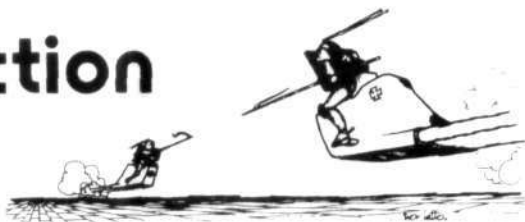


Birmingham Science Fiction Group

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



NEWSLETTER 107

JULY 1980

The Birmingham Science Fiction Group meets on the third Friday of each month, normally at THE IVY BUSH pub on the corner of Hagley Road and Monument Road, Edgbaston, Birmingham 16 (but see below for variations during July and possibly August). New members are always welcome. Our treasurer is Margaret Thorpe, 36 Twyford Road, Ward End, Birmingham 8. The annual subscription is £2 per person.

JULY MEETING - Friday 18th July 1980

This is a BARGE TRIP and BUFFET, for which all tickets have now been sold. Our barge leaves Gas Street Basin AT 7.30 PM. I'll repeat that: the barge will leave at 7.30 pm, and if you aren't on board by then you'll be left behind. Gas Street Basin is in Gas Street, off Broad Street, in the centre of Birmingham, within easy walking distance of Andromeda Bookshop and Paradise Circus. (Gas Street is one-way; you can drive into it only from Broad Street.) The barge will arrive back at Gas Street Basin at 10.30 pm.

JUNE MEETING

The Open Forum came to several conclusions. Most of you want to have more big name authors speaking to the group, and your committee will do its best to arrange this. By a large majority it was agreed to ban smoking during the business part of each month's meeting, so that the speaker's voice won't be drowned by the extractor fan. A lot of people wanted meetings to begin earlier, to allow for more drinking time afterwards, so from August ALL MEETINGS WILL BEGIN AT 7.45 PM INSTEAD OF 8.00 PM.

The evening began with slides of the BSFG float and ended with Roger Peyton auctioning almost everything in sight.

FORTHCOMING

Next month, on Friday 15th August, beginning at 7.45pm, we'll have a talk by Alan Vince on Dan Dare, illustrated with lots of slides. We hope that the original Dan Dare artist, Frank Hampson, will also be able to come along. BUT PLEASE NOTE that The Ivy Bush will be re-decorated during the summer, and we may have to find another meeting-place for our August or September meeting. WATCH THIS SPACE FOR FURTHER DETAILS. The latest information on this can be obtained from Andromeda Bookshop (tel: 021-236-1112) or from your newsletter editor, Chris Morgan (tel: 021-476-0458).

BIRMINGHAM SCIENCE FICTION FILM SOCIETY'S next programme, on Sunday 3rd August, will be Attack of the Fifty Foot Woman (1958), The Mysterians (1957) and yet another two episodes of the Captain Marvel serial from 1940. It's on at Birmingham's Arts Lab cinema, starting at 11.00am, and you can join for £2.50 (6-months subscription). Contact Chris Smith at 49 Humber Tower, Francis Street, Birmingham 7.

NEWS

FRANK HERBERT is working on the final draft of a new Dune novel, provisionally entitled Sandworms of Dune. It is set 3500 years after Children of Dune. He has signed a contract with the US publishers Berkley/Putnam for a rumoured \$750,000 advance (though this is for more than one book).

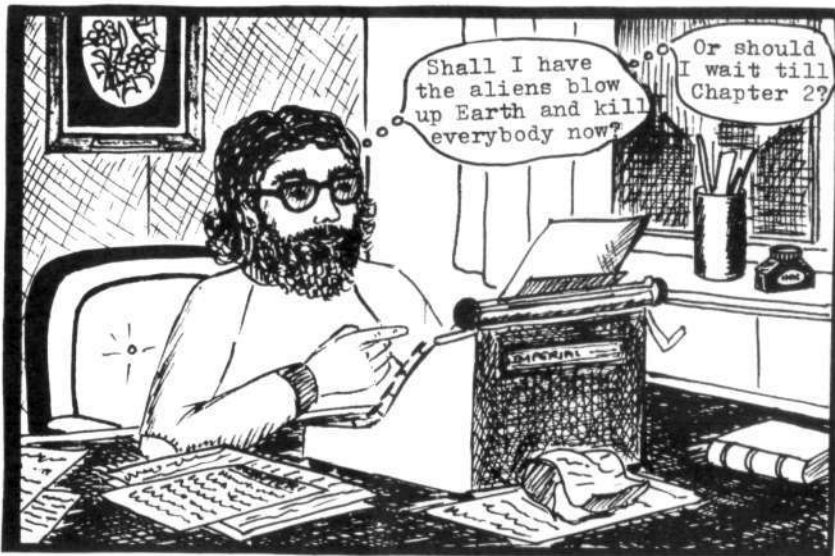
DAVID HARDY had eleven of his paintings stolen last month, while they were on show in a gallery in Stuttgart. All were planetscapes from his forthcoming book Thomas Cook Galactic Tours. If you hear about a batch of David's paintings being offered for sale please get in touch with him at 99 Southam Road, Hall Green, Birmingham B28. Tel:021-777-1802.

CHRIS PRIEST has just completed a new novel, The Affirmation, which is the one referred to in his short story "The Negation"---see his collection An Infinite Summer, just out from Pan Books.

ANDROMEDA BOOKSHOP'S top ten sellers for June were: 1.Dr Who and the Armageddon Factor - Terrance Dicks 2.The Jesus Incident - Frank Herbert & Bill Ransome 3.The Empire Strikes Back - Donald F.Glut 4.The Russian Intelligence - Michael Moorcock 5.The Fountains of Paradise - Arthur C. Clarke 6.Web - John Wyndham 7.Steppe - Piers Anthony 8.Dr Who and the Power of Kroll - Terrance Dicks 9.The Eye of the Heron - Ursula Le Guin & others 10.Conan the Mercenary - Andrew J.Offutt.

INFORMAL BRUM GROUP MEETINGS: It has been suggested that there should be a second Brum Group meeting each month, an informal one without a programme, at which members could gather for a chat and a drink. This could be at The Ivy Bush on, say, the first Friday of each month. The committee want your reactions to this suggestion.

SOLIHULL GROUP: coincidentally (see the last item) Steve Green informs me that he is starting up a fannish group in Solihull. The idea is not to compete with the Brum Group but to complement it, by having informal get-togethers in a pub, perhaps once a month. The actual pub and day of the month for meetings are as yet undecided. The group certainly won't be restricted to those living in Solihull. The only formal thing will be a group fanzine, sent free to members (though there will be a small membership fee). Steve hopes to have this in operation sometime in the autumn. If you're interested, drop him a line at 11 Fox Green Crescent, Acocks Green, Birmingham B27 7SD, enclosing a stamped addressed envelope.



UNICON was held at the University of Keele over the weekend 4th-7th July, with Harry Harrison as writer G-O-H and David de Leuw as artist G-O-H. Our special correspondent at the event (Dave Holmes) says it was generally an enjoyable con, attended by almost 200 people. Although the atmosphere was good and there were all the facilities of an Eastercon (including auctions, fancy dress, films, alternate programme, fan room, video room, Space Invaders machines, etc) there were too many programme changes and the food was appalling. Perhaps the inexperienced committee bit off more than they could chew.

NUMBER THREE IN A SERIES OF PROFILES OF THE COMMITTEE

PAULINE E MORGAN

Actually, Pauline Morgan (who is currently the BSFG Publicity Officer) didn't exist until 1978, when she was created one Saturday afternoon in July, just south of Croydon. But there used to be a science fiction fan called Pauline Dungate...

Pauline's interest in SF began when she was very young. A diet of Dan Dare, Star Trek and the various Gerry Anderson TV series have helped to make her what she is today.

While studying Chemistry and Geology at Aston University in 1968 she encountered the Aston SF Group, which was being run by Bob Rickard (where is he now?) and Vernon Brown. On one momentous occasion John Brunner came to talk to the group, and Pauline recalls noticing a very smart young man who sat at John Brunner's feet and wrote down every word spoken by him. She assumed this to be John Brunner's secretary, but later discovered it to have been Peter Weston.

At that time Pauline had very long hair and wore glasses in an attempt to keep the world at bay. She attended her first convention in 1969---the Easter convention at Oxford. In 1971, as one of those helping to run the Aston SF Group, she was drafted onto the committee of Novacon 1. Also that year she attended the first meeting of the present Brum Group.

At the end of a very successful Novacon 1 she did a very rash thing: agreed to be the chairperson for Novacon 2 the following year. She was also, at one time, the Secretary of the Brum Group (in the days when committee meetings were actually slave labour sessions dedicated to the collation of Peter Weston's fanzine, Speculation), and she made a good job of chairing the 1977 Eastercon at Coventry. Only last year she served on the committee of Novacon 9. She says that one of her claims to SF fame is that she has been kissed by both Larry Niven and Isaac Asimov.

She claims to be a were-gerbil: when the moon is full she chews up cardboard boxes and exclaims "Ee-ee!" through the bars of her cage.

Pauline is not really a Brummie, having been born in Surrey. Most of the time she tries to teach science to children, but in her spare time she enjoys cooking, reading, gardening, sailing and yoga. For the last two years (almost exactly) she has been happily married to Chris Morgan (your newsletter editor) who is determined to make a book reviewer out of her yet.



COMPETITION set by STAN ELING

Here's another chance to win yourself £2 worth of SF books!! Read this very carefully:

The five members of the Off Planet Readers Group met early this month. At the drinks break during the evening the bar creature (who was a Raibradd, from the planet Eyeveeb'ooshe) heard the following conversation.

"I would like the detective story next," said the Earthling.

"You are welcome to it," said Vanooty.

The person who had just finished the anthology said, "I didn't know you had read it yet."

"She hasn't," said the Ragion. "We all have except you and her."

At this moment Bill hit the table with the book he was holding.

"If you don't mind, I have not quite finished it," he said.

"I thought the Asimov was good," said Bortice.

"Excellent, wasn't it," agreed the only female. "But if you remember, I said so before you started on it."

Sotwillined spoke for the first time in his squeaky voice, "I'll take the history book next, if that is okay with the Poloctan, then I can end with the SF novel."

"You will have to have the SF novel before the history book," said Vanooty, "or I won't get to read the detective story at all, seeing as how it is mandatory to read the history book." And she handed him the SF novel.

"Wonderful," said the Wickmoniisoc, putting down the detective book at last.

NOW, the question is, if Brendern read the SF novel after Bill, and Bortice read the detective story before the creature from K60, who hasn't read the anthology besides the Wickmoniisoc?

If you can work out the answer (and it's quite possible to do so from the information supplied), send it or give it to the editor (Chris Morgan, 39 Hollybrow, Selly Oak, Birmingham B29 4LX) in writing, before 1st August. The first correct solution opened after that date will entitle the winner to a free choice of £2 worth of SF books.

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LAST MONTH'S COMPETITION: SOLUTION

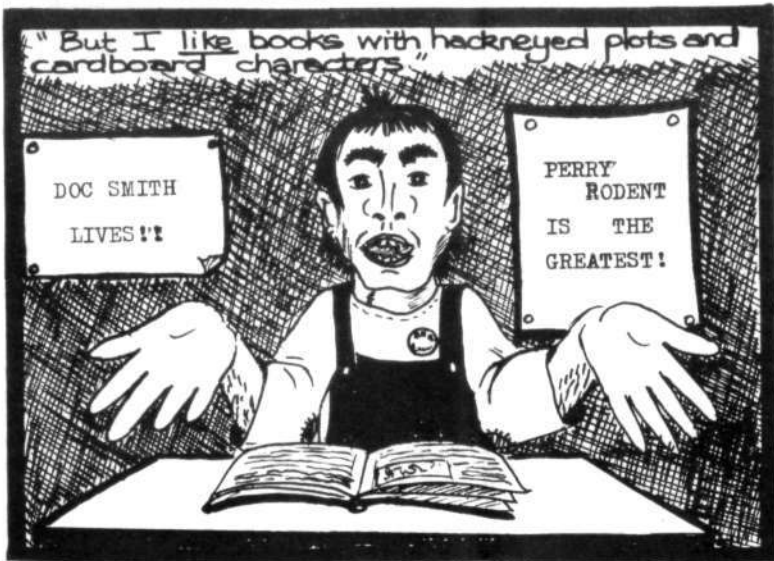


That word "OMDINAKTNGH", apart from meaning something extraordinarily obscene in the language of one of the sentient races of Betelgeuse II, can be shuffled to make "DAMON KNIGHT", which was the required answer. The winner of £2 worth of books for the first correct solution opened is Malcolm Thorpe. Congratulations.

WRITERS' MEETING

Are any of you interested in writing science fiction, or fantasy, or horror? If so, would you be interested in attending a writers' meeting in Birmingham, probably on a Sunday in September? The format will be based on the Pieria writers' meetings (of which you might have heard). Briefly stated, everybody has to bring along a story of their own; these are read out in turn and criticised by all others present. The criticism should be constructive rather than destructive. Story lengths may be anywhere between 1000 words and 6000 words. Longer stories may be pre-circulated by post. Extracts from novels, etc are permitted.

The whole object of the exercise is to improve the writing standards of all those present (which will be about seven people). Attendance won't cost you any money, nor is it restricted to members of the BSFG. It doesn't matter whether you've had anything published professionally or not. All those interested please get in touch with Chris Morgan, 39 Hollybrow, Selly Oak, Birmingham B29 4LX.



BOOK REVIEWS

HALF IN SHADOW by Mary Elizabeth Counselman, William Kimber £4.95, 212 pages

Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

Mary Elizabeth Counselman has been producing excellent horror stories for nearly fifty years, though only at the rate of a story a year. She has always lived in America's Deep South, and uses it as background for many of the fourteen stories in this collection. They are tales of the unexpected, each so skilfully written that the twist in the last line is obvious only in retrospect. On a second or third reading these stories remain spellbinding, for they are highly original creations which do not depend on their final twists but are masterpieces of atmosphere. Even routine hauntings are rejuvenated by Miss Counselman's deft touch. The standard is so high that picking out a favourite or two seems unfair on the rest. They are complemented by a marvellously atmospheric dust jacket picture by Ionicus. Collectors will be interested to know that although this volume has the same title and number of stories as the 1964 UK paperback, half the stories are different.

THE BOOK OF THE DUN COW by Walter Wangerin jr, Allen Lane £4.95, 241 pages
Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

Although The Book of the Dun Cow is a fantasy novel in which all the characters are animals, it bears little resemblance to Watership Down, being more like George Orwell's Animal Farm. Walter Wangerin's animals (every species from deer to mosquitoes) live peaceably together in a fantasy land without human beings. They are ruled by a rooster. That they believe in God (whose messenger is the Dun Cow of the title) and are required to rise up and fight for Him against the forces of evil which threaten their world is the fairly simple and straightforward plot. This is a religious allegory, though not a complex one. What is special about this novel is that all the animals are endowed with human personalities, with human hopes and fears. The Book of the Dun Cow unfolds slowly but majestically. The telling is both simple and highly convincing, drawing freely on ancient myths. Chauntecleer the Rooster is a marvellous character. The means by which he rules his land, comes to recognise an external danger and finally marshalls all the animals to counter the threat of the Cockatrice and its basilisk offspring are impressively described. Recommended.



INTERWORLD by Isidore Haiblum, Penguin £1.15, 221 pages

Reviewed by Margaret Thorpe.

This is a brilliantly funny SF novel that reads like a futuristic Raymond Chandler novel. It has a much wider appeal than Haiblum's first book, The Tsaddik of the Seven Wonders, although the background of Yiddish humour and self-mockery is important to the very complicated plot. Tom Dunjer is the chief of Security Plus, and to save his business from involuntary and permanent liquidation he has to recover the stolen Linzeteum, without knowing what it is, before the owner misses it. His enquiries reveal that more than his life and reputation depend on his success; the very fabric of the universe is at stake!

A WORLD BETWEEN by Norman Spinrad, Arrow £1.35, 343 pages

Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

Consider the position of a small non-aligned country which is pestered by competing offers of aid (with ideological strings attached) from the Americans and the Russians. In his first novel for seven years, Norman Spinrad does just that, except that the "country" is a planet---Pacifica---and the competing ideologies are sexual---one based on male domination, the other on female domination. As always, Spinrad's approach is satirical, though somewhat less horrifyingly obsessional than in The Iron Dream. The peaceful, almost utopian planet of Pacifica, where male-female equality is a long-established tradition, is quickly polarised into warring camps of male and female chauvinism, each screaming abuse at the other. Like Bug Jack Barron, this is a TV-oriented novel. It takes a very close look at the nonsense preached about male or female superiority and shows that each sex needs the other. The plot is obvious from the outset, but the details of media campaigns and political manoeuvrings are well told. Only a lack of wit prevents this from being a very good novel. Recommended anyway.

NEBULA WINNERS THIRTEEN edited by Samuel R. Delany, Harper & Row £5.95, 239 pages Reviewed by Chris & Pauline Morgan.

Although the quality of Nebula-winning novels seems to shift up and down over the years, the winners in the shorter categories seem only to get better. Here are the winning short story, novelette and novella from 1977, plus the editor's choice of one runner-up at each length. The short story winner, "Jeffty is Five" by Harlan Ellison, also took the Hugo award; it's a nostalgic fantasy about a Peter Pan figure. Raccoona Sheldon (better known as James Tiptree jr) won the novelette award with "The Screwfly Solution", a typically hard-hitting piece from her, about a terrible disease which threatens the end of humanity. The novella award went to "Stardance" by Spider & Jeanne Robinson, a beautiful, haunting story which expresses the medium of dance in words most exquisitely. Of the runners-up, John Varley's "Air Raid" is a masterpiece of fast-moving ghoulishness---one of the very best short stories of the 1970s. There are excellent contributions, too, from Edward Bryant and Vonda McIntyre. This is an outstanding anthology, though, as happens with the very best, all the stories have already been reprinted elsewhere since their initial appearances, three of them in Donald A. Wollheim's World's Best SF 5, reviewed in last month's newsletter.

CAPELLA'S GOLDEN EYES by Christopher Evans, Faber £5.95, 220 pages Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

There's an impressive start to this first novel by a young British author. Juvenile characters---human colonists on an alien planet---are handled in a very mature fashion. Many good elements are introduced, including some inscrutable sentient aliens. Yet after competently building up the background and characters in the first hundred pages the author concentrates on plot and begins to lose credibility. The plot is too simple for the book's length and all its twists and turns are predictable (notably the narrator's contact with the revolutionary underground movement). There is little technology here, though the book does contain one technological error large enough to drive a starship through. Those aliens---the most exciting element present---are much underused. It's no use sighing over might-have-beens, but this novel could and should have been greatly improved by some knowledgeable editing. It would be nice to find a new British author to compete with the brilliant young Americans who appear so frequently, but Christopher Evans, on this showing at least, is not the one.

TIME IS THE SIMPLEST THING by Clifford D. Simak, Magnum £1.10, 191 pages Reviewed by Margaret Thorpe.

Telepathic mind projection has replaced space exploration, and Shepherd Blaine is one of the telepaths working for Fishhook when he meets an alien and trades minds with him. In trying to escape from his erstwhile employers he encounters the superstitious hatred of the world's non-telepaths. A fast-moving tale with an exciting story line which I think progresses faster than either All Flesh is Grass or Way Station, though this is at the expense of detailed characterisation. In Blaine himself, however, this serves to emphasise his alienness, and actually adds to the atmosphere of the story. In my opinion this is one of Simak's best.

MIND OF MY MIND by Octavia E. Butler, Sphere £1.00, 221 pages

Reviewed by D.C. Holmes.

Doro dreams of building an empire of telepaths. Over the previous 4000 years he has experimented, breeding together potential psychic talents. His work culminates in Mary. However, it is she who begins to build the empire, and Doro finds himself shut out. The stage is set for the final confrontation. Though no masterpiece, this novel is extremely well written and definitely worth reading. The plot is only resolved right at the very end, so whatever you do don't turn to the last page first. If you are wondering how Doro survived 4000 years, read the book. The casualness is frightening. However, be warned, there are some horribly sad scenes.

AN INFINITE SUMMER by Christopher Priest, Pan £1.25, 189 pages

Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

You may recall that I praised the hardcover edition of this five-story collection in a previous newsletter. Since then one of the stories, "Palely Loitering", has won the BSFA award for short fiction and been nominated for a Hugo. All five are strange and disturbing, though beautifully told. Chris Priest is one of SF's greatest stylists, and this collection contains his best writing so far.

STEPPE by Piers Anthony, Panther £1.25, 191 pages

Reviewed by Chris Smith.

Steppe is a potted history of the 9th century wars on the Steppes of Russia. The twist is it's also a game being played by 24th century Galactics, using The Machine. Four men plan to win the game by bringing Alp, a 9th century warrior, forward in time. This they manage, but Alp escapes. The story moves along so quickly that it seemed to finish just as it was becoming interesting. This 1976 reprint is less good than Anthony's new book, Split Infinity.

OCTOBER THE FIRST IS TOO LATE by Fred Hoyle, Penguin 95 pence, 175 pages

Reviewed by Malcolm Thorpe.

When the Earth of 1966 is split into time zones, epochs apart, a musician takes a piano to classical Greece and a mathematical scientist searches for knowledge of the future. They meet in a utopian society of the fifth millennium and are told of mankind's progress so far. This book is mainly a vehicle for the author's views on metaphysics, the future and music. In fact a knowledge of classical music will help if the reader is to get full value from the flagging story line.

THE EARTH BOOK OF STORMGATE by Poul Anderson, NEL 95 pence, 144 pages

Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

Here are six stories about relations between Earthmen and aliens. The Earthmen have gone out to far distant planets to survey or trade, and while a couple of these tales concern the Ythri (the intelligent flying aliens dealt with at length in The People of the Wind) most are based on the problems of the traders who belong to the Polesotechnic League. While some of the stories are too brief and anecdotal, those which involve the trader Nicholas van Rijn (especially "Margin of Profit") are well worth reading.

SATURN 3 by Steve Gallagher, Sphere 95 pence, 160 pages

Reviewed by Paul Oldroyd.

One must remember that this book has been deliberately produced for the 'Sci-Fi' reader, else there would be no excuse for the garbage presented here. The late John Barry wrote the original story, and, from the basic plot, it was probably excellent. There are the ingredients of a classic Frankenstein story, with elements of pure Greek tragedy. None of the mystical/ray-gun rubbish that has marred so much media SF lately. How much blame can be placed on the author for the desecration of the original idea is debatable, as I have yet to see the film, but I suspect the film company decided to underplay the Frankenstein element in favour of a kind of 'Alien II', with a soppy (if ingenious) Disney-like ending. What Gallagher cannot be forgiven for is the banal Sci-Fi style he uses, and his irritating political naivete. Anybody who gets round to reading this will mourn what could have been a great novel.

EDITORIAL NOTES

Once again, thanks to Locus for news, and to all reviewers and artists for their contributions. Thanks also to numerous publishers for review copies; please keep on sending them. Art credits this issue: p.1 Ivor Latto, p.2 & 5 Di Abbott (with captions by Chris Morgan), p.3 David Hardy, p.6 David Hardy & Anthony Naylor. Produced & edited by Chris Morgan, 39 Hollybrow, Selly Oak, Birmingham B29 4IX.