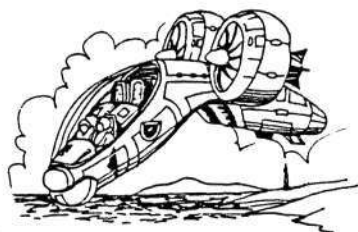


# Birmingham Science Fiction Group

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



## Number 154      JUNE 1984

The Birmingham Science Fiction Group has its formal meeting on the third Friday of each month in the New Imperial Hotel in Temple Street, Birmingham City Centre. There is also an informal meeting on the first Tuesday of each month at the General Wolfe pub, on the corner of Aston Road and Holt Street (near Aston University and the science park). Newcomers are always welcome.

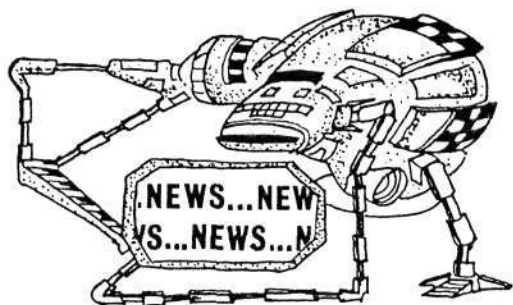
JUNE MEETING - Friday 15th June 1984 from 7.45 pm onwards

The speaker this month is Jack Cohen whom I'm told needs no introduction to the Brum Group although I haven't met him myself, being a relative newcomer to the area and the group. I can remember Jack from my very first convention in Worcester 1971. A very entertaining speaker he had even brought along numerous creepy crawlies and other animals with him to the convention. Pete Weston rang Jack up the other night to try and persuade him to bring some wild-life to the meeting and also to ask for more information on what he'll be talking about. However, since Jack was in the bath at the time all he could tell us was that he'll be telling us of the research and the collaboration he has been giving Harry Harrison in Harry's forthcoming book WEST OF EDEN. (How many noticed the slight compass error in last month's newsletter? I'd shoot my information source but that would leave the group Chairmanless.)

MAY MEETING

Our guest in May was Douglass Hill - not a name known to many members perhaps, but as things turned out Doug was one of the most entertaining speakers we have had for some time - and a very good sport! At the Chinese meal afterwards he seemed to be having an excellent time, helping some of our regulars to put the world to rights. Doug's talk revolved around his experiences in writing and publishing and in particular his own interest in children's sf. It's rare to find an author who takes "juvenovels" so seriously, rather than writing down (slightly cynically, perhaps?) to a younger age group. In any event it was a well attended meeting which went on well past 11.00pm. Especial thanks to Rog Peyton for inviting Doug along to the BSFG.





#### FORTHCOMING BOOKS FROM PENGUIN

June: VOYAGE FROM YESTERYEAR by James P Hogan (hardcore SF, a story of what happens when a planet colonised by robots in charge of a diverse gene bank is visited for the first time by humans from Earth. The children reared by the robots without adult supervision are free from the vices of the old world and

battle to maintain their independence.)

July: TWILIGHT AT THE WELL OF SOULS by Jack L. Chalker (The final volume of Chalker's Saga of the Well World - volume 4 was reviewed in the April Newsletter. Heroes Nathan Brazil and Mavra Chang have to reach the Well of Souls in time to save the universe). Also in July THE SEVEN SERPENTS (Sorcery 3) by Steve Jackson.

August: THE TRIPODS TRILOGY by John Christopher (in Puffin) - (THE WHITE MOUNTAINS, THE CITY OF GOLD AND LEAD, THE POOL OF FIRE). Also BLUESONG by Sydney J van Scyoc, a fantasy novel, sequel to DARKCHILD published April '84 - "Deeply mysterious and built around a love story that will endear the book to women readers."

September: TALES FROM THE VULGAR UNICORN edited by Robert Asprin

October: PAVANE by Keith Roberts, THE CROWN OF KINGS (Sorcery 4) by Steve Jackson. November: BROKEN SYMMETRIES by Paul Preuss.

December: COILS by Fred Saberhagen and Roger Zelazny. January 1985: THE FURIES by Keith Roberts. February: SOFTWARE by Rudy Rucker. March: THE CODE OF THE LIFEMAKER by James P Hogan.

April: THE ARTIFICIAL KID by Bruce Sterling

#### NEBULA AWARD RESULTS:

Best novel: STARTIDE RISING by David Brin

Best novella: HARDFUGHT by Greg Bear

Best novelette: BLOOD MUSIC by Greg Bear

Best short story: THE PEACEMAKER by Gardner Dozois

Grand Master: Andre Norton

OBITUARY: Charles Finney, author of THE CIRCUS OF DR LAO died on 16th April in Tucson Arizona.

PAULINE MORGAN: Pauline Morgan, one time editor of this Newsletter has sold a short story which appears in issue 15 (June 1984) of Imagine magazine. Called THE AIR WAS HEAVY WITH THE SCENT OF RAIN it was one of the prize winning stories from Mythcon.

BSFG GROUP MEMBERSHIP: Renewals received in May were Mick and Sue Gadd - thanks for continuing to support the group. Also welcome to Robert Meades who joined the group in May but has a Mid Glamorgan address - that's what we like, enthusiastic members! (Want a committee post?)

ARTHUR C CLARKE: Anyone wishing to see Arthur C Clarke, and with a spare £75 burning a hole in their pocket can attend a conference at the North East London Polytechnic from 2nd to the 5th of July where he is to be guest speaker. In fact the membership fee is £75 plus VAT (just a mere £11.25 extra) and it is called View From Two Shores, subtitled 1984: Now or Never? Dunno about you but I thought it was 1984.

# LETTERS

## Informalities - the question

It may come as a surprise to some of you but there is, every month, an informal meeting (on the first Tuesday of each month at the General Wolfe, Aston). I used to appear at these meetings regularly but, due to the fact that I now take evening classes on Tuesdays, I don't any more. It has come to my notice that very few other people attend (generally only 2 or 3). There have been suggestions that the meeting be moved somewhere more central, or that the date should be changed (I have said this myself a few times). The problem is that, unless someone else is likely to show up, there isn't much point in doing either.

As to the change of venue, both the "Australian" in Hurst Street, and the original venue the "Old Royal" have been rejected as "grotty". Other suggestions received so far are "The Grapes" in Hill Street and "The Crown" in Hurst Street both of which are decidedly plush inside and close to New Street station and the buses on Bright Street and Stephenson Street. Then the date. Due to the success of the second informal (held on the last Thursday of the month) now replaced by the MISFiT meeting (the following night) I would suggest either Thursday or (even better) Friday.

If anyone who would like to attend one of these meetings has any suggestions then they should send them to

W. A. McCabe, 53 Wenman Street, Balsall Heath, Birmingham B12 9SP  
and I shall try and get something done about it.

((Thanks for the letter William. I'm all for a change of date to a Friday although I'm not so sure about changing the venue. This newsletter is interested in hearing from anyone with any views on this - Graham))

## BOOKS RECEIVED FOR REVIEW

Granada:	THE FURTHER ADVENTURES OF HALLEY'S COMET by John Calvin Batchelor
	LYONESSE by Jack Vance
	THE FARM by Richard Haigh
Gollancz:	THE TITHONIAN FACTOR by Richard Cowper
	LIES, INC. by Philip K Dick
Penguin:	THIEVES' WORLD edited by Robert Asprin
Corgi:	MAGICIAN'S GAMBIT by David Eddings
Arrow:	THE CRUCIBLE OF TIME by John Brunner

I wish to thank all of the above publishers for their review copies and I hope to review as many books as possible over the next few issues of the Newsletter

## LITTLE GREEN MEN

The pavements sway from side to side  
The buildings are swimming round  
Darkness is closing in  
As I hit the ground  
There's a banging in my head  
My stomach's not my own  
My legs feel like lead  
As I stumble home

When I awoke that morning  
with a glazed look in my eyes  
To find I was at home  
Well that was a surprise  
I don't know how I got here  
Nor what happened last night  
Must have been the Gin and Beer  
That made me get so tight

And now I feel so awful  
I just want to curl up and die  
What on earth made me do it  
Oh I wonder why  
And sure as hell I see them  
All those little green men  
Have returned for another visit  
No, I've been drinking again

Jan Poole







# BOOK REVIEWS

THE BUCCANEERS OF LAN-KERN by Peter Tremayne, Methuen £1.95, 201 pgs  
Reviewed by Pauline Morgan

The best thing about this final volume in the Lan-Kern trilogy is its Tim White cover. Volume 1, THE FIRES OF LAN-KERN, showed promise. It began with Frank Dryden being catapulted into the future, which after suffering a major disaster, had reverted to a Celtic based culture. Although fast paced THE BUCCANEERS OF LAN-KERN is poor, being too full of idiots and coincidences. The three main characters, Dryden, Kigva (whom he loves) and Pryderi (her brother) continue to chase the enigmatic box, an ancient relic, that only Dryden will be able to open. They go this time, not to an underground Nazi-style tyranny, (as in THE DESTROYERS OF LAN-KERN) but to an oppressed island somewhere in the region of Eire, lorded over by bloodthirsty barbarians. There is much to-ing and fro-ing and running around in circles, but as may be expected it all comes out all right in the end. Perhaps Peter Tremayne is an excellent horror writer but this and volume II were not worth waiting for.

THE BOOK OF THE RIVER by Ian Watson, Gollancz £7.95, 208 pages.  
Reviewed by W. A. McCabe

The World of the River is sliced neatly in two by the river itself or, to be more precise, the black current that is in the river. While the current makes no real impact on life on land it can control to some extent the people it allows on the river. It has a special preference for women.

Yaleen is a riverwoman and this is her story. On her side of the river female sailors ply their trade up and down the river and, due to the fact that the forests block off all inland routes to a great extent, control trade of all sorts. Yaleen has a brother who, with several comrades and telescopes, is watching the activities on the other bank. The people of the other bank are engaged in a witch-hunt. He wants to go over there and find out why the current has never allowed anyone to cross (or a man to go on the river more than once). He has the idea that he can get through under the current. He gets through and is burnt on the other side.

Yaleen finds another way of crossing and finds out what is really happening. The people on the other side think of the black current as a devil that they must avoid or destroy (and she has just given them the key to its destruction).

All in all the book is readable and little more. It is also open-ended (as is the custom nowadays).

THE TERMINAL BEACH by J.G. Ballard, Everyman, £2.95, 221 pages  
Reviewed by Paul Brantingham

J.G. Ballard is, I suspect, one of the most enigmatic and least understood science fiction writers living. His work demands the

fullest intellectual participation available from the reader. Nonetheless, there are probably some minds of a type doomed never to experience the full extent of the visions his mind has released. His ferocious intelligence has created works such as CRASH, with its central concept of the sexuality of automobile crashes, and THE UNLIMITED DREAM COMPANY, a stunning fable, all at once erotic, erotic and magical. It can be no coincidence that the main character of this visionary piece of work is named Blake. Ballard is one of the few authors in the science fiction genre whose work can be appreciated by a much wider audience as literature of the highest standard. He himself believes, in fact, that science fiction is the authentic literature of the twentieth century.

One of his earlier collections of stories, THE TERMINAL BEACH, has now been reissued by Everyman, in a larger than usual format. The stories contained therein are some of Ballard's more accessible pieces of work, and make a superb introduction to this unique author. A bizarre spectrum is spanned in this book, from the simple, straightforward poignancy of "Billenium" to the chilling, bleak, almost Kafka-esque handling of the psychological drama of "End-Game". The "Illuminated Man" is a hauntingly beautiful picture of the effects of an awesome concept - that of cosmic supersaturation and the eventual crystallisation of matter. Ballard later expanded this short story into a novel, THE CRYSTAL WORLD, a work which when experienced burns itself eidetically into the mind of the reader. The title story, "The Terminal Beach", is a tour de force through a nightmarish psychic landscape, shot through with guilt and inevitability. The eight other stories in this collection complete a breathtaking package, one that leaves the reader in some strange way altered by the experience of reading them.

The work of J.G. Ballard reduces to insignificance the efforts of many wider-known authors. His writing has such logic, perception and power that the overwhelming majority of science fiction consumed these days is shown up for that which it really is--drivel. THE TERMINAL BEACH is a superb insight into the mind of this unique author, and is a gem to be treasured, taken down from the bookshelf again and again, and opened to experience the coruscations of genius which make up these stories.

TIME'S DARK LAUGHTER by James Kahn, Panther £1.95, 348 pages  
Reviewed by Pauline Morgan

Humans are no longer the dominant species. Genetic engineering has populated the world with strange mythical beasts and talking animals. In a world rapidly entering a new Ice Age unusual friendships flourish. A Bear, a Vampire and a centaur set off to rescue the Human Joshua Green who has been lured to the City With No Name. Five years previously (in 'WORLD ENOUGH, AND TIME to which this is a sequel) Joshua had led his friends to rescue the Centaur's human wife from the same city. We meet old characters afresh and new ones in a fantasy world of great potential. The plot is racy but runs into trouble when it passes into the surreal. The gestation and development of the bird-child that is the result of the union between Joshua and the Queen of the City With No Name, are impossibly short, notwithstanding the immense power of this creature. The descent into philosophy and allegory towards the end spoils an otherwise good read, and as the middle volume of a trilogy stands up surprisingly well as a complete novel.

GETA by Donald Kingsbury, Granada £2.50, 512 pages

Reviewed by W.A. McCabe

Every book has good points and bad points. Before I get into the review proper I'd like to tell you of the good points of this book. The cost per page is something like half of what you'd expect from a more normal book. It comes complete with maps (front) details of calendar (back) and phrases and sayings (beginning of each chapter) designed to give you an insight into the culture of the people represented in the book.

The book is set in a society where cannibalism and group marriage (6 is an ideal number) are quite normal. One of the plots of the story is the courtship of another partner to a group of 5 (the original title was "Courtship Rite") but this fades into the background about a quarter of the way through. No single plot persists throughout, the thing is held together by a cast of 9 central characters. These are:- the 5 initial partners in the marriage, their intended bride, the bride they have forced upon them, a corrupt dictator responsible for the forcing, and a temple whore/assassin. The numerous sub-plots and plots include a technological revolution, a minor war, a plague of insects, and the discovery of pre-colony history (the planet, Geta, on which this takes place is a future colony of Earth or Thiere). One point of interest - for God read ship. I hope I have given you some clue as to the tangled structure of this book. All that is left to say is that, if you liked DUNE or any one of several large historical novels, you might just like this one, otherwise I wouldn't really bother.

THE NEVERENDING STORY by Michael Ende, translated by Ralph Manheim, King Penguin £5.95

Reviewed by W.A. McCabe

The neverending story is every fantasy you ever had, every book with an imaginary world you ever read. It is a story in a book in another book. The book that binds it all together tries to blur the distinction between one level of fantasy and another. There are many of the traditions of classic fantasy lands and some new ones - it also requires imagination.

Bastian Balthazar Bux is an ordinary boy. Short, fat, weak, a dreamer, talks to himself, and is not above stealing. We first notice him when he crashes into a bookshop to escape from the taunts of the other schoolboys. The shopkeeper is reading a book. This is no ordinary book, it is the neverending story, a book to end (or begin) all books. Something draws Bastian towards the book, he steals it. Once he has left the shop he is overcome with guilt. He cannot return it, he cannot face school, he cannot go home. He hides in the attic above school. He reads the book.

Fantastica is in trouble. It is a land of the imagination and someone's imagination is defective. There are holes developing in its imaginary landscape and its imaginary history. It needs someone to fill in the gaps. Bastian is drawn into the book, drawn by something he cannot control. From the unplumbed depths of his imagination he fills in the gaps. He becomes a hero and no longer wants to go home.

But so far I've only told you part of the plot. The story involves all the characters you'd find in any fantasy novel or at least ones that are familiar. The novel works on several levels adventure/personal philosophy / extremely blurred reality and quite a few I probably haven't come to yet. One word of warning. I have heard that the book will soon be published in black and white. If you wait 'til then the adventure will be a little more difficult to understand and some of the layers will be more obscure (and the pictures won't be half as good). If you want books to compare it with I'd give you Alice (Lewis Carroll) or Oz (L Frank Baum) and probably mention that Tolkien was never in the same class.