

newsletter

The Bulletin of The Irish Science Fiction Association



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NEWS & REPORTS

- JOHN MCCARTHY WINS AISLING GHEAL AWARD

The Grattan Room in Dublin's Clarence Hotel was the setting for one of the highlights of the year, the First Annual ISFA Short Story Contest Award Dinner, held there on the 28th of April. After informal drinks in the Hotel Bar, the fifty-odd guests convened in the aforementioned Room, with its enchanting view of the fair river Liffey, and partook of an excellent and admirably straightforward meal, its main course consisting of ham and chicken etc.

When the assembly began showing signs of recuperation, ISFA chairman John McCarthy, blissfully unaware of what was to transpire later in the proceedings, rose to his feet and in a brief speech welcomed all present to the above mentioned F.A.I.S.S.C.A.D., a term which was to undergo considerable shortening later, in the process introducing the honoured guests at the head table: James White, ISFA patron and judge in the Short Story Contest, Peggy White, Joan Harrison, adjudicator in part two of the Contest, i.e. the selection of the Award's name, Moira Harrison, committee member, Paddy O'Connell, former long-standing committee member, and Brian Redmond, ISFA secretary/treasurer and chairman of the Contest Sub-Committee, who in this latter capacity proceeded to direct the following activities.

Brian firstly explained how the Contest was set up, and how, when the Contest was originally conceived, it was anticipated that there would be half a dozen entries at most, which turned out to a good guess, until a few days before the deadline, that is. Another fourteen stories were received in the few days before

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UPCOMING MEETINGS

Sunday, 24 June 1979

At this regular monthly meeting, which will start as usual at 7.30 pm at the Parliament Inn in Parliament Street, Dublin 2, there will be an informal talk by John Baxter, author of The Hermes Fall and other SF and SF-related books. Meeting co-ordinator: Eoin Bairread.

Sunday, 15 July 1979

The first meeting of the Writers Workshop since the Short Story Contest will be held at 7.30 pm in the Parliament Inn. Anybody interested in writing, whether it be SF or not, is invited to come along, and it would be a help if you brought along a story or five for reading and discussion.

Sunday, 29 July 1979

July sees the tenth anniversary of the Apollo 11 mission and the first moonlanding. The ISFA intends to celebrate this with a birthday party at the Parliament Inn at 7.30 pm. Dr. Joseph Laffan will deliver a paper entitled "Serendipitous Medical Results of the Space Program". There will be a birthday cake, and other activities. Meeting co-ordinator: Moira Harrison.

February 28th, the fourteenth only five minutes before midnight that day. These stories, some of which, in spite of the name of the Contest, none too short, were read by five vetters, Mary Gallagher, Seamus Mulhall, Chris King, Eoin Bairead and Michael McCann, who selected the five finalists.

At this point the tension concerning two parts of the Contest was relieved. First, Peggy White selected at random from a bowl containing the names of all the entrants in the Short Story part of the Contest the name of the one to win a year's free membership : Jacob Struben.

Then Joan Harrison announced her choice for the name of the award, the Aisling Gheal Award, which had been submitted by P.J. Goode, who was rewarded with a year's free membership. Joan told us she had chosen this name because it was as euphonious as it was appropriate (it could be translated as "Bright Vision" Award), and because the fact that it is a Gaelic name emphasizes the Irishness of the Award.

And then the moment approached which could be put off no longer, the announcement of the winners of the Short Story Contest. James White, as one of the judges, took this task upon him. He introduced his remarks by explaining how stage two of the judgment process till scant hours before the start of the Dinner.

The five finalists were passed on to the ISFA's esteemed patrons, which in the cases of Anne McCaffrey and Harry Harrison presented no great difficulties, as they both live fairly close to Dublin, but the combination of James White's residence in Belfast and the lengthy postal strike conspired to delay the delivery of the five MSS to him to just over a week before the Dinner was due to be held.

This said, he announced the names of the two runners-up. These were Joseph McCluskey's story "Closing Circles", a polysyllabic piece reminiscent of Hal Clement in his early career, and Pete Hamilton's "Of Human Garbage", which, he said, resided somewhere on the borderline between SF and mainstream fiction.

After remarking incidentally that there had to his regret been no female entrants in the Contest, James White told us the names of the 3rd, 2nd and 1st prize winners. They were, in that order, Gerry McCarthy's story "Harp Uppermost", Martin Hayes' "Museum", which, he commented, was impressive in idea and unique in theme, but somewhat too long and in need of editing, and finally the winner, John McCarthy's "A Vector of Vacuum", for which James White had nothing but praise, and which, he said, was quite saleable.

John made a short and unprepared acceptance speech, in which he exhorted the assembly to make full use of the bar extension, which they proceeded to do after a telegram from Harry Harrison was read which included felicitations to the winner and a plug for a film he is working on.

Note: Three of the five finalists, as well as one or two other submissions to the Contest will be published in the next Stargate, which will appear later this summer. The remaining two finalists, "A Vector of Vacuum" and "Closing Circles" were published in the current Stargate, Vol. 3 No. 2.

- AGM REPORT

This year's Annual General Meeting was held on 29 April in Buswell's Hotel, Dublin. After the quorum was filled (eventually there were 19 members present, as well as a small number of proxies), the meeting came to order.

The Committee Reports (1978-1979) which were published in the last Newsletter (No. 22, April/May 1979) were passed unanimously, in the case of the Financial Report with the proviso that an update thereon would be published in this present Newsletter. This follows herewith:

Financial Report of the ISFA for the Period from the 12th of April 1979 to the 30th of April 1979.

Income & Assets

Cash at Bank	199.86	
Cash on Hand	12.00	211.86

Dinner Receipts (37x3)	111.00
Membership Receipts	10.70
Loan from B.Redmond (30/4/79)	<u>47.00</u>
	£380.56

Expenses

Dinner	216.50
Expenses of Guests of Honour	46.12
Journal Expenses	44.00
Prizes	40.00
A.G.M. Expenses	10.00
Committee Expenses	<u>17.39</u>
	£374.01

Surplus of Income over Expenditure £6.55 (which equals the Adjusted Bank Balance as of 30/4/79).

- Note: 1) There is an outstanding expense of £20.00, which represents uncollected prize money.
 2) There is still £18.00 owed to the ISFA from members who booked tickets for the Award Dinner but did not attend.
 3) All things considered the ISFA actually returned a loss of £42.45 for the year 1978-1979. This was caused by the subsidising of the Award Dinner.

Also accepted unanimously were the brief reports from the Writers Workshop Sub-Committee and the Short Story Contest Sub-Committee.

This was followed the proposal and voting on amendments to the ISFA Constitution. The following amendments were passed:

- To Article 4 (c): add "There is a junior membership rate. A person shall be deemed a junior if he or she is under 18 on the date of application or renewal."
- To Article 4 (d): delete entirely, and replace by "New memberships shall be from the date of application (subject to subsequent acceptance of the application); renewed memberships shall run one year from the date that renewal fell due."
- To Article 12 (a): delete entirely.
- To Article 15: to read as follows "The Annual General Meeting shall consider Accounts, Reports from the Committee, Election of Committee Members and Appointment of Auditors, and other business."
- To Article 19: to alter "majority vote" to "majority poll vote".
- To Article 20: add "The record order of business shall be that the meeting shall then accept an agenda."
- To Article 24: alter "unanimous poll vote" to "2/3 poll vote"
- To Article 36: delete "after being in office for one year" and insert "at the A.G.M. following their assuming office".
- To Article 38 (b): delete entirely.
- To Article 41: delete "sent" and insert "circulated".
- To Article 43: read "Notice of every General Meeting shall be given to every person entitled to receive such notice."

Following this nominations were received for the Committee for 1979-1980, and after adjournment the following were elected: Moira Harrison, Jacob Struben, Eoin Bairead, John McCarthy, P.J. Goode and Brendan Ryder.

No other formal business arose, and the meeting was adjourned till next year.

The newly elected committee held its first meeting the same day, at which specific tasks were allocated. John McCarthy is the new (or continuing) chairman, while Moira Harrison took over the post of secretary/treasurer. Jacob Struben is in charge of the Writers Workshop and publications, and Eoin Bairead of public relations. P.J. Goode continues his valuable work as librarian, and Brendan Ryder will serve as ombudsman.

PS: The AGM voted thanks to Brian Redmond for his work for the ISFA, especially in connection with the Short Story Contest. Also, the Meeting passed a resolution to make our patrons Harry Harrison, James White and Anne McCaffrey, as well as Joe and Gay Haldeman, who were guests of the ISFA at the June 1978 meeting, Life Members.

- FAST MEETINGS

The April meeting was held scant hours after the AGM ended, and was the first one at which the new committee was present. It was a very informal gathering, unique in the respect that there were no less than three professional writers present: James White, Harry Harrison and Nicholas Emmett, the latter visiting his native city with his charming Norwegian wife Anne.

At the May meeting we held one of our ever popular book auctions, this time under the well-informed and witty direction of Bobby McLoughlin. A vast quantity of books, some of them genuine collector's items, were processed, producing some revenue which will find its way towards necessary and useful expenses, if you get my meaning.

- STARGATE AWARD

"Stargate Award" is the provisional name for the companion award to the Aisling Gheal Award. It is our intention to make this an annual event as well, but while the Aisling Gheal Award is voted on by a small panel of judges, thus limiting the ISFA membership's participation to those who actually write stories and submit them, the Stargate Award will make possible, in fact require, the participation of the entire membership.

The Stargate Award will go to that piece of SF writing, whether it be fiction, poetry, or criticism, published in Ireland during the year in question, which the ISFA membership votes to be the best. A voting form for the 1979 Stargate Award will be included in the next Stargate, and while the period which qualifies the piece of writing for your vote runs from 1st September 1978 to 31st October 1979, you will have time to make up your mind till well into December, just as long as we get your vote before the New Year. At any rate, from now on read your Stargates, Newsletters, national newspapers, or whatever other fanzines there may be floating around this island, with more literary discrimination than ever. It wouldn't hurt to reread the past ones as well.

By the way, the name of the award, Stargate Award, is by no means a definite and unalterable choice. It is just a suggestion as to what this award could be called, and we would like to hear your own ideas on that matter. In fact, we would prefer to give it a name suggested by a member, rather than imposed from the committee. After all, it's the members who are going to award it.

- ADDRESS CHANGE OF THE COMMITTEE

Now that Brian Redmond, whose address was the contact address for the committee and the publications, is no longer on the committee, we would appreciate it if you no longer sent your contributions, membership applications, enquiries and other correspondence to him. From now on, all correspondence regarding ISFA matters and publications should be sent to:

Moirra Harrison,
Secretary, ISFA,
Kestrel Ridge,
Vale of Avoca,
Co. Wicklow,
Ireland.

Which must surely be the most euphonious address the ISFA has ever had.

REVIEWS

Welcome to the Monkey House by Kurt Vonnegut, Jr (Panther)

When I sat down to read this book I looked forward to twenty-five science fiction stories by an established writer. I was quite surprised to find that only six stories fit rather loosely into that category, but that did not detract from my reading enjoyment. With a choice of twenty-five stories there is bound to be something in this book for everyone, whether they like love stories, war stories, or just plain fun stories.

Among the stories with a science fiction interest is "Harry Bergeron". This may be familiar to most addicts. It tells of a future society in which the entire society is handicapped physically so that all are equal, and what happens to two people who dare to remove their handicaps. This has been made into a short film. I know because I've seen it, but I can't remember where.

The title story, "Welcome to the Monkey House", not the best in the collection, has mankind again handicapped, this time sexually. This is done in an effort to cut down on population. The story deals with one man's fight against the system, and the small success he achieves. A very weird idea.

"Report on the Barnhouse Effect" and "The Euphio Question", written in 1950 and 1951 respectively, have very familiar themes. The first deals with a professor who develops a formula or method to increase mental powers enormously and his reaction to the military minds who try to make use of his ability. The second also has a professor (professors were very big in the science fiction of the fifties). This professor discovers a certain hiss from the stars which has a euphoric effect on people when it is amplified and broadcast. The story concerns attempts to commercialize this effect.

"Unready to Wear" is a fun story about a time in the future when society has the ability to live outside their bodies. The method of leaving the body was discovered accidentally by a doctor (really a thinly disguised professor), and the story tells of the enmity that exists between the people who use the method and those who do not.

The last story in the book, "Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow", has a drug (probably discovered by a professor) which slows down the ageing process. The use of this drug leads to overcrowded cities, food shortages, etc., etc. It also leads to hilarious problems with property and wills.

The remaining stories are a very mixed bag, but with a common theme of humanity. Kurt Vonnegut, Jr appears very concerned with the weaker members of the human race and most of his stories reflect this. My own favourite from the collection is "Adam". This is a very simple story in which the hero attempts to communicate his delight at the birth of his son to totally uninterested acquaintances.

Another I particularly enjoyed is "New Dictionary". This piece is not a short story as such, it's more a humorous review of a new dictionary (surprise, surprise) in which Vonnegut points out how americanized the English language is becoming. I agreed with his sentiments. A friend of mine recently returned from the US bearing a dictionary entitled "The Complete Works of the American Language" (reviewer's italics -ed).

To sum up, Welcome to the Monkey House is a very enjoyable book, easy to read and ideal to have with you on a bus or train journey. Most stories are quite short, the longest running to about ten pages.

Reviewed by Fred Woods

Second review of Stand on Zanzibar by John Brunner (Arrow Books, £1.75 + VAT etc)

This is the first reprint of a book which is generally acclaimed as a science fiction classic, and a work which was of immense importance to the field in the 1970's. It has won awards from three countries, including a Hugo, and more than any other, it has been the topic of both comment and conversation over the past five years - ever since it went out of print.

Reviewing such a book is always difficult, and this book is not made any easier by the fact that subsequent books by Brunner - The Shockwave Rider and The Sheep Look Up, for example - have been available.

The book - Brunner calls it a non-novel - is superficially concerned with over-population. The title is derived from the hypothesis that if all the humans in, on or under the Earth were to stand together they would need a space the size of the island of Zanzibar. Rather than being a simple sequential novel it is made up of four interrelated but separate streams, of which only one could be called a straightforward narrative. This device allows Brunner to construct a world which is frighteningly real. Unlike other writers who hint at the future with vague references to ray guns and spaceships, this Earth of 2010 is as real as today, yet strange enough to be not totally familiar. If any author could make doubt for the survival of me/us then Brunner could.

It is this ability to construct a world at once unfamiliar and comprehensible which is Brunner's forte, that and an all encompassing and moving concern for people. His ability to handle either story or characterisation must be questioned. I found the passage where the quiet scholar turned into a trained killer is seduced by/ seduces the 20 year old Bengali widow who is dying of leukaemia to be one of the funniest in the genre, something which the author did not intend. In the later books I mentioned Brunner concerns himself even less with plot or characters - so I feel he recognizes this himself.

To summarize: the book is exceptionally entertaining, and can be recommended for this alone. More importantly, if Brunner's vision of the future is to be made untrue it can only be done by human beings deciding to make the place more enjoyable to live in, and if any extra motivation is required it could come from reading Stand on Zanzibar. Read it.

Reviewed by Eoin C. Bairead
Commissioned by P.J. Goode

The Heavenly Host by Isaac Asimov (Penguin, 1978, £0.65 + VAT etc)

The Heavenly Host, one of Asimov's latest offerings, is a book for children aged 7 to 10, and probably published with the aim of introducing young people to SF. It was originally printed in "Boy's Life" as a short story before selling as a juvenile SF publication. This marks a trend in recent years, that of getting well known SF writers to write juvenile books, eg. Arthur C. Clarke and Ursula K. Le Guin.

The story concerns a young boy, Jonathan Derodin, whose mother is a planetary inspector and who in the course of his mother's job finds himself on Anderson Two. There he acquires the friendship of a Wheel, one of the native inhabitants of the planet, but is dissuaded from seeing it again because the human beings on the planet feel they are dangerous and should be killed. He discovers that they are intelligent, but the adults refuse to believe him and continue to hurt them. Finally he shows them to be intelligent and so the colonizers must leave them in peace.

The story is of course written simply, but at least shows the young reader that not all aliens are monsters (a picture usually conveyed in many SF films and series). I think that the readership the book is aimed at would appreciate it, as it would serve as a platform for interest in SF, though in my opinion there is a very loose definition of intelligence in the book that I would not expect from a writer of Asimov's calibre, but which would probably go unnoticed by the young readers.

Over all this is not a bad story, and one which any 7 to 10 year old would enjoy.

Reviewed by Seán Moraghan

Nova Express by William Burroughs (Panther, 85p + VAT etc)

I shall indulge in some sociological meanderings. The hippy movement was a phenomenon which was not fully understood at the time, and the importance of which I feel is still not realised. It was both the beginning and the end of the post-war reaction, an opting out by those who had been too young to experience the World War and Korea, and who had become disillusioned with the society those two conflicts produced before they could find an adequate alternative or a coherent philosophy. The hippy movement began when American youth could avoid the draft in large numbers, and it died when the same youth refused to continue the war in Viet Nam. Between the loss of an ideal in the early 50's and the beginning of the long American preoccupation with "Honesty and Justice" at the start of the 70's hippyism was born, flourished, and died. Its best known writer is probably Timothy Leary, its best probably Kerouac. Somewhere between the two comes Burroughs.

His books are by no means easy to read. The style can only be called psychedelic, and this makes them strange, both to readers who are too young to remember the sixties and those who do remember, but never really liked what they found there. It is also a style which I feel has almost nothing to say to anyone today.

This is not to say that the content of the book is similarly irrelevant. It may seem almost impossible to follow, or to relate the blurb to what you are actually reading, but I advise you to bear with it (no pun intended). The book really is a damning condemnation of modern capitalism in two of its forms: the generally accepted form of large and legal business, and the lesser known branch which destroys life in no less a way by selling drugs, often poisonous, to people whom they know will die if they don't take them.

I'm not really sure if Nova Express is science fiction, but I don't think this is really all that important. It's a book that deserves to be read if the style doesn't turn you off. If you happen to be an ex-flower-child/user and you haven't read the book, then put on your record of Baba Magheena Das chanting "Om mane padme Om", light up a few joss sticks for the atmosphere and read it, in the lotus position if you remember how to do it.

Reviewed by Eoin C. Bairead

Commissioned by P.J. Goode

The Dead Remember by Robert E. Howard (Panther, 80p + VAT etc)

This is the second book in the "Dark Man" series by a writer who will be remembered best as the creator of Conan. It's fantasy of that macabre variety usually associated with H. Sprague de Camp, of whom Howard was a great disciple. Not everyone will like fantasy, and an even smaller group seems to enjoy this particular genre, but if you're an aficionado then you could do an awful lot worse than this book.

Howard writes with style and verve, and if his attitudes towards women and negroes seem ludicrous to us we should remember that they form a central motif in "sword and sorcery" fantasy. I don't wish to debate here whether this is a fundamental fault with this type of fiction - indeed whether all fantasy depends on an attitude to some group which is discriminatory; I'll leave that to others. What I can say is that I read the nine stories in the book with ease, that I found them less satisfactory than the first "Dark Man" collection, but that nonetheless I can recommend them not alone to lovers of fantasy, but also to anyone who has nothing else to read. At the very least they'll keep you amused for about an hour, and you can't ask for more for 80p + VAT (and sterling surcharge -ed).

Reviewed by Eoin C. Bairead

Commissioned by P.J. Goode

The Mystical Pessimist.

A Review of The Terminal Beach by J.G.Ballard (Penguin,80p + VAT etc)

This is definitely not the book to curl up in bed with when you feel that the world is getting you down. You see,Ballard agrees with you - and thinks it's going to get worse. This makes him unique in fiction - I think. I know of no other author who holds out so little hope. You might cite Nineteen Eighty-Four, but it's the least optimistic of Orwell's books,and he's often positively bright. No,Ballard summarises the future with four short words:"it will get worse".

Why,then,do we read him? I disagree totally with him on the futility of existence,yet he's one of the three authors whose books I collect,hoard and never loan. I think it's because he's one of the few mystics writing science fiction. While his novels create a hauntingly real world of despair it is in a story in this collection that I feel he has written his best fiction. This is "The Drowned Giant". I know that stylistically this is not his greatest work,but he has captured some archetypal emotion in this story of the drowned body of a giant washed up on a beach.

The other stories are,with one exception,excellent. Ballard's use of imagery ensures that he communicates on a para-verbal level: their effect cannot be analysed in purely linguistic terms. He uses the image of the Echo communications satellite in three different ways in three stories,one of which ("The Illuminated Man") is an early version of The Chrystal World. Indeed he uses motifs from more ancient mythology to startling effect,the snakes of "The Delta at Sunset" and the blind king in "The Gioconda of the Twilight Moon" are examples.

The only story I did not enjoy was the last one,"The Lost Leonardo", and that's only because it was completely out of style with the others. I advise you not to read it with the rest of the book for that reason.

Once again let me say how good this book is. If at all possible read it, even keep it for re-reading. One last point: how many stories have been written in which "The Virgin of the Rocks" by Leonardo is mentioned?

Reviewed by Eoin C. Bairead
Commissioned by P.J.Goode

Alternative review of Pulsar 1,edited by George Hay (Penguin,1978)

Pulsar 1 is a pathetic attempt at combining stories and articles to provide an all round picture of SF today for the average reader. But sadly the combination just doesn't work. Many of the articles gave the appearance of having been written by people who couldn't think of anything intelligent to say,and put down a lot of statistics and technical data to fill up a few pages to confuse the reader. After each story the contributors tried to write about the stories' subject matters in relation to future developments. They only succeeded in writing about topics that would not interest the general reader whom Hayes has in mind. Obviously the stories were written before the features, so the contributors had to write about whatever the main themes were,about which they seemed to know very little.

As for the stories themselves,they are unbelievably dull,save "Small World" by Bob Shaw. Even the presence of names like van Vogt,Watson and Coney failed to lift the book from the darkest depths of boredom and dullness, which tended to push the reader into a psychotic state.The "scintillating fiction" just never took off the ground,not even van Vogt's story rescued the book. Yeuch! I was amazed at what bad stories these well known writers could produce. The stories could have dealt with individual aspects of the genre,giving newcomers to SF an all round picture of what SF is all about, but they only skimmed the surface of science fiction.

Also included was an interview with Isaac Asimov which wasn't bad at all, even though no new facts or anecdotes about the Good Doctor were uncovered.

Overall this book is a nightmare package that would most likely put people off SF for life, instead of showing them what it's really like.

Finally, the title of the book is Pulsar 1, and for all our sakes I hope there will be no subsequent Pulsars !

Reviewed by Seán Moraghan

LIBRARY NEWS

This is a partial update for the library, covering April and May. We're working on a complete update since January 1st, which will accompany your next News-letter, and which will supplement your latest Library Booklist. If you haven't got that Booklist, please let us know so that we can give you one.

The following books were donated by the following people, to whom thanks: Alun Llewellyn, Paddy O'Connell, John McCarthy, J.J. Struben, et al.

ASIMOV (Isaac)	The Heavenly Host (juvenile)
ASPRIN (Robert)	The Cold Cash War
BALLARD (J.G.)	The Terminal Beach
BRACKETT (Leigh)	Alpha Centauri or Die !
BRADDON (Russell)	The Year of the Angry Rabbit
BRADLEY (Marion Zimmer)	The Bloody Sun
BRUNNER (John)	Stand on Zanzibar
CHANDLER (A. Bertram)	Spartan Planet
COWPER (Richard)	The Custodians
	Domino
DELANEY (Samuel R.)	The Einstein Intersection
DICK (Philip K.)	The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch
	We Can Build You
	The Far Call
DICKSON (Gordon R.)	The Genocides
DISCH (Tom)	Lord Tyger
FARMER (Philip José)	The Trouble with Tribbles (Star Trek)
GERROLD (David)	The Ultimate Threshold (ed) (Soviet SF)
GINSBURG (Mirra)	Pulsar 1 (ed)
HAY (George)	The Worlds of Frank Herbert
HERBERT (Frank)	98.4
HODDER-WILLIAMS (Christopher)	Swords against Tomorrow
HOSKINS (Robert)	The Dark Man
HOWARD (Robert E.)	The Dead Remember
	four Simon Rack novels: New Life for Old,
JAMES (Laurence)	Planet of the Blind, Starcross, and Backflash
	Don't Pick the Flowers
JONES (D.F.)	The Great Time Machine Hoax
LAUMER (Keith)	The Worlds of Fritz Leiber
LEIBER (Fritz)	The Strange Invaders
LLEWELLYN (Alun)	The Exile Waiting
MCINTYRE (Vonda)	Revelations
MALZBERG (Barry)	The Champion of Garathorm
MOORCOCK (Michael)	The Thurb Revolution
PANSHIN (Alexei)	The New Apocrypha
SLADEK (John)	Supermind
VAN VOGT (A.E.)	Underkill
WHITE (James)	Alien Embassy
WATSON (Ian)	After Nostradamus
WOLDBEN (A.)	
NEW WORLDS (magazine)	May 1961

MORE REVIEWS

The Ultimate Threshold, edited by Mirra Ginsberg (Penguin, £0.75 + VAT etc)

This is a collection of short stories by writers from the Soviet Union. I think it's the first such collection to appear in the West. (It isn't, actually. I seem to recall that Sphere published a similar anthology, called Vector, and edited by, I think, Brian N. Ball -ed.) It first appeared in 1970, the stories are all from the sixties.

I don't know why these stories are so unsatisfactory. Perhaps it's because I feel a certain impulse forcing me to approve, to compliment, to say: "Oh how wonderful" to an anthology of Soviet science fiction. Well, I can't. It's not as simple as saying that the Russians are unable to write speculative fiction. As well as the excellent We (by Yevgeny Zamyatin, available in Penguin -ed.) one recalls a certain Mazeltov or Asimuth or something who was quite big in the field. It goes deeper than that.

I suspect that the stories were chosen rather carefully. They're twee, and nice, and sickening. Damn it - they're JUVENILE. The stories are nice little pieces about wholesome robots and genteel aliens. Everyone is appallingly civilised and completely two-dimensional.

I hope not just for the sake of science fiction, but for all Soviet writing that these stories are not representative. I know that censorship is supposed to be quite strict in the USSR, but I don't think that that explains the lack of depth in these stories.

Perhaps, as an inducement to you to buy/read this book, I could extol it as Dr. Johnston did women preachers: "It's like a dog walking on its hind legs, it's not the fact that he does it well but that he does it at all" - or was it the other way round?

Reviewed by Eoin Bairead
Commissioned by P.J. Goode

Callahan's Crosstime Saloon by Spider Robinson (Ace Books)

Spider Robinson has won several SF awards over the last few years. He is, indeed, an "up-and-coming" if not an actually "arrived" author. Some would have it that, with Joe Haldeman, he represents the best new talent of the late seventies. Yet I find he is almost unknown in Ireland, and, I suspect, in Europe also. That is why I wanted to review this book, donated to the society (library -ed.) by our patron James White.

The similarities between Robinson and Haldeman are perhaps not as obvious as their differences, but I feel they are extremely important, for they will indicate any broadly based trends which SF of the eighties will have. It is difficult to isolate such trends when I have read only three books by Joe Haldeman, and only one by Spider Robinson. Yet I think I can see such trends appearing, not clearly enough to want to discuss them, but enough to want to read more by both authors. I will say that the concern for individual "human" beings which can be distinguished in their books is at variance with the traditional breakdown of people into "heroes" and "the masses".

This might lead one to suspect that I found Spider Robinson the greatest thing since the self-sharpening bread knife. He isn't. Unfortunately. But he is quite good. The emphasis on readability and coherence which seems to have been emphasised in writers' workshops in the sixties has paid off.

This is an extremely readable set of connected stories. In fact, not since Damon Runyon and Dashiell Hammett have I read an American author whose style and dialogue interact to produce such an enjoyable book to read.

My main criticism of the book is that the author attempts to give to the reader not only some good yarns, but also a philosophy, or more correctly an ethic. And it's not that he fails, or that this ethic has flaws - this would be a tolerable fault in an author who attempted such. No, it's that he chickens out. In the last two stories, instead of rounding off the collection in the style of the rest of the book, he takes what to my mind is a cheap escape from

the problem which he himself has posed: "How can human beings live together without blowing themselves to small pieces?"

You would have to read the book to comprehend what a disappointment this was. I strongly advise you to do so. Also, any other books by the same author which you find, I would be happy to acquire.

Reviewed by Eoin C. Bairread

The Genocides by Thomas M. Disch (Panther Granada, £0.85 + VAT etc)

This is a Disaster Novel, or "Yarn" as the unnamed blurb writer of the cover has it. Judith Merrill thought it "an easy contender for the best novel of the year". I think that lovers of Disaster Novels are a law unto themselves, and represent an easily distinguishable subsection of science fiction readers. I cannot count myself among them. Too many Triffids and Martians were consumed as a youth for me to take such works over-seriously.

This is a grand wee book. Disaster piles upon horror and death follows inferno for all concerned. Nothing seems to survive. If one thing doesn't get them another does, and with a gruesome and macabre glee at that.

Like most books of the genre I found that the principal character was the disaster itself, and the humans were distinctly secondary in importance. This is not so much a failing as a condition imposed by the plot. Indeed in many such books the instrument of the disaster gives the name to the book. It does, however, mean that I finish the book with a strange feeling of having spent an hour or two reading about human beings without ever getting to know them.

But that's only me. If you like that sort of thing it's certainly better than certain other such which have attained a certain notorious fame these last few years. I don't know if the editor will allow me to name these inferior offerings, so I won't even try, but if I mention Satan's Sledge as an example you might get my meaning. (I left that in, didn't I? -ed)

If you like either Disch or Disaster Novels this is for you. Panther bring out a regular list of science fiction novels, and the prices in their various sub-labels - Triad and Granada being two - are generally less than £1, and would be less than 90p were it not for the tax the Irish Government imposes on literacy.

(Editorial note: the situation concerning imprint or publishers' names is a bit different than indicated above. Granada Publishing Limited published paperbacks under a number of different imprints, including Panther, Mayflower, Paladin, Dragon, etc. until approx. 1977, when a new imprint saw the light, Triad, so called because this was a paperback publishing operation jointly set up by Granada and two hardback publishers, Jonathan Cape and, I think, Bodley Head. Most books published under the Triad imprint were in fact Panthers, and on the spine they were marked Triad Panther. This did not last long, and at present the imprints owned by Granada are marked on the spine Panther Granada, Mayflower Granada etc.)

Reviewed by Eoin C. Bairread

The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch by Philip K. Dick (Triad Panther, £0.85 + VAT)

This is a re-issue of a book which was published first in 1968, having been written three years earlier. That makes it 14 years old. It wears its years fairly well, but nonetheless it's interesting to think that fiction up to 30 years old can still be considered "modern".

The problem facing the characters in Stigmata is on the nature of reality, or should I say "Reality"? The eponymous character has a drug which can transport the user into a dream-world which is indistinguishable from the real one. A goodly part of the book is concerned with the efforts of the various drug takers to establish in which world they are.

I won't go into the plot in much detail, much less reveal the final dénouement, but I will mention my one criticism. In any book with a "separate Reality" as its theme the author leaves his readers guessing at the end if the book actually finished as it seems. Since this was the only thing I found wrong, I can only recommend this book.

Reviewed by Eoin C. Bairread

WANT ADS

In spite of a slow response, quite possibly due to the low number of ads published at the time, we intend to continue this column, inaugurated in the February/March Newsletter, on a regular basis. We will repeat the instructions published then, adapted suitably to the changes in the Committee and with the proviso that these instructions assume a return to normal in the postal situation, which at present looks unlikely for the immediate future.

All responses to ads should be sent to Moira Harrison, Secretary, ISFA, Kestrel Ridge, Vale of Avoca, Co. Wicklow. Please mark the outside of the envelope in the upper left corner "Ad Reply" or something similarly suitable, and mention the box number if appropriate at the head of your letter. Persons submitting ads should tell Moira whether they want them sent out, or if they will pick up any replies at the next meeting. If replies are to be forwarded by P&T, enclose a SAE please.

MYTHOPOEIKON, by Patrick Woodroffe (Dragon's World Books) wanted. Must be in good condition. Box AAE.

ANYTHING by John Barth wanted.
Box AAF.

SECTOR GENERAL SERIES. I'm looking for the first two books in this series by James White. Box AAG.

NEW WORLDS MONTHLIES, Nos 163 to and including 174 wanted by New Wave Fan and Magazine Collector. Box AAH.

ZELAZNY'S 'Avalon' books wanted. I'm looking for the entire series for my collection. Box AAI.

PLAYERS OF NULL-A by A.R. van Vogt wanted to complete the series.
Box AAJ.

VONNEGUT'S Canary in a Cat House, not available this side of the Atlantic, wanted by Kurt V, Jr, Fan. Box AAK.

ANY early, out-of-print, books by John Baxter wanted. Box AAL.

MONUMENT by Lloyd Biggle sought. No reasonable offer refused.
Box AAD.

50 SHORT SF TALES, edited by Isaac Asimov and Geoff Conklin, wanted.
Box AAM.

ANY ACE DOUBLES wanted by collector of same. Box AAN.

PRE-1955 BOOKS & MAGS. If you have any of these you want to get rid of to make room for your new stereo or whatever, I'll take them off your hands for my collection.
Box AAO.

PHILIP KENDRED DICK'S Solar Lottery and Cosmic Puppets wanted by desperate PKD freak.
Box AAP.

ALDISS HARDBACKS wanted. I'm looking for any Jonathan Cape edition of The Eighty Minute Hour and the Faber hardback of Report on Probability A.
Box AAR.

BALLARD'S The Drowned World wanted in the Gollancz hardback edition. Also Left Hand of Darkness by U.K. LeGuin, in any non-book club hardback edition. Box AAS.

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This Newsletter is copyright (c) 1979 by the Irish Science Fiction Association and/or the individual contributors. Enquiries should be addressed to Moira Harrison, Secretary, ISFA, Kestrel Ridge, Vale of Avoca, Co. Wicklow.