

Birmingham Science Fiction Group

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



NEWSLETTER 173

FEBRUARY 1986.

THE BSFG MEETS ON THE
THIRD FRIDAY OF EACH
MONTH IN THE NEW
IMPERIAL HOTEL, TEMPLE
STREET, IN THE CENTRE
OF BIRMINGHAM. DETAILS
OF THIS MONTHS MEETING
IS GIVEN BELOW.

MEMBERSHIP OF THE GROUP
COSTS A MERE £5.00 PER
YEAR FOR ONE PERSON

(£7.50 FOR TWO AT THE
SAME ADDRESS) OR £2.50
FOR SIX MONTHS (£3.75
FOR TWO PEOPLE AT THE
SAME ADDRESS).

ALL CHEQUES AND POSTAL
ORDERS PAYABLE TO BSFG
AND SENT TO THE TREASURER
CHRIS CHIVERS AT 51,
BOUNDARY ROAD, STREETLY,
SUTTON COLDFIELD, WEST
MIDLANDS.

THE COST OF ENTRY TO
THIS MONTHS MEETING
WILL BE £1.25 FOR BSFG
MEMBERS AND £1.50 FOR
NON - MEMBERS.

THIS MONTHS SPEAKER IS THE CREATOR OF THE DRAGONS OF PERN

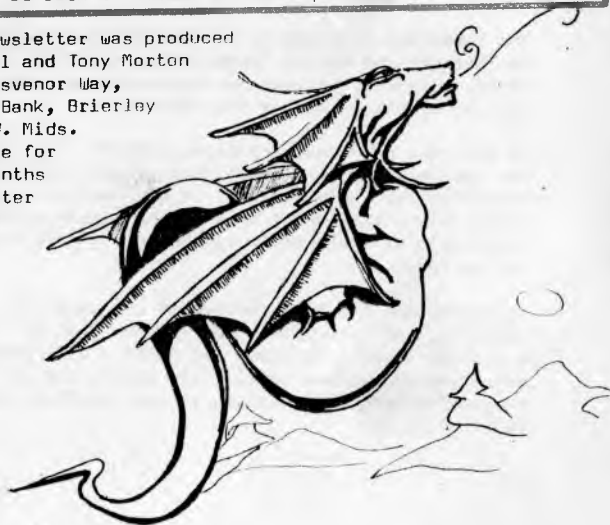
Anne McCaffrey

Anne is a regular if not annual visitor to the BSFG meetings. She is here to tell us about her new novel 'KILLASHANDRA', see book review on page 5. Anne's best known work, the Dragon books of Pern, began life as two short stories published in Analog in 1967, 'Weyr Search' and 'Dragonrider'. These two stories went on to be the first half of Dragonflight, the first in the Dragon series. She has published many other novels notably 'Decision at Doona', 'The Ship who Sang' and 'Restoree'. Her latest 'Killashandra' is a sequel to the excellent 'The Crystal Singer'.

IMPORTANT.

This months meeting is on 14th February ONE WEEK EARLY. It will be held in the ARIEL SUITE of THE ROYAL ANGUS HOTEL. The meeting will start at 8.00pm prompt, it has been heavily publicised, in fact we have invited two other S.F. groups and space is limited. So be warned, and be early. Next month we will be back to normal at the Imperial.

This newsletter was produced
by Carol and Tony Morton
45, Grosvenor Way,
Quarry Bank, Brierley
Hill, W. Mids.
Deadline for
next months
newsletter
is 6th
March





NEWS

B.S.F.G. COMMITTEE FOR 1986.

At the first committee meeting it was decided to accept Tony Berry's nomination as Novacon 16 Chairman, and Tony Morton as assistant newsletter editor, so the full committee for 1986 is:

Chairman: Rog Peyton, 19 Eaves Croft, Bartley Green, Birmingham, B32 3QL.

Treasurer: Chris Chivers, 51, Boundary Road, Streetly, Sutton Coldfield, West Midlands, B74 2JR.

Secretary: Dave Hardy, 99, Southam Road, Hall Green, Birmingham, B28 0AB.

Newsletter Editors: Carol and Tony Morton, 45, Grosvenor Way, Quarry Bank, Brierley Hill, West Midlands, DY5 2LJ.

Novacon 16 Chairman: Tony Berry, 567, Holyhead Road, Coventry, CV5 8HW.

Publicity Officer: Bernie Evans, 7, Grove Avenue, Acocks Green, Birmingham, B27 7UY.

AUCTION AFTER A.G.M.

You may be interested to know that the profit made from the auction held after the A. G. M. was £109.15!!

The committee and members of the BSGF would like to extend their sympathies to Margaret and Malcom Thorpe on the death of their baby so soon after the birth. Margaret, we hope you are soon well, and we look forward to seeing you and Malcom at this months meeting.

If you have any news, articles, artwork or opinions which you feel are suitable for inclusion in this newsletter, please send them along to Carol and Tony Morton at the above address. If you are willing to review books for the newsletter could you contact us at this months meeting, also if you feel that a book, or film could be reviewed in retrospect, ie now the 'trilogy' is complete, again let us know.

The committee has just learned of the death of L. Ron Hubbard. I contacted the Church of Scientology and learned that he 'left his body' peacefully in his sleep on 24th January. Mr. Hubbard will probably be remembered for the extraordinary volume Battlefield Earth, but he did infact publish many novels, novelettes and short stories in the thirties and forties, mainly science fiction and fantasy.



COMPETITION

The Committee have decided that as our 15th Anniversary looms ever closer, that it would be a good idea to have a contribution to the Fifteencon booklet from the BSFG members. To that end there will be a short story competition with the winning entry to be printed in the Fifteencon programme booklet....Oh yes!, there will be a CASH prize of £15.

The rules are :-

1. You must be over 15 to enter.
2. You must be a fully paid up member of the BSFG or Fifteencon (so pay your subs now!!).
3. If you have had a novel or two short stories published, we must treat you as a professional writer and only amateurs can enter.
4. The story must have a 15th anniversary of some kind as the background.
5. The story must be no more than fifteen hundred words long.
6. Entries must be received by 15th April. Send them to the BSFG Newsletter Editors Carol and Tony Morton, 45, Grosvenor Way, Quarry Bank, Brierley Hill, West Midlands DY5 2LJ.
7. The BSFG/Fifteencon Committees' decision is final.
8. The BSFG/Fifteencon and their families are not eligible to enter.

----- GOOD LUCK -----

Have you ever wondered, now that the group is reaching its 15th anniversary, just what the original members were doing all those many years ago? Here is a run down of the meetings of fifteen, ten and five years ago.
The group did not officially start until June 1971 so until then we'll give you 14,10 and 5 years ago meetings.

February 1972, Brian Aldiss speaking on "Tourist Class Utopias"

February 1976, Dave Hardy's Audio-Visual evening

February 1981, Ken Slater SF bookseller

Watch this space for more past meetings.

ANDROMEDA'S BEST SELLERS FOR *1985*

The figures were workrd out from Andromeda's monthly top ten by giving 10 points for each month at No. 1, 9 fbr No. 2 and so on, (last years results in brackets).

Top Authors

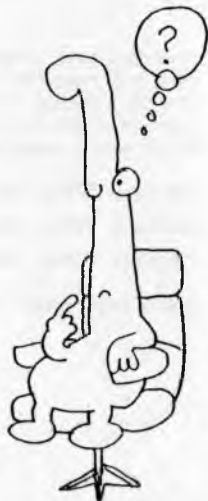
1. (-)	Harry Harrison	42 pts (-)	9. (11)	Alan Dean Foster	20 pts (15)
2. (2)	Terence Dicks	28 pts (50)	10.=(-)	Dave Langford	19 pts (-)
3. (-)	Douglas Adams	26 pts (-)	10.=(-)	Terry Pratchett	19 pts (-)
4.= (-)	Piers Anthony	25 pts (-)	12.=(-)	Richard Meredith	16 pts (-)
4.= (-)	Margaret Weis & Tracy Hickman	25 pts (-)	12.=(-)	Gordon R. Dickson	16 pts (-)
6.= (7)	David Gerrold	24 pts (-)	14. (-)	David Drake	15 pts (-)
6.= (-)	Bob Shaw	24 pts (-)	15.=(4)	Jack Vance	14 pts (31)
8. (-)	Phillip E. High	22 pts (-)	15.=(-)	Robert Heinlein	14 pts (-)

Top 20 Paperbacks

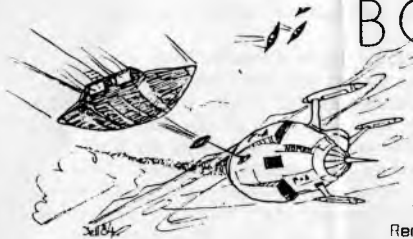
1.	So Long and Thanks for all the Fish	By Douglas Adams.
2.	A Stainless Steel Rat is Born	By Harry Harrison.
3.	The Colour of Magic	By Terry Pratchett.
4.	Come Hunt an Earthman	By Phillip E. High.
5.	Heretics of Dune	By Frank Herbert.
6.	Robots of Dawn	By Isaac Asimov .
7.	We all Died at Breakaway Station	By Richard C. Meredith.
8.	Enchanter's Endgame	By David Eddings.
9.	Helliconia Summer	By Brian Aldiss.
10.	Orbitsville Departure	By Bob Shaw.
11.	Sold for a Spaceship	By Phillip E. High.
12.	Starhunt	By David Gerrold.
13.	The Final Encyclopedia	By Gordon R. Dickson.
14.	Crewel Lye	By Piers Anthony.
15.	Bearing and Hourglass	By Piers Anthony.
16.	Hammer's Slammers	By David Drake.
17.	Starwolf	By Edmond Hamilton.
18.=	The Integral Trees	By Larry Niven.
18.=	The Antipope	By Robert Rankin.
20=.	West of Eden	By Harry Harrison.
20=.	Null-A Three	By A. E. Van Vogt.

Now to January's top ten.

1.	Mythago Wood	By Robert Holdstock
2.	Dr. Who and the Gunfighters	By Donald Cotton.
3.	Greyhawk	By Gary Gygax.
4.=	Blackbird in Silver	By Freda Warrington.
4.=	Bored of the Rings	By National Lampoon.
6.	A Stainless Steel Rat is Born	By Harry Harrison.
7.	Leaky Establishment	By Dave Langford.
8=.	Unicorn Variations	By Roger Zelazny.
8=.	Job	By Robert Heinlein.
10=.	Icehenge	By Kim Stanley Robinson.
10=.	Starsilk	By Sidney Van Scyoc.



BOOK REVIEWS



As is usual we start this months book reviews with this months guest's latest book.

Remember, there will be a signing session at Andromeda on Saturday 15th February from 12 noon.

KILLASHANDRA by Anne McCaffrey, Bantam, £8.95, 292 pages, reviewed by Carol Morton.

Take a planet, Ophtheria, whose only source of off-world income is the Summer Music Festival, then destroy their main crystal organ just months before the festival begins. Take a Crystal Singer, Killashandra, so desperate to get off-planet that she will accept the assignment to repair the Crystal Organ using some crystals that she has recently cut. Add in the complaint that the Ophtherian Council won't let its people off-planet, and you have the basis for Anne McCaffrey's excellent sequel to THE CRYSTAL SINGER. In this volume Killashandra has not only to repair the crystal organ and secretly investigate the complaint, but she also has to cope with malicious wounding, kidnapping, abandonment on a deserted tropical island and also the loss of her lover. The book is very well written, and has many unexpected twists in the plot - to tell you more could blunt your enjoyment of this book. I thoroughly recommend it, no doubt Rog will have a few copies at the meeting, if not take note of the signing session detailed above. My advice is buy, read, and enjoy.



MYTHAGO WOOD by Robert Holdstock, Grafton, £2.50, 310 pages, Reviewed by Tony Morton.

The winner of the World Fantasy Award and the British Science Fiction Association for best novel of the year - thoroughly deserved. An absolutely brilliant book (think of a superlative and double it !).

The bringing together of myth, legend and superstition in a tale that seems itself to be from ancient folklore (supressed or lost memories ?). From the opening pages the story transports you into a haunting world of old heroes and forgotten gods mixed with the 'modern' influx of the storyteller, Steven Huxley. The mystery of Ryhope Wood fascinates the family with tragic results while leading the brothers Christian and Steven into a future itself a legend. I have no intention of expounding on the plot or spoiling a stunning book, but just say the interaction of the brothers and the love of a woman forms the framework from which the story unfolds. Beautifully written - one can imagine it told around campfires of any civilization - a story told in superb fashion. Truly excellent. Buy this.

UNICORN VARIATIONS by Roger Zelazny, Sphere, £2.50, 252 pages reviewed by Chris Morgan.

Although Zelazny's later novels have never fulfilled his early promise, he has continued to produce entertaining short stories for over twenty years. The 20 stories (and 2 articles) presented here are not all recent, and some are mere snippets, yet each one is worth reading for the way in which it illuminates his approach to SF and fantasy. Zelazny has added some brief, thoughtful introductions. 'Unicorn Variation' is a marvellous story---but, then, so are several others. 'Home is the Hangman' is included, which won awards. Several pieces have previously been almost impossible to obtain, especially 'My Lady of the Diodes', a very good computer story. It's a fine collection.

THE INITIATE by Louise Cooper, Unwin, £2.75, 278 pages, reviewed by Carol Morton.

The seven Lords of Order have ruled the land for centuries unchallenged. They are served by the Adepts of the Circle who inhabit a castle which was the last stronghold of the Lords of Chaos before their defeat. Into the Adepts peaceful lives comes a child Tarod, transported to them by a warp storm, Tarod, who has just killed his friend using unknown powers. How Tarod grows up and becomes the most powerful Adept in their history, and how he discovers just who he really is, makes interesting reading. This is the first volume in the Time Master trilogy. It is not a particularly original story but it is well written. It is easy for the reader to sympathise with Tarod, while still wondering which side he will take, Order or Chaos. I recommend you read this book and I am looking forward to the sequels, THE OUTCAST and THE MASTER.

THE MAMMOTH HUNTERS by Jean M. Auel, Hodder and Stoughton, £10.95, 639 pages, reviewed by Anne Gay.

The eagerly awaited sequel to THE CLAN OF THE CAVE BEAR and THE VALLEY OF THE HORSES, Jean Auel's third book in the Earth's Children series deals with another group of Ice Age men and women - surprise, surprise - the Mammoth Hunters. For those who are interested, there is a wealth of detail about life on the periglacial steppes. Herbal lore and the tricks of survival are here too - could be useful in the Nuclear Winter. Our heroine, Ayla, having left the Neanderthal group to live on her own, found her true love in The Valley of the Horses. Together they travel back to his tribe, but they stop to overwinter with - you've guessed it - the Mammoth Hunters, and jealousy rears its ugly head.

If I am talking in cliches it's because Ms. Auel deals in cliches, though the writing has fair quality and the settings are entertaining. Unfortunately, the novelty of the background has worn a little thin by this third book, and it has all become a feminist's Mills & Boon with Ayla inventing everything except sliced bread. I thoroughly recommend volume 1, but it is mainly previous readers who will really care what happens to Ayla in the Mammoth Hunters.

HAWK MISTRESS By Marion Zimmer Bradley, Arrow, £2.25, 336 pages, reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

This Darkover novel is set between Stormqueen and Two to Conquer in the time before Terrans rediscover the planet. The plot is very simple and familiar: girl prefers men's activities to women's and runs away, dressed as a boy, from an arranged marriage, joins rebel cause and saves the day. What cannot be dismissed so lightly is the stylish way in which the tale is told. It reaches out to carry the reader along. Small details so often ignored in plots like this, are considered and neatly dealt with. Though it is probably easier to follow if you are familiar with Darkover culture, the book stands up well on its own.

RHIALTO THE MARVELOUS by Jack Vance, Grafton, £1.95, 240 pages, reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

This, despite the label on the cover, is a collection of three Dying Earth stories. In the 21st Aeon, when the Earth is old and the sun is about to go out, magic is practiced by a loose association of motley individuals, of whom Rhialto is one. Their behaviour is regulated by the Blue Principles, the original copy of which goes missing in 'Fader's Waft' the second and longest of the stories. Often, as in this case, Rhialto is the only one who can get the others out of the mess they have got into, either through their own weakness, their envy of others or their greed. Rhialto is a far more believable character than the eponymous hero of Nifft the Lean (by Michael Shea) as Vance is a far more subtle writer than his imitator. A delightful read.

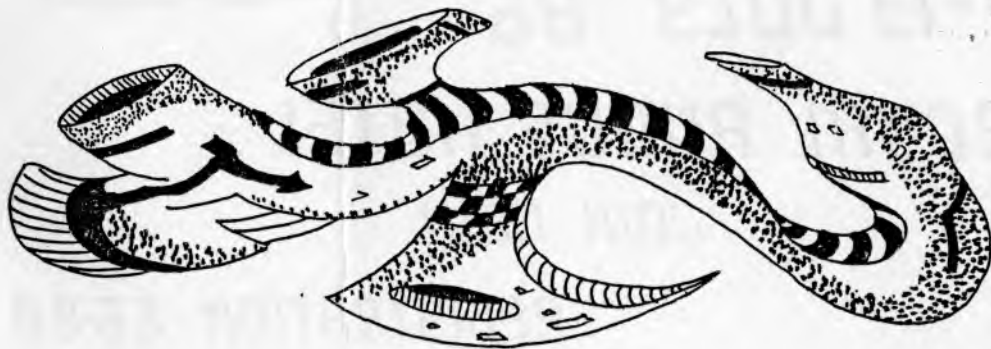
MENACE UNDER MARSWOOD by Sterling E. Lanier, Grafton, £1.95, 246 pages,
reviewed by Tony Worton.

Use specially bred bacteria launched in robot probes, follow with cargoes of fungus spores and mosses, throw in a lashing of unspecified cargoes from a piqued superpower not invited, allow to mutate for a couple of centuries and MARSWOOD !! The inhabitants consist of ancestors of the original settlers who 'deserted' then interbred to become a fierce independant clan people, 'greedy' mining corporates and UN forces to protect the investment. The clans people (Ruckers or True People) are fighting to free Mars from Earth domination... But wait ! A 'New Clan' have emerged to threaten the balance, so UN soldiers are forced to cooperate with the Ruckers (vice - versa ?) to alleviate the problem. The story is based around Slater, a lieutenant in the UN forces who falls for a local 'wise woman' (Romeo and Juliet?) and their struggle to overcome the hazards of the Ruck, the 'True People' and the strange beasts encountered on their travels. Descriptive passages of the fauna and flora interweave with the narrative, which does cause some loss of rhythm to the story. It is not a particularly original story but handled with apparent ease and having a good build up to the final encounter. Well worth a read despite having some flaws.

IN THE HALL OF THE DRAGON KING (315 pages), THE WARLORDS OF NIN (367 pages), THE SWORD AND THE FLAME (313 pages) all by Stephen Lawhead, Lion, £2.50 each,
reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

It does not surprise me that this trilogy was published in the USA by arrangement with Good News Publishers as it is riddled with religion. Quentin, the hero, is chosen by the Most High, the God of Gods, to go forth, throw down the old gods and vanquish evil. Even such a theme would be acceptable if the books were well written. They have all the stylistic flaws of bad writers; wordy descriptions, convoluted sentences, said bookisms (the use of any word except "said" to qualify speech), cardboard characterisation and multiple coincidence. Despite the numerous bloody battles, important persona rarely get killed --- even the evil ones are resurrected. Throughout, everything is flatly related --- there are no emotional peaks and troughs. The characters pass across the stage saying to the reader 'look at me, I'm different'. All are black or white and are interchangeable.

In volume one, In the Hall of the Dragon King, the Queen rides off with Quentin and friends to find her missing husband, the King. Frequent descriptions are needed to remind us that she is female and it is never made clear whether she does this out of love or duty. Not until ten years later at the start of volume two, The Warlords of Nin, are we told they have a daughter and though Quentin supposedly loves her there are no passionate or tender scenes between them --- perhaps because it takes him over ten years to realise she would make a suitable wife. If you are seeking Enlightenment, the Bible is far more exciting, Fantasy readers, leave well alone.



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