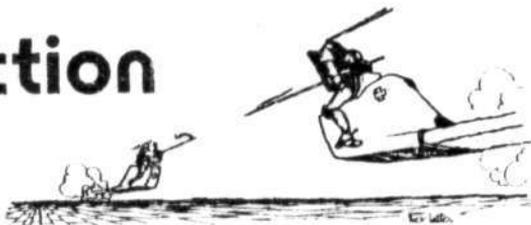


# Birmingham Science Fiction Group

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



## NEWSLETTER 110

OCTOBER 1980

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

## OCTOBER MEETING - Friday 17th October at 7.45 pm

- At the IMPERIAL HOTEL in Temple Street, off New Street, Birmingham.
- Our speaker is ANTHONY CHEETHAM. Although he has edited two SF anthologies, Science Against Man (1970) and Bug-Eyed Monsters (1972), his more important role has been as a leading publisher of SF. He has masterminded the Orbit range of SF paperbacks, published by Futura, which includes novels by Larry Niven, John Varley and Patricia McKillip, as well as the Andromeda series of original anthologies edited by Birmingham's own Peter Weston, plus UK distribution of many Ballantine Del Rey titles. At present Anthony Cheetham is the Managing Director of Macdonald Futura; one of their most recent books---the excellent hardcover anthology Dark Forces edited by Kirby McCauley---is reviewed in this newsletter. You may have seen Anthony Cheetham interviewed on TV earlier this year in "The Hype"---a programme which investigated the ways in which novels are made into best-sellers.

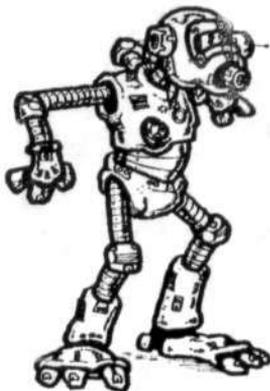
## SEPTEMBER MEETING

Ian Watson talked about some of the technical mistakes he has made in his novels (making the point that the more up-to-date one's scientific details are in writing SF, the easier it is to be caught out by advances or theoretical volte-faces) and about a new psychological theory of UFOs.

## FUTURE PROGRAMME

- \* On Friday 21st November our speaker will be ESP researcher Dr Julian Isaacs. We may or may not be able to return to The Ivy Bush, Hagley Road, where renovation is still in progress. For the resolution of this cliff-hanging situation see next month's enthralling newsletter.
- \* On Friday 12th December (the SECOND Friday of that month, please note) we will be having our XMAS PARTY at the White Swan/Dirty Duck pub in Harborne Road, Edgbaston. This will be a BEER & SKITTLES evening, with food. We have hired the pub's Skittle Alley for the whole evening, and there will be a substantial buffet including, per person:  $\frac{1}{2}$  chicken, baked potato, sausage roll, sandwiches, etc. The cost will be £3.00 each, and entry will be by ticket only. Tickets are available from our treasurer, Margaret Thorpe, at the October and November meetings, or by post (please enclose an s.a.e.). Her address is 36 Twyford Road, Ward End, Birmingham 8.
- \* There WON'T be a meeting on the THIRD Friday of December.
- \* On Friday 16th January 1981 will be our ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING, plus an AUCTION. By this time we should be back at The Ivy Bush, Hagley Rd.





"No, I don't suppose there are many robots who go in for disco dancing. Actually, I prefer the waltz, but I had so much trouble finding partners...."

KRYSTYNA BULA and KEITH OBORN, who are Brum Group members (though they never come along to meetings!) and Novacon 10 committee members, got married recently. Congratulations.

BIRMINGHAM SCIENCE FICTION FILM SOCIETY has survived its initial six-months trial period, and its committee are now asking members to renew for a further twelve months. There's optimism for you. It costs £2.50 for 6 months or £4.50 for 12. Shows are on the first Sunday of each month at the Arts Lab cinema, Holt Street, Birmingham. Next month, Sunday 2nd November, clashing with Novacon 10, is Flesh Gordon. To join contact Chris Smith, 49 Humber Tower, Francis Street, Birmingham 7.

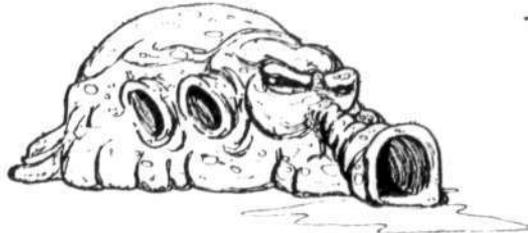
DUE TO the success of The Outer Limits, BBC TV are planning to screen another old SF series from America, The Twilight Zone. This was made in 1959-64. Most of the scripts were written by Rod Serling, and some of the episodes are said to be very good indeed. The series is closer to fantasy than to hard SF. Most episodes are half an hour in length. Among the players are William Shatner and Lee Marvin.

UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM Department of Extramural Studies is running a one-day course entitled U.F.Os & Extraterrestrial Life. That's on Saturday 8th November. It lasts from 11.00 till 5.30, costs £2 (half price for students and pensioners) and, through its intent to bring about a "frank and objective assessment of the facts", by having speakers from "both sides" should be entertaining. Details and booking forms are obtainable from Mrs Anne Oliver, Dept of Extramural Studies, University of Birmingham, P.O.Box 363, Birmingham B15 2TT.

J.O.BAILEY, whose book Pilgrims Through Space and Time (1947) was the first critical study of the science fiction field, has died in the US at the age of 76.

FANTASYCON VI was held in Birmingham, at the Imperial Hotel, over the first weekend of October, with Ramsey Campbell as guest-of-honour. Our special correspondent at the event (Dave Holmes) reports that the atmosphere was similar to that of the early Novacons (also held at that hotel). There were about 200 people attending. Tanith Lee's Death Master won the August Derleth award for best fantasy novel of the year. Best thing at the con was the US TV film of Ursula Le Guin's Lathe of Heaven.





## BOOK REVIEWS

**MOREAU'S OTHER ISLAND** by Brian Aldiss, Jonathan Cape £4.95, 174pp  
Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

Top US official Calvert Roberts is returning from the Moon; his space-shuttle crashes; he is eventually the only survivor, reaching the safety of a tiny, isolated Pacific island. But safety is a relative term: the island is inhabited by grotesque beast-people--of sub-human intelligence and exuding a suitable air of menace---barely controlled by a few armed humans. It is obvious (and admitted by the man in control, Dr Dart) that this is a conscious continuation of the work of Dr Moreau. Dart himself is as bizarre as his creations---a thalidomide victim with artificial limbs. Roberts is imprisoned and not allowed to inform the US authorities of his survival. The fact that World War III is in progress---escalating towards the all-out nuclear variety---means that any search for him will be cursory. Roberts' arrival precipitates a chain of tragedies on the island. It's a fast moving, enjoyable novel; a homage to (and close parallel of) Wells' The Island of Dr Moreau. Yet it adds little to that theme, being less of a satire on science or even a response to evolution than the original. Many SF authors would be glad to have produced a novel like Moreau's Other Island; for a writer of Brian Aldiss's merit it is a lightweight work.

**GOLEM**<sup>100</sup> by Alfred Bester, Sidgwick & Jackson £6.95, 384 pages  
Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

This is Alfred Bester's most pyrotechnic novel so far, brimming over with exuberance, originality, wit and typographical outrages (plus 130 pages of way-out illustrations by Jack Gaughan, which are tightly integrated with the text). These effects frequently go over the top into self-parody; only occasionally are they boring. The plot is slim: Golem<sup>100</sup>, a projection of the joint ids of a group of women, engages in an orgy of atrocities in a 23rd century metropolis; its source must be found and controlled. Mainly this is a novel about zany larger-than-life characters, of whom the black and beautiful Gretchen Nunn is the most memorable, set against a background too ingeniously affronting to be believable (some parts are intended as satire, anyway). There's a superb jacket illustration. Recommended.

**THE MAGICIANS** by James Gunn, Magnum £1.10, 197 pages  
Reviewed by Kevin Easthope.

It's always difficult to review a book which has knocked you out with its excellence. I won't reveal any of the plot as it might spoil your enjoyment, other than to say that the setting is very familiar: a convention. But this is a convention with a difference: one devoted to witchcraft. A convention, in fact. The cover bears exactly zero resemblance to anything inside, but don't let that put you off. Recommended unequivocally.

**MORTAL GODS** by Jonathan Fast, Granada 95 pence, 187 pages  
Reviewed by Margaret Thorpe.

Nick Harmon is given the task of entertaining an alien VIP while genetic research is done to save her race, for which the aliens will pay in material which has military uses. She is made the scapegoat for some politically expedient assassinations, and Nick finds he has to prevent the presidential candidate from conquering the universe. A fast moving novel that has serious undertones beneath the racy, zany exterior; well-written and fun to read.

**DARK FORCES** edited by Kirby McCauley, Macdonald Futura £6.95, 551pp  
Reviewed by Chris & Pauline Morgan.

Here is a magnificent anthology of 23 new stories by many of the top names in SF and horror writing. Although billed as 'Suspense and Supernatural Horror' quite a few of the stories are SF, such as that by Ray Bradbury and the 130-page novella by Stephen King. The latter is the longest and best in the book, a stunningly believable disaster tale. There's great variety in the themes and treatments, yet the standard is consistently high. Among the other contributors are Theodore Sturgeon, Robert Bloch, Joe Haldeman, Richard Matheson, Clifford Simak, Ramsey Campbell, Gene Wolfe and Nobel prizewinner Isaac Bashevis Singer. This is all remarkably good value, at a price which might have been asked for the Stephen King story alone.

**TERROR!** by Peter Haining, Sphere £2.95, 176 pages

Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

Peter Haining presents an assortment of fascinating old illustrations spanning the whole era of cheap horror pamphlets and magazines, from the late 18th century to the present day. There is very little text, just a brief introduction to each chapter. The pictures themselves (a few are reproduced in colour) are great fun to look through, showing the changing styles of portraying horror and fantasy subjects. Good value, though an index would have been useful.

**SPORE 7** by Clancy Carlile, Sphere £1.25, 282 pages

Reviewed by Kevin Easthope.

A mysterious metamorphic disease which leaves its victims mad and covered in slime starts up in a small American coastal town, and the plot revolves around increasingly frantic attempts to control its spread, culminating in a rather Draconian but very exciting climax. This is an eminently readable novel although presented like a 1950s monster flick. Better than it looks.

**TRADER TO THE STARS** by Poul Anderson, Panther 95 pence, 144 pages

Reviewed by Chris Smith.

This reprint contains three novellas about Anderson's larger-than-life trader, Nicholas Van Rijn, as he fights, drinks and swash-buckles his way round the galaxy. There are no deep meanings, but the book is entertaining if nothing else.

**WILD SEED** by Octavia E. Butler, Sidgwick & Jackson £6.95, 248 pages

Reviewed by David C. Holmes.

Octavia Butler is an erratic writer. Her four novels to date (Patternmaster, Mind of My Mind, Survivor and Wild Seed) have varied from poor to very good. Wild Seed is one of her better works. This is the story of Doro and Anyanwu, thrown together by their unique longevity. Yet they have major differences: to her, he is an obscenity; to him, she is a threat which must be eliminated. It is a gentle story which, though generally beautifully written, falls at the end. By wrapping up what is a good conclusion in a couple of pages, she loses the pace of the rest of the book. As a result, the book as a whole is not worth the hard-cover price.

**LAST SHUTTLE TO PLANET EARTH** by John Rankine, Dobson £5.25, 182pages

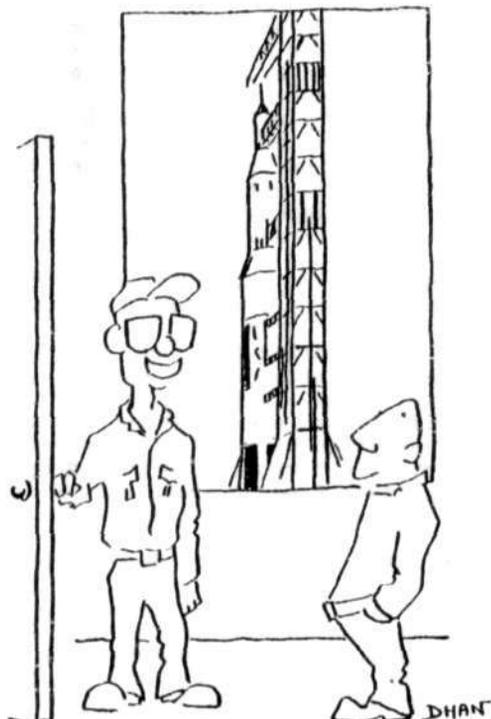
Reviewed by Kevin Easthope.

John Rankine usually puts out awful stuff, but sometimes aspires to the lofty heights of mediocrity; this novel falls into the latter category, but with one or two nice touches now and then. The plot revolves around the social and physical decay of an O'Neil type space colony, with the usual repression of the plebs by a pampered ruling class. Down on Earth things are even less perfect. A pretty standard SF adventure story.

THE SHAPE OF FUTURES PAST by  
Chris Morgan, Webb & Bower  
£5.95, 208 pages

Reviewed by Dave Hardy.

If a single conclusion can be drawn from this book it is that predictions have been wrong many more times than they have been right! But this does not make them any less interesting---or entertaining or, sometimes, amusing. The predictions here refer to alternate futures suggested by authors---mainly of fiction---between 1800 and 1945. The author divides these into categories: Dire Warnings, War, Satire, Escapism, etc. The field is covered very thoroughly; inevitably there is some overlapping (a story about war may also be satire) but generally the opportunity is taken to expand here. On occasion one wishes that more explanation could be given, as in the chapter on escapism, entitled 'Through the Sun in an Airship': no explanation is given of why the airship in the book of this title did not get hot... The illustrations are well-chosen and many have not been reproduced elsewhere. A pity that some could not have been larger. A minor quibble here is that the artists are usually not named. But this is a book which should be on the shelf of every SF fan interested in the roots of his chosen genre, and is thoroughly recommended.



"The chief gave me a rocket!"

DREAM DANCER by Janet Morris, Fontana £1.50, 350 pages

Reviewed by Margaret Thorpe.

Having rescued one of the Kerrion family from death, Shebat is adopted by the head of the family. When she is made heir she surprises the schemers by being more intelligent and devious than they had surmised, and manages to turn their plotting back on them. What could have been an excellent novel is marred by the writing. If the reader can untangle the incredibly long sentences and put up with their clumsy construction, it can be a fairly entertaining book.

THE STARS IN SHROUD by Gregory Benford, Sphere £1.50, 273 pages

Reviewed by Dave Hardy.

This is a rewritten version of Gregory Benford's first novel, Deeper Than Darkness. The setting is a Japanese-dominated galactic empire, collapsing under the onslaught of aliens---the Quarn---whose main method of attack is psychological. You may find the psychology of these future humans and the 'game' by which they try to regain tranquility after the traumas of space 'Jumps' or battles almost as alien as the Quarn themselves. But the book does have adventure and excitement if you can stick with it through the more difficult passages. Together with the sub-plot of a failing marriage, good science and characterisation, it makes for a worthwhile read.

THE SCIENCE FICTIONAL SOLAR SYSTEM edited by Isaac Asimov, Martin H.Greenberg & Charles G.Waugh, Sidgwick & Jackson £6.95, 317 pages  
Reviewed by Margaret Thorpe.

Each of the thirteen stories here covers one of the major bodies in our Solar System. Isaac Asimov, as usual, makes an excellent job of introducing the stories and updating planetary information in a very readable fashion. The stories, though not new, have been very competently written by such familiar authors as Blish, Niven, Clarke and Asimov. Of special note are Larry Niven's "Wait it Out" and the contribution by Duncan Lunan, the only Briton in the anthology, "The Comet, the Cairn, and the Capsule". This is excellent value, and an interesting way of combining top quality science fiction with well presented science fact.

100 GREAT SCIENCE FICTION SHORT SHORT STORIES edited by Isaac Asimov, Martin Harry Greenberg & Joseph D.Olander, Pan £1.75, 302 pages  
Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

The shorter they are, the more difficult it is to write them well. Here's a mixed bag of examples, all worth reading but spanning a vast range, including fantasy and horror. Some are amusing, some silly, some clever, some predictable. You'll almost certainly have read at least a few of them before. It's just a pity that Damon Knight's "Eripnav" is ruined by a printing error in the last line, and that Fredric Brown (the most famous and prolific of short short story writers) has been omitted.

MY NAME IS LEGION by Roger Zelazny, Sphere £1.50, 206 pages  
Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

Roger Zelazny's stories are always worth reading. These three, following the adventures of a futuristic private eye, are slick and likeable without achieving the sort of breathtaking brilliance of which Zelazny is capable. The fact that the hero is unnamed, existing outside the worldwide computer information network, is the gimmick. (He could be Francis Sandow, from Isle of the Dead, though the evidence is only circumstantial.) "Home is the Hangman" the last story, is a Hugo and Nebula winner.

DRAGONWORLD by Byron Preiss & J.Michael Reaves, Bantam distributed by Corgi £3.95, 545 pages  
Reviewed by Margaret Thorpe.

Amsel is a Fandoran, content to live alone in the forest until he is wrongly accused of murder and of spying for the Simbalese. Hunted by both nations he travels to long-forgotten lands in order to avert an all-out war. A beautiful fantasy novel, reminiscent of Tolkien; indeed, the Fandorans and Simbalese resemble Hobbits and Elves. The story is well written and fast-moving. All the characters are convincingly portrayed, possessing very human failings. A special mention must be given to the superb drawings by Joseph Zucker, which add to the overall enjoyment of the book.

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EDITORIAL NOTES

Thanks to all contributors, and to Locus, from whose pages all non-Birmingham news items were taken. Artwork this issue was by: Ivor Latto (p.1), Phill Probert (p.2), Euan Smith (pp.3 & 5), David Hardy (p.4), and David Hardy & Anthony Naylor (p.7). Next month your newsletter team will bring you a report on Novacon plus reviews of The Wounded Land by Stephen Donaldson, The Venus Hunters by J.G.Ballard, Urshurak by the Hildebrandts & Jerry Nicholls, all 3 volumes of The Road to Science Fiction edited by James Gunn, Tales of Known Space by Larry Niven, The Star Wars Gift Set and much, much more... Your newsletter editor is Chris Morgan, 39 Hollybrow, Selly Oak, B'ham 29.