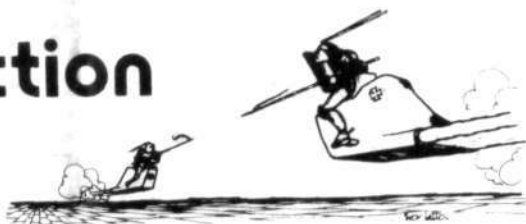


Birmingham Science Fiction Group

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



NEWSLETTER 104

APRIL 1980

The Birmingham Science Fiction Group meets on the third Friday of each month at THE IVY BUSH pub on the corner of Hagley Road and Monument Road, Edgbaston, Birmingham 16. This month's meeting is on Friday 18th April at 8.00pm. New members are always welcome. Our treasurer is Margaret Thorpe, 36 Twyford Road, Ward End, Birmingham B8 2NJ.

APRIL MEETING - Friday 18th April 1980

The speaker this month is LES FLOOD, Britain's best known science fiction agent. Acting as intermediary between authors and publishers, he has been running the E.J.Carnell Literary Agency since John Carnell's death in 1972. His clients include Piers Anthony, Fritz Leiber, Larry Niven, Fred Pohl, Theodore Sturgeon and A.E.Van Vogt. He also represents most British writers, including Ken Bulmer, Colin Kapp, Keith Roberts, Bob Shaw and James White.

MARCH MEETING

Your editor did his renowned Bamber Gascoigne act (with Pauline as scorer) in several sessions of a quiz based on ITV's University Challenge. Four teams competed, with Kidderminster Loonies coming out on top. Their team consisted of the amazingly knowledgeable Eddie Stachelski, with occasional help from Ian Warner and Fred Ingham. To round off the evening there was an exciting challenge match between the winners and the so-called Summer Row Superbrains, consisting of Roger Peyton, Dave Holmes and Lawrence Miller. The result was a tie.

NEWS

NEBULA AWARD nominations have been announced, for SF published in 1979. The six novels (and their UK publishers) are: Titan - John Varley (Sidgwick & Jackson hc, Futura pb); The Fountains of Paradise - Arthur C. Clarke (Gollancz hc); On Wings of Song - Thomas M. Disch (Gollancz hc); Jem - Frederik Pohl (Gollancz hc); The Road to Corlay - Richard Cowper (Gollancz hc, Pan pb); Juniper Time - Kate Wilhelm (not yet published in Britain; in the US a hard-cover from Harper & Row). There are novella, novelette and short story nominees too. The results will be out on 26th April. I'll try to review all these novels in next month's newsletter.

AND MORE NEWS.....

BBC TV has recently begun showing episodes from The Outer Limits (BBC2, late Friday nights). This is an SF series made for TV in the US in 1963-5. The first one, Harlan Ellison's "Demon With a Glass Hand" was shown on 28th March. It was very good. It's said to be the best of the series and it won Ellison a Writers' Guild award.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS Rog Peyton and Chris Smith were interviewed on Beacon Radio (Wolverhampton) in a lunch-time chat show on 14th March. After exercising remarkable courtesy and restraint in explaining to the interviewer why SF should never be referred to as "sci-fi", Roger said a few words about SF as literature, SF bookshops (without managing to plug Andromeda) and "great books!" like George R. Stewart's Earth Abides. Chris did a good job of advertising the Birmingham Science Fiction Film Society. Asked about his favourite SF films he mentioned Metropolis and Make Room! Make Room!. Nice one, Chris. Did you mean Soylent Green?

BIRMINGHAM SCIENCE FICTION FILM SOCIETY has its first programme at the Arts Lab cinema on Sunday morning 4th May. New memberships will not be taken at the door. To join contact Chris Smith, 49 Humber Tower, Francis Street, Birmingham 7. DON'T FORGET - MAY THE FOURTH BE WITH YOU.



CROSSWORD SOLUTION.....

Last month's crossword proved so difficult that nobody managed to get it completely correct and claim the £3 prize. An honourable mention must go to Stan Eling, who missed it by one word. The solution is:

- Across 3. Novella, 6. Robinton, 8. Sword, 10. Sol, 11. Mote, 12. Ring, 16. And, 18. Medics, 19. Aldiss, 20. Fan, 22. Stake, 26. Lifeboat, 27. Orson, 28. Monsters, 29. Yes.
- Down 1. Grass, 2. Anome, 3. Norton, 4. On, 5. Ler, 7. Ball, 9. Worlds, 13. Ness, 14. Death Ray, 15. Dicksons, 16. ASF, 17. Dan, 21. Asimov, 23. Beast, 24. Jones, 25. A test.



BOOK REVIEWS

THE CRYSTAL SHIP edited by Robert Silverberg, Millington £4.50, 188 pages
Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

To prove that women are writing some of the best new SF, here are three good original novellas by Joan D. Vinge, Marta Randall and Vonda N. McIntyre. McIntyre's "Screwtop" is the most powerful, a deliberately exaggerated and over-emotional story set in an extremely nasty forced labour camp on a slightly alien planet. It's a protest story, its moral being "never submit to an authority of which you disapprove, especially if it seems to be an easy way out". It is deeper and more perceptive than her novel Dreamsnake. "Megan's Planet" by Marta Randall shows the impact of a human mining expedition on different (and competing) groups of primitive humanoid aliens. The theme is a standard one but the treatment is exceptionally fine. The aliens are not unintelligent, just unfamiliar with science and technology. They are sophisticated enough to engage in power politics and wily enough---most of the time---to distinguish between a technologically-aided Earthman and a god. It is ironic that the title story, by Joan Vinge, is the least successful of these three, because she has shown so much promise elsewhere and is bound to become one of the great writers of SF of the 1980s. Not that "The Crystal Ship" is a poor story, just a little unplanned and unpublished. This is one of the best anthologies which Robert Silverberg has so far assembled.

DRIFTGLASS by Samuel R. Delany, Panther £1.25, 318 pages

Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

I got a lot of joy out of re-reading these ten stories. They were written between 1965 and 1968, though this is their first UK paperback appearance. Delany writes with complexity and great beauty, filling his stories with real people and with more original ideas than most authors put into a whole novel. Effortlessly he deals with love, hate, prejudice, friendship. I found that "The Star Pit" and "We... Move On A Rigorous Line" are still my favourites, and that "Night and the Loves of Joe Dicostanzo" is still (even at the umpteenth time of reading) almost unintelligible. There are two Nebula Award winners here, too. An excellent collection.

ENEMIES OF THE SYSTEM by Brian Aldiss, Panther 95 pence, 124 pages

Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

For some time now it has been obvious that Brian Aldiss is not writing SF as an end in itself, but using it as a tool, as a means to other ends. Here he adopts the trappings of SF to present a satire on communism. A million years hence, Homo sapiens has been replaced by Homo uniformis. The principle of Biological Communism has, via genetic engineering and bottle-grown babies, produced what its inhabitants agree is a utopia. But some are more uniform than others, and a group of upper-echelon comrades has been awarded the privilege of a holiday on the planet Lysenka II (so called, it gradually becomes clear, because its inhabitants have devolved according to the eccentric genetic theories of the notorious Russian biologist Lysenko). From the start their uniformity does not prevent them from arguing over what are to the reader fairly minor points of communist logic. On a sightseeing trip in the wilds, the road collapses beneath one of the motor coaches, leaving its passengers stranded, out of contact with civilisation and surrounded by savage animals. What do they do? They hold a meeting to elect an action committee. Later, as they struggle to survive without the help of their utopian system, their conditioning begins to break down. This is a fairly slight book, due partly to its paucity of pages and partly to the way in which characterisation and background are subservient to dialectic, but a witty one.

THE UNTELEPORTED MAN by Philip K. Dick, Magnum 80 pence, 124 pages;

DR FUTURITY by Philip K. Dick, Magnum 85 pence, 157 pages; THE MAN

WHO JAPED by Philip K. Dick, Magnum 85 pence, 158 pages; THE SIM-

ULACRA by Philip K. Dick, Magnum 75 pence, 220 pages

Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

The first two are typical formula SF: tightly plotted adventure stories (one through space, the other through time) without any deeper meaning. Both are enjoyable and easy to read, with imaginative ingredients, though not particularly memorable. The Man Who Japed, first published in 1956, is the first of Dick's novels to be largely anti-establishment, and the first to contain a reality shift (even though this is explained away as a trick). It includes considerable amounts of satire and black comedy, giving a strong indication of the direction in which Dick's work was to move during the 1960s. The Simulacra, from 1964, is a much deeper and more sombre novel than the other three. It depicts a future USA moving from an uneasy stability into civil war and chaos. The major theme is political power and there is a complex plot involving numerous characters who work out their

lives in various zany fashions---usually with the help of a psychoanalyst. Dick's novels have a cumulative effect, and after reading three or four of them his paranoid view of reality seems awfully believable.

THE WRONG END OF TIME by John Brunner, Methuen 55 pence, 185 pages;
TRAVELLER IN BLACK by John Brunner, Magnum 75 pence, 181 pages

Reviewed by Pauline E.Morgan.

John Brunner has extrapolated trends to show a frightening future for American citizens. Paranoid, polluted and thoroughly decadent, the US has retreated into defensive inaccessibility. Aliens have arrived in the Solar System and appear ready to throw Mankind back into the stone age. Into this situation is injected a Russian agent. What Vassily Sheklov can do is unclear, both to him and to the reader. The story moves at a good pace but collapses towards its unsatisfactory ending. In complete contrast is Traveller in Black. The enigmatic traveller has been given the task of encouraging the retreat of the forces of chaos, but is himself bound by laws which prevent direct intervention. He can act only to grant somebody's expressed wish, but not always in the way anticipated. The book contains four stories of the traveller, written with a wry sense of humour.

OF MEN AND MONSTERS by William Tenn, Magnum 95 pence, 251 pages

Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

It's a pity that William Tenn seems to have given up writing SF. He is a fine humourist, best known for his short stories. Of Men and Monsters, his only novel, is an extremely good example of the alien contact theme, with Earth occupied by enormous aliens while Mankind struggles for survival, living like mice in the walls of alien dwellings. It's a deceptively clever and satirical story, beneath the facade of an all-action plot.

A.K.A. A COSMIC FABLE by Rob Swigart, Magnum 95 pence, 226 pages

Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

Outrageous is the best word for this. Rob Swigart puts together a lot of black humour, zanyness and sex to produce the funniest, most unusual SF novel I've read for a long time. Its subject matter is mostly sex, beginning with the launching of a rocket to the stars which is powered by orgones, units of sexual energy. And from that point everything gets crazier and crazier as Swigart pokes a satirical finger at many cherished American institutions. The book contains a host of characters so peculiar that I found it impossible not to believe in them. What, you might ask, does A.K.A. stand for? The answer is Avery Krupp Augenblaue, the richest man in the world, who flies off into intergalactic space. It also stands for the AKA clubs all over the world which wait to hear the secret of The Blue Light, orgone power. And with each passing chapter it comes to stand for something or some one else as well. The most amazing thing about this novel is that it is structured like a chess game: every move has significance and the whole thing fits together exactly. Highly recommended.



EDITORIAL NOTES

I'm pleased to say that quite a number of publishers are cooperating; so far 11 have either sent books for review or promised to do so. At the March meeting I was able to pass on books to three other members, so as from next month's newsletter there should be some new names among the reviewers. Anybody who would like to write reviews for the newsletter should get in touch with me. Let me know which authors you feel capable of reviewing. You'll have two or four weeks to read the book and get your review to me. You keep the book.

The Nebula Award nominations were reprinted from Locus.
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