

# ISF NEWS

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SF IN THE CLASSROOM

KING DISCLAIMS  
LAWNMOWER MAN

FILM AND BOOK NEWS AND REVIEWS

FTL - Stranger than fiction



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## PRODUCTION

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## EDITORIAL

A new look means a new approach. In taking over from Brendan's sterling work on the last squumpteen issues of the newsletter, I've tried to keep to the same format, while adding some features that I hope will carry the eye easily through the magazine's content. Since I'm new on the job my first act is to acknowledge those whose support is crucial, and without whom I would have had to write it all myself. The reviewers, who continue to entertain and inform, Brendan Ryder, who is keeping me posted on the ISFA front, Paul Sheridan, who kindly gave permission to use his artwork on the cover, and Pádraig O Méalóid for several snippets of news and for letting me show off my fada ascii codes.

Special thanks are due to Frances Halpin who drew the logos and cartoons.

Also, to *Locus* and *Science Fiction Chronicle* (SFC), invaluable sources for all the latest news and gossip in the sf world.

**Michael Cullen**

NOTE: THE OPINIONS EXPRESSED IN THIS PUBLICATION ARE THOSE OF THE INDIVIDUAL CONTRIBUTORS AND DO NOT REPRESENT THOSE OF THE ISFA, EXCEPT WHERE STATED.

## Trek Spinoff

A spinoff from the *Next Generation* called *Star Trek Deep Space Nine* will start filming this month, according to SFC. Storylines and characters will occasionally mix with those of *Next Gen*. More details next issue.

And according to Critical Wave, two German fans are suing Paramount for stealing their idea and turning it into **Star Trek VI: The Undiscovered Country**.

## SF Channel Still Afloat

The 24-hour *Sci-Fi Channel* may yet go on air in the States. It has been taken over by the *USA Network*, one of the big cable players, and the debut is set for autumn with a prime time show ing of *Star Wars* [wow!]

## King News

So much news about the wunderking this month that I've decided to give him his own column. Okay, to start off with we have Stephen King on **Stephen King's Lawnmower Man** - "the biggest ripoff you could imagine, because there's nothing of me in there. It just makes me furious."

About the only connecting scene between the original story in **Night Shift** and the film, which stars Pierce Brosnan and which grossed \$17.5m in the US on its first two weeks, the maestro said "if you go out for popcorn, you'll miss it...My name shouldn't be on it...My name is my fortune, and it's the only name I've got." [Apart from Richard Bachman - ed]

King Story #2: Along with such notables as Amy Tan and Matt Groening, King played rhythm guitar and sang with the **Rock Bottom Remainders** at the annual book auction in Anaheim last month. As featured on *Entertainment Tonight*, the group were a sort of Nirvana for the older generation.

## Giger Game

A PC game called "Dark Seed" out this month from Cyberdreams Entertainment Software will feature artwork by H R Giger. Another called "No Mouth" is based on the original trapped-in-a-computer story "I Have No Mouth and I Must Scream" by Harlan Ellison.

## Magazine News

While other magazines are bought

(Continues over)

### Inverted Comments

"I wish I could boldly go where no man has gone before" - Garth (Dana Carvey)

"You can either do **Judge Dredd** excellently with me, or do it badly without me" - Arnold Schwarzenegger

"One time I arrived at his apartment to find him in his underwear, sitting cross-legged on the floor, happy as a lark. He was indexing one of his giant science book, sitting there placing 3 X 5 index cards in neat little piles around him" - Martin H Greenberg on his friend, the computer-hostile Isaac Asimov.

out and the readership plummets, *Science Fiction Age* will debut at the next Worldcon with a rumoured circulation of 65,000. The magazine will be bimonthly and full size, and the first issue will have an essay by Harlan Ellison. Half the content will be fiction, and they're now looking for stories (which have to be sf and between 4000 and 7000 words). Guidelines from *Science Fiction Age*, Box 369, Damascus MD 20872.

### Awards round up

The 1991 Nebula for best novel went to Michael Swanwick's **Stations of the Tide**. Best novella was **Beggars in Spain** by Nancy Kress, novelette, "Guide Dog" by Mike Conner, and best short story was Alan Brennert's "Ma Qui".

The Philip K Dick Award, and a \$1000 cash prize, went to Ian McDonald for **King of Morning, Queen of Day**. The nominations for the Bram Stoker Awards, given by and to members of the Horror Writers of America at the end of June, are, for best novel, **The MD**, by Thomas M Disch, **Needful Things** by Stephen King, **The Dark Tower III: The Waste Lands** by Stephen King, **Boy's Life** by Robert R McCammon, and **Summer of Night** by Dan Simmons.

The **Awards Round Up** award for the most novel award of 1992 goes to the James Tiptree Jr Memorial award, given to **White Queen** by Gwyneth Jones and **A Woman of the Iron People** by Eleanor Arna-

son. The plaque, in the shape of a typewriter, was made completely of chocolate.

According to John Brosnan in *The Primal Screen* (copyright 1991) "Harlan Ellison has taken legal action against [James] Cameron and the film's production company, Hemdale, claiming that [*Terminator*] borrowed too freely from a number of his works, including his story 'I Have No Mouth and I Must Scream' and an episode of the *Outer Limits* TV series called 'Demon With A Glass Hand'; the claim was settled out of court in Ellison's favour."

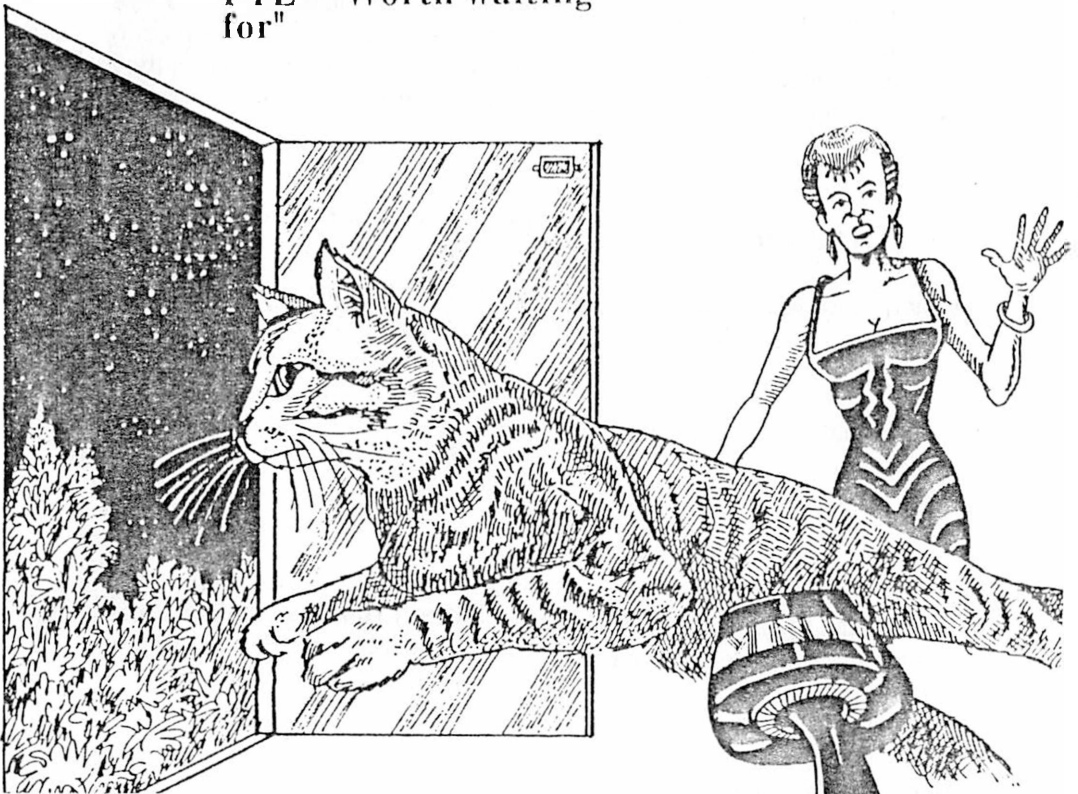
But in the issue of *Fear* magazine dated October 1990 there is the following:

#### "Retraction

"Issue 19 of *Fear* included a story on Harlan Ellison and **Terminator 2** in which we stated that the author was receiving a sum of money from the budget of the movie in regard to a plagiarism suit against James Cameron...We retract this story and apologise to both Mr Ellison and Mr Cameron for any inconvenience or embarrassment caused."

So what is the truth about Ellison and Terminator? I think we should be told.

## FTL - "Worth waiting for"



There's still no definite date set for FTL 12, according to editor John Kenny, but as a teaser you see on this page and the cover details from Paul Sheridan's artwork for the story "Vox Angelica".

The magazine was originally to appear in January, but although the illustrations and advertisements were ready it was decided to rethink distribution. Then designer Dave McKane withdrew for personal reasons, and Mark Smullen took over. At the same time, the printer they were scheduled to use went out of business.

Now John Kenny says there are some new staff members and a likely printer, and that "although FTL has been outrageously delayed there's no point in rushing out a shoddy product - it's worth waiting for."

Material has already been chosen for issues 13 and 14, in which there will be shorter fiction and more features, and it is hoped to run these two bimonthly so as to catch up with subscriptions.

## Aisling Gheal

Due to the current postal dispute the closing date for the competition has been extended to July 31. The rules for the competition were printed in the February Newsletter, and are available by telephone at 934712, evenings only.

## Committee Posts Vacant

Jonathan Redmond, Public Relations Officer, has reluctantly resigned from the committee due to pressure of work. On behalf of the ISFA the chairman would like to thank Jonathan for all the work to date. So we're looking for someone urgently, as promoting the association will be a very important task in the period leading up to Octocon. It can be a very rewarding position: the duties involve making contacts with other groups throughout the world, giving the occasional interview to the press, designing posters to advertise the monthly meetings etc. Interested? Contact the ISFA at 934712, evenings only.

*Note: You must be an ISFA member to hold the position.*

We also need a couple of other people to help out occasionally, so if you feel you could give us a hand contact us at the usual address.

## Postal Dispute

If you want to contact the ISFA during the current dispute please phone any time (there's an answering machine during the day). If you haven't received an issue of the Newsletter let us know and we'll put one aside

for you - we have most of the April and May issues to get out when the dispute ends. If you wish any back issues of the Newsletter they are available for 50p plus 30p p + p each by post (whenever it returns) or they may be ordered at the monthly meetings.

## ISFA Awards

The categories for the ISFA awards are included in this mailing. Bear in mind that the Awards refer only to material from 1991 - this means that everyone will have had a chance to read/see the nomination in question. The nominations in each category will be announced in the August Newsletter, and in Progress Report 2 from Octocon. The closing date for nominations is the July meeting, on Tuesday 7th. Don't forget you must be an ISFA member to nominate!

## SfEx '92

Any artists who have still not collected their work please note that there is a storage fee of £1 per week per piece in operation so please do make an effort to take it off our hands!

## In Brief...

Screenwise International are holding a competition, the winner of which will attend a two day script-writing course on 13-14 June. All you have to do is answer the question "Who wrote **Thelma & Louise?**" Answers to Screenwise International, Jasonia House, 23 Eustace

Street, Dublin 2. Their number is 710155 ext 26. \*

A report next month on the first Irish International Cartoon Festival, which was held in Rathdrum, Co Wicklow from Thursday 28 May to Monday 1 June.

*Dandelion Books* recently acquired over 100 first edition hardback review copies from the 60s, 70s and 80s, including Asimovs, Farmers, Harrison et al.

Claudia Andrei, who works in *Forbidden Planet* and exhibited at last Octocon, will have her own exhibition in September, sponsored by the Goethe Institut. There is also a feature on her work in the magazine *Skin Two*.

Andrew M Greeley's novel *The Final Planet*, the writer/priest's story of Seamus O'Neil's adventures in space, contains a reference to "the gunships Bernadette Devlin, Eamon Casey and John F Kennedy". The other two, all right, but since when does Bernadette Devlin have dangerous weaponry on board?

#### Classified Advertisement

A new multi-genre role-playing fanzine is going into production. The first issue should be out around August. Any submissions (role-playing rules, scenarios, short stories, art [black and white or colour!]) should be sent to 8/9 The Cherries, Grangewood, Rathfarnham, Dublin 16. If your submission is published you will receive - a free copy of ELMO.

How could you refuse?

## Conventions Update

NOVACON 2, 6-8 November 1992, Royal Angus Hotel, Birmingham. One of the oldest continuously running cons in Britain, going since 1971. GoH is Storm Constantine. Details from Bernie Evans, 121 Cape Hill, Smethwick, Warley, West Midlands B66 4HS. Membership £20 until October.

O3 - Octocon '92, 16-18 October, The Royal Marine Hotel, Dun Laoghaire, Dublin. Registration (until Sept 1) Attending £13, Supporting £6, Junior (under 16) £6. GoH Orson Scott Card. Other confirmed guests: Gill Alderman, Graham Andrews, Catherine Brophy, Diane Duane, Martin Duffy, Nicholas Emmett, Katherine Kurtz, Scott McMillan, Anne McCaffrey, Peter Morwood, Geoff Ryman, Michael Scott, James White. "Green" theme and a Tolkien celebration. Progress Report 1 now available to members only. Membership etc available from O3, 30 Beverly Downs, Knocklyon Road, Templeogue, Dublin 16. Telephone 934712 anytime. (Note: anyone wishing to help out on the organisation of the con ring the above number anytime - it's a big job!)

MEXICON 5, 28-31 May 1993, same address as for NOVACON. Focussing on written sf, still contacting potential guests. Previous guests include William Gibson and Howard Waldrop. Registration £18.

(Continues over)

CONTRAPTION, Roleplaying/gaming con, University of East Anglia, Norwich, 11-13 September 1992. Attending £18, supporting £9. GoH Steve Jackson. Enquiries to 4 Haddon Close, New Malden, Surrey, KT3 6DP.

sity SF Club. Includes news on AELITA, the largest SF con in Russia, and VOLGACON, an international con in Volgograd with 300 attendees.

Friends of Foundation Newsletter, March 1992, published by supporters of the Science Fiction Foundation, which is in financial trouble after support was withdrawn by the Polytechnic of East London.

## Publications received

Informational sVodka #4-5 (double issue), October 91-March 92. Published by the Moscow State Univer

## You'll kick yourself!



if you miss the next ISFA meeting, which takes place on July 7th. The topic is Alien Landscapes, and it's brought to you by Paul Sheridan, who did the excellent art on the cover. The May meeting was a screening of and a panel on the 1956 film classic **Forbidden Planet**, starring Leslie Nielsen.





Because of the postal strike we got no letters this month, so I've decided to use and extend something that was intended to be a letter for the last issue.

Dear Editor

Having been the co-ordinator and one of the judges for last year's Aisling Gheal competition, I feel that with the next one coming up fast I could share some of my thoughts on the subject of writing. I hope they don't sound conceited - I learned a lot from simply writing them down. They are the debris of one person's battle with that most dreaded of beasts, the Eason's 80-page A4 notepad.

\* First and foremost, accept that you're a writer. Whether you're halfway through your second novel or your second story or the second sentence of your first ever story, think of yourself as a writer. You have everything to gain, especially confidence, and nothing to lose. Avoid totally the dreaded "I'm not a real writer". As the old saying goes, the road to hell is paved with embarrassed writers who leave the room when their mothers tell the visitors about their works-in-progress.

\* Once you've accepted this, there are certain responsibilities that go

with being a writer. For instance, never, under any circumstances, write a scene or a piece of dialogue just because you think you should. Everything that goes into a story must belong there. A story is not an all-seeing, all-hearing account. It's what happened, in brief. There is no rule that says if a character leaves his house you have to describe the garden. Cut to him on the plane to Morocco if something interesting happens on the plane. If nothing interesting happens, invent something.

\* Another important responsibility is never, under any circumstances, make your character do or say something he wouldn't do or say. This involves you having the ability to create a whole human being. If you're not at that stage yet, for God's sake take someone you know and make them the character. Arthur Conan Doyle did it with Sherlock Holmes, who was based on one of his old teachers.

(Continued next month)



## The Naked Lunch

Starring Peter Weller, Judy Davis

Written & directed by David Cronenberg

People who've read William S. Burroughs' **The Naked Lunch** are divided into three sections; people who consider it a seminal novel and work of genius, people who consider it a piece of filth that should be banned, and people who consider it a crap book. I fall into the third category; I didn't find it offensive, except that I'd paid money for it and ended not even finishing it.

It was therefore with some trepidation that I shelled out more money to see what Cronenberg could do about turning an awful book that everybody agreed was unfilmable into a movie. I was pleasantly surprised. It was by no means a cinematic masterpiece, but I enjoyed it. Our hero is a cockroach exterminator, whose wife introduces him to the delights of injecting roach powder. Under the influence of the drug he becomes aware of a global conspiracy involving giant talking cockroaches, mugwumps and a host of other weird stuff.

The film starts with that famous quote from Hassan i Sabbah - "Everything is permissible, nothing is true". It is under the influence of this philosophy that both the book and film were created, and the result is a film that is very difficult to follow at times. you've had it. Any hope you may have had of grokking this movie will have gone out the window.

This is a film that brought out the best in all its participants; it was well written and excellently directed by Cronenberg, and Weller and Jullan Sands both turn in performances that suit Cronenberg's atmosphere perfectly. **The Naked Lunch** is occasionally funny, occasionally puzzling, occasionally bathetic. Like the book, I suspect that people will either really enjoy this film or they will walk out before the end. If you survive to the end of the film, you'll be rewarded by having seen a very strange, but very entertaining film.

## Wayne's World

Starring Mike Myers, Dana Carvey, Rob Lowe

Wayne's World "Whoa, dude!", quoth those of you who've seen the film. "Surely this movie, excellent though it is, is not science fiction?" Well, not really, and don't call me Shirley. However, given the hype this movie has received recently, and the fact that it contains the occasional allusion to **Star Trek**, I felt it was my moral duty to review the film, a decision that has nothing whatsoever to do with jumping on the **Wayne's World** bandwagon. Wayne and Garth host a public access television show titled, appropriately enough, *Wayne's World*. Evil Rob Lowe, a television "dude", to use the parlance, sees the show and buys the rights from our two heroes. It seems that things can't get worse, but then the bad guy also falls for Cassandra, Garth's babe. Things don't look well. When the bad guy as more brains, money and influence than the good guy, how can evil be

vanquished? At this point in a Wayne's World review, it's customary to use a phrase like "This is a deep, meaningful film - not!". I, however, will eschew such banalities in favour of critical analysis of a film that influenced the masses. Comparisons to *Bill & Ted* are inevitable, so I won't bother, except to note that the babes in this film get to say more than two words at a time. .

Although this is a film with what passes for a plot, it's made up of a number of set pieces, such as the Alice Cooper bit and the Bohemian Rhapsody bit. None, however, matches the end bit, which I can honestly say is one of the best endings to a movie I've seen. This is not a movie that you'll want to go and see once. This is a movie you'll watch every week in the cinema, and then buy when it comes out on video. Yeah, and monkeys might fly out of my butt. Damn, I said I wasn't going to do that.

**Robert Elliott**

#### Video Tips

##### **Tales from the Darkside - the Movie**

Forget the crap TV series. This anthology of three stories plus one "wraparound" is spooky, gooey, and boasts dishy Debbie Harry and contributions by Michael McDowell and George Romero. The directing by John Harrison is unusually excellent in a genre movie. "Cat from Hell" is based on a Stephen King story, and "Lot 239" on one by A Conan Doyle.

Also recommended: **Timescape**, starring Jeff Daniels.

#### Video Review



##### **The Unholy**

(Vestron 1988)

Starring Ben Cross, Ned Beatty, and Hal Holbrook.

Very few films have the power to scare me, but I have to admit that this is one of the few. Not surprising in a film where the most light-hearted moment is a phone call from Hell! The story centres on a young priest, Father Michael (Cross) who has been chosen to fight The Unholy - a devilish entity which manifests itself between Ash Wednesday and Easter Sunday, when the church is dark and the altar is bare. The Unholy takes one who is consecrated to be its sacrifice, tricking him into sinning in some way before it can take him.

Father Michael takes over the Church of St Agnes, which has been closed for the past three years, after the mysterious deaths of the two previous priests. He also takes on the battle to conquer evil, to defeat the Unholy.

I thoroughly enjoyed this film. The plot is well-thought-out and fast-moving, and the special effects are excellent. The only things I didn't particularly like were the Ghoulies-style creatures. But this is just a minor flaw. Watch. Be scared. Enjoy!!

**Theresa O'Connor**

Videos for review come from  
*Video Town*, Main Street, Leixlip,  
telephone 6242719.



## "Stephen King likes picking on kids - Discuss"

Such is life. It was only after the interview was concluded that I found out that Tony Keating, who teaches the fiction of Stephen King, among other subjects, as part of his media studies course in Liberties College, grew up around the corner from me in Ballyfermot.

And it was only when I listened to the tape that I heard him talk effusively about the rich symbolism of **Blade Runner** and Thomas Hardy's suspect proprieties in a refreshingly familiar accent.

For most of the interview Tony spoke unprompted about horror, the course, and his students. I could barely get in half a dozen questions between his answers, which of course is the way it should always be.

**"My sister Tipp-exed out the cover because it was frightening"**

into the novel, and the novel will start to frighten them then. Some of the more gullible ones wouldn't read it at night, for example, they'd only read it during the day. In fact my sister-in-law Tipp-exed out the cover because it was frightening, she claimed it was frightening her kids.

"This was with the 16, 17, 18-year-olds, but I got the same reaction from the 19, 20, 21-year-olds, they would have already had a general interest in that genre. So that would be the course novel, whereas in the Leaving Cert it's Jane Austen, or Charles Dickens."

He was given the freedom, because the college offers vocational courses rather than the strict syllabus, to introduce something different.

"I felt that the English element wasn't suitable for the kind of person coming in, that it wasn't suitable for them. My thoughts were that it should be

something interesting to them, something that they're going to want to read. And I'm a horror buff anyway, I'm very much into that."

"**Dracula** is a Victorian novel, it's not easy to read. And they start off saying 'This is crap. Can we not watch the film'. They gradually get

"So they study **Dracula**, and a novel of their choice, usually it's Stephen King, or Clive Barker. And then backed up with some short stories,

J G Ballard for writing, and **New Worlds** is a science fiction anthology that I use quite a lot, just to describe very interesting and unusual things to do with English - because it is quite innovative what is done in sf and horror.

"This was a new course.

We do a lot of innovation in this school. Because of the location - a lot of ordinary courses don't work here, and the school is interested in suiting the courses to the likes and abilities of the kids coming in."

"What I do with [the movie of **Salem's Lot**] for instance, I would look at technical effects. We look at what I call the Danny Glick scene, the initial scene is the kid in the room, and he's making models, and then the music starts to build up with your heart beat, and then it stops, there's silence, and you're immediately alert. And then there's the scratching on the window. People have phobias, so King is playing on people's phobias. We have more music, and the mist

building up, and the kid comes to the window and says 'Open the window', and the audience is going 'No, don't' in their own minds, the kid is walking towards the window and they're going 'No, don't, he's going to bite you', it's kind of a music hall thing, 'It's behind you', it's a fairly cheap trick, but it works. And then the kid grabs the cross and puts it up, and we hear bells. And directly after that we have a 'bool' scene,

there's silence, and the door flies open, and it's Dad coming in to check he's okay.

"We look at what I call the Danny Glick scene..."

"There's two or three different tricks there, the bool, he's behind you, the anticipation, which are technically easy to identify. And they might be able to

apply to video production then, they make some quite good horror shorts, using those techniques for their final project, if they're interested in that kind of area. People are quite morbid actually, a lot of people this year have set their projects in graveyards, they're obsessed with death, for some strange reason."

Does King stand up to the kind of scrutiny that we're used to applying to Dickens and Hardy?

"Dickens would describe the workhouse. We've seen **Oliver!** on film, so we know what a workhouse is like, so King would just have to men-

"King is like radio"

tion the workhouse, and we'd fill in the rest ourselves. So King is like radio, in a sense, he gives you the cues, and you imagine, which is actually more frightening. He

wouldn't stand up to standard criticism. His characters, in comparison to Dickens', would be seen as shallow, but there's no need to go into it in that kind of depth anymore. In that sense he stands up, he's a good yarn-spinner. He does have certain formulas he repeats - victimising little kids, for example. He builds up sympathy for a character, and then he either gets run over by a truck, or in it, I think it was, the first kid that's

eaten is the one he's introduced the most. When the monster is in the shore, the first kid he grabs is the one we have the attachment to.

There's a book of King's called **Danse Macabre**, which is an analysis of the horror genre, and obviously the man knows what he's talking about. The trick of good writers is to appear very simple, like the Japanese haiku poems. I think Stephen King is a great writer, a great English writer."

When can we expect horror and sf in the national curriculum?

"With the new Leaving Cert and the new Junior Cert coming in, a lot of the stuff which would be sf is more acceptable, because it doesn't have the sexual overtones of horror, the blood-and-guts. Most people are seeing the sense now of teaching something that the kids themselves find some relevance in, cause that's half the battle, if they're interested in doing it. I could see a space between Art and English, where the comic would be a very good thing to look at.

"The kids are more visually literate now, and I think teachers are beginning to realise that, and starting to exploit the medium.

"It's coming. In the Senior Cert there's an option for media studies, video and photography work. It's a psychological shift, in the fact that staff have to let go of the fact that they're an expert."

In his teaching Keating brings in the historical background of, say, **Dracula**, to complement what is now a familiar story.

"Stoker was very pro-American. Whereas the Victorian people of the time, kind of, Americans were yokels. So the Quincy character in **Dracula** is a very kind of go-getting, yahoo, gung-ho, very positive character. To the Victorians the Americans were just bums, basically, loud colonials. But Stoker had a great respect for them, and his American character is quite unusual for the time.

"Stoker's American character is quite unusual for the time"

"That kind of level of analysis is quite available to you. Then there's the whole thing of the Anti-Christ, **Dracula** drinks blood to take life, you drink Christ's blood to give life, there's this whole blood idea.

"People don't realise that there's that depth of analysis. Plus it's very easy then to shunt from the written media to the movies, how the novel was transferred across.

"I'd teach the whole medium. I'd usually start off with fairy tales, with "Little Red Riding Hood", and the whole thing of loss of virginity, and blood, and I'd move on then to Angela Carter, **The Company of Wolves**, then we do **Dracula**, and references to **Frankenstein** and **Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde**, the archetypes, because all horror fiction is based on three archetypes. Four if you include ghosts, which I steer clear of because it's too wide.

"So you've got ghosts, vampires, things - monsters, in other words, and changelings. And you have stock characters, which you can take from fairy tales first of all. You have the wicked person, it's usually an old woman, then you have the man that's a bit soft, the stepfather, the man who gets fooled by the wicked woman, you have the dark handsome boy, you have the girl, who is a virgin throughout, and then at the end kind of loses her virginity, you have a code for it, and there are minor characters throughout. You can break up most of children's fiction and horror fiction into those stereotypes, they crop up again and again.

"One of my favourites is the black-and-white **Nosferatu**, which is what got me interested in the first place. I was a small kid in my granny's house, and I was allowed to stay up late, and this thing called 'Silents Please' came on, it was a series that ran, I think it was on RTE, and this thing came on. This bald guy called Max Von Schenck, I think it was, with huge big long nails, it completely fazed me, and I must have had a morbid fascination for that sort of thing after that."

How do the students cope with the radical departure from ordinary English class?

"There's a vast repository of knowledge. This is a subject they can come to as an expert. There are two models of teaching. I'm here, you're there, I have to fill you up. That's Gradgrind. I don't hold with that sort

of thing. Then there's the type where the teacher sets the agenda, but people can contribute. With that, teachers get afraid, because suddenly they're not the expert.

"People who wore Levi's were hippies, and we tended to beat them up"

"They're bringing a like and an expertise into the situation, and we're saying to them what you know is actually valid. We look at ads as well, we do a whole section on Levi 501s. I do the history of the 501 Jean. When I was 15 you were considered odd if you wore Levi's, it was Wrangler.

People who wore Levi's were hippies, and we tended to beat them up."

The shift in emphasis at the blackboard has led to a different kind of peer pressure in the yard.

"Delicatessen is the big thing at the moment," Tony tells me. "You're nothing in this school if you haven't seen **Delicatessen**."

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Interview by Michael Cullen



## New Age SF - Racist Heinlein? - BSE-horror

### TIME IN MIND

Kathlyn S Starbuck

Grafton, 319pp, UK £3.99

After my last, mercifully misattributed, attempt at reviewing a book I decided that this time I would do a Hatchet Job and deliberately chose for review purposes a book that I would never have bought for myself. With an Author whose name screams drippy hippy sentimentality and a cover illustration featuring what looks suspiciously like a New Age Fantasy Matriarch complete with crystals I thought it would be like shooting fish in a barrel. On opening the cover and discovering that Kathlyn S Starbuck is also known as Mrs Raymond E Feist I felt vindicated in judging the book by its cover. I was wrong.

This was in fact a very enjoyable New Age time travel science fictionish type book. I was right about the crystals though. The setting for the story is a future where the population has been decimated, not by war, but by pestilence brought on any over crowding in cities. A basically agrarian society has developed in its stead where most possess some psionic ability and all practice mediation with the full new age panoply of crystals, incense, and higher souls. The higher souls we meet seem to be external to the characters that they guide and not

merely an expression of their higher selves. Rather they seem to be some kind of cosmic Boy Scouts doing their good deed for the day by advising the characters and teaching them better ways to meditate. Once they have done this they shuffle off to be replaced by yet another higher soul eager to do its good deed.

The plot is a straightforward conflict between progress and stagnation, with progress represented by Cia, she of the cover, and Ian, her psionically deaf-mute son, fighting against a massively powerful telekinetic bully who wants to do something bad. That's part of the problem with this book. While it's abundantly clear that Drove Gardner is evil and obviously has some kind of hidden agenda, it remains resolutely hidden throughout. Ian is pivotal to the conflict and to protect him from Gardner his mother hides him in time by bringing his mind back to the 20th century and stashing it in the mind of a 20th century telepath, who happens to be female. This central part of the book provides some light humour and almost as an aside offers some new theories on autism.

The book reads easily and keeps a grip on you for as long as you're reading, but once you put it down a couple of niggling questions appear, particularly regarding the higher souls. Why did they allow the community to stagnate for so long and where was Gardner's higher soul while he was terrorising and abusing all and sundry? What are the motivations of the higher souls, do they all come from the same place and is there dissension amongst them? Towards the end Ms Starbuck hints



strongly at another book and I hope she deals with these issues in it. All in all it was an excellent way to spend a Sunday afternoon, and it wasn't even raining.

CONOR GALLAGHER

## **POLAR CITY BLUES**

Katherine Kerr

Grafton Books, 347pp, UK £3.99 pb

Having read most of the Devery series, I was quite interested in how Katherine would fare in a modern setting. I wasn't disappointed. As it says in other reviews: "There's cops, there's drugrunners, there's whores and pimps...there's a weird bacterium, a lot of computer jockeying, and even more politics; there's detective work, social commentary and lots of action. It's a strong soup and a hell of a lot of fun. You should buy this one!" My thanks to **Locus**. What else is left to say?

The main characters are a psychic, Mulligan, an alien, Nunks, a very competent female, Lacey, and a sentient computer called Buddy. Sundry aliens and humans add colour and depth. The story begins with the murder of a carli, an alien creature, one of the dominant members of the Confederation. Anyone who is witness to the crime is likely to disappear shortly. Mulligan, the psychic, is asked to "read" the murder scene and give a report. He conks out! Very suspicious.

Somewhere in the story another major player enters, and the weird bacterium has a role to play also. Join Buddy, the jealous computer, in his quest for autonomy and his

search for Love. See various low-lives, mental powers and humour in action. Watch Lacey come to terms with her relationship with Mulligan!

Katherine Kerr has created a world of believable characters which she will probably visit again in other books. Not to do so would be a waste.

CHRIS O'CONNELL

## **WULF**

Steve Harris

Headline Features

In Steve Harris' second novel, **Wulf**, madness and violence immerse the remote village of West Waltham, and the unlikely young Heater Heatley finds that he has been chosen to combat the evil. He is helped by girlfriend Ember, the mysterious and somewhat degenerate Beetle the Biker, and a mythical creature called Wulf.

The evil appears to emanate from a blighted field called God's Teardrop, where past and present merge in a primitive call to the people of the village. Evil evoked by a particular spot is easily accepted by readers of the genre. However, Harris introduces another element, a human strain of BSE which also runs rife in the village, and the merging of the two did not work well, and certainly lacked cohesion. I kept wondering which was the real catalyst and finally suspected that the BSE existed only for added effect.

Despite this one jarring point, **Wulf** is a fairly good read, the characters grow as the story unfolds, and it offers some particularly tense moments.

D O'BRIEN

## **FARNHAMS'S FREEHOLD**

Robert A Heinlein

Orbit, 299pp, UK £4.50

This book was first published in 1963 and set around that year. It's very interesting to see how attitudes have changed in the last 20-odd years. After reading the book I'm sorry to say these changes in attitude have ruined the book.

Herbert Farnham builds a fallout shelter at a time of growing mistrust between East and West. When the three-minute-warning is given he, his family and their houseboy run for safety. When they emerge, they find themselves in a wilderness, though not the one they expected. They find themselves in a world apparently untouched by Man's handiwork. They were actually transported through time 2000 years where a new civilisation exists, one where only dark-skinned people, Indians, Africans, are treated as humans. White-skinned people are bred basically as cattle.

This book starts off fairly competently. It's basically a family drama, Heinlein describing the Farnhams' problems and tragedies. The style changes when the future civilisation is contacted. What was a reasonably fast-moving plot becomes a wade through treacle. The new city, the inhabitants and their customs are well-thought out, but they do nothing. The last 100 pages are just plain boring. Also, the set-up of the city is radical. Radical that is for 1963, when the book would have been called revolutionary. Now however it's just racist. Heinlein

goes overboard with his ideas concerning this future culture and philosophy. It's very unsettling. Maybe we need a taste of our own medicine. What happened in the 60s to racial minorities, mainly Africans and Asians was bad enough but do we need reminding now? This book can and is probably meant to be taken very seriously, and racism is a serious problem. But Science Fiction is not the genre in which to voice these ideas. It just doesn't work. I'd advise everyone to pass it over unless you're a fan of either Heinlein or moral debates.

GERARD O'BRIEN

[In response to this review, may I recommend certain little-known titles dealing with, respectively, the class struggle, racism, morality as opposed to the greater good, and the abuse of power. The books are *The Time Machine*, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, *The Dead Zone*, and *Frankenstein* - Ed]

## **BLACK TRILLIUM**

Marion Bradley, Julian May and Andre Norton

Grafton, 491pp, UK £4.99

This is not the type of book I expected as a collaboration between three well-known fantasy writers. It's about 200 pages shorter than I imagined and the storyline is a little thin but this of course didn't make it a bad book.

Three princesses are given a necklace each when they are born, containing parts of black trillium, a magical plant, the necklaces are

destined to protect the princesses in their times of trouble and to aid them in fulfilling their own destinies. When their father's kingdom is destroyed, the three embark on pre-ordained tasks, finding love, treachery, maturity and one or two surprises along the way.

As I said before, this is a relatively short work for a collaboration but that's not a disadvantage. This book is well-written and well thought out. The three main characters are accurately drawn but the bit about them maturing is a little old-fashioned. Still, it doesn't mar the book. It's easy to read, and a lot happens so no criticism there. The only fault I found was with the magic. I think the idea was to leave it as a mysterious power, above nature really. It isn't explained properly however and the subject becomes rather confusing.

Overall I found it a good read, very entertaining, and I hope you'll agree.

GERARD O'BRIEN

## THE HOUSE OF THUNDER

Dean R Koontz

Headline, 311pp, £15.99

The House of Thunder is a cavern in Pennsylvania where, as a student, Susan Thornton undergoes a traumatic experience when her boyfriend is killed. She graduates and becomes a physicist. She has a car crash and loses her memory. Or does she?

The storyline carries the reader with a few bumps up to page 281 where it changes from a tale of horror to a spy thriller with the last thirty pages reading more like a book synopsis than a fitting end to a horror story.

This is one of Dean R Koontz's earlier books, first published under the pseudonym of Leigh Nichols, and it appears to be one of those plots that had to be resolved to beat the deadline. Occasionally these resolutions fit into the plot with a semblance of order, but other times, as in the case of **The House of Thunder**, where the reader feels cheated, it is not acceptable.

This ending is self-destructive and lacks the finesse of his later books.

If you are starting to read Dean R Koontz, **The House of Thunder** is not the place to begin. He has written better, much better.

NU LYONS

## LORD VALENTINE'S CASTLE

Robert Silverberg

Pan Fantasy, 506pp, UK £5.99

The first book in the bestselling Majipoor Trilogy.

This story concerns Valentine, AKA Lord Valentine. He wakes up in a foreign land suffering from amnesia. Joining a wandering band of jugglers, he finds that he has some skills at juggling also. Snatches of memory return, aided by the various members of the troupe.

Valentine discovers that he has been mind swapped, and his rightful place is as Coronal, one of the Major Powers of Majipoor. The other powers are the Pontifex, the King of Dreams, and the Lady of the Isle. Each has an important role to play in the organisation of the planet. The introduction of the "false" Coronal will upset the

balance of Power and will ultimately ruin the Kingdom.

So, from a position of weakness, Valentine has to regain his memory, gather a band of followers, get to Castle Mount, and retake his throne. This is quite an undertaking. After all, he is a blond-haired man and the Coronal (his real body) is dark-haired. How can anyone believe in mind-transfer? But the fake Coronal has imposed a number of unusual and cruel decrees. Some people would wonder, and others would just accept that all rulers are crazy.

The book is filled with incredible variety, new creatures, rich characterisations, poetic descriptions and more. I found it enthralling and can do scant justice to the storyline. In fact I wouldn't want to say too much about it, for fear of spoiling anything.

Naturally I am searching eagerly for the companion volumes.

CHRIS O'CONNELL

## RENEGADES

Shaun Hutson

Sphere, 434pp, UK £4.99 pb

British Intelligence (?) [? - ed] meets the IRA and Gilles de Rais' personal bodyguard. This book gives the feeling of two totally separate stories trying desperately to meet at some point, which they do but not without a certain amount of guffawing and flashbacks of "Plan 9 from Outer Space"-plotting.

The first story revolves around Doyle, a "live for today - we don't give a fuck" British spy who is afraid of nothing and cares for no one. He is sent to Northern Ireland to

capture a renegade IRA man who is intent on keeping the North troubled. He is sent with an extremely attractive female operative, with whom he definitely does not get involved (well maybe a little bit).

The second story concerns Mark Channing, an historian who is examining a ruined church which once belonged to Gilles de Rais. In it he finds a stained glass window buried in a wall. When he uncovers it strange things start happening. On the window are some Latin words and some of de Rais' favourite pastimes - children being mutilated.

The two stories meet when the man, one Mr Callahan, who supplies guns to the renegade IRA men, gets his hands on the window. He then tries to unleash the ultimate power upon the world, ha! ha! ha!

The stories are okay but the way that they meet is a little bit 1950s-ish.

RONAN FITZGERALD

## PSYCHOMECH

Brian Lumley

Grafton, 351pp, UK £3.99 pb

Keeping with his predilection for the hidden powers of the mind Lumley once again issues forth more ESP intrigue.

This time, however, he leaves out the 300-year-old vampire and the KGB Secret Service and instead involves ex-Nazi officers and British soldiers.

Garrison is a soldier who suffers from bad dreams. I mean bad dreams. He dreams that he is riding on a machine with a black bitch at

his back, and he is heading to a room within "The Black Tower". In another dream he envisages a package exploding in front of him.

While he is stationed in Northern Ireland he saves a German industrialist's family from an explosion in their hotel room, but is left blind as a result of the blast.

After his rehabilitation the German decides to repay Garrison for his actions. He repays him in the highest way possible.

He includes Garrison in one of the biggest ESP experiments the world has ever seen (or not seen in this case as it's secret) and then he promises him everything. Money, power, women, the WORLD etc (you know the usual mad scientist spiel).

Does Garrison reach his own personal Nirvana?

Read the book and see.

RONAN FITZGERALD

## **SERPENT'S SILVER**

CHIMAERA'S COPPER

Piers Anthony and Robert E Margroff

Publisher unavailable

These two books are the second and third books in a series which I believe will continue for at least seven books. The second book, *Serpent's Silver*, deals with two lines out of a prophecy which seems to apply to a Roundear called Kelvin. The third book deals with another two lines, and it seems that there are a lot more lines to follow, which implies a lot more books.

The books are situated on a world inhabited by people who have pointed ears (no, not Vulcans). On this world there are several people with round ears, and these apparently came from Earth, or at least some of them. On this world there is a portal which only allows roundears to travel through to alternative worlds.

One of the main characters in *Serpent's Silver* travels to one of these worlds where he meets the girl of his dreams and saves her from a silver serpent and then eventually saves the kingdom from a ruthless tyrant and saves his father, who I assume had somehow been captured in the first book.

The third book *Chimaera's Copper* takes up where the second book left off. However in this book there are too many coincidences to make it credible. They are simply too many to list. The book is completely spoiled because of this and I cannot find anything complimentary to say about it.

These two books are simply the beginning of what I think will be a very long series. I don't hold out much hope for the series to be any good; I haven't read the first book in the series, *Drag on's Gold*, and I don't intend to. The two books are simply bad Science Fiction/Fantasy.

STEPHEN B YOUNG

## Drabble

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## Competition

A hundred words may seem like an artificial limit to place on a story, but in fact the constraint leads to interesting effects and lessons, especially in science fiction/fantasy/horror.

For the beginner, a target of 100 words is something realistic, affordable, and you can see the results of your efforts fairly quickly.

For the more experienced writer who tends to write 100 words in one piece of dialogue, the limit forces them to cut out every needless comment, every aside, to describe events just as fully but in a single sentence or turn of phrase. A Drabble should be the essence of a story.

For both, the form is also a safety valve for discharging all those ideas which get stuck in your mental net, flounder around for a while, then jump out if they think they're not needed. Most ideas writers get aren't used simply because they don't have the time. A Drabble may not ensure the immortality of its author but it is a form for ideas. It's also related in more ways than one to the

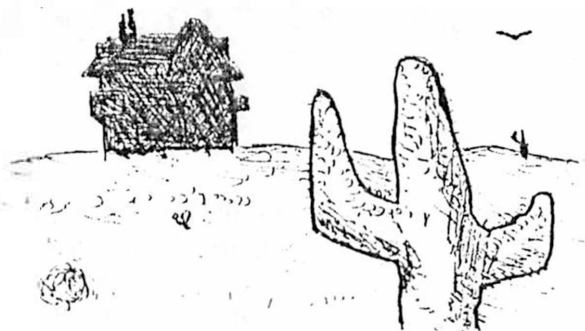
great-grandfather of all fiction, the joke.

In association with Easons, we're offering prizes and publication in the Newsletter to the best Drabbles received. You can hand them in at the monthly meeting or post them to the address on the inside cover, if there is any post. If we get enough submissions then we will give the prize on a monthly basis, otherwise bimonthly. The prize this time is a £5 Easons book token.

Below is one example of the genre to get you thinking. Although many Drabbles are humorous this is not a requirement for yours. We would be grateful though if it had a passing connection to science fiction, horror, fantasy, western, bodice-ripping, or horticulture.

### Interview with a Lodger

The very moment my parents introduced me to Mister Alucard, I knew a terrible secret lay hidden in his name. After dinner that evening, I went up to my room. For nearly an hour I lay on my bed with paper and pencil, trying to figure it out. Then finally it came to me. By rearranging the letters of our new lodger's name, I came up with "UCLA rad". The man was a campus activist! I went to sleep that night dying to tell my father, so that he would chuck the impudent fellow out. How bitingly clever I am!



## MY FAVOURITE BOOK

Robert Neilson

Why did I ever say yes to this? I have no favourite book. So what do I do? Act the intellectual ponce and pick something like Plato's Republic or trivialise the whole show by going for Winnie the Pooh or The Lion The Witch and the Wardrobe (both of which, incidentally, I could make a supportable argument for)?

Well first of all I decided to cut down the size of the playing field by limiting myself purely to SF (although this hardly helps because almost anything, including the above-mentioned books, can be considered as part of the genre). Secondly, I thought I'd pick something that while obviously a personal favourite, you are unlikely to have read. Which left me with the still difficult choice between Titus Groan by Mervyn Peake, several novels by Philip K. Dick and the book I finally plumped for: The Hawkline Monster by Richard Brautigan.

The what? By who?

In reverse order, Richard Brautigan was a long-haired hippy type born in the Pacific North-West of America in 1935 who wrote some very short but brilliant novels and then croaked himself. The Hawkline Monster is, according to its subtitle, a Gothic Western. The action concerns a couple of cowboys who kill people for a living. They are murderous but not without feeling as the opening action demonstrates when, after travelling to Hawaii by ship and suffering terribly from seasickness, they decide to let their target live after observing him at work in the fields with his young son. On their return to the States they are engaged by a mysterious and beautiful Indian girl (Native American for the politically correct) to travel to the armpit of nowhere in order to deliver her mistress from the curse of the Hawkline Monster.

On arrival at the home of Miss Hawkline, a Gothic mansion in the middle of a desert which is somehow surrounded by snow, the Indian girl slowly transforms into Miss Hawkline's twin sister. (Pretty weird, huh?) Then after having had their brains fucked out by the Hawklines and their heads fucked about by the mysterious (yet again) chemicals invented by the Hawklines' father and which may have caused his disappearance (although he could have been eaten by the monster), our cowboy heroes set off in search of the monster which inhabits the ice caverns upon which the house was built.

All I can say about The Hawkline Monster is that it is beautifully written in Brautigan's unique, spare, straightforward prose style. At times his phrasing is almost child-like in its approach and simplicity, but this is a child of unnatural beauty and intelligence.

If The Hawkline Monster is still available it will reward the effort of searching it out. My edition (which has yet to be returned by the last bum I loaned it to) was published by Picador at the ridiculous price of £1.25 and is of no more than novella length. If you ever have a desire to write fiction, and even if you don't, do yourself a favour and check out how this man used the English language.

science fiction

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In your Newsletter next month:

Robert Elliott and Michael Carroll went to  
Inconsequential and their report of the  
experience is honest, thought-provoking, and  
a serious indictment of the organisation of  
modern conventions - Not!!!

Also, a competition to find the worst movie  
title, and all the usual features and news.

Cover art: detail from Paul  
Sheridan's illustration of "Vox  
Angelica". See story on page 5.