

THE BIRMINGHAM SCIENCE FICTION GROUP

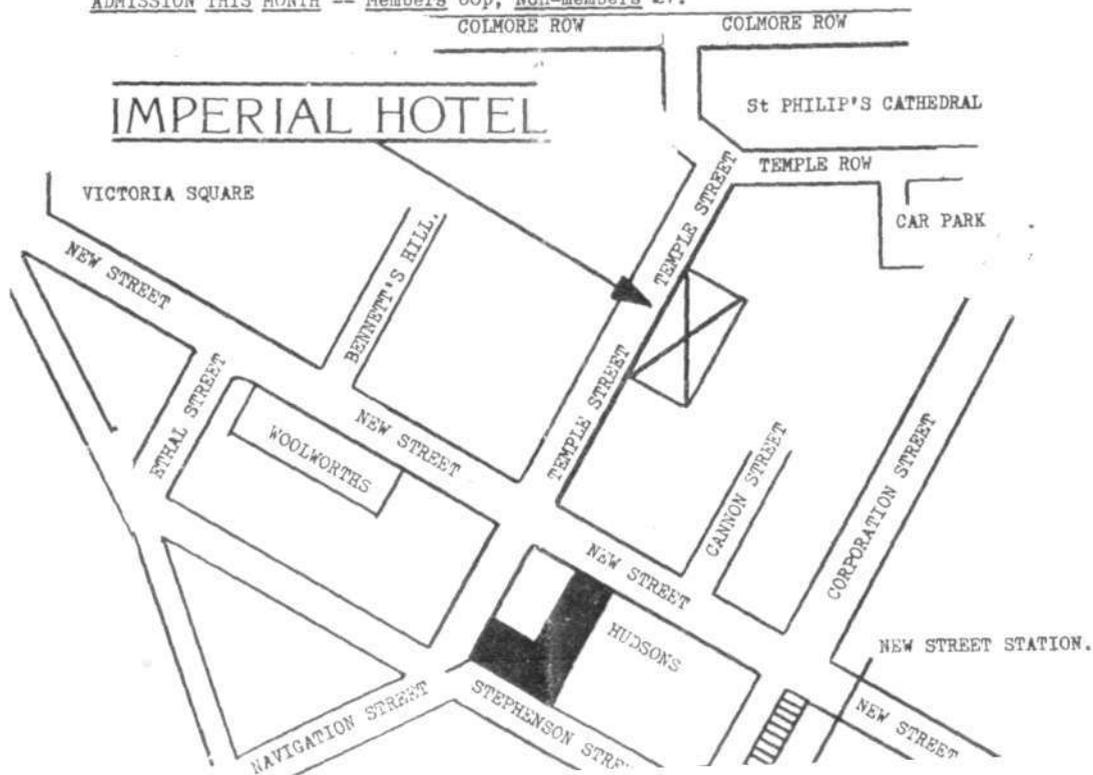
(Honorary Presidents: Brian W. Aldiss
and Harry Harrison)

Number 147

NOVEMBER 1983

The Birmingham Science Fiction Group has its formal meeting on the third Friday of each month in the Imperial Hotel, Temple Street, Birmingham city centre. 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 Street, 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.

ADMISSION THIS MONTH -- Members 60p, Non-members £1.



This Month

It would be difficult, if not impossible, to think of a more worthy contender for the title of best British comic writer than Alan Moore. Even John Wagner, who shot to fame briefly with his wry scripting for the futuristic "Judge Dredd" series ((in the children's comic "2000AD")) has failed to match Alan's sheer staying power and versatility.

This latter gift is as responsible as any other of his talents for Alan receiving the "best writer" Eagle Award last month. His scripts range from the gritty superheroics of "Marvelman" through the political black comedy of "V For Vendetta", to the Pythonesque "Bojeffries Saga", three of the best strips in Warrior (after just one year on the shelves, this pioneering magazine won an amazing nine of the ten Eagles). America has not been slow to notice this rising talent, DC hiring him to breathe new life into Swamp Thing and Marvel talking optimistically of a full-colour "Marvelman" strip in its quality showcase Epic.

Alan is typically modest about his success: "It's nice; there's been a myth too long that good comics don't sell....I'd like the standards raised to the point where I'm having trouble; I'd love to see standards jacked up to the level of the film industry or the mainstream publishing industry..."

(Alan Moore leaves for Kingston Polytechnic on Saturday morning to join Dave Gibbons and David Lloyd at a seminar on comics.)

EAGLE AWARDS:

- WARRIOR-- Best writer -- Alan Moore.
Best character -- Marvelman.
Best villain -- Kid Marvelman.
Best story -- "Marvelman" in W 1-6
Best cover -- Number 7 by Austin.
Best artist -- Bolland for "Zirk" strip.
Best new magazine.
Best magazine.
Best supporting character -- "Zirk"
- 2000 AD -- Best supporting character most deserving of a strip of her/his own -- Judge Anderson, the psi-judge from "Judge Dredd".

STEVE GREEN

This month's news came from Locus, thank you to everyone who contributed. I'm sorry this issue is so short but there's been a distinct lack in contributions being sent in. I need artwork especially. This was printed by Tim Stannard and Kall-Kwik. My address is 32 Digby House, Colletts Grove, Kingshurst, Birmingham B37 6JE. Artwork this issue by Matt Brooker. Sorry about having to revert back to this awful typewriter, but the super electrical one refuses to . & 7 or backspace! Its gone into hibernation, which I'm about to do right now!

News~

BRUM GROUP CHRISTMAS PARTY

The next great BSFG event is our annual Christmas Party, which this year will be really something special.

There will be a sit-down meal (not buffet) with a really appetising menu which must, for the moment, remain Top Secret. Suffice to say you'll enjoy it, it will not be turkey or plastic chicken, and there'll be a full three courses plus wine.

Then follows the 'entertainment', which will include the presentation of Awards for services performed during the year, a few words from our special guest BOB SHAW, who will be joining us with his wife, Sadie, and then a cabaret.

Oh yes, it should be an interesting party this time, and we hope a lot of fun. Date is Friday 16 of December, commencing at 8.00 pm, at the Imperial Hotel, Temple street. Tickets will be restricted to a maximum of 50 seats, cost £5.00 each and they will be on sale from the November meeting onwards or by post from Margaret Thorpe, 36 Twyford Road, Ward End, Birmingham B8 2NJ. Remember -- the barbecues sold out very quickly, so don't be disappointed -- book now!

PETE WESTON

NOVACON 14

Grand Hotel, Birmingham. ((On Colmore Row))

November 9-11 1984.

Membership £6.

Guest-of-honour ROB HOLDSTOCK.

Send money to: Ann Thomas at 11 Fox Green Crescent, Acocks Green, Birmingham B27.

((Registrations will be taken at Friday's meeting.))

WILLIAM GOLDING has won the 1983 Nobel Prize for Literature. He is best known for his novel Lord of the Flies (1952). Mr Golding also wrote an sf novel The Inheritors (1955) and three novellas (1971).

PIA ZADORA will star in a low-budget SF film, Attack of the Rock n' Roll Aliens, due to start filming soon.

Melbourne, Australia won the 1985 Worldcon bid; so the convention will be held in August 22-26, 1985 in Melbourne. The guest-of-honour is Gene Wolfe.

chairman's report

VINTAGE YEAR?

So what's the verdict on this year's NOVACON convention? Pretty favourable, I should think; as they say, a good time was had by all.

Personally, I had to split my time between the conflicting demands of a job, a bonfire party, children, and my other interests in door-knob fandom, with the result that I didn't arrive until after 9.30 pm on Friday, Eileen in tow. Immediately though, we seemed to bump into all the right people, starting with Bob and Sadie Shaw, then old pals like Leroy Kettle and Jack Cohen.

The evening proceeded with all the usual events, including the ritual attack by Tom Sippey in the bar. This time, however, we had the Brum Group Party to look forward to, with the preceding "Rock Opera" by Ian Sorenson. It seemed to go well -- at least, we'd bought enough drink -- though it didn't quite reach the heights of frenzied lunacy which characterised the Brum Group Thrash at Glasgow. Must really get a disco going next time, methinks.

But onward, to a night of drinking and socialising in the bar. Eileen claimed to have scored four propositions, though as I pointed out, one didn't count because it was Roger, and one of the others was sharing a room with seven other men, and so the offer must be regarded as impractical, at least! We finally left (yes, to go home!) at 3.00 am.

Next morning I was in there, still punching, and the day went by in a flash: I ducked out at 5.00 pm, to go to a Bonfire party elsewhere. But Eileen and I arrived back at about 10.00 pm, just in time for the final couple of reels of the Barn Dance. This really was incredible fun; though Rog and I became totally confused and kept colliding during the intricacies of one number! A bold experiment, and I commend Phill and his committee for putting it on.

And then what? More parties of course: on Saturday night we were spoilt for choice, what with the Mexican in the incredibly hot and sweaty fan room (and tequila), the Seacon '84 party on the second floor, and Chris Suslowicz dispensing explosive Polish concoctions on the floor above. Notable moments include Martin Hoare mistaking Eileen for my "fancy piece" (because she's cut her hair since he saw her last) and a long, complicated discussion with Gerry Webb, about the way he was going to take over the European Space Programme.

And onto Sunday.....but you don't really want to hear any more about the way I enjoyed myself, do you? There's nothing more boring than reading about parties you didn't attend. Suffice to say, NOVACON-'83 really worked well, and while at the beginning of the year we'd had doubts whether we'd still get the support and attendance of fandom, all our fears proved groundless; just about everybody was there.

It's been said there is only one True Novacon, and each year it simply adds a few more incidents onto its long duration; this year, was a high point; so much so that people even started to forgive the

much-cursed Royal Angus; when Steve Green stood up to announce next year we'd be moving to the Grand Hôtel, there was a mixed sort of reaction, almost an expression of fond regret at leaving the Angus instead of the loud cheer that might have been expected.

Oh yes, and Lisa Tuttle proved a most popular Guest-of-Honour; she gave an excellent, entertaining speech on the Sunday afternoon, and was a friendly, much-liked lady. Next year our GoH is Rob Holdstock, an equally popular, equally-deserving choice.

Well done, NOVACON committee; now on, ever on, to fresh projects!

PETER WESTON

Reviews

THE COMPLETE BOOK OF SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY LISTS by Maxim Jakubowski and Malcolm Edwards, Granada £2.95, 350 pp.

Books of lists have been around for a long time but until recently, consisted of exhaustive indexes, primarily aimed at collectors, intended as straightforward reference works. The current fad, however, is for more serendipitous collections -- books to be dipped into by the reader, serious reference material being liberally interspersed with more frivolous lists. This book falls into the latter category, being an SF-orientated equivalent to the bestselling People's Almanac books of lists, and succeeds in being both useful and entertaining. By far the most useful section is a ninety-one page chronicle of the best SF written in the years 1805 through to 1981, which will be indispensable to new readers, though I do feel that, having called the book 'The Complete Book Of Sf And Fantasy Lists', the lack of similar data for the fantasy field is a serious omission. On the lighter side are several 'guest' lists which would be better described as humorous mini-essays. Of these, personal favourites are David Langford's 'Ten Favourite Scientific Errors' which explains, amongst other revelations, just why Larry Niven's Ringworld structure could never exist; and Jo Sladek's hilarious 'List of Seven Great Unexplained Mysteries of our Time (With Explanations)' which neatly sends up the Turin Shroud, UFOs and other such nonsense. Finally, there are the oddities -- writers who have recorded rock music, favourite nude SF scenes, pieces of SF terminology -- endless fascinating trivia. In fact, there is only one vital list which has been left out; the book lacks a table of contents, an annoying omission which makes tracking down any particular list a task reminiscent of needles in haystacks, and which renders the book virtually useless as a reference work. Still, despite this flaw, Maxim and Malcolm's book remains an addictive treasure-trove of ephemera. Buy it now!

REVIEWED by PAUL VINCENT

THE BLACK CLOUD by Fred Hoyle, Penguin £1.75, 219 pp.

The fact that The Black Cloud by Fred Hoyle has been reprinted fifteen times since its first publication in 1957 says a lot for its durability as one of science fiction's greatest classics. Sir Fred Hoyle, F.R.S., being well-known astronomer as well as a writer, radio broadcaster and TV personality, here uses knowledge of his profession to produce a thoroughly enjoyable and believable tale. The first part of The Black Cloud deals with the quandries of American and British scientists (and politicians) as a large cloud of gas heads towards the solar system. Perhaps the fact that Fred Hoyle is an astronomer (as are his two main characters) explains why he goes to such lengths to make it plausible. He certainly succeeds, though I feel that if you want to follow the occasional calculation and the scientists' jargonized reasoning, then an 'A' level in physics would come in handy. On the other hand, some explanations are necessary to do the story justice, and the astronomers' discovery of the cloud, the petty fears and machinations of politics, and the eventual discovery of the cloud's vast intelligence certainly makes fascinating reading. The second part of the novel tells us of the Norsonstowe group's communication with the cloud and their predicament after the cloud's target reversal when they inform it that World Governments have sent up hydrogen rockets to destroy it. The narrative is well punctuated by dialogue and action, and a tongue-in-cheek portrait of certain governments, and the dry wit of some of the main characters adds a touch of lightening humour to the story. Unlike many other science fiction authors, Fred Hoyle does not make the mistake of blinding us with science to the detriment of the characters' believability. This, coupled with a convincing portrayal of events which, I began to feel, could possibly happen, makes a truly entertaining story.

REVIEWED by CAROL M PEARSON

Andromeda Top ten

1. CITADEL OF THE AULTARCH by Gene Wolfe. (Arrow £1.95)
2. 2010: ODYSSEY 2 by Arthur C Clarke. (Granada £1.95)
3. MAJIPPOOR CHRONICLES by Robert Silverberg. (Pan £1.95)
4. DR WHO: ARC OF INFINITY by Terrence Dicks. (Target £1.35)
5. STARTRAK SHORT STORIES by William Rotsler. (Arrow £1.25)
6. SHADOW OF THE TORTURER by Gene Wolfe. (Arrow £1.95)
7. WHEN VOIHA WAKES by Joy Chant. (Unicorn £2.95)
8. LORD VALENTINE'S CASTLE by Robert Silverberg. (Pan £1.95)
8. CLAW OF THE CONCILIATOR by Gene Wolfe. (Arrow £1.95)
10. SWORD OF THE LICTOR by Gene Wolfe. (Arrow £1.95)

This list was compiled by Andromeda Bookshop at 84 Suffolk Street, Birmingham B1 1TA. Telephone 021-643-1999.

BY MAT BROOKER

DOUBLE CROSS

PART 3

MIZ ERRIGLITZ, CHAIRMAN OF APAX INDUSTRIES, HAD HIRED ME TO ASSASSINATE VEGAN ENVOY FRUITS DEMER. AFTER COMPLETING THE JOB, I RETURNED TO APAX, ONLY TO FIND TROUBLE IN COLLECTING THE SECOND HALF OF MY PAYMENT...

ST. PRICE, YOU'VE BROUGHT OTHERS INTO THIS DEAL WITHOUT MY CONSENT!!

...FOR THAT I'M CANCELLING THE CONTRACT!

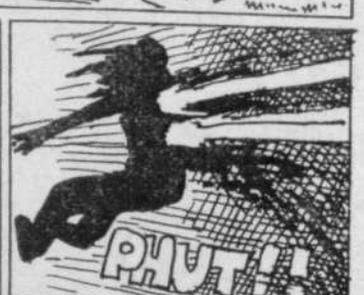
MIZ ERRIGLITZ CARLSON HERE IS A REGISTERED COURIER WHOSE DISCRETION IS ABSOLUTE.

WRONG, ST. PRICE!!

FRUIT!

I JUST HAVE!

THERE IS NOTHING IN THE CONTRACT AGAINST HIM BANKING MY MONEY. YOU CAN'T CANCEL...



NOTE: RATS ARE NOW AVAILABLE IN A VARIETY OF FLAVOURS FROM YOUR LOCAL HYPERMARKET...