

Birmingham Science Fiction Group

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



NEWSLETTER 174

MARCH 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
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SAME ADDRESS) OR £2.50
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FOR TWO PEOPLE AT THE
SAME ADDRESS).

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

This month's guest is

Richard Evans

He is the editor at Futura responsible for Science Fiction.

His talk is titled

"Should S.F. get back to the Ghetto?"

Do you think S.F. has become too respectable? Ponder the point and maybe we will have a lively discussion.

We are back to normal this month with the meeting being held at the New Imperial Hotel on 21st March at 7.45.

Also enclosed with this newsletter is a leaflet from the Staff at Andromeda outlining their opinions on David Pringle's Science Fiction : 100 best novels.

They also include those books they think should have been present in the best 100, they also asked us to point out that the printers missed one book off their list, The Chrysalids by John Wyndham. They all gave this book a rating of 5.

What is your opinion on this? Maybe it could provide us with a discussion at a future meeting.

This newsletter was produced by Tony and Carol Morton, 45 Grosvenor Way, Quarry Bank, Brierley Hill, West Midlands, DY5 2LJ.

Deadline for next month's newsletter is 4th April. Anyone wishing to contribute ARTWORK please contact us.



NEWS

FIFTEENCON - MASS SIGNING SESSION

As part of our 15th anniversary celebrations at Fifteencon, Andromeda will be throwing a party on the Friday night. The aim is to get fifteen authors signing books at the same time, it will undoubtedly be the biggest signing session of any ever seen. The authors who will be there include :-

Clive Barker	John Brosnan	Ramsey Campbell	Adrian Cole
Colin Greenland	M. John Harrison	Rob Holdstock	Shaun Hutson
Leigh Kennedy	Leroy Kettle	Gary Killworth	Dave Langford
Anne McCaffrey	Chris Priest	Geoff Ryman	Bob Shaw
Alisa Tuttle			

to name but a few, so if you want to be at what promises to be an interesting if not unique occasion, then contact the Fifteencon committee at the address on page eight of this newsletter.

HOLLAND, IN 1990

The bid has gone in for the World Science Fiction Convention in 1990 to be held at The Hague Convention centre. If you wish to become a pre-supporting member, the cost is £4.00 and the addresses to send your fee are

1. Colin Fine,
205 Goldsham Lane,
Cambridge.
2. Ian Sorensen,
304A Main Street,
High Blantyre,
Glasgow,
G72 0HD.

Voting on the bids for 1990 will of course take place at CONSPIRACY 87 in Brighton, so come along to Brighton and support the bid for Holland in 1990.

DR. WHO - BACK ON THE SCREEN IN THE AUTUMN??

The BBC proudly (?) announced that despite rumours to the contrary Dr Who will be back on our television screens this autumn. That is the good news, the bad news is that his new assistant will be none other than ... Bonnie Langford?? This confirms the suspicion in my mind that the BBC really is trying to axe Dr Who.

In a survey taken at bookshops in the West Midlands two S.F. novels were in the top ten selling books.

THINNER by Stephen King was number one and MYTHAGO WOOD by Robert Holdstock was number nine. This survey was taken at ordinary bookshops, not just specialist shops like ANDROMEDA.

SIGNING SESSION - JOSEPHINE SAXTON

There will be a signing session at Andromeda on Saturday 22nd March, when Josephine Saxton will be signing copies of her new novel QUEEN OF THE STATES, the session will be from 12 noon to 1.30pm.

By far the worst news received this month was the news of the death of Frank Herbert, the following piece is reproduced by permission of Halcom Edwards, who was Frank's publisher at Gollancz.

Frank Herbert died on 11th February aged 65, following surgery for cancer. He kept the nature and gravity of his illness secret from his family; his death came as a complete shock to his publishers and friends around the world.

In recent years Frank Herbert became one of the world's most popular and successful novelists - NEL alone has sold more than 27 million copies of his books - but this massive success came comparatively late in a long and varied career, and he viewed many of its consequences with wry detachment. In particular, he was conscious of the irony that DUNE - a novel whose core is a sustained argument against the idea of blindly following leaders - gave him an almost guru-like status among some of its millions of readers. Herbert was born and lived most of his life in Washington State where he was raised on a small farm. He worked for many years as a reporter and newseditor on a variety of West Coast newspapers, at the same time publishing a scattering of science fiction stories and one well-regarded novel, THE DRAGON IN THE SEA. He worked for years on DUNE, without any expectation of the effect it would have both on his life and on the whole science fiction field. Quite simply, until DUNE nobody had written a science fiction novel of such scale and complexity, one which attempted to create a world and civilisation in all its detail.

It was slow to have an effect; 20 US publishers rejected the manuscript, and to begin with sales were unspectacular. It was not until the early 1970s - more than five years after first publication, that its underground and word-of-mouth reputation began to boost sales to phenomenal levels. With the freedom to write full-time, Herbert produced a string of further novels - including five additions to the DUNE sequel - though he remained in publishing terms something of an oddity; a popular best seller whose novels were primarily intellectual enquiries.

*****Last Month's Meeting*****

Last month's guest Anne McCaffrey gave her annual report (her own words) to the group and was, as usual, very amusing and entertaining. She presented an unusual appearance this year with pink, blue and purple stripes in her hair in celebration of the year of the Tiger, her birth year we were told. As she was born early in the day she is supposed to be a sleepy or sleeping tiger, she has been anything but sleepy recently with 4 books coming out this year. There is the LADY TOUCH a contemporary novel of Ireland all about people getting on with their lives and each other, it's about horses aswell, THE YEAR OF THE LUCY, THE GIRL WHO HEARD DRAGONS, and the shorter stories THE COELURA and NERILKA'S STORY which will be printed together in one volume. She also has two more dragon books planned, one about the original colonists of Pern, and the other about a class on Pern that she says that she seems to have passed over it's called THE RENEGADES OF PERN - THE HOLOLESS ONES, there is also a Killashandra 3 in the pipeline. Anne said that there had been some progress in transferring the Dragon books to the screen. TMS want to do a cartoon version, and the BBC are interested in a 12 part adaptation of DRAGONFLIGHT. However, she said that there was a hold-up because she will not compromise her dragons to the dictates of Hollywood-good for you Anne. She also asked us to write to Paramount requesting that they dedicate Star Trek 4 to the ill-fated Challenger crew, I for one will write - how about you?

As she is now a famous author Anne receives manuscripts from other authors for her approval and she recommends that we read several; namely Pamela Sargents's VENUS OF THE DREAMS - a novel about the Terra-forming of Venus, David Brin's THE POSTMAN, Victor Milan's CYBERNETIC SAMURAI and Patricia McNeally's COPPER CROWN and THRONE OF SCONE.

Anne finished by saying that she always wanted to be in films, well Anne, Hollywood's loss is our gain. Look forward to seeing you next year.

FIFTEENCON COMPETITION.

As many of you will have noticed - and some have pointed out to me - there was a (deliberate) mistake in the rules for the short story competition, so here is a reprint of the rules with one other change.

1. You must be over 15 to enter.

2. You must be a fully paid up member of the BSFG or Fifteencon to enter.

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 May. Send them to the BSFG Newsletter Editors, Carol and Tony Morton, 45, Grosvenor Way, Quarry Bank, Brierley Hill, West Midlands, CV5 2UJ.

7. The BSFG/Fifteencon Committees' decision is final.

8. The BSFG/Fifteencon Committees cannot enter.

Remember there is a £15 CASH prize as well as the winning story being printed in the Fifteencon booklet.

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

PAST MEETINGS.

15 years ago the BSFG was born and listed below are a few of the meetings that the group held.

- March 1972. "50 Years of SF" Slide Show. Pete Weston.
- March 1976. J. F. Young "Robotics".
- March 1981 Dr. Jack Cohen "Sex and Aliens".

Watch this space for more past meetings.

Andromeda's Top Ten Sellers for February.

- 1. Dr. Who and the Time Monster by Terence Dick.
- 2. Secret of the Sixth Magic by Lyndon Hardy.
- 3. Mythago Wood by Robert Holdstock.
- 4. The Initiate by Louise Cooper.
- 5. Wasp by Eric Frank Russell.
- 6. Practice Effect by David Brin.
- 7. Shattered Word by Michael Reeves.
- 8. Leaky Establishment by Dave Langford.
- 9. Sinister Barrier by Eric Frank Russell.
- 10=. Dinner at Deviants Palace by Tim Powers.
- 10=. Exiles of the Rynth by Carole Nelson Douglas.
- 10=. Stainless Steel Rat is Born by Harry Harrison.



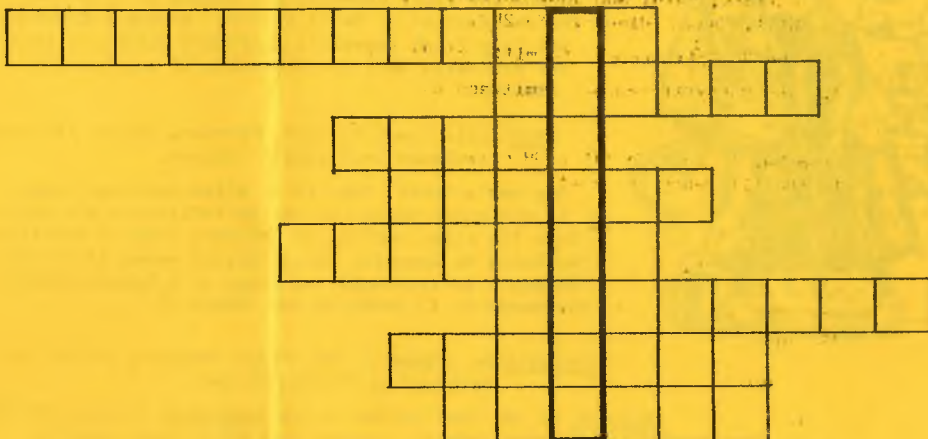
PRIZE PUZZLE.

Drawn up below is an eight clue puzzle, solve the puzzle and you could win a paperback from Andromeda up to the value of £2.50.

The object is to work out the name of the character in the heavily scored boxes and then to say what book (or books) this character appeared in. (hint: the clues all refer to people or places from Anne McCaffrey's books). Note the Clues are in no particular order. Please send your entry to

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

Entries must be received by 30th April, the winner will be announced in the May newsletter.



CLUES

- Todd's furry friend ?
- Lady of the fire lizards ?
- They wrote a ballad about her.
- Almost an Irish butter ?- Or a singer?
- Helva's first love ?
- Jeff Raven's home planet ?
- Lothar's First Councilman ?
- The smallest dragonboy ?

***** GOOD LUCK *****


Belated thanks and our apologies to the contributors to last month's newsletter. Thanks this month go to:-

ARTWORK : Jeeves (page 2), Bill Rotsler (page 4), John Dell (page 6).

REVIEWS : Margaret Thorpe, Pauline and Chris Morgan.

Many thanks.


BOOK REVIEWS



SINISTER BARRIER—Eric Frank Russell, Methuen, £2.50, 200 pages reviewed by Margaret Thorpe.

Earth has only 80 hours to live, and only one man can save it. A typical 30's plot — top scientists are being killed by aliens who have controlled Earth for centuries. One man discovers the existence of the aliens and their purpose, and begins to organise the destruction of Man's masters. Sounds stereotyped but Eric Frank Russell's treatment raises it above the ordinary. Well worth reading if you have'n't already.

WASP Eric Frank Russell, Methuen, £2.50, 175 pages. reviewed by Margaret Thorpe.



One man's Secret Army in an alien setting. Mowrey is the human agent who has to infiltrate and bring down the alien empire. An unlikely idea is brilliantly executed by Russell, whose twisted sense of humour brings a refreshingly new slant on a hackneyed plot. A classic S. F. novel by any standard.

STARSILK by Sydney J. Van Scyoc, Penguin, £2.50, 245 pages reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

Starsilk is the last volume in the Darkchild trilogy and the series is packed with original ideas. Clearly the author knew exactly where she was going when she started writing. On Brakath, (a planet settled by accident) humans have adapted well to a hard environment. Much of their history we learn in Darkchild but to prevent an overload of the imagination from too much trying to be explained at once, some revelations are saved for Starsilk. In this book, Reyna, youngest daughter of a bahrona (a woman able to focus the sun's power to bring life-giving warmth to the valleys) goes to meet her challenge. Traditionally, this is in the mountains but led by the starsilk---a length of fabric that speaks when the wind catches it--- she travels instead to the planet where the silk was spun. Well written, with diverse cultures carefully thought out. Highly recommended.

NIGHT'S DAUGHTER by Marion Zimmer Bradley, Sphere, £1.95, 202 pages. reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

To opera lovers this story will be very familiar, the plot following very closely that of Mozart's The Magic Flute. Within that framework Bradley has added fantasy elements, principally halflings. These are part human, part animal to varying degrees and it is the way that they are treated by the rivals, the Queen of the Night and Sarastro, the Sun-king, which defines good and evil. When Pamina, the Queen's daughter, is stolen by Sarastro, Tamino, on his way to undergo the Ordeals at the Temple of Wisdom, is persuaded to rescue her. Gradually our perceptions of the rivals change. On the surface this is a simple story of love triumphing over all. At a deeper level it asks questions about how we treat our fellow creatures, human and animal. The faults of this book lie in its brevity and the telescoping of events to follow the original story.

LORD OF LIGHT By Roger Zelazny, Methuen, £2.50, 256 pages.
reviewed by Tony Morton.

A complex mixture of religion, mythology and advanced technology blended into a struggle against the 'gods'. Brahma, Krishna, Vishnu, Kali et al, have gained powers and rule in decadent glory over a mortal populace kept in the dark ages by stopping the rediscovery of technology. Against them stands the hero/anti-hero Siddhartha/Sam/Buddha who plots over several life spans their downfall. The story swirls between strategies and battles, past and present with quotes from the 'scriptures' as reference to actual history and its future mysticism. By putting 'light' and 'death' on the same side Zelazny makes it hard to establish 'goodies or baddies' as both sides achieve godhead at some stage - and also change sides. Undoubtedly well written and building to a 'final' battle, the book is however somewhat heavy going in some places. I found it interesting and the cross-referencing between actual history and the subsequent scriptures version a good by-play to the action. Difficult to see the reasons behind the initial setting up of Heaven or Sam's reasons for wanting to destroy it - also an awful lot of characters pass through the story making it hard to follow. Not a book for a quick light read, but if you like a substantial read and a think - read on.

A BLACKBIRD IN SLIVER by Freda Warrington, NEL, £2.95, 303 pages.
reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

This is the start of a series by a new author and shows promise. It is a quest tale with some original touches. The fantasy world in which it is set is bisected by three infinite planes (invisible unless you accidentally find one of the shifting entry points) that take the place of underworlds and over-worlds in other fantasy novels. The three principal characters meet at the House of Reds and set out with a purpose of killing the Serpent which is seen as the embodiment of evil. None of them are acting entirely of their own volition and to a certain extent resent the company of the others. Each has their own reasons for wanting to kill the Serpent. Estarinel has seen it ravage his homeland and seeks revenge. Ashurek hopes partly to atone for the evil he has caused but mostly to free the woman he loves from the Dark Regions. Medrian remains silent, refusing to give her reasons. The book has its faults, but I look forward to reading the second volume.

THE MERCHANTS' WAR by Frederik Pohl, Gollancz, £8.95, 209 pages, and
POHLSTARS by Frederik Pohl, Gollancz, £8.95, 203 pages.
reviewed by Chris Morgan.

Fred Pohl is producing some of the best S.F. written today. It's not that he's a terribly clever writer or highly original, but he knows how to tell a good story, and his work is unfailingly entertaining. The Merchants' War is a sequel to The Space Merchants, which Pohl wrote with the late C. M. Kornbluth and which was published in 1953. The new novel captures the spirit of the original--- a fast-moving, highly satirical view of a future Earth dominated by advertising agencies. The plot describes the ups and downs in the life of Tennison Tarb, a top-class copywriter. We see him first on secondment as a diplomat on Venus---full of anti-advertising colonists. Then he's back on Earth, getting mixed up in various schemes as the plot moves faster and more of the iniquities of advertising are revealed. It's a marvellously enjoyable book.

Pohlstars is just as good---a sparkling collection of stories that Pohl has written over the last ten years, including a really fine novella, "The Sweet, Sad Queen of the Grazing Isles", never before published. Most of the stories are hard-hitting, none more so than "We Purchased People", in which convicted human criminals are bought and used by alien races.

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