
11. The Mote In God's Eye - Niven & Pournelle
12. The Demolished Man - Alfred Bester

ALL THE ABOVE TITLES ARE AVAILABLE FROM THE SHOP
BY MAIL ORDER OR BY PERSONAL VISIT!!!

"Helliconia Spring" - Brian Aldiss. London: Corgi, 361 pages hardback, UK £6.95

This is the most recent novel by one of the leading British SF writers and historians and it presents the first volume of a trilogy, to be devoted to this planet in a distant solar system of our galaxy.

The author has created a world with as wide a canvas as possible, in order to portray the rise and fall of various civilizations, which are intended to reflect the current problems of our own Earth: particularly in the fields of technological advance, pollution, and dangers of destruction through a World War.

The hero's name is Yuli, a young peasant who becomes a priest in the underground city of the god Akha, which he leaves to found a new one called "Olderando", an imitation of "El Dorado", the mythical land of gold and riches.

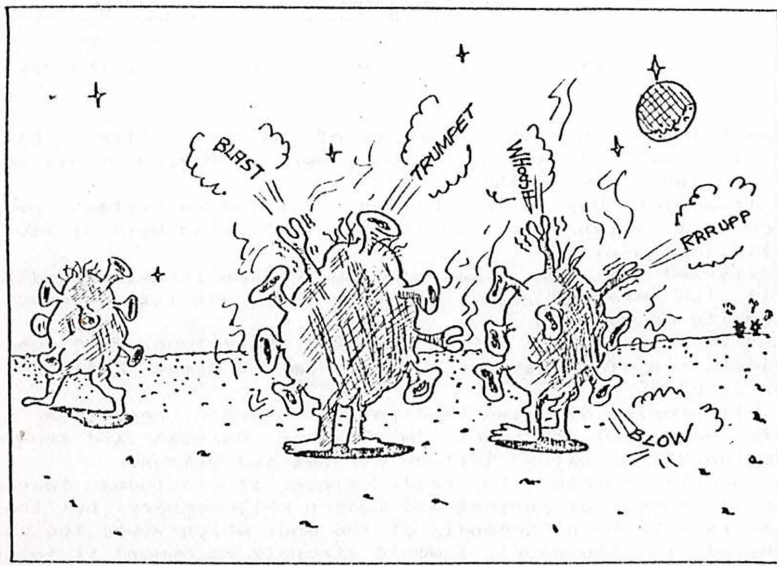
Whilst his descendants carry on their struggle to survive against the primitive humanoid "Phaeors", a huge Earth observation station, with 5,000 scientists and workers, keeps watch but hesitates to intervene in the planet's future.

It is written in the style of a "scientific romance", following the examples of H.G. Wells, Jules Verne, and most recently "Lord Valentine's Castle" by Robert Silverberg. Finally, one minor defect of this otherwise excellent novel, is that it lacks any maps or illustrations.

reviews by David Lass. M.A., Dip. Lib.

THIS CARTOON, FROM THE
TALENTED PEN OF JOHN
MOORE, IS THE SUBJECT OF
A COMPETITION. WHAT'S
THE BEST CAPTION YOU
CAN THINK UP FOR IT?

(THE ANSWERS TO LAST
MONTH'S CROSSWORD WILL
APPEAR IN THE NEXT
ISSUE OF THE N/L -
THERE WAS NO ROOM IN THIS
ONE!)



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