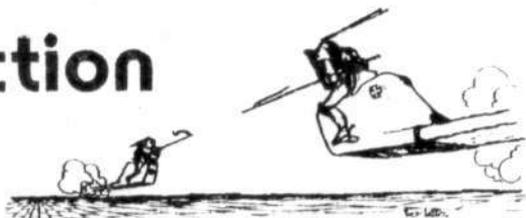


# Birmingham Science Fiction Group

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



NEWSLETTER 126

FEBRUARY 1982

The Birmingham Science Fiction Group has its formal meeting on the third Friday of each month in the upstairs room of THE IVY BUSH pub on the corner of Hagley Road and Monument Road, Edgbaston, Birmingham 16. 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.

FEBRUARY MEETING - Friday 19th February 1982 at 7.45 pm

**BRIAN ALDISS** visited the Group 10 years ago this month (Feb 1972) and 5 years ago. He has been a regular and welcome speaker and will be entertaining us again, this time on the publication day of his new novel Helliconia Spring (published by Jonathan Cape, 384 pages and the first volume in a new trilogy). Those who were at the 10th Anniversary Party last June will know that this is a meeting not to be missed.

JANUARY MEETING -A.G.M.

In the business part of the meeting the membership elected the new committee to be:

Chairman - Vernon Brown	Treasurer - Margaret Thorpe
Newsletter Editor - Pauline Morgan	Secretary - Chris Suslowicz
Publicity Officer - Alan Cash	

Rog Peyton is the Novacon Chairman/Representative

During the auction in the latter part of the evening numerous books were sold several times.

FORTHCOMING

- \* Spring - Marion Zimmer Bradley should be visiting us in March or April.
- \* Anne McCaffrey couldn't make it this month but she hopes to be back in the country late March or early April and may be able to visit us then. More details later.

Remember: Since the 1981 A.G.M. subscriptions are renewable on a 12 monthly basis. When yours is due you will receive a reminder with your last newsletter. Rates are still £3.50 for 12 months (or £5.00 for two members at the same address). Send your subscription to our treasurer, Margaret Thorpe 36 Twyford Road, Ward End, Birmingham 8.

Admission to this month's meeting: 60p for members, £1.00 for non-members.

THIS MONTH'S RAFFLE PRIZE: HELLICONIA SPRING by BRIAN ALDISS.



# APATHY RULES, O.K.?

In his address as retiring chairman, Rog Peyton struck out at the apparent apathy that is infecting the present membership. Admittedly the turnout was low and he was preaching to the converted, but perhaps those who weren't there have been totally overcome by apathy. The new committee will do its best to provide a programme to suit you. The Group is not just a one-evening-a-month affair. We have some exciting projects in hand, but they need your help. Shake off your apathy and join in!

## LORD MAYOR'S PROCESSION

Two years ago the Group built a spaceship and trundled it round on the back of a lorry in the Lord Mayor's Procession. Our new publicity officer, Alan Cash, intends to make this happen again. But he needs ideas, materials and willing hands. If you are interested, or have access to a lorry or an empty garage (or similar as a workshop), Alan is waiting to hear from you. Contact him at 28 Englesteade Close, Handsworth Wood, Birmingham 20; tel: (021) 554-1175.

## B.S.F.G. FILM MAKING GROUP

In October Alan Cash asked for volunteers interested in making a film to be entirely written, produced, shot, edited and acted by Brum Group members. In connection with this Alan can still use talent and exhibitionists. In addition he URGENTLY needs use of an Open Reel Tape Recorder. He also wants the expertise of a seamstress---or anyone who can sew--- to make up some costumes that have been designed for him. Contact Alan at the above address.

## BRUM SF WRITERS GROUP

We already have a handful of people in the Group who are keen to write and improve the quality of their efforts. We meet about every three months at different venues, members taking it in turns as host. If there is anyone else who is interested in writing SF, horror or fantasy, speak to Chris Morgan or your new newsletter editor (for address see back page).

## BRUM GROUP FANZINE

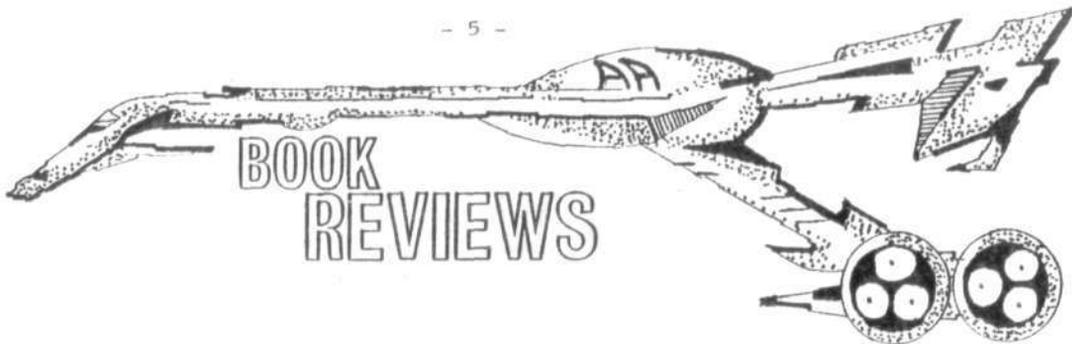
Wouldn't it be nice if the Brum Group produced a real live fanzine occasionally (twice a year, perhaps)? It would have much greater scope and more space than the newsletter. This isn't a totally original idea (how many of you remember Meta?) but it's worth trying again. There would be room for long articles, letters, lots of illustrations and even some fiction. If you're interested in helping to write, illustrate, produce or edit such a fanzine, have a word with Pauline Morgan.

## NEWSLETTER

This is your mouthpiece. If you have something to say let's hear it. We already have quite a large number of members who are reading and reviewing books for the newsletter. We can always do with new, good reviewers (they get to keep the book) so if you feel you would like to have a go, see me, Pauline Morgan. We can also use articles, news and illustrations.







**TIMESCAPE** by Gregory Benford, Sphere £1.75, 412 pages

Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

Here in British paperback for the first time is the winner of the most recent Nebula and John W. Campbell Memorial awards. If, like me, you're of the opinion that most SF awards seem to be made to novels lacking in literary merit, let me assure you that Timescape is one of the exceptions. Benford is a well known US physicist, but despite that and the evidence of his previous fiction he is an able writer. This novel of a pollution-threatened 1998 trying to send a warning back through time to 1962-3 via tachyons has a highly credible background of British and American research establishments, well developed main characters and, above all, well sustained threads of interest and excitement throughout its length. Despite Benford's sojourn at Cambridge, England, some of his English characters, especially the representatives of the lower classes, are caricatures, convincing only to an American audience. Apart from this, most details of 1998 and 1962-3 are well conveyed. Recommended.

**THE ELEVENTH COMMANDMENT** by Lester del Rey, Ballantine distributed by Futura £1.25, 186 pages

Reviewed by Margaret Thorpe.

"A little knowledge is a dangerous thing" or so it appears to Boyd Jensen. He is deported from the sane, controlled society of Mars to a post-holocaust Earth, where the Church has decreed any form of contraception to be unlawful; the resulting billions live in squalid chaos. Boyd's attempts to alleviate the suffering with his medical and scientific knowledge bring about swift reprisals from the Church authorities. Eventually he learns that to survive he will have to conform. What little relevance this idea has to present day thinking is rather concealed by glossing over the problems raised by the basic premise. The novel is effective in that the reader is required to think seriously about the points which are main issues in the book. Fairly entertaining.

**SPACE WEAPONS, SPACE WAR** by John W. Macvey, NEL £1.75, 286 pages

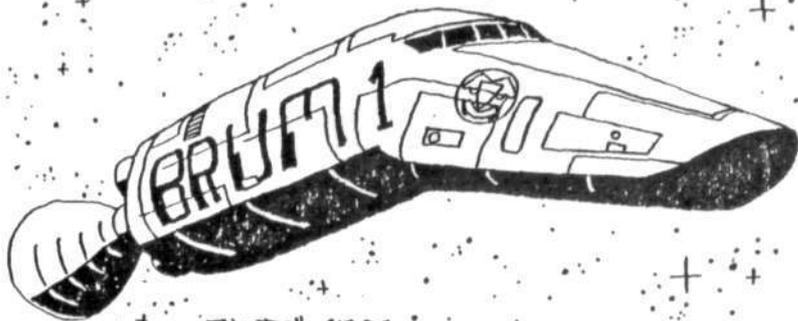
Reviewed by Vernon Brown.

Although well written from a grammatical viewpoint this book lacks content. After postulating alien invasion, the author "discusses" the methods that they may use to destroy the human race, such as freezing, flooding or roasting the Earth, or dropping meteorites on it. Trouble is, he then goes on to say that, as the aliens must possess a very high technology to cross interstellar space, they will have the means to do this sort of thing, but he doesn't say how. (Rather like the old adventure stories, "with one bound he was free".) Frankly, I'm not sure just who the author expects to read this book. There's too little information for anyone interested, however vaguely, in the subject, while those not interested will ignore it.

**THE BALUSTRADE PARADOX**, vol. 3 of **THE WARP**, by Neil Oram, Sphere £1.95, 204 pages

Reviewed by Anne Gay.

The best thing about this book is the use of the word "snarkle", (=snarled, tangled), of whose existence I was previously unaware. The worst thing is that the author can write well, as shown in the perfect sentences doled out with the generosity of Oliver Twist's porridge. If you are a big lefty acid-head drop-out still living in the sixties, this book has a consciousness-raising message for you. But if you are, you know it already. And the rest of us won't be converted by Mr. Oram.



SCIENCE FICTION SPECIAL 42: TITAN by John Varley (302 pages), TIN WOODMAN by Dennis R. Bailey & Dave F. Bischoff (102 pages), Sidgwick & Jackson £8.95  
Reviewed by John Farr.

Here we have a good novel by one of today's most promising young SF authors and a pretty fair novel by a pair of unknowns. The link between them (apart from being bound together) is that each is fantasy masquerading as SF. Varley is a very daring and innovative writer who will eventually produce a novel of the highest quality. Titan isn't it, but it has streaks of brilliance and has sufficient pace to seem much shorter than 300 pages. It's the first of an adventure trilogy set inside a vast organic planetoid which has decided to orbit Saturn. The planetoid is a super-intelligence which has (god-like) established a number of intelligent races with suitable environmental vegetation on its large inner surface. Most of the characters are well constructed and reappear in later volumes. It has black and white illustrations by Freff. Tin Woodman, which is noticeably cobbled together from two separate stories, brings new life to the old theme of telepaths being hated by non-telepaths. Some of its symbolism is a little obvious but there's plenty of excitement as human beings (including some telepaths) go to investigate an alien superbeing (gosh, another link between the novels) which has decided to orbit the star Aldebaran. If you enjoy your SF and fantasy together in one smooth blend you could do a lot worse than look out for this joint package.

CITY by Clifford D. Simak, Magnum £1.50, 248 pages  
Reviewed by John Farr.

Much of Simak's writing is overly sentimental, but sometimes, as here, he has found a suitable theme and done it justice in such a manner that the sentimentality seems right. City is probably Simak's best known novel (actually a collection of linked stories), telling of mankind's movement from cities to a more rural way of life, and the gradual decline of humanity, as robots and dogs become more important. It's a classic work of SF, which won the International Fantasy Award for 1953 and is still very readable today. I note that the copyright information given in this volume is wrong, it having first appeared in Britain in 1954 from Weidenfeld & Nicolson, and its first UK paperback having been from Four Square Books in 1965.

SMILE ON THE VOID by Stuart Gordon, Arrow £1.75, 294 pages  
Reviewed by Anne Gay.

What is the difference between myth and reality? Which is unreal, science or magic? From the start, Stuart Gordon raises expectations to shatter them, not cruelly but purposefully. In this story, he takes a Ghetto orphan, describes his loveless life in the cold chateau of his adoptive parents, his lone travels through the Mau Mau uprisings of Kenya, and his rise through drugs and arms deals to being the richest, and most callous, man in the world. Yet this is not a Harold Robins tale of rags to riches, but an intelligent exploration of our traditional social and political beliefs. If you want simple escapism, don't read this. But if you are open-minded, and interested in philosophy and adventures of the mind, maybe Gordon can tell you "whither Mankind". Riveting on its own terms.

GOD'S WORLD by Ian Watson, Granada £1.50, 285 pages; THE GARDENS OF DELIGHT by Ian Watson, Corgi £1.50, 185 pages

Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

These two enjoyable novels have, simultaneously, just appeared in paperback for the first time. Both feature a synthesis of outer space and inner space---and a startling blend of SF and fantasy---involving interstellar expeditions from Earth and their search for God. But before that irrevocably puts you off let me add hurriedly that there's virtually no religion in either book and that each contains plenty of fascinating incident only rarely slowed down by philosophic observations. In God's World a multinational crew sets off for the planet of that name in response to psychic invitations, in a faster-than-light ship which is psychically powered. The six who eventually arrive on God's World don't find God exactly, but they do find a fascinating and beautifully described alien race together with many surprises and complexities. As soon as the humans become slightly alien themselves, by acquiring a symbiotic covering of golden hair, the aliens begin to initiate them into the mysteries of godhood. Yet nothing is quite what it seems!

In The Gardens of Delight a multinational crew is trying to check on the progress of colonists who arrived almost a century earlier. They find instead a planet laid out in the form of Hieronymous Bosch's painting "The Garden of Earthly Delights", with heaven, hell and the enigmatic gardens---all complete with naked humans, strange beasts and peculiar towers. For most of its length this novel is a straightforward tour of the world, where one must die to penetrate to a different section, in the company of three recently-arrived crew members. One of these, an Irish psychologist, succeeds in unravelling the situation. I note that the book is dedicated to BSFG member Dr. Jack Cohen. Both novels are cleverly written, consciously displaying considerable erudition. (If I didn't know Ian Watson better I'd think he was showing off!) Although Ian Watson has a reputation for being a "difficult" author, anyone who can read without moving their lips shouldn't have much trouble in comprehending the meanings of these novels. Try them both.

THE SENDAI by William Woolcroft, Futura £1.50, 285 pages

Reviewed by Bob Vernon.

This is a cheap and nasty thriller with outrageous pretensions. "Genetic engineering has the potential to alter mankind as no other science has or likely ever will" claims Woolcroft, and hopes that this book will raise serious concern in the reader's breast by claiming scientific credibility and relevance. Rubbish. This tatty offering won't help anyone think more clearly about a complex and important subject. Plot? Mad scientist creating DNA recombinant monsters, aiming for a thick, strong slave race. Dashing Doc and his new found lovely fight against the odds and win---but is that the end of the story? Mis-concieved and badly written its only quality is pace. Don't buy it or read it.

THE PRISONER: WHO IS NUMBER TWO? by David McDaniel, NEL £1.50, 141 pages

Reviewed by Dave Hardy.

A curious phenomenon, The Prisoner, to remain popular so long after the TV series ended. I suppose it could loosely be classed as SF, but like Star Trek (not that I'm really comparing it) it seems to have a sub-culture of its own. The snag is that one always knows in advance that Number Six won't succeed in escaping at the end of each episode... This is quite entertaining reading, with occasional forays into the individual's right to freedom and such. As to the question in the title---I never found out.

MIDNIGHT AT THE WELL OF SOULS by Jack Chalker, Penguin £1.75, 360 pages

Reviewed by Margaret Thorpe.

A really satisfying fantasy novel bearing similarities to several of Frank Herbert's books. The characters and aliens cannot be faulted either in conception or consistency. The plot is complex, catching and maintaining the reader's attention right to the end. Nathan Brazil is an incredibly ancient space-freighter captain who is diverted from a mercy mission by an S-O-S. An alien transports three of his passengers into various world models in pursuit of two maniacs who could destroy the universe. The humans are transformed into different alien bodies, and have to come to terms with, and understand, their relationships with the different environments. Plenty of humour and neat twists guarantee entertainment.

SCIENCE FICTION SPECIAL 40: FALSE DAWN (208 pages), TIME OF THE FOURTH HORSEMAN (183 pages), CAUTIONARY TALES (207 pages) all by Chelsea Quinn Yarbro, Sidgwick & Jackson £8.95  
Reviewed by Pauline E. Morgan.

Chelsea Quinn Yarbro belongs to that group of female SF and fantasy writers---which includes Katherine Kurtz, Octavia Butler and C.J. Cherryh--- that have appeared in recent years and are busy carving themselves a niche in the genre. The first two titles in this omnibus volume are novels which have the same basic theme---survival--- but very different settings. False Dawn portrays a world, only thirty or forty years on, in which no-one is bothering to pick up the pieces after the catastrophes of pollution, plague and nuclear devastation. In the disturbed environment Thea and Evan Montague fight for existence in an everyone-for-himself situation. Time of the Forth Horseman is a much more immediate tale. In a greatly over-populated city, diseases thought to be extinct start to reappear. It is a fight by a group of dedicated doctors against the statistical errors of their colleagues, which have caused the acute situation. There is perhaps a lot more flesh on the bones of these two backgrounds than is at first apparent. Is one a precursor of the other? Both are also, incidentally, love stories. In Cautionary Tales most of the stories are disturbing in some way. One, "Frog Pond", gives a preview to the world of False Dawn as it is an incident from the childhood of the lead character, Thea. The themes vary greatly (in "Un Bel Di") and dead (in "The Meaning of the Word"). All are worth reading more than once. This volume does show how Chelsea Quinn Yarbro has improved her writing, and novels like Hôtel Transylvania and its sequels show that she is still doing so.

THE MOMENT OF ECLIPSE by Brian Aldiss, Granada £1.25, 187 pages

Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

Here's yet another Aldiss collection with a new cover. The stories are mostly from the late 1960s; middle period Aldiss, one might say. Very good they are too, including poignant views of future India and, best of all, a couple of wickedly satirical pieces. These are "Heresies of the Huge God" about religion and "Swastika!" (still one of my favourite Aldiss stories) about Adolf Hitler.

THE PIG PLANTAGENET by Allen Andrews, Arrow £1.50, 186 pages

Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

This fantasy about animals getting the better of humans in mediaeval France is a failure from start to finish. It lacks the sharp satirical edge of Animal Farm, the credibility of Watership Down and the slow grandeur of The Book of the Dun Cow. Its attempts at humour are amazingly ponderous, none of its characters---human or animal---are at all believable, and its style is boringly pedestrian. In trying to jump on the bandwagon of talking animal books, Allen Andrews has slipped up and fallen flat on his face.

SCHRODINGER'S CAT II: THE TRICK TOP HAT by Robert Anton Wilson, Sphere £1.95, 249 pages

Reviewed by Malcolm Thorpe.

The second in a trilogy that can be read, on the author's admission, in any order. This is made possible by the fact that there is no storyline, just a collection of unconnected anecdotes set on a 1983 Earth with dramatic social and political changes. As befits a past editor of Playboy, there is an abundance of soft porn, interspersed with philosophical and metaphysical comment. Some parts are funny ha-ha, but most is funny peculiar. I must echo the author's opening warning---"caveat lector"; if you know and like the style this is a good example, but if not, let the reader beware.

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## Editorial Notes

In this, my first issue as editor, I have been practising. I promise to practise a bit harder for next month. Thanks to Chris Morgan for invaluable editorial assistance, Locus for news and Rog Peyton for Lettraset. Artists are Ivor Latto (p1), Phill Probert (pp2 & 5), Steve Green (p3), and John Dell (p6). Produced and edited for the BSFG by Pauline Morgan, 39 Hollybrow, Selly Oak, Birmingham B29 4LX.