

THE BIRMINGHAM SCIENCE FICTION GROUP

(Honorary Presidents: Brian W. Aldiss
and Harry Harrison)

Number 146

October 1983

The Birmingham Science Fiction Group has its formal meeting on the third Friday of each month in the upstairs room of the Ivy Bush pub on the corner of Hagley Road and Monument Road, Edgbaston, Birmingham 16. There is also an informal meeting on the first Tuesday of each month at the Old Royal pub on the corner of Church Street and Cornwall Road, Birmingham 3. (Church Street is off Colmore Row.) New members are always welcome. Membership rates are £3.50 per person, or £5.50 for two people at the same address. The treasurer is Margaret Thorpe, 36 Twyford Road, Ward End, Birmingham B8 2NJ.

OCTOBER MEETING.

Friday October 21 at 7:45 pm

SHAUN HUDSON is our guest this month. This meeting is arranged by Steve Green, so here are a few words from him to introduce Shaun.

"I first encountered the bizarre imagination of Shaun Hudson a couple of months back on Channel Four (it was my turn to watch that week); Shaun was guesting on the youth-orientated current affairs show EAR TO THE GROUND and doing his best to bewilder the anchorgirl. 'Do you consider yourself to be a good writer?' she asks, ready to pounce; 'I'm a commercial writer' he replies, whipping the line of questioning from under her. Shaun's lack of self-illusions and straightforward approach to his writing career immediately suggested him to me as a Brum Group guest, and thankfully the rest of the committee agreed; somewhat surprised by the offer, Shaun took time off to contribute a slightly dubious account of his life." (See next page for this and a review of his latest book.)

ADMISSION -- Members: 60p. Non-members: £1.

NEXT MONTH:

November 18: Our guest is Alan Moore, one of the most prolific and most talented writers in British comics.

Currently working on the acclaimed "Marvelman" and "V For Vendetta" strips in the excellent WARRIOR, Alan frequently voyages into sf territory, often with a humour rare in the field. His latest coup is a contract to script SWAMP THING for DC, making Alan the first British writer to make an impact on the American market. He's also a damn fine speaker, as anyone who attended Cymrucon II last year will readily testify. (Steve Green)

Shaun by Shaun

I was born, in 1958, in Letchworth, Hertfordshire. A place that was so quiet its twin town was Highgate Cemetary. Which was fine until we started to get exchange visitors.....

I was invited to leave school at 18 and, after failing to make the grade as a journalist, I decided to have a crack at writing. This decision was brought about after I'd read possibly the worst book in the history of the civilized world; namely "Night Of The Crabs" by Guy N. Smith who is to horror writing what Rudolph Nureyev is to heavy industry.

My first novel was published in 1980, when I was 21. It was a war novel, set on the Eastern Front (who says every first novel is autobiographical?). Someone described it as gutsy. Quite apt considering there were guts on nearly every page.

I then went on to write four more war novels but then turned to horror with "Slugs". Everything started to happen after that; a) people began avoiding me in the street, b) every amateur gardener for miles around started telling me how to get rid of the little devils and c) it became a best-seller.

I followed this with "Spawn", both novels having received merit awards from Marks & Spencers for boosting the sales of underwear.

Known variously as 'The Man in Black', 'The Nightmare Maker', or, to my friends, 'that nutter that writes those sick books', I enjoy a certain noteriety and now, at 24, I have written 21 novels, 12 of which have been bought by various publishers.

When not writing, my hobbies include the cinema (I'm a film fanatic, having seen over 8,000 films in the last seven years), listening to heavy rock music and sticking pins in wax effigies of Jeffrey Archer.

I don't smoke, I gave up drinking about five years ago, tried drug abuse (I used to shout insults at bottles of paracetamol) but became a workaholic instead. I work under five pseudonyms in addition to my own name.

I live with my fianee, Belinda, who, miraculously, has not had to undergo psychiatric treatment of any kind since meeting me. We were manacled together after meeting at a cinema where I used to work. I had four jobs before becoming a professional writer, all of which I was sacked from.

I'm working on my next novel at the moment, another horror opus whichs hould do for the sales of meat what "Slugs" did for lettuces.

I've appeared on numerous radio shows and also a couple of TV programmes, one of which prompted a viewer to write in and complain that I should be "...put inside for life as being a danger to society." Well, you win some, you lose some.....

SHAUN HUDSON

SPAWN by Shaun Hudson, reviewed by ANN THOMAS.

Imagine Walter (TV's modern day village idiot) working at a hospital as a porter. Only because he started the fire many years ago, that Kentucky-fried his baby brother, he cannot bring himself to burn the abortions which is one of his duties. He buries them instead, and during an electrical storm (thank you Dr Frankenstein, that will be all...) lightning strikes revives the little horrors who then decide to wreak vengence on their mummies and anybody else they fancy. Add a psychopathic scythe-murderer and more blood and guts than your average Sam Peckinpah movie, and you've got a best-seller!

News~

THE 1983 HUGO AWARD WINNERS:

BEST NOVEL: Foundation's Edge by Isaac Asimov.

BEST NOVELLA: Souls by Joanna Russ.

BEST NOVELETTE: Fire Watch by Connie Willis.

BEST SHORT STORY: "Melancholy Elephants" by Spider Robinson.

BEST NON-FICTION BOOK: Isaac Asimov: The Foundations Of Science Fiction by James Gunn.

BEST PROFESSIONAL EDITOR: Edward L. Ferman.

BRST PROFESSIONAL ARTIST: Michael Whelan.

BEST DRAMATIC PRESENTATION: Blade Runner.

BEST FANZINE: Locus, edited by Charles N. Brown.

BEST FAN WRITER: Richard E. Geis. (Our very own Dave Langford was third in this catogory.)

BEST FAN ARTIST: Alexis Gilliland.

JOHN W. CAMPBELL AWARD: Paul O. Williams.

Frank Herbert has signed a multi-million dollar contract with Putnam books for "Dune VI".

Roger Zelazny has sold three new "Amber" novels for an advance in six-figures. Mr Zelazny's reponse? "It's a decent amount...":

According to the august 28 edition of the Oakland Tribune (California), Philip K. Dick could still be alive. They became interested when Mr Dick's eldest daughter was puzzled about his death certificate. Mr Dick, apparantly, went into a coma from a fairly mild stroke and there was a deal of confusion and family conflicts after his brain was declared to be dead. He was cremated without any funeral service in a rather unseemly haste and no-one knows anything about the fate of the thousands of dollars he made from his writing in the last few years. A staff writer on the Tribune, David Alcott, believes that Mr Dick has done a Reggie Perrin and could be living with a new identity. It is particularly interesting that his last novel, The Transmigration Of Timothy Archer, dealt with the death of a character and the 'transmigration' of his soul into another body.

Christopher Tolkien is still rummaging through his father's tea-chests in search of unpublished manuscripts. Next year, The Monsters And The Critics And Other Essays will be published.

Norman Mailer has been planning an sf novel for several years and it is soon to be published from Random House.

Maeve Gilmore Peake died recently. She married Mervyn Peake in 1937 and edited many of his works, including Peake's Progress. She was a talented painter who had a number of important exhibitions and wrote a book about her life with Mr Peake. She also wrote children's books, illustrated with photographs of dolls she made herself. Michael Moorcock referred to her as "A woman of enormous generosity, passion and kindness....."

Daphne Castell died of cancer in august. She wrote short stories for New Worlds, Venture, Amazing and various anthologies.

Norah Lofts died in september. As well as historical novels, she wrote at least two fantasy novels: Afternoon Of An Autocrat (1956) and Is There Anybody There? (1974).

The Philip K. Dick Society has issued its first newsletter. Membership is \$5.00 per year from PKDS, Box 611, Glen Ellen, CA 95442, USA.

The Best Of Susan Wood is available for \$2.00 from Jerry Kaufman, 4326 Winslow Place North, Seattle, WA 98103, USA.

Moscowcon I has been cancelled. I wonder why?!

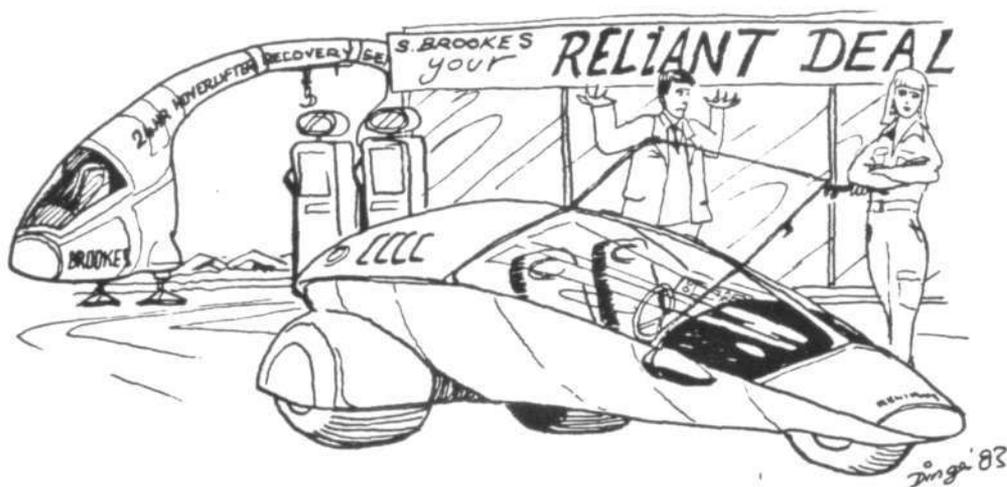
Remember Battlefield Earth? It missed winning the 1983 Hugo by only fifteen votes. Only a little more effort and it would have won and the Hugo award would have been discredited in the view of some people.

Seacon 84's European guest, Pierre Barbet is apparantly as popular in France as Lionel Fanthorpe is in Britain!

An Eastercon is up for bid for 1986, to be called Contravention and possibly held somewhere in the Midlands. The committee is Alan and Rochelle Dorey, Paul Oldroyd, Chris Donaldson, John Wilkes, Eunice Pearson, Jan Huxley and Chris Hughes.

Revenge Of The Jedi is only the first draft of Star Wars. In this version, Luke is adopted into a tribe of Wookies, teaches them to fly X-wings and off they sail into the wide blue yonder to knock the Death Star about a bit. For Wookies, read Ewoks.

Another Eastercon 1986 bid, to be possibly held in the Midlands! This time from Steve Green and Martin Tudor. (Confusion reigns!)



This newsletter was edited by Eunice Pearson, in rather a rush. Sorry about the delay, but life crept up on me rather unawares! I live at 32 Digby House, Colletts Grove, Kingshurst, Birmingham, B37 6JE. All letters, artwork, etc. gratefully recieved. This month's news comes to you from Locus, Ansible, and Scuttlebutt. I had hoped to have a report on Worldcon from the one Brun group member who attended, but sadly not. If you go to a con, I would be very glad to print your impressions of it.

This issue was printed by Tim Stannard, reductions by Kall-Kwick.

Reviews

LORD OF DARKNESS by Robert Silverberg, Gollancz £9.95, 559pp.

Not sf, but an 'historical fantasy', based on the true story of one Andrew Battell, an English sailor who sailed from Essex in 1589 and returned some twenty years later after being captured by the Portuguese and used by them in West Africa, until he escaped to live with the fearsome Jajqa tribe in Angola. On the brief account of his life Silverberg has built his history, inventing much of his narrator's background and character, filling in the details of his jungle world. Sixteenth century Africa is a world as alien to his hero as Venus would be to a later protagonist, and the cannibal warriors of the Jajqa are almost another species, so Silverberg has not moved far from the sf genre -- in fact in many ways, he has moved further away from our everyday experience than Majipoor. Or would have done if he had succeeded in conveying the utter strangeness of the places and people Battell encountered. This book is carefully and consistently written (despite a few spottable anachronisms of vocabulary and intrusive liberal sentiments scarcely to be expected on the lips of an Elizabethan sailor) and obviously well researched, but I missed the atmosphere and irony found in much less portentous tomes, such as the 'Flashman' adventures, and the profound humanity of Burgess a la 'Earthly Powers'. An unfair comparison? I fear not, for Silverberg has tackled some heavy themes here, concerning the nature of man's separateness and alienation from his fellow beings, our inability to more than observe the behavior of another rather than share his or her experiences, the ambiguity of evil and the relativity of moral values, the need to accept and honour things and people we can never fully understand, the meaning of compromise and the nature of honour. If you are going to plough that field, you had better sharpen your blade and discipline your horses. Silverberg's success has been obstructed in part by the first person narrative form he has adopted. As his hero speaks from a fixed point, with hindsight and without objectivity, it is difficult for him to grow in the telling of his story. Others have avoided this difficulty by setting their narrator to one side of the central drama rather than making him the main protagonist, allowing him to observe the changes around him and within the hearts of others, Silverberg's hero does not learn very much despite the bizarre landscape and the larger than life characters he meets. He is not sure if the Jajqa leader, Imbe Calandola, is an agent -- or manifestation -- of the Devil, or if his campaign to restore the putity of Mother Earth by opposing and destroying men's attempts to tame, wound and dishonour her with 'civilization' is in fact a Holy War. He explores the philosophy of the cannibal warrior and lives that separate reality without, it seems, resolving its claims within himself. All of which is heavy criticism, and the book's seriousness deserves such attention. On another level entirely it is engaging, competent and avoids the slough of Tushery, is not quite a 'bodice ripper' and compares well with Wilbur Smith. (Well...compares with Wilbur Smith.) See how much it costs when it comes out in paperback.

REVIEWED BY BOB VERNON

NO ENEMY BUT TIME by Michael Bishop, Sphere £2.25, 397pp.

To fare through Time in dreams to an innocent Eden, fleeing a hostile present.....escapism on the grand scale. In Parallel is given Joshua's tortuous path through his twentieth century reality. How he was brought up, speechless, by a mute in abject poverty; how he came to form part of materialistic America; and his involvement in African politics on behalf of a developing nation, beset by external interference. Joshua is likeable, interesting and has a well-developed sense of fun. The reader is drawn to him and wants to know what happens next, both in the pleistocene and the South. Being short and black can be a double handicap. His adventures at the Dawn of Man are equally entertaining. A tender love-story with a primeval Helen has its ups and downs -- tribal droit de seigneur amongst others. But this book is more than thrills and chuckles. It is also an allegory of civilization and barbarism. The hard part is telling which is which. Moreover the implications of dreamfaring are presented as a trail to follow. Not all pasts are as simple as life with the lions. And if the past is accessible, what of the future? In what state will the dreamfarer -- Helen's daughter -- return from what is yet to be? Add wit, detail and an observer's eye, and No Enemy But Time is a marvellously satisfying book on many levels.

REVIEWED BY ANNE GAY

THE RED DOVE by Derek Lambert, Sphere £1.95, 274pp.

Written with a humorous emphasis on Soviet incompetence with running their own spy networks, this slightly overlong semi-fact thriller is set on present-day Earth and centres around the actual American mistrust of anything the Soviets do, on Earth or in space. The 'Dove', Russia's first space shuttle, has successfully returned and a fleet is planned for conquest of the heavens. A worried and jealous US President, in his seventies and up for re-election, wants any further flights put to a stop. It results in what can only be called a global cliffhanger, as cosmonauts of both nations prepare for a defection as yet undreamed of. This novel is written with a little too much attention to detail, but is nonetheless, well worth reading.

REVIEWED BY IAN COLBERT

CONSTELLATIONS by Malcolm Edwards, Penguin £1.50, 171pp.

There's something for every taste in this well-planned anthology, one of the first fruits of Penguin's rekindled interest in science fiction and the paperback version of a collection first put together for Gollancz in 1980. It begins with hard sf tempered by human interest -- Bob Shaw's LIGHT OF OTHER DAYS, a Slow Glass story -- and ends with an Arthur C. Clarke tale in which the idea is all, in this case a race between silships riding the sloar wind. In between there are such delights as Jerome Bixby's well-known but thoroughly unsettling IT'S A GOOD LIFE, Gary Kilworth's time-travel story LET'S GO TO GOLGOTHA with its disturbing theological implications, and eight others,

including OF MIST, AND GRASS, AND SAND one of Vonda McIntyre's best works and the seed which grew into her novel Dreamsnake, the Hugo-winner of 1979. Even if you've read some or all of the stories in this book before, it's worth having. I wish more anthologies were assembled with as much care as this one.

REVIEWED BY DARROLL PARDOE

TIK TOK by John Sladek, Gollancz £7.95, 178pp.

Tertullian summed it up in one phrase: "I believe it because it is impossible." Life, like one colossal trailer for RIPLEY'S BELIEVE IT OR NOT, is a global cauldron of absurdity, macabre coincidence and grim black comedy; no wonder then, I feel so much at home with the work of John Sladek, a true prophet of our plastic age. Tik-Tok is a homicidal robot, but the story does not rise or fall on the strength of that premise; for, as Quintin Crisp is prone to point out, style transcends form -- and Tik-Tok has style in abundance. No mere metallic murderer he, Tik-Tok is a performance artist in the psychopathic medium, his every killing -- even those he considers random -- a calculated stepping-stone on his path to fame, fortune and, more importantly, the opportunity to revenge himself on the weak-willed humanity he detests. His revelry in the excesses of the first deadly sin are painted against a superbly comic canvass of ridiculous plot-twists and mocking portraits of contemporary America, so incisive, so Sladek. It takes a great deal to make me laugh out loud first thing in the morning, but had my fellow commuters been able to read over my shoulder and stumble into such marvellous creations as the duck-buggering fastfood billionaire Colonel Jitney, Lavinia Culpepper, a frail Southern aristocrat doomed by her allergy to space and time, or the insanely optomistic General Gus Austin, I'm certain they would have echoed my sentiments entirely. And what of Sladek's final punchline, his suggestion that the American public could be fooled into electing anyone -- or anything-- into the White House, given the appropriate lead by the self-deluding media? Sorry, John, it's been done before -- by your second-rate rival, reality.

REVIEWED BY STEVE GREEN

DINOSAUR TALES by Ray Bradbury, Bantam £2.95, 144pp.

For every fan of the giant beasties, Mr Bradbury's new book is a real treat. One hundred and forty-four pages of pictures, poems, tales and appreciations of dinosaurs: Mr Bradbury always seems more-at-home when writing about children, and this book is no exception. It begins with the tale of a little boy who was so determined to be a dinosaur, that he very nearly succeeded. The book then proceeds at an ambling pace through Mr Bradbury's very best time-travel story (A SOUND OF THUNDER) dancing, cavorting monsters, a beast who loved a foghorn, and two pieces about real, honest-to-goodness, twentieth century dinosaurs. Mr Bradbury's love for the creatures is very evident and the illustrators seem similarly enamoured. This book will definitely appeal to the little child in all of us. It is perfect for curling-up with when the winter-weather is suitably prehistoric.

REVIEWED BY EUNICE PEARSON

STARSHIP TRAVELLER by Steve Jackson, Puffin £1.50, 149pp.

This is the fourth in the Fighting Fantasy Gamebooks series. In this one, the reader takes on the role of a starship captain. Budding James T Kirks should note that they do not have an unlimited supply of security guards (cannon fodder) but this should not prove a problem. Most situations allow a multi-choice option but some are left to chance by comparing a die roll with skill, stamina or ships fighting ability, or even Luck. In the preparations, photocopying the 'Adventure Sheets' is recommended, but a piece of paper will do. The reader is advised that "It is unlikely that you will find your way back to Earth in your first adventure". Speaking from experience and also analysing a network of the possible routes, I would say that this is an understatement. The actual reading (or playing) is done in a sort of computer programme style where one is sent to sections scattered throughout the book. The only fault I can find is in Entry 196, there is no 'stamina' for the scavenger, so how do you fight it? The full-page illustrations are pertaining to an actual event on the opposite page and there are elven types of fillos which are repeated randomly throughout the book, and the cover portrays an actual event (which I only just managed to survive). Although they are supposed to be for children, it is a good way to while away a rail journey. One last word, the prime directive doesn't always pay off! Good luck, you'll need it.

REVIEWED BY DAVE ROWLEY

Andromeda Top ten

1. StarTrek Short Stories by William Rotsler. (Arrow, £1.25)
2. White Gold Wielder by Stephen Donaldson. (Fontana, £2.50)
3. Ceres Solution by Bob Shaw. (Granada, £1.50)
4. Dr Who: Terminus by John Lyndecker. (Target, £1.50)
5. Different Seasons by Stephen King. (Futura, £2.95)
6. Dr Who: Earthshock by Terrence Dicks. (Target, £1.40)
7. Walls Of Air by Barbra Hambly. (Futura, £1.95)
8. Time Of Dark by Barbra Hambly. (Futura, £1.25)
9. For The Love Of Mother Not by Alan Dean Foster. (Futura, £1.95)
10. Juxtaposition by P. Anthony. (Granada, £1.95)

This list came from Andromeda Bookshop, 84 Suffolk Street, Birmingham, B1 1TA. Telephone 021-643-1999..

chairman's report

BUZZ-WORD?

This time I'm going to pose a little question and invite you to answer. First, we all agree that BSFG members are interested in science fiction (about the same way that bees like honey!). So of course, most of us will be keen to meet sf authors, buy the latest books, hear talks about our No1 hobby -- won't we? And, judging by recent late-night meetings, members seem to like socialising, drinking, meeting each other..... Any arguments so far?

Then here's my question. Granted that all the above is correct, then why do so few BSFG members attend the annual Novacon convention?

It's strange, but so far as we can tell, there aren't any accurate figures just yet, only about one-third of the Group actually comes to Novacon. And yet here we have a splendid fun weekend, complete with films, artshow, auctions, everything anyone could want, conveniently arranged in the centre of town at the Royal Angus Hotel.

I have a theory about this. A few months ago, Bob Vernon mentioned that he "didn't realise the Group had anything to do with Novacon". Suddenly, I realised. We've let "Novacon" become a buzz-word: we throw it around assuming everyone knows what it means, assuming everyone knows what is involved. And yet, to many people, especially our newer members, this mysterious 'Novacon' probably seems a mysteriously in-group sort of thing, a large investment to make in time and money, a somewhat risky venture into the unknown.

Let me hasten to explain: it's just like a very large BSFG meeting, with trimmings! You don't have to stay over-night at the hotel, you don't have to commit yourself to two or three days away from home. Nor do you have to book in advance!

This year we're offering day-membership to Group members only. Just turn up at the door -- you'll probably recognise Margaret, or Eunice, or someone at the desk. You can register for just £4.00 for any one day (saturday is best) -- and then you're free to wander around, enjoy the programme events and the comradeship that seems to infect almost every first-time visitor to a convention. (That's why they get bigger, every year!) Finally, if you really want to take the plunge, come and help us on the friday night. The BSFG is hosting a special party: we'd like as many members as possible to dispense beer and good cheer -- so please do join us there. After all, it took Tim Stannard ten years to get the convention habit -- now he can't stay away!

--PETE WESTON

BY MATT BROOKER

DOUBLE CROSS

PART 2

I AM WYNNE ST. PRICE, THE ASSASSIN. LAST EPISODE, I ACCEPTED A HIGH PAYING JOB FROM MIZ ERRIGUTZ OF APEX INDUSTRIES. MY VICTIM IS, HOWEVER, A LITTLE UNUSUAL...

THE SOUTH PACIFIC SEA TOWER IS THE HOME OF THE TERRAIN BRANCH OF THE UNITED PLANETS ORGANISATION...

MY STRIKE *LIES WITHIN...

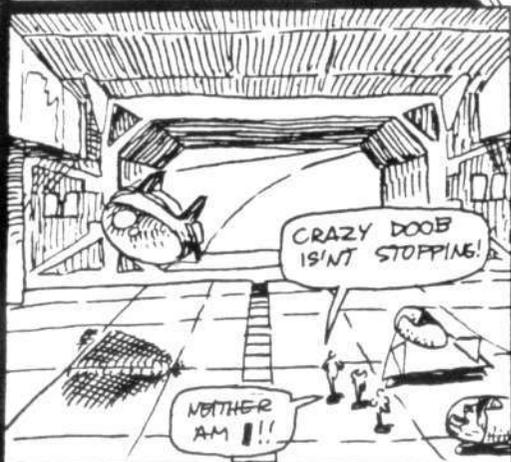
MIZ ERRIGUTZ HAD PAID ME HALF IN ADVANCE, WHICH WAS JUST AS WELL, AS THE ENTRY CODE FOR THE SEA TOWER SECURITY AREA ALONE COST ME TEN MILLION TETRADS...

... BUT ENOUGH ACCOUNTANCY. IT'S TIME FOR ME TO BAIL OUT...

* VICTIM



GERONIMO!!



CRAZY DOOB IS'NT STOPPING!

NOTHER AM !!!



PHASE ONE COMPLETED: THE DIVERSION HAS BEGUN IN THE HANGAR...



PHASE TWO HAS BEGUN: I HAVE ARRIVED ON THE SEA TOWER'S EXTERIOR...

THINGS ARE GOING WELL.
I HAVE LANDED NEAR THE
GRILLE...

... WHICH LEADS TO
THE VENT...

WHICH LEADS TO
MY PREY...

... WHICH
LEADS
TO THE
CORRIDOR...

NOK
NOK

COME
IN!

FRUITS
De MER
VEGAN TRADE ENVOY
TO EARTH !!

GOOD NIGHT
MR. DeMER!

BLAT!

PLAUT!

PLOONT!

PLOONT ??

eek

NEXT: DOUBLE CROSS (4)