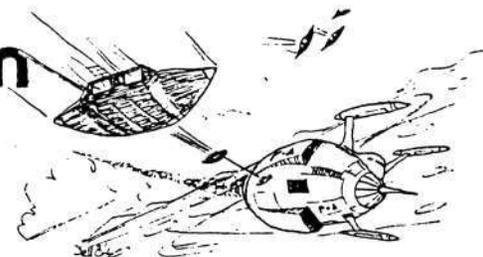


# Birmingham Science Fiction Group

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



## Number 159

## NOV 1984

The Birmingham Science Fiction Group meets on the third Friday of each month in the New Imperial Hotel in Temple Street, Birmingham City Centre. Details of our next meetings are shown below.

**NOVEMBER MEETING: FRIDAY NOVEMBER 16TH AT 7.45PM**

"Team Think". Paul Brantingham, Steve Green, Chris Chivers and Pauline Morgan will be on hand to answer all your SF questions, giving their own biased opinions of course! After a previous comment of mine I'm told one question will be "What right has anyone to question the reading habits and tastes of the British public?"

**DECEMBER MEETING: FRIDAY DECEMBER 21ST FROM 7.30PM**

"Christmas Party". Most members will remember our old venue, the Ivy Bush pub on the Hagley Road. This is the venue for our Christmas meal and party. The meal, a hot buffet, will consist of vegetable soup, roll and butter followed by beef bourguignonne or chicken chasseur, boiled rice, chopped mixed salad and french fries. Sweet consists of apricot and orange cheesecake, gateaux or raspberry trifle. The modest cost for this lot, after a subsidy from the Group, is £5 per head. Awkward so-and-sos (like Jan and myself) who are vegetarian or have dietary peculiarities are still welcome and alternative arrangements can be made so long as you let myself or Paul Brantingham know well in advance. Spaces for the meal are limited to 50. All applications for tickets must be sent to our treasurer by DECEMBER 1ST. Remember, we had to turn late-comers away last year.

**JANUARY MEETING:** Our Annual General Meeting will soon be here and the current Committee would like to hear from any members interested in standing. Platforms will be published in the January issue of the Newsletter.

**INFORMAL MEETING DATES:** First and last Friday of each month at the General Wolfe pub on the corner of Aston Road and Holt Street, near Aston University. Friday 30th November and Friday 7th December.

## Birmingham SF Group Newsletter

NEWSLETTER EDITOR & EDITORIAL ADDRESS: Graham R. Poole, 86 Berwood Farm Road, Wylde Green, Sutton Coldfield, W. Midlands, B72 1AG

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SECRETARY: Paul Brantingham, 33 County Park Avenue, Abbeyfields, Halesowen, W. Midlands, B62 8SU

TREASURER: Stan Eling, 124 Galton Road, Smethwick, Warley, West Midlands, B67 5JS

MEMBERSHIP DETAILS OF THE BIRMINGHAM SCIENCE FICTION GROUP

The annual membership fee of £5 (£7.50 for two people at the same address) entitles members to a copy of this newsletter each month, reduced entrance fees to the monthly meetings, the opportunity of joining our free-to-members Amateur Press Association (APA-E) and the chance of meeting and corresponding with like-minded science fiction fans. All new membership fees and renewals should be sent to our treasurer

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### EDITORIAL

A big thank you to all contributors to this issue - John Dell for all artwork, Martin Tudor for Jophan and the convention listing, Chris and Pauline Morgan, Dave Hardy and Anne Gay for the reviews and the publishers for the review copies. Don't worry if your review doesn't appear in this issue...they'll be in next month's bumper Christmas special.

Star prize this month goes to eagle-eyed statistics recorder Stan Eling who was the only person to spot and point out my deliberate mistake in the last issue. It was, of course, number 158, October 1984.

Don't forget I would like to publish Novacon photographs in the next issue of the Newsletter. Please let me have all contributions as soon as possible. All contributions that are used will be paid for and returned after use.

LAST MONTH: Chris Priest gave a marvellous talk on why we didn't want to hear about 'The Hacker' and why he is turning his back on science fiction. A few brief quasi-quotes, out of context but conveying the general meaning: He doesn't like the spate of series and serials; they are an admission that something's wrong, you didn't quite get it right the first time, and the readers are unadventurous by buying them. Everything is becoming the same, identifiable, predictable and talent is being driven out of SF. It is significant that it takes a non-sf book, THE GLAMOUR, to really launch Chris Priest into the 'big-time'. At the end of the evening, of course, Chris had to tell us about 'The Hacker', a dreadful new science fiction series being made by Yorkshire TV in conjunction with Home Box Office in the States. At least it might be a series. Every story idea Chris gave them was turned down and, eventually, after much hassle, he dropped out of the project.

Footnote: It's not often I get time to read these days and so I asked Rog Peyton whether it was worth buying THE GLAMOUR. Silly question, Rog is a bookseller! I made time to read the book and was well rewarded. Recommended!

DEADLINE FOR THE NEXT ISSUE: FRIDAY 7TH DECEMBER

# BRUM: 2184

SPACEMAN SMITH, ON LEAVE IN BIRMINGHAM HAS MET TWO OLD FRIENDS. THEY TAKE HIM TO "THE PROGRAMMER AND DRAGON" A PUB IN THE HARBORE TOWER.....

So whats the favour chaps?

When we settled here in Birmingham our father came with us....

However, he died two weeks ago....

HIS LAST WISH WAS THAT HIS ASHES SHOULD BE SCATTERED ON ZYLAN HIS BIRTH-PLACE.

WHICH IS WHERE THE ROYAL ANGUS IS HEADING ON ITS NEXT TRIP.



I'D BE ONLY TOO GLAD TO DO THAT FOR YOU LADS....

The pilot of the black lifter watches from a corner...

A TOAST TO THE OLD ZYLAN'S MEMORY!

IT'S MY ROUND... I'LL GET THEM IN...

AAAAGH!

SUDDENLY....

**BLAT!**

You're not going ANYWHERE!

SEE THE NEXT EPISODE..

© JOHN DELL '84



First thing this time we have the snippets of film news promised in last month's report. THE CLAN OF THE CAVE BEAR and THE VALLEY OF HORSES started being shot, back to back in June, they're being directed by Michael Chapman with screenplays written by John Sayles (THE HOWLING and PIRANHA). Darryl Hannah (SPLASH and BLADERUNNER) has been signed to play the role of Ayla, a Cro-Magnon cavewoman who although beautiful by our standards was not considered so by her people - they were Neanderthals. After being cast out by her clan, she becomes the leader of a new people. Originally conceived as an NBC mini-series it was later decided that the project was better suited to the feature film medium. Jean M. Auel is now working on the third volume of the series, THE MAMMOTH HUNTERS.

HYPER SAPIEN the \$18 million film I mentioned briefly last time was due to begin production last month. Directed by Michael Wadleigh (WOLFEN) the story deals with two species of aliens, the Hyper Sapiens and the Trilats, who are studying a doomed race called Humans when three alien youngsters stowaway on an Earthbound ship. The adult aliens have to find the youngsters before they are discovered and killed, or before the powerful Tilat youngster does something to destroy the planet. Needless to say the adults are not particularly successful in their search and the young aliens become involved in a series of adventures - including falling in love with an Earth boy.

The Disney production, to be called BABY or WILD THING, stars Patrick McGeehan (THE PRISONER), William Katt (THE GREATEST AMERICAN HERO) and Sean Young (BLADE RUNNER) as two opposing teams of explorers who discover a baby brontosaurus in an uncharted region of Africa. Directed by Bill Norton (AMERICAN GRAFFITI) with special effects by Isadoro Raponi (KING KONG, CLOSE ENCOUNTERS).

Another \$18 million sf epic, ENEMY MINE, has had a change of director - Richard Loncraine left after just three weeks of filming in Iceland and was replaced by Wolfgang Petersen (DAS BOOT, THE NEVERENDING STORY) who has now moved the filming to Hungary.

Moving on from the film industry, but only just, we have a new Palace Software game written for the Commodore 64 - THE EVIL DEAD. Billed as 'The Ultimate Experience in Gruelling Terror' this game has come in for almost as much criticism as the film on which it is based. But despite opposition from Mary Whitehouse and the refusal of W.H. Smith's to stock it, it has proved a great success, selling large numbers and prompting Spectrum and BBC Micro versions to be launched before Christmas.

Another new game, this time from Lumpsoft for the Spectrum, is entitled THE KEY TO TIME, and is the first game I've heard of to be based on DOCTOR WHO. According to a review in PERSONAL COMPUTER NEWS No. 84 the game is 'jolly good'. Including as it does such quirks as responding to a typed instruction WAIT with a batch of purple prose, 'the infinite sands of time trickle through the cosmic hourglass', then turning Pythonesque with 'I never wanted to be an adventure game, I wanted to be a Lumberjack'.

But moving swiftly on from the world of computers to the even more cloistered world of Fandom, (before Pete Weston starts moaning again) now seems as good a time as any to remind you that there are so far two bids for the 1986 Annual British SF Convention. The ALBACON 111 bid is based in Glasgow with a committee

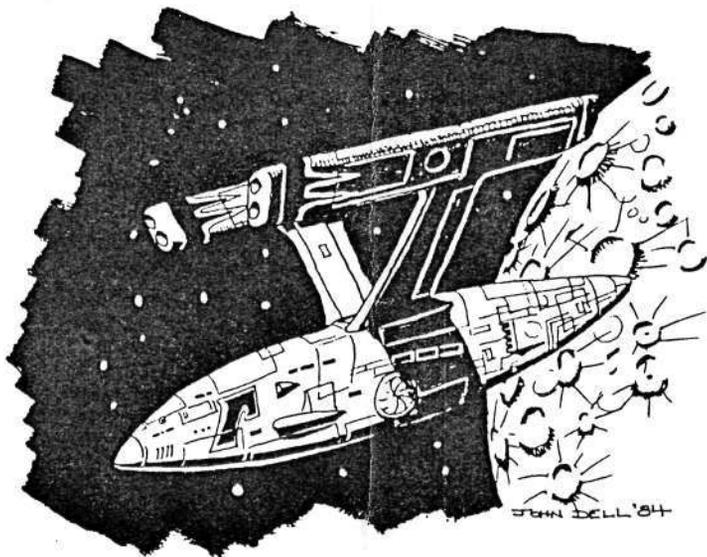
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of self-confessed smart-asses who think they know it all (and judging from the success of previous ALBACONS they probably do) consisting of Bob Jewett, Dave Ellis, Ian Sorenson, Michael Molloy, Bruce Saville, Chris O'Kane and Vince Docherty. If you wish to pre-support their bid send £1.00 to Vince Docherty, 20 Hillington Gdns., Glasgow, G52 2TP. Opposing Glasgow we have the CONTRAVENTION bid...the site has yet to be settled but Brighton and Birmingham NEC Metropoles have been mentioned. The committee consists of Chris Donaldson, Rochelle Dorey, Chris Hughes, Jan Huxley, Paul Oldroyd, Chrissie Pearson, John Wilkes and Richard Vine. Again it's £1.00 to pre-support this time send it to CONTRAVENTION 46 Colwyn Road, Beeston, Leeds, LS11 6PY. (Oh and just in case you didn't spot that tiny hint of bias there I feel I should mention I've already pre-supported ALBACON 111...)

Still on the subject of 1986 conventions it looks like we are going to have to wait until February of that year before the next MEXICON. Apparently the committee of MEXICON 2 has been having trouble finding suitable and affordable hotels. "We couldn't even afford one day at the last place we tried," groaned Greg Pickersgill to intrepid ANSIBLE editor Dave Langford adding, to quote from Dave's illustrious newszine again, 'that hotel managers had readily confessed that a) if they didn't get MEXICON they'd have an empty hotel and lose money, but b) they still wouldn't reduce their charges in the slightest.' An official press release is promised soon, but in the meantime registration, until 1985, remains at £6.00, from Pam Wells, 24a Beech Road, Bowes Pk., London, N11 2DA.

ANSIBLE also reports that CAMCON 85 should be the sixth UNICON...the committee is still searching for a suitable affordable unbooked college venue in Cambridge. Again it's £1.00 to pre-support, monies to 63 Drake Rd., Chessington, Surrey, KT9 1LQ - money to be returned if no con is possible. And now before I continue, I suppose I should give you details of how to acquire ANSIBLE so you can get some news first hand and I can keep Langford off my back. Subscription rates are 6 issues for £2.00 (which at the current rate of publication could well last you 3 years) monies to be sent to Dave Langford, 94 London Road, Reading, Berks, RG1 5AU.





# REVIEWS



MYTHAGO WOOD by Robert Holdstock, Gollancz £8.95, 252 pages

Reviewed by Chris Morgan

Robert Holdstock has written a complex and compelling book--- certainly one of the best fantasy novels of the year. "Mythago Wood" was an award-winning novelette which appeared in The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction in 1981; the novel version is not only a great deal longer, it is more satisfying and does justice to the author's marvellously original idea.

He postulates a patch of ancient English woodland, untouched since the last Ice Age, which supposedly has an area of only three square miles but, like Dr Who's Tardis, is much bigger inside than out. The wood itself is semi-sentient, turning away all but the most determined explorers; it is inhabited by mythagos (= myth imagos), flesh and blood images of mythical heroes of the past. These images are formed from racial memories lingering in the minds of the people who live near the wood---even when all conscious memory of the particular hero has gone. Thus although the wood may contain Robin Hood and King Arthur, most of the action concerns mythagos of prehistoric origin--- magnificent, wholly believable creations.

The story is told by Steven Huxley, a young man who returns to his family home, adjacent to the wood, in the late 1940s, after war service. His father, recently dead, has spent decades trying to understand the wood and its mythagos. His elder brother, Christian, is already obsessed by the wood's secrets, and Steven cannot help following the same path. This is the situation in the original novelette, the first part of the book. In part two Steven has a love affair with one of the mythagos, Guiwenneth---the archetypal warrior maiden. Part three is a superbly written quest into the depths of the wood.

It must be stressed that at no time is Mythago Wood a simple adventure tale. The wood itself is clearly intended to be analogous to a human mind; inside it time flows faster, and the deeper one goes the more ancient are the mythagos living there. Right to the end the novel is always surprising, always more complex than one has imagined.

Steven's narration is gripping rather than elegant. It is aided by extracts from the notebooks of his father and by legends told to them by some of the mythagos. Holdstock shows himself to be an expert at myth creation. Although better known for his SF he has, in recent years, been attracted towards myth, particularly Celtic myth.

Mythago Wood's faults are minor; for example, there is insufficient sense of the late 1940s in its setting, Steven seems to possess no friends or points of contact with the outside world, and in one place the month of July immediately follows the month of August. What really matters, though, is that this is a deep and highly original novel---the best work so far of an outstanding young author.

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AGAINST INFINITY - By Gregory Benford, New English Library,  
£1.75, 251 pages. Reviewed by Dave Hardy.

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As usual with Gregory Benford, this is SF with an accurate scientific background - this time on Jupiter's moon Ganymede, which is in the process of being terraformed to make it fit for human habitation, though at present pressure domes and servo-assisted suits are needed. So there is a strong element of 'winning a new frontier', and this is very well handled. Throughout, we follow the fortunes of one character, Manuel - at first as a boy and later as a young man - and again Benford handles the characterization quite well.

There is an alien artefact, known as Aleph, which burrows in the crust of Ganymede, occasionally surfacing and destroying the works of man, apparently without deliberate intention or malice, but sometimes lethal. Tracking and 'killing' it becomes an obsession with Manuel...

It's all good stuff, but I couldn't help remembering what Chris Priest said at the last meeting: nothing new is being written in SF - no really new ideas, and I kept feeling that parts of this were variations of stories I'd read before. Inevitable, I suppose, but it's all a bit sad, isn't it?

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THE CRUCIBLE OF TIME by John Brunner, Arrow £2.25 275 pages  
Reviewed By Pauline Morgan.

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I thoroughly enjoyed this book. It has a grandeur and ambitiousness, spanning the centuries of development of an alien species, that is rare. There is not a single human in this novel. The people are invertebrates, resembling, as far as I can tell, an air-breathing, shell-less mollusc. Their solar system is under increasing bombardment from the debris of a super-nova explosion. As the sun passes into the dust cloud it becomes increasingly certain that the planet is doomed. Each of the seven parts takes a hinge event, a development or discovery that carries them a step nearer escape into space. Although each part introduces a new set of characters there is a sense of continuity and history running through it and you can pick out parallels with human civilisation. But the differences are immense, not just in the people themselves, or the urgency of their need for scientific advancement but in technology itself. Although metal-working is known they prefer bio-engineering and in the last phase all our familiar machines have specially developed animal or plant equivalents. There is a certain feeling of clumsiness at the beginning where the reader is getting used to the alien terms (carefully chosen to be unfamiliar but comprehensible), something which is carried throughout the book with only the occasional slip. The people have claws and pads which are used instead of "hand" and "foot" and this is perhaps taken too far in some instances eg: clawsome instead of handsome. On the whole this is a notable achievement and thoroughly recommended.

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PROTECTORATE - By Mick Farren, published by NEL £1.95,£2.52.

Reviewed by Anne Gay.

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Two alien races are battling away in our part of the galaxy and one just happens to have a base on earth. Two hundred years ago its establishment had devastating but inconsidered effects, alien parasites and plagues to name only a couple. A more or less self-determining government rules over a stratified society in a towered city which bears a (coincidental?) resemblance to the one in Blade Runner. Then a strange young man starts a religion/revolution.

Sundry protagonists play out their parts on different levels and begin to wonder if he is really human.

Mick Farren's book is a colourful montage of varied sets and the characters are sufficiently 3-D to carry off the action. Not exactly heavyweight, protectorate is nevertheless an agreeable way of resting your brain.

#### FILM REVIEW

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THE COMPANY OF WOLVES directed by Neil Jordan, screenplay by Neil Jordan and Angela Carter. Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

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Based on a short story by Angela Carter, the whole is the drama-fantasy of a pubescent girl. In the drama world Rosaleen (played by Sarah Patterson) lives in a village in the middle of a forest infested with wolves. Her Grandmother (played by Angela Lansbury) warns her "Never stray from the path, never eat a windfall and never trust a man whose eyebrows meet in the middle." We have a series of stories told either to or by Rosaleen each involving the transformation of man into wolf or vice versa, because, as Granny says, not all wolves are hairy on the outside. Rosaleen is told to beware of the wolves that are hairy on the inside. The transformations are excellently and hideously done if sometimes unnecessarily prolonged. The climax of the film is the re-telling of the little Red Riding Hood story. Rosaleen in her red shawl meets a young stranger, whose eyebrows meet in the middle, on her way to her Grandmother's house. He wagers a kiss that he can reach the house before her by using his magical compass while Rosaleen keeps to the path.

Filmed almost entirely in the studio the sets have a dream-like quality - we have glimpses of owls and toads watching the characters from the forbidden territory, off the path. The most disappointing things are the wolves themselves. As they race through the forest they resemble a pack of hairy alsatians chasing a stick.

It is worth seeing and fills out the original story which is written in a very spare style.

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CONVENTIONS LISTING.....CONVENTIONS LISTING.....CONVENTIONS  
LISTING.....CONVENTIONS LISTING.....CONVENTIONS LISTING.....

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NOVEMBER 16-18..FOURTH LEONARD NIMOY CONVENTION..For details  
contact Carol Davies, 77 The Ridings, Ealing,  
London, W5 3DP.

DECEMBER 14-16..SANTACON. A multi-media con in Leeds. Contact  
Santacon, 84 Ambrose Street, Fulford Road,  
York, YO1 4DR

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MARCH 22-24.....THE DENTON CONVENTION. Rocky Horror con at  
the Royal Angus Hotel in Birmingham with all  
profits going to Save the Children Fund.  
Membership £15 to Tony Chester, 28 Balcaskie  
Road, Eltham, London.

APRIL 5-8.....YORCON III. The 36th Annual British Easter SF  
convention to be held at the Dragonara and  
Queens Hotels in Leeds. Until the 31/12/84  
attending membership will remain at £8.00  
(£6 for the unemployed). From 1/1/85 it will  
be £10.00. At the door it will be £12.00.  
Further details from Mike Ford, 45 Harold  
Mount, Leeds, LS6 1PW. Guest of Honour Greg  
Benford, fan guest of honour Linda Pickersgill.

MAY 25-27.....LAZLAR LYRICON 85. Hitch Hiker's Guide con to  
be held in the Strathallan Hotel in Glasgow.  
The con is being organised by 'ZZ9 PLURAL Z  
ALPHA' an HHGTG appreciation society. Membership  
£16.50 to Robert Cogger, zz9 Plural Z Alpha,  
10 Bourne Road, Bexley, Kent, DA5 1LQ. Cheques  
payable to ZZ9 PLURAL Z ALPHA. The con describes  
itself as "a games convention for HHG fans"  
plus guests, talks, bar, films, dealers room,  
disco, and a constant video programme in all  
hotel rooms."

JULY 26-28.....BECCON '85. Guest of Honour Richard Cowper,  
membership £8, but rumour has it that the con  
is now 'sold out'. Details from 191 The  
Heights, Northolt, Middx.