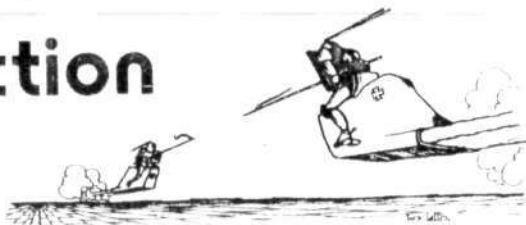


# Birmingham Science Fiction Group

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



## NEWSLETTER 109

SEPTEMBER 1980

The Birmingham Science Fiction Group meets on the third Friday of each month. Our place of meeting will be altering over the next few months, so see below for details. New members are always welcome. Our treasurer is Margaret Thorpe, 36 Twyford Road, Ward End, Birmingham 8. The annual subscription is £2 per person.

### SEPTEMBER MEETING - Friday 19th September at 7.45 pm

- At the **IMPERIAL HOTEL** in Temple Street, off New Street, Birmingham. We should be meeting in the Connaught Room.  
- Our speaker is **IAN WATSON**, one of the most successful English SF authors of the 1970s, well known for his complex inner-space novels such as *The Embedding*, *The Martian Inca*, *Miracle Visitors* and, recently published, *The Gardens of Delight*. He used to lecture at Birmingham Polytechnic (among other places) but is now a full-time writer. Next year he will be the guest-of-honour at the Easter convention, *Yorcon II*; you can save yourself time and money by coming along to hear him on Friday in Birmingham. He is, notoriously, a controversial speaker---you may remember his appearance on BBC TV's "The Book Programme" a few months ago, when he firmly put Robert Robinson in his place---so it should be a very entertaining evening. There will also be a raffle for a copy of the first edition of Ian's new novel, *The Gardens of Delight*.

### AUGUST MEETING

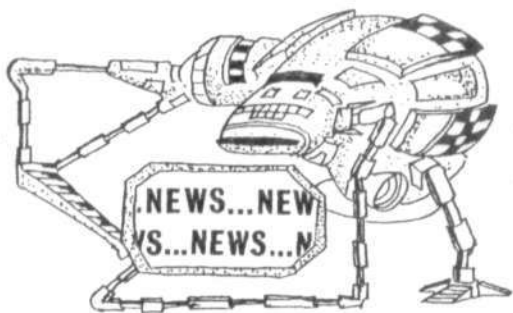
We were lucky enough to have not only Alan Vince talking about Dan Dare and showing slides, but also Frank Hampson himself, who brought along some of his original Dan Dare artwork.

### FORTHCOMING

NOTE THAT FOR THE OCTOBER MEETING WE WILL PROBABLY BE AT THE IMPERIAL HOTEL AGAIN. IN NOVEMBER, WITH LUCK, WE SHOULD BE BACK AT THE IVY BUSH, HAGLEY ROAD. MORE DETAILS NEXT MONTH.

Anthony Cheetham will be our speaker on the third Friday of October. At the beginning of November is Novacon 10, with Brian Aldiss as guest-of-honour. On the third Friday of November Dr Julian Isaacs will be talking to us about ESP.

**BIRMINGHAM SCIENCE FICTION FILM SOCIETY**, our junior offshoot, meets at Birmingham's Arts Lab cinema, in Holt Street, on the first Sunday morning of each month. The programme for October 5th, commencing at 11.00 am, is 2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY, plus two more episodes of the Captain Marvel serial, plus an auction of various desirable items, such as original film posters. For membership details get in touch with Chris Smith, 49 Humber Tower, Francis Street, Birmingham 7. Also, the BSFFS is planning to make its own SF film. Anybody with an interest in, or experience of, filming, lighting, sound recording, screenplay writing, acting, etc, is invited to contact Chris Smith.



THE 1980 HUGO AWARDS were presented at Noreascon II, the 38th World SF convention, in Boston, USA, on Sunday 31st August. Results were:

Best Novel - The Fountains of Paradise - Arthur C. Clarke  
Best Novella - "Enemy Mine" - Barry Longyear  
Best Novelette - "Sand Kings" - George R.R. Martin  
Best Short Story - "The Way of Cross and Dragon" - George R. R. Martin  
Best Non-fiction - The Encyclopaedia of Science Fiction - edited by Peter Nicholls

Best Dramatic Presentation - Alien  
Best Professional Artist - Michael Whelan  
Best Fan Artist - Alexis Gilliland  
Best Editor - George Scithers  
Best Fanzine - Locus  
Best Fan Writer - Bob Shaw  
John W. Campbell Award (Best New Author) - Barry Longyear  
Gandalf Award (Fantasy Writing) - Ray Bradbury

ANDROMEDA BOOKSHOP'S top ten best selling paperbacks during August:

1. Homeworld - Harry Harrison
2. The Dead Zone - Stephen King
3. Mission to Moulokin - Alan Dean Foster
- 4= Restoree - Anne McCaffrey
- 4= The Ship Who Sang - Anne McCaffrey
6. The Transformation of Miss Mavis Ming - Michael Moorcock
7. Twice Upon a Time - James P. Hogan
8. Conan: the Sword of Skelos - Andrew J. Offutt
9. The Martian Chronicles - Ray Bradbury
10. The Five Gold Bands - Jack Vance

It's nice to see one of our Honorary Presidents in the number one spot. Four of this top ten are reviewed in this issue of the newsletter.

"Yes, yes, I know, Smithy - our kids watch The Outer Limits, too."



ARTHUR C. CLARKE's Mysterious World is a new 13-part ATV series which began on September 2nd and is going out every Tuesday evening. Clarke investigates all kinds of weird happenings and "inexplicable" phenomena. There's going to be a book of the series.

TIME OUT OF MIND, BBC TV's 5-part series on SF authors (Clarke, Moorcock, Brunner and McCaffrey) and Seacon, is due to be screened yet again. That will be on Monday afternoons during October, which should suit those of you working at home or on the dole. And if you don't watch it this time the BBC will keep on showing it until you do.

ISAAC ASIMOV's latest book to be published in Britain is About Black Holes, a simple guide for children, well illustrated in (naturally) black and white. It's published by Pan Piccolo at 75 pence.

DON'T FORGET that most evening classes begin their winter seasons this month, including one on Science Fiction. That begins on Thursday 25th September at 7.30 pm and will run for twenty weeks, at the Brasshouse Adult Education Centre, Brasshouse Passage, off Broad Street, close to the centre of Birmingham. The class tutor will be Chris Morgan. Detailed syllabuses should be available at this month's Brum Group meeting.

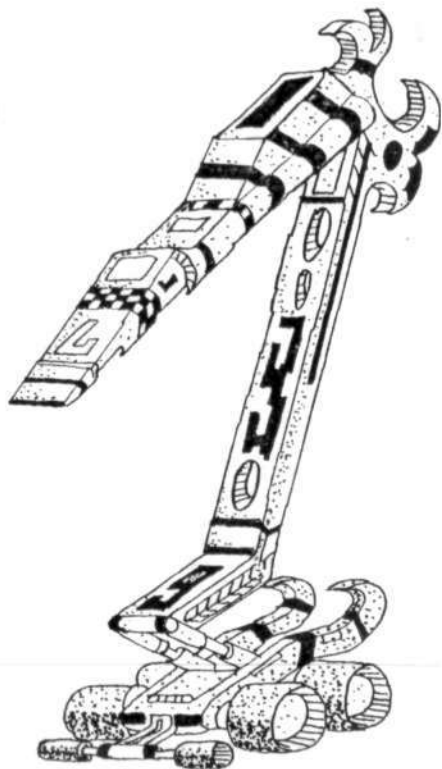
BIG O and PHIN, two of the firms publishing large, glossy books full of illustrations, including a fair amount of SF and fantasy, have both gone into voluntary liquidation recently. The problem seems to be that too many large format illustrated paperbacks are coming onto the market, so that too few copies are sold of each new book.

MOST SPHERE BOOKS have become unobtainable, following a big fire at the warehouse of TBL Services, which handles all Sphere book distribution.

STEPHEN DONALDSON, author of the Chronicles of Thomas Covenant the Unbeliever fantasy trilogy, will be in Birmingham briefly during October, doing a signing session at Andromeda as part of a national publicity tour. We tried, without success, to persuade him to talk to the Brum Group. He's determined to spend as little time as possible making public appearances, because this trip to Britain will also be his honeymoon.

LIONEL & PATRICIA FANTHORPE have become booksellers. They've recently bought a shop in Cardiff, and are selling second hand SF, plus toys and games (including fantasy games), though Lionel is still doing his job as headmaster of a school there. They haven't started sending out mail order lists yet, but if any of you are in that area and want to call in, the address is 129 City Road, Roath, Cardiff.

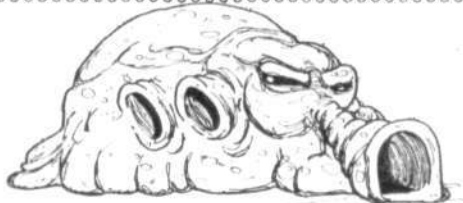
THE SHAPE OF FUTURES PAST is a new book by your friendly newsletter editor, Chris Morgan, published at the end of September by Webb & Bower at £5.95. It's about early predictive SF, and is well illustrated.



Pauline and I have just (as I write this) arrived back from one of the smaller British cons of 1980---Anglicon, which happened in Norwich over September 5th-7th and was organised by the Norwich SF Group. With around sixty people attending, that was the smallest con that either of us had known. Not that I'm complaining; the committee were aiming for that size because this was their first attempt at running a con and they didn't want to be too ambitious. They succeeded well.

It was held on the University of East Anglia campus, which meant single rooms (but the beds could be moved), student food (cheap 'n cheerful) and long walks to get from one's room to each of the various programme locations (fortunately it was a dry and sunny weekend). Joint guests of honour were Brian Stableford and Ian Watson. Lionel Fanthorpe and family were also there.

High points for me were the drive to Norwich (all those long, straight roads through dead flat country!), the Friday night party (free buffet and booze), a book-hunting expedition to Norwich over Saturday lunchtime (together with Brian and Lionel we managed to denude seven second-hand bookshops of their SF; this delayed the afternoon programme by about half an hour, but nobody seemed to mind) and the films (Hardware Wars projected backwards and the superb Wizards). A cheap and enjoyable con.



## BOOK REVIEWS

CAUTIONARY TALES by Chelsea Quinn Yarbro, Sidgwick & Jackson £6.50, 207 pages

Reviewed by Pauline E. Morgan.

Ms Yarbro writes nasty stories beautifully. Yet all twelve here have some quality which raises them above the level of mundane nastiness. In "Un Bel Di", the cruelty of an alien ambassador is coloured by the gentle innocence of equally alien natives, to give the story a charm of its own. By contrast, "The Fellini Beggar" portrays the cruelty of circumstance---an exquisite voice trapped in the body of a hideously deformed beggar. "Dead in Irons" has little in it that is not shocking, particularly as the characters are the crew of a ship trapped in hyperspace. This is a volume of contrasting stories, all of which are worth reading.

THE VISION by Dean R. Koontz, Corgi £1.25, 293 pages

Reviewed by Margaret Thorpe.

Mary Bergen is psychic, and uses her talents to help the police track down murderers. She is then confronted by a killer from her past who is aware of her powers and attempts to kill both her and her husband in order to escape capture. This is far more professionally written than most novels of its type; the plot is fast paced and absorbing with enough factual background to keep the reader interested. The characters are well thought out, and the author does not, as do so many in this field, delight in too much gory detail.

THE FIVE GOLD BANDS by Jack Vance, Mayflower 95 pence, 138 pages

Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

The first and rarest of Jack Vance's novels, written thirty-five years ago, is here published in Britain for the first time. But it wasn't worth waiting for. The story is brief and routine, a space opera dealing with the adventures of an unconvincing Irishman seeking the hidden secrets of evolved humans. For Vance completists only.

HOW THE GODS WOVE IN KYRANNON by Ardath Mayhar, Sidgwick & Jackson  
£5.95, 181 pages

Reviewed by Margaret Thorpe.

A fantasy novel by a hitherto unknown author that is a joy to read. The action is fast paced and well sustained throughout, despite the format, which is narratives of the action recounted by the leading characters. This gives a balanced picture, almost a panorama of the story. Perhaps the characters are a little sketchy, and the author has certainly not developed the non-human races sufficiently. All in all, though, it is a beautifully written book about the way in which the Gods of Kyrannon bring about the downfall of a despot by the use of sensitives who live in harmony with the wild, rather than abusing it for their own gain. Highly recommended for fantasy lovers.

TO WAKE THE DEAD by Ramsey Campbell, Millington £5.95, 317 pages

Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

Ramsey Campbell, still only in his mid thirties, is probably Britain's most talented horror writer. To Wake the Dead, about a woman's gradual realisation that she can achieve astral projection and possesses occult powers, is a supernatural thriller well above the average. It is more ambitious than Campbell's first novel, The Doll Who Ate His Mother. The descriptive writing is excellent, creating just the right atmosphere of dread as it builds up to a terrifying climax. Sometimes the building-up seems too slow, with too much extraneous detail, though in retrospect the novel's pace and supernatural content increase evenly from first to last.

MISSION TO MOULOKIN by Alan Dean Foster, NEL £1.35, 280 pages

Reviewed by Margaret Thorpe.

More of a continuation than a sequel to Icerigger, this is not quite up to the same standard. Excess padding gives the novel a very slow start, though once well into the tale the action is as fast and furious as ever, with some interesting sidelights into the planetary ecology of Tran-ky-ky. Ethan Fortune and Skua September discover that the humans are exploiting the Trun, and decide to help organise the city-states into a federation which will be recognised by the Commonwealth Council. Neither the offworld profiteers, nor the Landgraves in charge of the cities, take kindly to the idea, plunging the crew of the Icerigger boat "Slanderscree" into more bloodthirsty battles.

THE BOOK OF HELL by Ray Russell, Sphere £1.10, 179 pages

Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

Despite the title and packaging this collection is not at all satanic. Seventy per cent of the book consists of an updated film script treatment of Oscar Wilde's The Picture of Dorian Grey. This is mainly a contemporary crime story, presented too simply for a reading, rather than a watching, audience. Making up the length are four brief stories, clever but with only a marginal content of horror or fantasy. A disappointing book, deceptively packaged.

HUNTER OF WORLDS by C.J.Cherryh, Orbit £1.50, 254 pages

Reviewed by Pauline E.Morgan.

C.J.Cherryh has again set herself the very difficult task of creating alien aliens. But merely to give them differently coloured skins and to insert untranslatable words into their speech does not make them convincing. Too often the reader must consult one of the three glossaries for the meanings of otherwise unexplained words, which interferes with the main flow of the story. Hunter of Worlds involves the vengeance hunt of one family of the predatory iduve species against another. Involved against their will are two kallia and a human, whose minds have been linked by a surgical implant. If Ms Cherryh had concentrated on the interplay between the conflicting personality patterns of her aliens this could have been much more enjoyable. Stripped of the language problems, the underlying novel has much to commend it.

HOMEWORLD by Harry Harrison, Granada £1.25, 191 pages

Reviewed by Pauline E. Morgan.

In this, the first of a new trilogy, Harry Harrison has created a world which at first sight could be a depressing extrapolation of the present economic recession: the majority of a decimated population are on the dole, and oil has long run out. Jan Kulozik is an engineer and part of the wealthy elite. When he starts to show curiosity about the rest of the world he discovers how closely his life is under surveillance. However, the background does not entirely ring true, and much of the plot is contrived. Harry Harrison can write entertaining humorous or satirical novels, but this appears to be intended seriously and does not reach the same standard.

CRYPTOZOIC, EARTHWORKS and THE MOMENT OF ECLIPSE by Brian Aldiss, Panther 90 pence, 75 pence and 90 pence, 187, 126 and 189 pages

Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

Cryptozoic (also known as An Age) is a peculiar surrealist fantasy set partly in the remote past, to which many people are mind-travelling to escape an oppressive dictatorship. Edward Bush, an artist and mind-travelling champion, experiences sex in the Devonian, professional jealousy in the Jurassic and various kinds of subjective betrayal in the future and recent past. Most fascinating in this entertaining novel is Aldiss's portrayal of time, especially man's shadowy interface with the past.

Earthworks is a brief surrealist dystopia set a century or so in the future. In a very subjective first-person narrative, Knowle Noland describes his progress throughout life, via a depressed childhood in blighted Britain and a tough spell of farm life, to being the incompetent captain of an automated cargo ship and getting caught up in international politics. Despite its tendency to leap off at tangents I found this compulsive reading.

The 14 stories which make up The Moment of Eclipse were mostly written in the late 1960s, and contain some of Brian Aldiss's best short fiction. The tone is predominantly surrealist or absurdist. Included are three impressively sad stories set in future India. Best of all is "Swastika!" (Hitler is alive and well and living in Ostend), an outrageous piece which alone is worth the price of the book.

THE PENGUIN SCIENCE FICTION OMNIBUS edited by Brian Aldiss, Penguin £1.95, 616 pages

Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

Anybody new to SF and bewildered by the excessive choice available could scarcely do better than to begin with this anthology of 36 stories. There's nothing new here, though; the stories date from the 1950s, and Brian Aldiss's selections were originally published in three separate volumes in the early 1960s and have been reprinted frequently since. Some are now considered classics of SF; all remain eminently readable.

JOURNEY TO THE CENTRE OF THE EARTH by Jules Verne, Penguin 95pence, 254 pages

Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

Not only is this one of Verne's most widely read novels, but it is certainly the most popular treatment of the hollow-Earth theme, as featured in hundreds of books over the last 250 years. Verne's portrayal of reptiles and vegetation from various pre-historic periods below the Earth's surface is the first fictional acceptance of Darwin's Origin of Species published five years before this novel, in 1859. Required reading.

CONAN: THE SWORD OF SKELOS by Andrew J. Offutt, Sphere £1.00, 246 pages

Reviewed by Malcolm Thorpe.

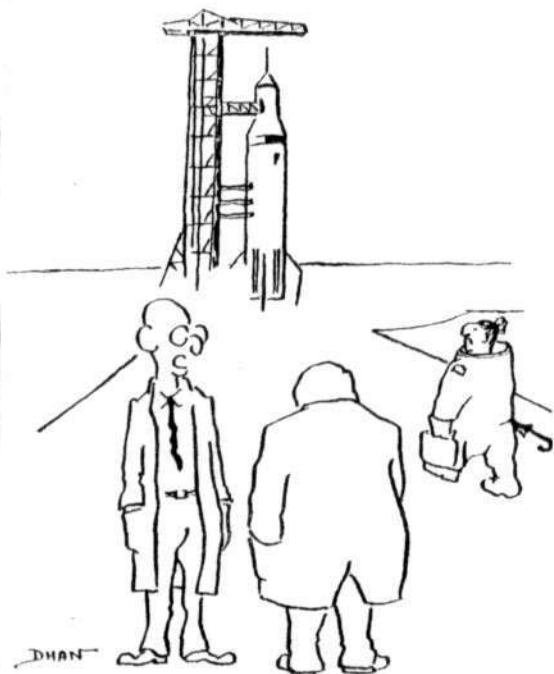
A continuation (and part retelling) of Offutt's last Conan book. The nineteen-year-old superhero brings down a despotic ruler and his would-be successor by brawn and brain. Though Offutt keeps to Howard's original style, he lacks depth and imagination. The book is complemented by some suitably mundane illustrations.



THE SNOW QUEEN by Joan D. Vinge, Sidgwick & Jackson £6.95, 536 pages

Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

Joan Vinge is almost unknown in Britain, but I hope that won't stop a great many people reading and enjoying this, her second novel. (Her first, The Outcasts of Heaven Belt, has yet to be published in Britain.) The Snow Queen is an awesome achievement, its high quality being sustained throughout. The plot, richly clad with description and encompassing many characters, is complex and admirably controlled, though somewhat contrived. The Snow Queen is the absolute ruler of the planet Tiamat, with a new candidate being chosen at intervals. Arienrhod, the present queen, schemes to extend her rule. She has already maintained her youth and beauty for a hundred and fifty years, by daily doses of a benign virus; she has also caused a clone of herself to be raised in secrecy. But Moon does not know she is a clone; by becoming a sibyl and going off-planet she accidentally frustrates the queen's plans. Moon loses her young fiance, Sparks, though he finds compensation with the queen. On Tiamat is a curious mixture of high technology and superstition, existing for particular astronomical reasons. Of great importance to the novel and the situation on Tiamat is a long-established, galaxy-wide information system of which the sibyls are a part. The book is a compromise---occasionally an uneasy one---between SF and fantasy. There is too much in The Snow Queen for me to do more than whet your appetite. This is probably the novel of the year. Read it.



"Every time we have a row she goes back to Mars."

SATAN'S WORLD by Poul Anderson, Corgi £1.25, 223 pages

Reviewed by Alan Cash.

Serendipity Inc provides information for a price by correlating random facts, sometimes giving a huge advantage to the client over his competitors. A consultation on behalf of Nicholas van Rijn, the "trader to the stars" plunges his team of "trouble twistors" into danger. A good read; bald in patches but thoroughly enjoyable.

SOME WILL NOT DIE by Algis Budrys, Magnum £1.25, 283 pages

Reviewed by Vernon Brown.

In a strange mixture of very good and rather mediocre writing, Budrys describes three different types of post-plague American democracies, founded by related individuals. Engulfing what are really three excellent short stories is a meandering tale of political chicanery and the search for a long-murdered founder, now an idealised legend rumoured to be alive in the mountains. Not one of Budrys's best but well worth reading with selectivity.

