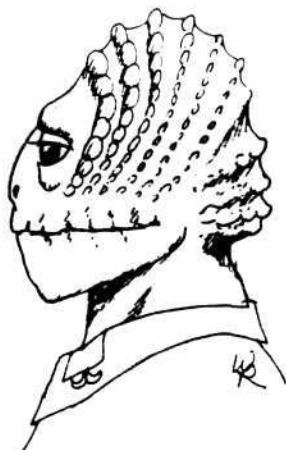


The Birmingham SF Group Newsletter - 162 1985 - February



(HONORARY PRESIDENTS: BRIAN W. ALDISS
and HARRY HARRISON)

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

FRIDAY FEBRUARY 15th FROM 7.45. MEETING BEGINS PROMPTLY AT 8PM

ROBERT RANKIN

This month's Guest Speaker, Robert Fleming Rankin was born in Parsons Green in 1949. He was educated at Grange Infants and Junior Schools, South Ealing, Horsenden Secondary, Greenford, and Ealing School of Art. With this in mind it is not surprising that three of his books have been set in Ealing. These books - *The Antipope*; *The Brentford Triangle*; and *East of Ealing* - detail the adventures of two drinking buddies Pooley and Omally, regulars at Brentford Labour Exchange and the Flying Swan. As both men are equally work shy a large part of their adventures detail Omally's get rich quick schemes and Pooley's search for a winning 'Yankee' accumulator.

By now you may be wondering what such things have to do with Science Fiction. Perhaps if I mention certain other subplots you will begin to see the connection. In the first book of The Brentford Trilogy there's this business of the five magic beans which Archroy's wife receives in exchange for his beloved Morris Minor, there's also Norman's attempt to wade across the Channel and the reappearance of Pope Alexander VI last of the Borgias, then there's Count Dante, the Deadliest Man on Earth, Soap Distant's search for the beautiful land of Agharta - the sunken realm at the centre of the Earth and of course Pooley, Omally and the Professor's titanic battle with the Powers of Darkness. The other two books concern themselves with laser-operated gravitational landing beams, alien onslaughts on planet Earth, personal account enumeration schemes using laser-readable implantations on the right hand of every living being and of course schemes to end civilisation as we know it. Now do you see the connection?

GROUP NEWS

The Committee for 1985:-

CHAIRMAN - ROGER PEYTON, 19 Eves Croft, Bartley Green, Birmingham, B32 3QL.

TREASURER - CHRIS CHIVERS, 51 Boundary Road, Streetly, Sutton Coldfield, W. Midlands.

SECRETARY - DAVE HARDY, 99 Southam Rd., Hall Green, Birmingham, B28 0AB.

NEWSLETTER EDITOR - MARTIN TUDOR, 845 Alum Rock Road, Ward End, Birmingham, B8 2AG.

PUBLICITY OFFICER - BERNIE EVANS, 7 Grove Avenue, Acocks Green, Birmingham, B27 7UY.

NOVACON 15 CHAIRMAN - PHILL PROBERT, 32 Digby House, Colletts Grove, Kingshurst, Birmingham, B37 6JE.

ORDINARY MEMBER - EUNICE PEARSON, her address as for Phill Probert.

'FOR YOUR INFORMATION':- From next month your esteemed Chairman will be at YOUR service. If any of you have queries about SF or Fantasy related topics Rog Peyton will be happy to (attempt to) answer them for you. Send them to Rog at the above address, marking them BSFG NEWSLETTER, and hopefully next month I should be able to publish his first column...go on catch him out if you can!

SUBSCRIPTIONS:- At the moment, as I'm sure you're all aware membership of the group costs £5.00 per year or £7.50 for 2 people at the same address. But the Committee have decided that from MARCH 1ST six monthly subscriptions will be accepted. These will cost £2.50 for one person or £3.75 for two people at the same address. It is hoped that this move will lessen the financial burden of those members who are students or otherwise unwaged. All subscriptions should be sent to the Treasurer CHRIS CHIVERS at the above address.

WARNING! WARNING! WARNING!

IF THERE IS AN 'X' IN THIS BOX THIS WILL BE YOUR FINAL NEWSLETTER - UNLESS YOU RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP IMMEDIATELY!



HITCH-HIKER'S GUIDE TO THE GALAXY:-

Will all those who have paid for their tickets to see HHGTG at the Crescent Theatre on March 1st either collect them from Rog Peyton at this month's meeting or send a S.A.E to Rog at the above address. The tickets will be ready for collection from the 10th of Feb.

BED & BREAKFAST:-

Some members might be interested to learn that there's no need for them to start their long journey home immediately after our meetings. If they wish, for a mere £16.00 they can stay the night at the New Imperial and head for home in the morning. Ask Rog Peyton for details.

FUTURE MEETINGS:- MARCH 15th - MATT IRVING.

APRIL 19th - BRIAN ALDISS.

JUNE 21st - RAMSEY CAMPBELL.

(Please note that the Ramsey Campbell meeting has been moved.)

THE ORGANIZATION

EUNICE PEARSON

Most members of the Brum Group probably have no idea what or who The Organization is. Allow me to jog a few memories, when we first began in June 1983, The Organization was known as APA-B - a 'working title' that lasted around 2 years. Remember us now? No? In that case I'd better explain.

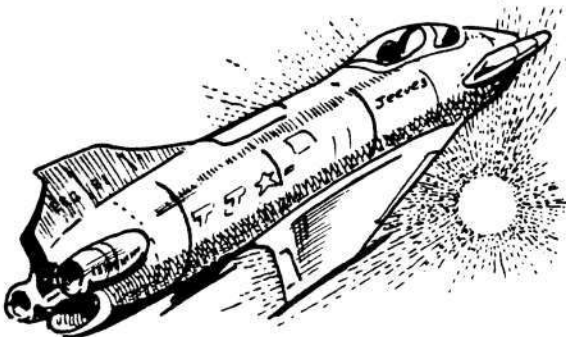
When APA-B, the Birmingham SF Group Amateur Press Association, first began quite a few BSFG members joined. However, as time went on, and deadlines loomed ever closer, most of these dropped out. For a while APA-B appeared doomed. But a gallant band of dedicated souls kept on producing contributions month after month.

Last year these stalwarts, bored with the title APA-B, christened themselves The Organization. Then slowly the number of members increased. Now with our membership still steadily increasing it seems we will see our third year. We can always do with a few more members though, are you interested?

Oh, you want to know what we do. Well, every month each of us produces at least two pages of written material. This can be SF or Fantasy related or just gossip, whatever you feel like. We then make 15 copies and either post them to the current OE (Official Editor) - at present I'm OE - or take them along to the MiSFits meeting (which is on the last Friday of the month around 7.30pm in the General Wolfe by Aston University) where all the contributions are collated. These are then handed out or posted soon after. And then the whole procedure begins again for the next month.

Last month's batch featured contributions from Joy Hibbert, Maureen Porter, Steve Green, Simon Lake, William McCabe, Peter - Fred Thompson, Nick Mills and myself - eight in all.

If you do think you might be interested in joining us, contact me, Eunice Pearson, at 32 Digby House, Colletts Grove, Kingshurst, Birmingham, B37 6JE, for more information and a sample mailing. Hopefully we can double our membership by the end of our third year!





The Jophan Report

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- OTHERWISE ENTITLED YE EDITOR SPEAKS!

Well as I type this it's just four minutes away from 3am, I'm already several days behind schedule and I'm wondering for the umpteenth time how on earth Rog Peyton ever convinced me I could manage to do this and still find time to work, sleep and eat! Hopefully things will get easier once I get into a routine, but looking at the knowing smiles on the faces of Pauline, Eunice and Graham, I somehow doubt it! But on to the business. First I want to thank Chris Morgan, Margaret Thorpe and Dave Hardy for their book reviews and Terry Jeeves and William Rotsler for the use of their excellent illos. Next I want to bring to your attention the campaign of the National Book Committee - 'Don't Tax Reading'. As some of you may already know the Treasury is considering putting VAT on books. This means that all reading matter from the Bible to the latest Piers Anthony will go up in price - and not just by 15%. Lower sales will lead to higher prices because of reduced printing orders. Fewer books will be published. This will hit smaller bookshops particularly hard, especially specialist shops - such as SF bookshops! So if you don't want to see Rog Peyton starve write to your local MP as the NBC suggests, at the House of Commons, London, SW1A 0AA.

Now for a few snippets of news...*Hard To Be a God* by the Strugatskys will be a West German/Soviet film co-production, costing around \$5 million...a reward of DM50,000 was offered recently when a print of the film *The Never-Ending Story* was stolen in Germany - despite which illegal videotapes of the film were on sale within a week of the theft...Corroboree Press will publish a hardcover edition of Phil Dick's screenplay for *UBIK* early next year...J.P. Tarcher bought Alexi Panshin's monumental work on SF - reportedly the most important work about the field ever to be published...Harlan Ellison, David Gerrold, Terry Ackerman and *Playboy* critic Arthur Knight saw *2010* in a special screening late last year; some were reportedly underwhelmed. Douglas Adams, author of *HHGTG*, gave a party recently to which Sir Clive Sinclair was invited. Noticing a copy of *So Long and Thanks For All the Fish* which had only recently been published by Pan, Sir Clive asked if he could have it. When Adams politely refused pointing out that it was his only copy, Sinclair immediately made it worth his while to part with the book by offering £1,000 for the charity of Adams' choice. Greenpeace is now £1,000 better off! Bookseller and writer Richard Dalby has launched the Dracula Press to publish works by and about Bram Stoker. His first publication *Bram Stoker: A Bibliography of First Editions*, is now available for £3.50 from 125 High Holborn, London, WC1V 6QA. Dalby plans to bring out Stoker's theatrical writings and journalistic work, as well as some of the neglected novels of mystery and the supernatural. He also hopes to reissue Stoker's better-known novels in their original form: "It's criminal the way Stoker's books have been mutilated," Dalby said. "Regretably, his literary reputation has been badly tarnished as a result. And Finally - to promote the London Underground over the car, adverts at Tube Stations show a movie marquee for *The Search For Spock*, with the line- "By the time you've found somewhere to park, they'll have found him..."

BOOK REVIEWS

VISCOUS CIRCLE (Vol.5 Cluster Series) by Piers Anthony.

336 Pages £1.95. Granada Books.

I haven't read the previous 4 volumes of the series, but as there is a concise and helpful prologue this in no way hindered my enjoyment of this book.

Apparently, there is a kind of Galactic Archaeological treasure hunt going on, with all the intelligent races eager to discover ancient sites of previous technological civilizations. The inhabitants of the area with which this story deals are, of course, regarded as animals with no rights whatsoever, until one of them, Rondl, begins to organize a resistance movement. He also discovers that he is an enemy spy. His dual identity causes complications in both of his lives, and far reaching complications for both civilizations.

The aliens and their philosophy are a novel departure from the human or animal based creations of many authors, and their insistence on committing suicide if hurt or shocked presents rather unique problems within the story. Piers Anthony certainly maintains his reputation as an amusing and highly inventive SF writer.

Review - Margaret Thorpe.

OUT OF THE CRADLE by William K. Hartmann, Ron Miller & Pamela Lee

\$19.95 hardback.\$11.95 softcover.Workman Pub.

It was in 1981 that Hartmann & Miller's *The Grand Tour* was published *Out of the Cradle* is really a sequel, with the intention of showing what Man will do when he gets out into the strange other worlds of our Solar System. Measuring 8X10 inches in horizontal format, it looks a small volume - but it's 190 pages are packed with forecasts for the future, and it is a must for space-art fans.

Hartmann - an astronomer and NASA consultant - has written the text and also contributed a number of the illustrations. His writing is authoritative without being too technical; his work as an artist is improving, though his paintings do sometimes still have a slightly 'primitive' appearance. In general, though the style of all three artists is remarkably similar, and aficionados can have fun trying to identify the artist without reading the credit. By far the largest number of illustrations are by Pamela Lee, a new artist on the scene, and I am most impressed by her very clean style (which I suspect uses acrylic paint) and imaginative treatments. Ron Miller's work has been well known for a number of years, and is of the high standard we have come to expect.

From solar power stations in Earth-orbit, through bases on Mars to searches for life on Europa or Titan, this is definitely a book to inspire our impulse to explore beyond Earth. As Tsiolkovsky said "...one cannot live in the cradle forever."

Review - David A. Hardy.

NB There is no information about a UK publisher or distributor, but this book will no doubt be available through the usual specialist book dealers on import.

THE SUMMONING by John Lyon. Granada £1.95. 207 Pages.

After a slow and boring opening (only 40 pages, though it seems much longer) this supernatural horror novel blossoms into something which is almost good. Historical flash-backs full of not very graphic but non-the-less gratuitous sex and violence help to spice up the trendy though uninteresting present-day English settings. Immortals make their presence felt through dreams, with exciting promises of unspeakable rites. The disgustingly rich playboy, Lord Treece, throws a party at his country mansion, and as the evening heats up Nasty Things begin to happen to some of his guests. The devil-worshipping immortals are much more sympathetic characters than their rather insipid and goody-goody opposition. John Lyon is reported to be the pseudonym for one of Britain's younger SF writers.

Review - Chris Morgan.

TIK-TOK by John Sladek. Corgi, £1.95. 174 Pages.

Laugh? If I hadn't received a free review copy of this I'd have rushed out to buy one. *TIK-TOK* must rate as one of the funniest SF novels of the year -- of any year. It's the autobiography of a robot who begins his working life in the normal robot manner slaving away at menial tasks for his owners. But his career (in 21st century USA) includes many unusual experiences and amazing changes of fortune. Gradually Tik-Tok stops behaving like a robot and starts behaving like a human being - going in for bank robbery, murder, politics and similar criminal activities. Full of black humour, this is probably Sladek's best book to date.

Review - Chris Morgan.

CASTLES by Alan Lee. Unwin, £12.95, 192 Pages.

Alan Lee's pictures of the castles of myth and fantasy are wonderfully atmospheric, featuring a good range of subjects and details and displaying a deep knowledge of his subject matter. Unfortunately the book is ill-served by its text (written by David Day) which consists of a series of brief, simplistic versions of any tale in Norse, Celtic or Arthurian myth that involves a castle. On average each tale occupies just 200 words, while *THE LORD OF THE RINGS* is dealt with in 300. The words, moreover, are written in over-the-top purple prose. Generally the book devotes too little space to modern fantasy, especially as it's most likely to be bought by (or for) those who read modern fantasy. Despite these faults it's a handsome book, and you may find that the pictures are worth the price.

Review - Chris Morgan.

LOST REALMS by Robert Holdstock & Malcolm Edwards.

Paper Tiger, £5.95, 114 Pages.

The subject matter here is all those places of myth and fantasy - cities, islands, subterranean kingdoms - which might exist or might have existed on planet Earth. The text is, regrettably, shallow and incomplete, with about 600 to 1000 words devoted to each subject, so that only children or truly ignorant adults will find anything new. The final chapter is an exception with its tongue-in-cheek look back at Earth's history from a far future viewpoint: this is reminiscent of Holdstock & Edwards'

successful collaboration, *TOUR OF THE UNIVERSE*, but less inventive. The illustrations - all produced speciall for the book by a dozen relatively unknown artists - vary from extremely impressive (by Mark Harrison and Bill Donohoe) to abysmal. They would have been improved by the addition of captions. Overall the package resembles a hurriedly produced piece of hackwork - a terrible waste of a good idea.

Review - Chris Morgan.

THE COLOUR OF MAGIC by Terry Pratchett. Gorgi, £1.75. 238 Pages

I must admit that despite the recommendations of such experts as big Dave Holmes I approached this book with no little cynisism. After all just how good could a book be if it was being desperately billed as - "the wackiest and most original fantasy since *HITCH-HIKER'S GUIDE TO THE GALAXY*"? The answer is - surprisingly good.

Set on the Discworld which is, of course, flat and balances on the backs of four elephants, who in turn stand on the back of a spacefaring turtle (sex unknown). The story concerns the travels of a failed wizard, a tourist (and his luggage) and Hrun the Chimerian.

About the story itself there's not a lot I can say without spoiling the plot (such as it is) but I can assure you that although quite obviously an imitation of *HITCH-HIKER* this book is still one of the funniest books I've read in a very long time. Borrowing extensively from Leiber's Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser books, with hints of McCaffrey's dragon tales and occasional swipes at Conan, along with echoes of almost any other work of fantasy you care to mention I have the feeling that Mr. Pratchett has at his fingertips a very lucrative and successful series. I personally think he beats Adams at his own game, if only because he is more familar with his material. Where Adams was merely a talented outsider sending up the conventions of science fiction, Pratchett, a long time fan, is very much 'one of us' and so writes with far more conviction than Adams ever manages.

What more can I say if you enjoy a good laugh (and a bad pun) don't just sit there - BUY IT.

Review - Martin Tudor.



NOVACON

Fifteen

1ST-3RD November 1985

GUESTS of HONOUR:

De Vere Hotel
Coventry

Dave Langford
James White

COME TO THE PARTY!! YES! NOVACON'S 15th BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION
WILL BE IN COVENTRY, AT THE DE VERE HOTEL,
OVER THE WEEKEND NOVEMBER 1st to 3rd, 1985.

It was proving to be a difficult job to 'top' last year's NOVACON. Who could follow Rob Holdstock as Guest of Honour and where should we hold the convention? Half the people we spoke to liked the style of The Grand Hotel, yet the other half missed the atmosphere of the Royal Angus. We couldn't use both at the same time, so we looked around and soon found the ideal location. The De Vere Hotel has been the scene of two Eastercons and has held a few Star Trek cons as well. Here we found the quality and style of The Grand Hotel combined with the cosy atmosphere of the Royal Angus. A choice of hotel I think you will appreciate.

As for a Guest of Honour, we thought why not have two? And so we have JAMES WHITE, NOVACON's very first GOH as well as DAVE LANGFORD someone whose name has long been associated with NOVACON.

We will be running two programme streams at NOVACON this year and have already come up with quite a few new and exciting ideas.

Our committee consists of 5 ~~and~~ enthusiastic people, who are, in order of shoe size:-

MARTIN TUDOR - Last seen racing around N14, Editor of 'Empties' and this years BSFG Newsletter. He is in charge of publicity, advertising and hotel liaison.

EUNICE PEARSON - Fannish lady supreme, has edited 5 fanzine titles, the BSFG Newsletter, been involved with 3 NOVACONS and is a member of 3 Apas. This year handling publications.

GRAHAM POOLE - Attended the first NOVACON! A prolific fanzine editor of the seventies who has recently returned to fannish activity by editing last years BSFG Newsletter and handling this years NOVACON registrations, he's also Treasurer.

KEVAN WHITE - Although a relative newcomer has attended NOVACONS religiously since 1979. He's responsible for films.

PHILL PROBERT - Was the Chairman of NOVACON 13 and now is Chairman again, so the less said about him the better.

IF THIS HAS WHETTED YOUR APPETITE AND YOU WISH TO KNOW MORE CONTACT
GRAHAM POOLE at 86 BERWOOD FARM ROAD, WILDE GREEN, SUTTON COLDFIELD
N.MIDLANDS. B72 1AG. OR BETTER STILL REGISTER NOW BY SENDING £7.00
BY CHEQUE OR POSTAL ORDER MADE PAYABLE TO 'NOVACON 15'.

SEE YOU AT THE PARTY!!