

# newsletter



The Bulletin of The Irish Science Fiction Association

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NUMBER 19

## ALL-IRELAND SF SHORT STORY CONTEST

As was announced in the flier enclosed with the last Newsletter, an All-Ireland SF Short Story Contest has been started. Some important details of the contest are now available.

Stories (typed, if at all possible) should be sent to the Secretary, Brian Redmond, 14 Granville Road, Blackrock, Co. Dublin. All stories will be vetted by a special subcommittee of non-participating ISFA members and non-members, who are willing to help out. Letters have already been sent to some people who might be able to help, asking if they would in fact be willing to serve. But if you do not intend to participate, and would like to be considered for the post of vetter on the subcommittee (6 will be selected by the Committee), please send your name to Brian Redmond before 29 October.

The vetting subcommittee will adopt rules of its own choosing and select the five stories to be sent to the ISFA Patron/Judges for final consideration after the 1 February deadline. Brian Redmond shall serve as the Chairman of the Subcommittee, but vote only in the event of a deadlock. He shall also make known to the subcommittee the various constraints under which the contest is to be run.

As a quick reminder, the stories should not exceed 20,000 words; a maximum of three stories may be entered by each person (including co-authored stories); stories should not contain any obvious identifying marks as to author (i.e., use a pseudonym or your phone number); only one prize for a short story may be won by any one person. The prizes are as follows:

- 1st prize: £25.00
- 2nd prize: £15.00
- 3d prize: £10.00

Subsidiary parts of the contest are as follows: the name of the award has not been chosen --- the closing date for suggestions is also 1 February; Joan Harrison has agreed to act as the judge in this part of the contest, so vetters may contribute to this part of the contest. The winning name will win a free membership for its submitter. A similar prize will be awarded out of a lottery consisting of the names of each contributor to the Short Story Contest itself.

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+++ Sunday, 29 October: +++

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+++ Our guest for this evening will be author and ISFA patron James White. He +++

+++ has agreed to give us a repeat of the speech he gave as the Guest of Hon- +++

+++ our at Faircon '78 in Glasgow, called The Secret History of Sector Gener- +++

+++ al. This meeting will start at the usual time of 7:30, at the Parliament +++

+++ Inn on Parliament Street, Dublin 2. Meeting Coordinator: Moirra Harrison. +++

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+++ Sunday, 26 November: +++

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+++ Our guest for this evening will be author and ISFA patron Harry Harrison. +++

+++ While he hasn't told us what the topic he's going to discuss is yet, we +++

+++ are sure that it will be as interesting as always. The meeting time and +++

+++ location will be as above. Meeting coordinator: John McCarthy. +++

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## Recent Meetings

Both the August and September meetings were held as scheduled in the Parliament Inn. The feature of the August Meeting was the long-awaited poster contest which was announced in the April Newsletter. Unfortunately, only two posters were entered, one by Sean Moraghan, and the other by Rita Meehan. Since neither of the works succeeded in attracting new members during the allotted time span, their work was judged by those present solely on artistic merit. The vote was, in fact, split 7 each; in addition, on the motion of David Lass, a vote was taken to see if some people liked both works equally well. This motion received only 5 votes, so it is fair to say that while both lost, each won. Rita and Sean were both awarded copies of the new paperback compilation of the three Stainless Steel Rat series.

The September meeting was the autumn book auction. The amount of books available was relatively high, but the take was unusually low: only £18.65 was received. Nevertheless, a good many books changed hands. We will, of course, have another auction in the spring.

## News of Note

### COMMITTEE CHANGE

The Committee would like to announce that they have received a letter of resignation from long-standing member Paddy O'Connell. Paddy has served in the dual role of Secretary and Treasurer for over two years. He has been of immense help in spreading the word about SF in Ireland, such as in his running of the booth the ISFA ran at the Science and Technology Exhibition at the RDS last November. He has also served as a steward at both the World Science Fiction Writers' Conventions. It is indeed a loss to the ISFA that personal affairs have made him unable to continue his fine work on our behalf.

As a numerical replacement, the Committee have coopted Moira Harrison to the Committee; however, Brian Redmond has assumed the offices of Secretary and Treasurer to go along with his role of Ombudsman.

A slightly new procedure at ISFA monthly meetings has also been initiated. In the future, one Committee member will serve as the meeting coordinator, i.e. will man the sign-in desk, announce the speaker or act or whatever, answer questions, and so on, so that the other Committee members can relax and enjoy the meetings themselves. The meeting coordinators for October and November are mentioned on page 1.

In view of the replacement of the Treasurer, a financial statement is now presented:

ITEM	VALUE OF TRANS- ACTION	BALANCE
Income and Assets:		
Carried forward	£ 42.31	£ 42.31
Memberships (43 x £5.00, 2 x £2.50)	220.00	262.31
Book Auction of 24 September	18.65	280.96
Expenses:		
October Journal (to date)	5.00	275.96
Capital Equipment (Stapler, paper, etc.)	19.00	256.96
Newsletters, mailings, envelopes already used (incl. lost July mailing)	16.45	240.51
Unused envelopes, stamps, etc.	3.55	236.96
Writers' Workshop	10.00	226.96
Aardvark House (1977-1978 to date)	22.45	204.51
NET BALANCE:	£204.51	

### DUN LAOGHAIRE HAPPENINGS

During the week after the 2nd World Science Fiction Writers' Conference in Dun Laoghaire, several ISFA members manned a booth in the Dun Laoghaire Shopping Center, where the Youth Committee of the Dun Laoghaire Festival was holding an SF exhibition. Several posters were in evidence, along with a supply of our ubiquitous Stargates and membership applications; also were shown many of the popular books which are on our ISFA Booklist. Before the various celebrities at the conference left Ireland, several of them came up to visit and sign autographs. Over the week at the booth, ISFA members talked to or were watched with interest by over 1400 people. The members who helped out included Rita Meehan, Brendan Hyder, Criostan Drew, and Arthur O'Duffy.

# Interview with TED STURGEON

(This is the first in what it is hoped will be series of transcripts of the interviews held at the 2nd World Science Fiction Writers Convention in Dun Laoghaire in June. The interviews were all held by members of an ISFA sub-committee. This interview was held by Fred Woods; it was transcribed by Brádan Ryder.)

Q: Are you currently working on anything?

A: I am currently working on a great many things. Always and perennially I am working on my mainstream novels. I have just finished a novel for Nova, a magazine put out in Penthouse in a million-dollar advertising campaign. I've seen the dummies of the magazine and it's beautiful. Thick and glossy, the most beautiful artwork and colour separation you have ever seen. It'll be a science-to-science fiction magazine. They have Penthouse distribution outlets and it's really going to be something great.

Q: Would we be able to get it in this country?

A: Penthouse is banned in Ireland?

Q: Unfortunately.

A: I don't want to throw any criticism on my host country but that kind of censorship is completely and utterly self-defeating. I will say to you at this moment: don't think of a white horse. All right; what pops into your mind? A white horse! And so the more you ban the stuff, the more fascinating it becomes and the more giggling behind the barn you'll get: I saw Susie's underwear. If this stuff is all on the stands, you take all the voltage off it and you take all the profit out of it. It stabilizes to a manageable level. This has happened in the States, and there's all sorts of stuff available and it has its day and goes. This means that there's no more behind the barn: I saw Susie's underwear. Sexuality is an interesting phenomenon in human beings and is kept under false guard by the advertising people because it does not sell goods. They have to keep the curtain up a little and let you see under it; but the nude body doesn't sell goods. The healthiest attitude is one of complete openness: living and learning and getting on with one's life. Children aren't interested in sex. I know as I have raised seven kids and none of my kids have ever had problems, sexual or otherwise. Two are grown up and happily married; the others are going to college, are not shockable, and are not preoccupied with sex. Little children, six and seven year olds, when they see a book or a magazine of that type, they may glance at it but they are quickly going to put it down and do something more positive. UNLESS you forbid it. If you forbid it...Oh, man, you've got problems.

Q: What about drugs?

A: That and drugs. There ain't no place in high school in the world where a child can't get them. I refuse to have drugs in my house but I don't care what sort of reading matter or art they look at. So that's my whole opinion of that attitude.

Q: Actually, a lot of your books, narrow minded people may consider them sexual on the surface, but I see them being basically about relationships. I've been reading your things, and rereading them, ever since you started writing them. Sex comes into it as an aspect of how one human being relates to another.

A: That's been exactly my aim.

Q: I am so sorry you stopped writing for so long.

A: Actually, I haven't dried up completely. I've been doing an immense number of book reviews and introductions. Mind you, the output is very small. In twenty years I produced only about 150 titles. That's everything --- novels, plays, scripts all add up to about 150 titles. One writer who has been writing 10 years less than I have is now into his thousandth. I have ceased to worry about that. I mean, I did at one time almost to the point of suicide. But I learned that the difference between now and when I started is profound. Which meant that the work had not stopped, it was just that the pages had stopped coming and so that I know when I start writing the stuff, it's good.

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Q: Of relationships between people, whether they are human or not?

A: Good science fiction has to be good fiction. Good fiction has to be people, it cannot be ideas. Good fiction is about the interaction of people and places, and people and people. To get back to the question of sexuality in my books, I don't believe you can find one explicit scene and in forty years I don't think I used one four-letter word. I have, on the other hand, very profoundly attacked certain things. I have written two stories, 14 or 15 years ago --- they were both blockbusters --- and they had to do with homosexuality. It was the first time such a thing had been mentioned in SF at all. And five years ago I wrote a very long novel with a magnificent title. It was such a magnificent title that it

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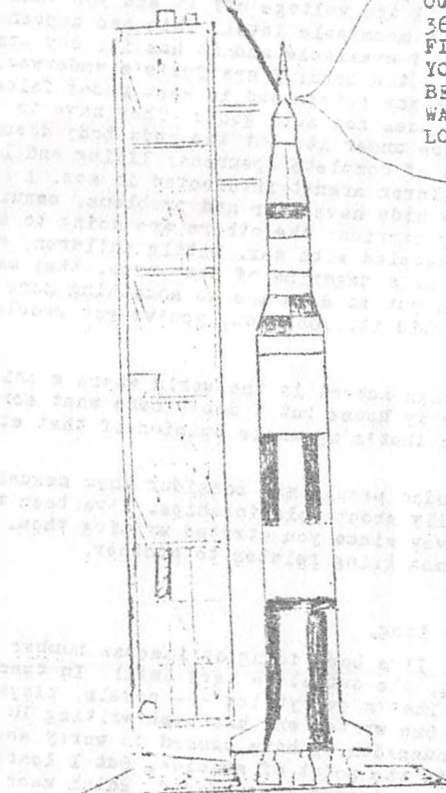
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HEY, DAVE, WHAT'S IT LIKE  
SITTING ON TOP OF A ROCKET?  
DO YOU HAVE APPREHENSIONS?

OF COURSE NOT. YOU SIT  
OUT THERE, ON TOP OF A  
365 FT ROCKET, WEIGHING  
FIVE MILLION POUNDS, AND  
YOU DON'T WORRY AT ALL,  
BECAUSE YOU REALISE IT  
WAS ALL BUILT BY THE  
LOWEST BIDDER.

Star Quote:

DAVID SCOTT, Commander  
of Apollo 15



didn't need a story to go with it, and as a matter of fact, there were two huge publishers who wanted to buy it on the strength of the title alone. It was called If All Men Were Brothers Would You Let One Marry Your Sister? All right. In these two stories, apparently about homosexuality and another about incest, these were really about ideas which people refuse to confront, utterly and completely refuse to confront. I was not writing about homosexuality and incest, I was attacking the refusal of people to confront real things, real aspects in humanity's life, and I am very pleased to have done this, to make people realise that they are there. I don't know what's happening in the rest of the world about homosexuality, or what we call "gay rights" generally, but it's becoming recognised and respectable very fast and the same thing happens --- once you take the lid off, the pressure's off. I mean, it doesn't matter in the States whether you're white or black, Christian or Protestant, Republican or Democrat, and now it doesn't matter whether you're gay or not and now people can go about their businesses without sniggering, or wondering, or exercising their prejudices, and so on.

Q: Just to say something about that: we do have a Gay Rights movement in Ireland and when it first came out there were letters to the newspapers, both pro and con. But that's slowing down now. People just know it's there and that's it.

A: It's been around a long time, you know. Longer than man, because we're not the only species to practice it, because every species in the animal kingdom goes through a situation like that and there are animals that remain homosexual all their lives. Maybe it's nature's way of keeping down the population while releasing the ideas of love and passion and physical activities, too.

Q: I must say, I've never looked at it that way.

A: Yeah? I don't know why we assume that God made what we consider good and the Devil made what we consider bad. I have a feeling that God made it all and probably for a good reason. As far as incest is concerned, people's immediate reaction is one of total condemnation. I'm not calling myself an expert but let us find out about this very profound trait in human beings. The very first thing that people say is that it produces children with defects, which is a terrible generalisation. Many couples produce perfectly normal children and the more you research into it, the more you see this. For example, three thousand years ago, a brother and sister produced no less than fourteen children with no defects. Further, where do you think we get our extras at pork chops, our grainhouses, our racecourses? It's caused by continuing inbreeding and weeding until a recessive gene shows up. Then you get two headed cats or something and you stop it. But every species on earth refines itself that way. There is no other way. Nobody knows why. It's fascinating.

Q: Did you find that in becoming a writer you reviewed other people's SF?

A: By all means. I had a column in the New York Times and another in Galaxy and I was doing spot reviews in the Los Angeles Times and a number of other papers.

Q: Do you have any advice for prospective authors?

A: Yes. Read. Read and read and read. Read until you find out what it is that you like and then read that until it comes out of your ears. Read until you become convinced that you can write a better story than any of them you have read. Write that story, and then I have some other advice. Write one story a week for a year. Then you must have some good stories. It is impossible for someone to produce fifty two bad stories in a row. You should have two good ones at least. And any writer who produces two masterpieces in a year is doing all right. Something else. On New Year's Eve, you write 500 words and you continue that each day. On 30 June you will have a novel, 60,000 words. If you write that amount again each day, on the following New Year's Eve, you will have another novel. If you get an advance of 2,000 per book, you will have made enough to live on and have two books in print. If you do that for five years you will have ten books in print and your royalties will be enough to keep you going. Of course, you have to sell what you write. How do you do that? Stories, like letters, are not simple. I have a story I have not yet written called "A Letter To Joe". You start:



"Dear Joe, and how are the kids?" and so on.

Now you have to select Joe very, very carefully. Now I want to write a story about someone running a business. I could write a story that would be fascinating but the percentage of people wanting to read about business is very small. What are people most interested in? Love, loss, grief, happiness, loneliness, loneliness above all. People like stories like stories about loneliness because everyone is an expert on that one and you're right down his alley. So you write a story about loneliness. Now Joe sits across the table from you, the selection of Joe is very important. He mustn't be an optics wizard or a collector of pheasant feathers, he's got to be everyman. In your imagination, he sits across the desk and he's listening attentively to every word you write. So he's someone you know. You create a situation with him in it. Three thousand words along, he's rolling with laughter, six thousand and he's fast asleep. So you rip up the last few thousand words and write them again. Three times, thirty times, three hundred times. Keep at it. He's the best audience you'll ever have. So what you do is keep one eye on him and constantly watch his reaction and write to him. Does he smile, does he laugh, does he sit back wondering, puzzled? You're going to give him the answer anyhow. But if you've the sense of writing to him, of his presence, you cannot fail to be successful. But the solution of Joe is important. He's got to be one of those wide-angled people, able to do the things you want him to do. Extra good: love, loss, grief, anger, loneliness. Reach him with those things. And at the same time, teach him things he didn't know before. Read, read everything because otherwise you won't be able to. One of the great losses is that of being unable to read. Go up to the Encyclopedia Britannica. Open it anywhere. You should do that all the time and you'll be surprised how much will stick to you. Read the labels on soup cans. Read everything. Except maybe chemicals. I've often wondered about those. Asbestos, etc. I have a trademark. You may have noticed it. It's a Q with an arrow through it. It means "ask the next question", it can get you into some awkward places, though. For instance, about incest. That question just won't come, no matter how long you wait. Let me tell you the basic truth: everything is moving. The Earth, moon, sun, stars. Only the human being wants it to stop.

FINISH

## Book Reviews

EDITOR'S NOTE --- Some members have been wondering what our editorial policy is about reviews. This is it: we review books that are sent to us by publishers as review copies; these books are then put into the library. We also would like to print reviews about other books. If you have a book you particularly enjoy, and would like to share that enjoyment with other ISFA members, just send in a review.

Dragonsong by Anne McCaffrey (London: Corgi, 1978, 176 pages.)

Hugo and Nebula Award winner McCaffrey produces here not only the third of the Dragonseries, but a book which is very readable and different. It is different because it is one of those few books wherein all the action takes place on a planet's surface or in its atmosphere, with the geographical detail one normally attributes to this planet, and where the protagonist is female. It is an unusual story about the aftermaths of the colonisation of the planet Pern. It is definitely a feminine book, where the femaleness of action and description is seen again and again. Perhaps the femaleness of the writer is best noticed not in the broadness of the adventure but in the minute descriptions of persons, places, and events. This tends to slow the action.

The story is well conceived and nicely written. It shows a lot of imagination for detailed introspection. The femininity of the principle character shows a side of SF which is only now beginning to surface. For a different type of authorship, read this book.

Reviewed by M. McCann

## NEWS OF NOTE (Continued)

### PLANNING FOR THE DECEMBER MEETING

In a break from our usual last-Sunday-of-the-month-tradition, the December meeting is to be held on 10 December. It is unlikely that the December-January Newsletter will be out in time for the first meeting, so the main announcement will be made here. We are scheduled to put on (in a very rough for) a play, a version of Ray Bradbury's "The Veldt". Script memorisation will not be used; rather, the characters will be supplied with copies of the script, so they can concentrate on putting on an enjoyable and stress-free show. Volunteers are needed to fill out the cast: we need one father, one mother, two adolescents (one of each), and a friend of the family. If you are interested, please let the meeting coordinator for December (John Mahon) know as soon as possible. A minimum of rehearsals and costumes will be used.

### ADDITIONS TO THE LIBRARY

Please add the following to your Library Booklists; these are new books donated by Liam Farrell, Jacob Struben, Sean Moraghan, Frank Roche, and M. J. McCann.

ASIMOV (Isaac)  
BALLARD (J. G.)  
BERLTIZ (Charles)  
BRADLEY (Marion Zimmer)

BRUNNER (John)  
CLARKE (A. C.)  
DICKSON (Gordon R.)  
ELLISON (Harlan)

FARMER (P. J.)  
HERBERT (Frank)  
KILWORTH (Gary)  
LEE (Tanith)

LeGUIN (Ursula)  
MOORCOCK (Michael)

POHL (F.)

McCAFFREY (Anne)  
REYNOLDS (Mack)  
ROBERTS (Keith)  
SILVERBERG (Robert)  
SIMAK (Clifford)  
SMITH (E.E. "Doc")  
VanVOGT (A. E.)  
VIAN (Boris)  
WHITE (James)

Bicentennial Man  
Low Flying Aircraft  
Mystery of Atlantis  
The Shattered Chain  
Star of Danger  
Squares of the City  
Report on Planet Three  
The Alien Way  
Again Dangerous Visions Book 1  
Again Dangerous Visions Book 2  
Timestop  
The Book of Frank Herbert  
In Solitary  
Drinking Sapphire Wine  
Don't Bite the Sun  
The Wind's Twelve Quarters Vol 2  
End of All Songs  
Adventure of Uza Persson  
Catherine Cornelius in the 20th Century  
Man Plus  
Drunkard's Walk  
Dragonsons  
Commune 2000 A.D.  
The Grain Kings  
The World Inside  
So Bright the Visions  
The Bloodstar Conspiracy  
Planets for Sale  
Froth on the Daydream  
Tomorrow is Too Far

## BOOK REVIEWS (Continued)

The World Inside by Robert Silverberg (London; Panther, 75 p. + VAT)

I must say for starters that I'm very much a Silverbob fan. And then say that this is not his best book. It's a study of a society in the 24th Century. The prime belief of this society is the mystic importance of procreation. The population of Earth is approaching 100 billion, and growing rapidly. Living space for these is provided in 1000 story apartment buildings called "Urban Monads". Each of these has a population of up to a million million, tightly packed into studios no larger than an ordinary kitchen.

Silverberg examines the effect of such a society on its members. It is obvious that any society has disruptive forces which would have to be ruthlessly eliminated. After two centuries this seems to have been totally achieved, and  
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one of the characters, a historian, thinks that this is as much due to physical inbreeding as to psychological control.

Superficially the book is about the life and friends/acquaintances of one Siegmund Kluver, a young man climbing rapidly to the top in the administration of his Unmod. It shows how these people, far from being content with their lot, seek to alleviate their misery by all manner of drugs, by music, by sex, and even by psychiatric surgery.

The book is well constructed, and I found it very easy to read. Silverberg's ability to create real people is undiminished, and the plot never flags. While the book is not in the same class as A Time of Changes, Nightwings, or Dying Inside, it can easily take its place with the many good (as opposed to great) books written by that supreme craftsman --- Robert Silverberg.

Reviewed by Eoin Bairread

Planets for Sale by A. E. VanVOGT (London; Panther Books, 1978; 191 pages)

This is the 25th book from the VanVogt stable and is good solid SF of the Space Patrol/Mystery-to-be-solved type. It is written with one E. Mayne Hull and as a story it hangs well together, concerning a maiden in distress on her way to the ridge stars. In her distress she meets up with the right people whose business is the buying and selling of everything that moves, hence the name of the novel.

The book is one that should be read to get an insight into VanVogt's style which is fluid and polished. The story stays within the parameters set out in the initial stages, and consequently no "deus ex machina" requirements are needed to bring events to the happiest of conclusions. A good SF adventure from a smooth SF pen. Recommendable reading.

Reviewed by M.J. McCann

A REPLY TO Mr. EOIN BAIREAD'S REVIEW OF P. K. DICK'S UBIK (Newsletter 18A) by J.J. SPRUBEN

It's hair-splitting time again, folks. Now I just happened to read Dick's Ubik for the first time shortly after (or was it shortly before?) I read the mentioned review. There are two points I would like to comment upon.

First of all, and this has more to do with Dick's entire production (of which I've read quite a lot, the notable exceptions being Confessions of a Crap Artist & Scanner Darkly) than with Ubik specifically, I think that Dick's work is not primarily about reality at all, and certainly not especially about time. When he is specifically writing about reality, he is as often as not about space as well as time, precisely because those two together the essence of observable reality, in equal proportions of importance. At times, they are indistinguishable (as in the so-called time-slips in Ubik, which are really time/space slips, or in the Run-iter manifestations in the same novel).

But having said that, it must be added that we shouldn't forget that Dick primarily writes about human beings who find themselves in difficult situations, and strive to survive. Some give up or fail because of an outside reason, but most succeed. The protagonist, when there is a clear protagonist (such as Joe Chip in Ubik) always survives, even if he's dead, like, again, Joe Chip.

The second point I would like to take up is that of the novel's "sloppiness" and weak ending. I don't see why the use of various ideas or themes should necessarily lead to a sloppy book, and I'm not entirely convinced that this one is sloppy. The four basic themes outlined by Mr. Bairread in his review (to which I could add "entropy" and "economics" make Ubik much more interesting and complicated (but not over-complicated) than a one-theme Ubik would have been. What went wrong is this: Ubik is too short! To satisfactorily explore all those six or seven major themes (or ideas, if you prefer Mr. Bairread's terminology), the novel should have been at least double, and probably triple its present length.

I can well imagine Dick pounding along, and suddenly realising that he was writing a 600 page novel. I don't know whether he thought he could never sell a 600 page Ubik (this was in 1968), or whether he felt that another 400 pages would kill him off (a real danger in view of his use of stimulating drugs when writing); but whatever the reason, he must have decided to cut the novel short then and there, hence the undeniably weak ending, and hence also the impression that the novel as it stands (and that is the only way we can judge it) is "sloppy".

Ubik is not "an appalling bag of worms", but rather a novel of great, but unfulfilled potential.