

Birmingham Science Fiction Group

HONORARY EDITORS:
BRIAN T. ALLEN and
HARRY HARRISON.

newsletter 167
july 1985

THE BSG SUPPORTS BRITAIN IN '87
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The Birmingham Science Fiction Group meets on the Third Friday of each month in the New Imperial Hotel, Temple Street, in the city centre of Birmingham. Membership of the Group costs a mere £5.00 per year for one person (£7.50 for two people at the same address) or £2.50 for six months (£3.75 for two people at the same address). All cheques and postal orders should be made payable to the Birmingham Science Fiction Group, and sent to the Treasurer, CHRIS CHIVERS, 51 Boundary Road, Streetly, Sutton Coldfield, West Midlands.

This Newsletter has been produced by MARTIN TUDOR of 845 Alum Rock Road, Ward End, Birmingham, B6 2AG. Deadline for the AUGUST Newsletter is Wednesday 31st of July.

THIS MONTH'S MEETING:- FRIDAY 19TH OF JULY. 7.45PM IN THE NEW IMPERIAL HOTEL.

The speaker at this month's meeting is Dr. JOHN DAVIES, who is an astronomer and aerospace engineer - so this is one for those members (and it should be all of you) who want to keep tabs on how fact is catching up with fiction, spacewise.

John Davies has worked for British Aerospace, and has written papers on subjects from future developments of the Space Shuttle to the composition of interstellar dust. On a more popular level he has written for SPACE VOYAGER, SPACEFLIGHT, ASTRONOMY and NEW SCIENTIST, and he has appeared on SCIENCE NOW and THE SKY AT NIGHT. He is currently at the Space Research Department at the University of Birmingham, where he is involved in the development of the new X-Ray Telescope which is to be launched in 1987. This promises to be an interesting and informative evening (the talk is illustrated with slides), so don't miss it.

— David A. Hardy.

NEXT MONTH'S MEETING:- FRIDAY 16TH OF AUGUST.

MAT IRVINE will be bringing along some of his latest models to show us and will be speaking to us about his SFX work on DR. WHO and BLAKE'S SEVEN.

Group News

LAST MONTH'S MEETING.

REPORT BY CHRIS MORGAN.

When the Brum Group members know that a horror writer is coming along to speak, hordes of them stay away. Which is rather a shame because both the horror writers we've had have been excellent speakers - though in different ways. A couple of years ago it was that young Leodome Shaun Hutson, telling us in an amusing and forthright manner how he wrote the nastiest possible books extraordinarily badly for large amounts of money. In June we had Ramsey Campbell, whom *TIME OUT* called "easily

the best horror writer working in Britain today." To tell the truth, the audience wasn't too small this time, but only because it was augmented by several local members of the British Fantasy Society. The fact that it was also rather a noisy meeting may not have been wholly unconnected with the reappearance, after a welcome absence of several months, of a certain Simon Norburn.

Ramsey Campbell is in his late thirties, ebullient and slightly obdubly, with a penchant for check shirts. Despite having lived all his life in or near Liverpool his voice is almost accentless. He is an articulate speaker who obviously thinks deeply about his own writing and about the horror genre as a whole. Just for the record, he's had five horror novels and four collections published and has edited five anthologies.

Horror films are as important to him as the literature. He reviews them, and he began by naming and describing some of the worst - and thus most hilarious - that he's ever seen. Moving on to horror fiction, he read out a few examples of atrocious writing, in particular selected highlights from a story entitled "The Legs That Walked" from a 1950s issue of *WIERD TALES*. Laughter filled the Hertford Room. This led up to a Serious Message, which Ramsey delivered in about half a minute in the middle of his talk, to the effect that humour and horror are inextricably linked. It was generally reckoned to be an enjoyable meeting - even by people who admit to hating horror novels. Perhaps we should invite a few more horror writers along.

On the Saturday Ramsey was at *ANDROMEDA BOOK-SHOP*, signing (in particular) Granada paperbacks of his new novel, *INCARNATE*, which is reviewed elsewhere in this issue.

BLACK BERET? - Somebody left a black beret behind at the June meeting. Chris and Pauline Morgan found it and will bring it along to the July meeting.

THE ORGANIZATION (APA-B) - On Tuesday the 9th of July, The Organisation split from the BSFG. It is now a separate, autonomous entity, and will receive no further funds from the BSFG. A full report should appear in next month's newsletter, but for now the BSFG Committee merely want to express their very best wishes for the continued success of The Organisation.

NOVACON 15 - With 200+ members registered so far N15's second Progress Report, containing the hotel booking forms, will be mailed within the next two weeks. If you haven't yet registered you will not receive a copy of PR2. Full details of how to register appear on the back cover of this newsletter. Hotel room rates have been confirmed as £15.00 per person per night for a twin room (that's the same price as NOVACONs 13 and 14) or £20.00 for a single room - both prices include full English breakfast.

RESIGNATION - On Tuesday the 9th of July the BSFG Committee reluctantly accepted the resignation of Eunice Pearson, - 'ordinary' committee member and administrator of The Organisation.



The Jophan Report

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- MARTIN TUDOR.

Really people! There's no reason to look quite that shocked, I realise that you haven't seen a Jophan Report since March but this being a newsletter some news was bound to work it's way back in sometime.

As you may have noticed the quality of the newsletter has been, how can I put it, a touch uneven this year. The reasons for this have been many and boring, so I won't test your patience by relating them all, suffice it to say that they have included lack of time, the collapse of four different typewriters (three in one month), time - the lack of, temperamental photocopiers and on my part a severe shortage of spare time. But with a bit of luck most of those problems are now behind us, although to be honest I'm still finding myself pushed for time.....

Time for that news I promised you, forthcoming on ITV is MURDER IN SPACE, an interplanetary whodunnit complete with its own tie-in novelisation (Bob Vernon will be pleased!) - viewers who solve the mystery will be invited to attend filming of the concluding sequel and may win a more worthwhile prize if they answer a barrage of questions on how they spotted the illusive killer(s). Wonderful eh? No? Well how about ITV's current selection of SF&F programs - CAPTAIN SCARLET & THE MYSTERONS (Sun. 1pm); FIREBALL XL5 (Weekdays 9.25am); THE INCREDIBLE HULK (mon. 4.20pm); I DREAM OF JEANNE (C4, Fri. 5pm) and THE AVENGERS (C4. Tues. 6pm). Speaking of which there are yet more rumours of a new, NEW AVENGERS series - except this will be more of a NEW OLD AVENGERS - or so says Brian Clemens, who along with Sarah Lawson (of the newly formed TAFT ENT. LAWSON GROUP) is very optimistic about selling the idea of a new series to US TV. Clemens has confirmed that Patrick Macnee would again play Steed, but that the part of Mrs. Peel remains, as yet, uncast. "We are going back to grass roots, and it will be far more like the old AVENGERS rather than THE NEW AVENGERS." He said in a recent issue of BROADCAST magazine.

Still on the subject of TV, but switching channels, the BBC appear to be standing by their decision in February to lay off DR. WHO for 18 months (or, as rumour has it, for good). This is despite the fact that the programme has over 110 million viewers worldwide. Despite the fact that after the decision was announced on Feb. 27th they had received over 80,000 complaints by letter and phone by March 2nd. And despite the offer of money from US fans, who after a nationwide appeal are believed to have raised donations of £1½ million - enough to keep DR. WHO going for five years!

BBC video releases on Monday the 15th of July included:- DR. WHO - "The Seeds of Death" (120 minutes); BLAKES SEVEN - "The Beginning" and a spy thriller called "Codename Icarus" which features 'deadly laser weapons, sabotage and sinister brainwashing'...is there any other kind?

BBC Radio 4 continues with Bob Coultie's exploration into the paranormal on Wednesdays at 7.45pm, July 17th's episode will be "Mediums and Their Message". BBC Radio Manchester recently broadcast Richard Turner and William Osborne's comedy serial "1994" a very funny and witty programme much influenced by BRAZIL - according to STARBURST's Tony Crawley. Does anyone know if it was broadcast by Radio WM?

But enough of the small screen and radio here's what's going on on the big screen (or perhaps I should say slightly larger screen considering the increasing 'popularity' of 3-in-1 cinemas). Jim Henson of Muppet fame is currently reunited with illustrator Brian Froud (his conceptual designer on THE DARK CRYSTAL) and George Lucas for LABYRINTH, which is taking up all nine sound stages at the Thorn EMI Elstree Studios; the plot concerns a young girl on a desperate rescue mission through a maze, with Henson and Froud supplying the creatures she encounters en route. Before that however, we'll be seeing Henson's previous project DREAM CHILD, a bizarre variation on the Alice in Wonderland story combining fact (the girl who inspired Carroll, Alice Hargreaves) and fantasy (the Mad Hatter, etc). The screenplays by Dennis Potter and it's directed by Gavin Miller.

Coming soon (or eventually...): LAUTHAWKE, starring Michelle Pfeiffer in a medieval fantasy about a beautiful damsel cursed to turn into a hawk during the day...Sean Connery and Christopher (Greystoke) Lambert in HIGHLANDER, an adventure fantasy spanning four centuries...Spielberg's new fantasy YOUNG SHERLOCK HOLMES, though both this and HIGHLANDER are still in production, so the titles may change before release....

Continued Page Six...

MAKE LEVIES ON TAPES DRAW A BLANK.

THE TAPE MANUFACTURERS GROUP

The Tape Manufacturers Group represents all the leading suppliers of audio and video tape in the UK, including Agfa, BASF, Maxell, Memorex, Scotch/3M, Panasonic, Fuji, TDK, JVC, Sony and Kodak.

It was formed in May 1981 to provide a united voice of common sense against a levy on blank recording tape. TMG has also taken its case to the EEC through ETIC, the European Tape Industry Council.

For more information write to us at
17-19 Foley Street, London W1.

The Government is considering introducing a new and unprecedented form of private taxation – levies on blank audio and video tape.

And, naturally, it wants the public to pay. That means anyone buying blank tape, for whatever purpose, would be forced by law to contribute directly to the income of copyright owners.

A starting figure of 10% on audio tape and 5% on video tape has been quoted, and with retailer mark-ups plus VAT, the actual increase to you could be a lot more.

And it's all because the Government has given in to unconvincing arguments by powerful special interest groups, including film and record companies, that home taping has become a massive problem and is severely damaging their income.

HOME TAPING: THE FACTS.

Home taping, as research surveys have proved, doesn't necessarily damage the interests of copyright holders.

For example, because someone taped, it doesn't mean that they would not have bought. In fact, taping arguably helps to stimulate interest in music leading eventually to bigger sales.

Much home taping is simply copying one's own records onto a cassette for playing elsewhere – in the car or on a personal stereo system for instance or to retain original records in pristine condition.

Or else it's to use the video to 'time-shift' – to have the freedom to watch favourite TV programmes when you want to. Research proves that less than 1% of recorded TV material is kept for repeat viewing, so where is the need or justification for a levy?

In truth, it's just another way of boosting film and record companies' profits through legislation.

Yet, despite the unfairness and unworkable nature of its proposals, the Government intends to press on unless public reaction to these levies forces them to think again.

HOW YOU CAN STOP THE LEVIES.

If you find the whole affair leaves a nasty taste in your mouth, write and tell your MP what you think. Or write direct to the Minister responsible: Geoffrey Pattie Esq, MP, Minister of State for Trade and Industry, Department of Trade and Industry, 1 Victoria Street, London SW1H 0ET.

Encourage your friends to do the same and let's stop the levies now.

Back to the small screen and video - ROCK AND RULE, an 80 minute animated SF fantasy featured advanced computer graphics; the excellent time travel thriller TRANCERS; IT CAME FROM HOLLYWOOD, a new 'bad movie' compilation with a heavy emphasis on SF and horror; Michael Radford's 1984, with Richard Burton and John Hurt; REPO MAN a cryptic thriller starring Harry Dean Stanton...RUNAWAY, a Blade Runner rip-off starring MAGNUM's Tom Selleck, also goes on national release this summer...As does NIGHT OF THE COMET, a fairly standard post-holocaust ~~fantasy~~ yarn starring THE LAST STAR-FIGHTER'S Catherine Mary Stewart...

On the local scene NOVACON 14's headlining rock band FREE FALL (now re-named CHANCE) has made it through to the finals of this year's Hottest Band in Town contest, arguably Birmingham's best spotlight for new groups; the support band at the con, IZZY THE PUSH, narrowly missed a place in the finals. Score one for NOVACON's ability to spot rising stars - yet another reason not to miss NOVACON 15 this year! Talking of music, new soundtracok releases include Jerry Goldsmith's score for the aforementioned RUNAWAY, and the Giorgio Moroder/Klaus Doldinger tracks for THE NEVERENDING STORY. Well that's all for this month, lots more news next time. Many thanks to LOCUS; Steve Green; STARBURST; SPACE VOYAGER and SCIENCE FICTION CHRONICLE for the news this time around.



BOOK REVIEWS

ONLY A FEW REVIEWS THIS TIME AROUND.

NEXT MONTH, HOWEVER, WILL FEATURE REVIEWS

- OF:- "The Day After Tomorrow" - Heinlein;
 "The Haunter of the Dark" - Lovecraft;
 "Flight of the Dragonfly" - Forward
 "A Rumour of Angels" - Bradley Kellogg;
 "The Warrior Who Carried Life" - Ryan;
 "Jitterbug Perfume" - Robbins;
 "The Steps of the Sun" - Tevis;
 "Obsession"- Ramsey Campbell;
 "The Continent of Lies" - Morrow;
 "The Man in the Tree" - Knight;
 and "Isaac Asimov Presents the Best Horror
 and Supernatural of the 19th Century"
 - edited by Isaac Asimov, Charles G.
 Waugh and Martin H. Greenberg.

MANY THANKS THIS MONTH TO SUPER REVIEWERS

CHRIS AND PAULINE MORGAN..

THE WALLS OF AIR by Barbara Hambly, Unicorn £2.50, 314 pp

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

In The Time of the Dark, the first volume of the Darwath Trilogy, Gil Patterson and Rudy Solis were inadvertently transported across the Void to a world menaced by the Dark, subterranean carnivores that have emerged from their nests after three thousand years. In this world Rudy has discovered that he can perform magic. Gil realises that she is a born killer. In this, the second volume, Rudy and the wizard Ingold journey towards Quo to seek help against the Dark from the council of wizards. Gil, as a member of the elite Guard, remains at the Keep of Renweth to help protect the survivors of three cities. This is an exciting, well-paced novel with a few flaws. There is good character development, and I look forward to the concluding volume. So read the first volume, then buy this one.

INCARNATE by Ramsey Campbell, Granada £2.50, 472 pp

Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

What's the connection between dreams and reality? Can you always be sure which is which? Can dreams ever change reality? Quite a few good novels have dealt with these questions---Ursula Le Guin's fantasy The Lathe of Heaven, James Morrow's SF novel The Continent of Lies (recently published by Gollancz and strongly recommended) and now Incarnate, Ramsey Campbell's latest horror novel.

This one is set not in Campbell's home city of Liverpool but in north London, where strange things are happening to a number of people---all of whom participated in a dream research project eleven years before. The story is multi-plotted, with each small group of characters dealt with separately and the groups only brought together towards the end. Campbell uses this technique well, maintaining pace and interest throughout a long book, and creating considerable tension in places. As usual for Campbell, the horror is more suggested than spelt out; it is neither gruesome physical horror of the "chainsaw massacre" variety nor supernatural horror full of magical powers, but psychological. Even at the end some things are not explained, so subtle is the author's approach. What exactly happened during that research project? Why has it taken eleven years for results to show themselves? Which scenes are real and which are dreams or hallucinations? Yet this is an enjoyable book, Campbell's most ambitious and most successful to date.

LAUGHING SPACE edited by Isaac Asimov & J.O.Jeppson, Robson £4.95, 521 pp

Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

This massive trade paperback is an anthology of science fiction humour in the form of stories, cartoons and even poems (well, verse, anyway). It contains about 126 items, including many of the best funny SF short stories of the last thirty years by such as Asimov (of course), Anderson, Bester, de Camp, Knight, Leiber, Matheson, Sheckley, Simak, Sturgeon and hordes of others. On the whole the stories tend to date from the 1950s rather too much, and they concentrate on US authors to the virtual exclusion of others---but this is finding fault unnecessarily with a very enjoyable compilation. Inescapably, most of the stories are very brief---rarely more than ten pages and often only two or three pages to support a pun ending. I found this the perfect book for reading in bed. Recommended.

Birmingham Science Fiction Group

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

THIS SURVEY HAS REVEALED THAT ONLY A
COMPARITIVELY VIEW MEMBERS OF THE GROUP ARE
ATTENDING THEIR OWN SPECIAL EVENT.

THE 'SPECIAL EVENT' IN QUESTION IS, OF
COURSE THE BIRMINGHAM SCIENCE FICTION
GROUP'S OWN CONVENTION — NOVACON....

WHY IS THIS THE CASE ?

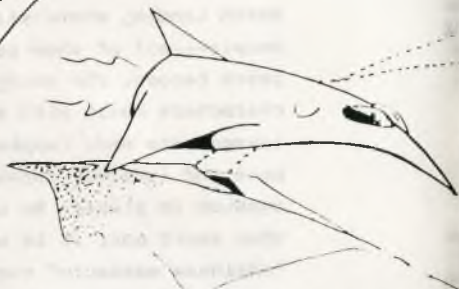
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SF EVENT IN THE REGION ?

WHY AREN'T THEY SUPPORTING THEIR
OWN GROUP ?

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THE COUNTRY.

A RECENT COMPARISON BETWEEN THE MEMBERSHIP
LIST OF THE BIRMINGHAM SCIENCE FICTION
GROUP AND THE LISTS OF ATTENDEES AT THIS
ANNUAL EVENT HAS CAUSED SOME CONCERN.



NOVACON

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1st - 3rd November 1985
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Dave Langford
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ONLY SF FANS FROM ALL OVER
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IT'S FIFTEENTH ANNIVERSARY
AND WE INTEND TO CELEBRATE IN
STYLE...IF YOU WANT TO FIND
OUT JUST WHAT WE MEAN BY THAT
YOU'D BEST REGISTER NOW SO
THAT YOU WILL BE ONE OF THE
LUCKY PEOPLE WHO CAN—



COME TO THE PARTY!