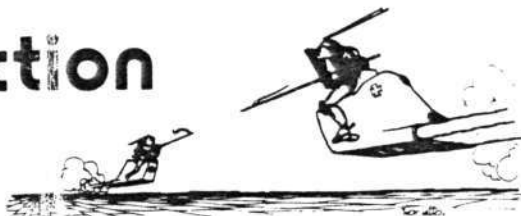


Birmingham Science Fiction Group

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



NEWSLETTER 175

APRIL 1986

This month's meeting is on 18th April at 8pm
and the speaker is-

Michael Scott Rohan

The committee were so impressed with the enthusiasm shown by last month's speaker Richard Evans towards this writer - and having read his book I can say that it is not misplaced enthusiasm - that we decided to invite him to talk to us this month.

Michael Scott Rohan has written a science fiction novel *RUN TO THE STARS* - sadly out of print, and with Alan Scott a study of the Viking era - which indicates his knowledge of original mythological sources that helped him in writing his latest book *THE ANVIL OF ICE* - see review on page 6.

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.

There will be an extra programme event on 6th June, a trip to the Bass Cherrington Brewery in Burton. The itinerary is :- A coach will leave the city centre - exactly where from is yet to be decided - at about 6.30pm to 6.45pm. Drive to the brewery where there will be a tour of their museum, then for the serious business, into their pub for FREE drinks and a buffet. The coach will leave the brewery at about 10pm and will of course stop off at a pub until closing time. The coach will arrive back in Brum at about 12midnight.

The cost will be £3.00 for the tour of the brewery and £2.00 for the coach fare. We are limited to a total of 40 so it's first come first served, and if you want to bring a non-member get in early. Send all cheques to your newsletter editors - address on page 8. Make all cheques payable to BSFG, all bookings must be in by 10th May. It's a good night out for a fiver. You could see me at the meeting I will be taking bookings then.

FIFTEENCON - LAW UPDATE.

If things don't improve, next month's headline may very well read **FIFTEENCON-CANCELLED**. Out of a B.S.F.G. membership of 65 (and where are those renewals?) only 25 have registered for Fifteencon, and 7 of those are Committee Members and their relations! That means only 18 out of 58 have taken the trouble to register. To put it another way, 40 out of 58 of you **CANNOT BE BOTHERED!!!** We have **TWICE AS MANY** members from outside the group as in it. It seems they are more interested in the Group's celebration than its own members are. Words begin to fail me, two conclusions are possible:-

1. YOU DON'T CARE ABOUT THE GROUP.
2. YOU ARE TOO APATHETIC TO DO ANYTHING.

Words begin to fail me, at least printable words, so do something to prove my conclusions wrong by next month, I can't run a Con with no members.

Bernie Evans

LAST MONTH'S MEETING - RICHARD EVANS.

Richard Evans is the Editor at Futura responsible for SF, and he has recently been promoted to Editorial Director. His talk was entitled :-

"Should SF get back to the Ghetto ?".

He forwarded two angles of attack,

1. Commercial - That SF should be published CLEARLY as SF because of the sales approach of book shops. Not all book shops are specialist (like Andromeda) and they have to sell books across the whole literary spectrum. So there is no commitment to SF - just to sales. The 'cost effective US sales approach' of buying a set number of titles in each literary category forces a condensed buying strategy - it comes down to space (-maybe it is the final-frontier for SF). The existence of the SF category is a strength as the buyers can order in quantity and the shop knows where to put it on their shelves. So without the SF label there may be a tendency to pass by new or unknown authors, as they would be mixed up in the mainstream titles.

2. Relationship with "mainstream". Do we want mainstream as identifiable SF? The problems associated with and SF category is of pigeon-holed attitudes due to its daring and imaginative approach - this is frowned upon. The "Literary Establishment" are slow to catch on to good writers. We live in an age of minitourists - each "literary" book safely in a recognised background, thus giving little risk. This is not SF - the sense of wonder and sense of the infinite is why we got hooked in the first place, so should SF become mainstream? Would SF be the same if safe with little imagination? - he thought not (- and rightly). SF is like no other category. It may be escapism but is none the worse for that! Can SF 'tout' in the same market as mainstream? Would it work as well?

There are of course exceptions to every rule, and there are books that break these rules and have enormous sales competing with the mainstream 'blockbusters'. These are known as breakthrough books and a few examples are Julian May's Saga of the Exiles. The success of this series surprised the publisher who did not foresee a new author could cause so much interest (and sales). Brian Aldiss's Helliconia caused similar interest but the author - as we know - is much better known.

There are books such as Return to Forever that were expected to do well but did not work - or sell especially well.

He concluded that leaving the 'Ghetto' would be disastrous and joining the mainstream a mistake.

His own company Futura try to balance a list that encompasses the best of SF and a market for teenagers and 'genre buyers', publishing 42 SF novels per year from this source. They are also on the look-out for new authors. He was particularly proud of a new find Michael Scott Rohan - this month's speaker- and his new book "The Anvil of Ice". This author has a vast knowledge of mythology and uses ORIGINAL sources.

This speaker gave a very interesting and thought-provoking talk, if you missed it you should be sorry- it was good.

Having never been to Glasgow before we went up on the Thursday, the intention being to have a look around before the Con began. As events turned out it was a wise decision. We were exhausted when we arrived, if we'd waited until Friday to travel we would have been too tired to enjoy the early part of the Con.

This was my first Albacon, and I really enjoyed it. There were three programme streams "Main", "Alternative" and "Fan". The Alternative was a mixture of items, some of which would have fitted happily into the main programme and some into the fan programme. It seemed to me to be an overflow for items which couldn't be fitted in had there been only two streams, and which were too good to leave out.

As I was with Mick I left the fan side alone much of the time, and went to more programme items than I usually do. I found myself enjoying new ideas (new to me anyway), such as cartoons with the films, films which were part of the main programme so you could watch them without missing anything else, and speakers I'd never heard before.

I went to a debate about the future of Eastercons, and re-discovered FAN APATHY!! The room was packed for voting next year's con, for which there was only one bid anyway not counting two spoof bids which were put on at short notice. Only when we went on to discuss more serious matters the room quickly emptied. If fans don't want two year bids, or feel they should be more "in the know", or have any other gripes then they have only themselves to blame.

Food, often a sore point, was excellent. The bar ran a cafe type food bar, with things like burgers and pizzas cooked to order in a microwave, and salad cobs with beef or ham or eggs etc, all hygienically wrapped until sold, at astonishingly cheap prices, mostly 50p per item! (Royal Angus-take note). The set meal in the Hotel restaurant was good value at £7.50 for three courses, including a carvery. The A la Carte we left alone (Couldn't read the menu).

Only two minor complaints: nowhere in the con literature could I find a plan of the hotel, and one of the films began about an hour early, so we missed most of it.

This was my third Eastercon, and for me personally the best, Seacon 84 having been a little too big, and last year at Leeds the split between two hotels spoilt it for me. THANKYOU ALBACON---AND WELL DONE.

EASTERCON - a convention report by Maureen Porter.

In principle it's a great idea to report on the Eastercon, as one of the fannish year's important events. In practice I've been chewing my pen for the last hour with no obvious idea of what I should be saying. Attending a convention is so essentially a personal experience. Someone, perhaps even me, commented during the weekend that there were at least 850 parallel conventions going on simultaneously in the hotel. And it was true. Even if several people share the one experience their perceptions of it are individually coloured and with a Eastercon it's even harder for there are really several independent cons happening at the same time, with many areas of activity represented which have no interest for me. Therefore they scarcely exist so far as I'm concerned in the same way that I scarcely exist for all those media fans who passed me in the corridor so many times. To cap it all Glasgow cons aren't like other cons. This is a piece of received wisdom with which I've lived for many years, but which I can only verify this last weekend. It's perfectly true that Glasgow cons bring out fans who appear to be unawares of the existence of the rest of fandom and who wouldn't go anywhere other than Glasgow. Their presence and unfamiliarity with anything other than the standard Glasgow confare sets them apart from the mainstream of fandom and gives the curious sensation to the hardened fan of being in a completely alien environment. It's a very strange feeling. However, if I spend more time analysing this the con report will go completely by the board, and it's taking long enough to get there as it is.

And was it a good con? Well, I enjoyed myself, so I suppose you could say there was at least one satisfied customer, though how much of it was to do with the con is, as ever, debatable. My relationship with cons is dodgy at best, non-existent at worst, but whatever faults Albacon may have (too big, too media-biased and so on and so on) the atmosphere was good. It felt right to be there and I was very happy there, despite being surrounded by many strangers with mutually incompatible tastes and interests. We all went our own ways peacefully, for the most part, held our own little cons and co-existed quite happily.

The hotel certainly helped, being quite the friendliest con hotel I've ever stayed in. The tea making equipment was a trifle bizzare but the rooms were pleasant and the hotel in general was comfortable in an ever-so-slightly scruffy way which seemed to suit everyone. The staff were amazing. It is customary to report surly bar staff and unhelpful attitudes during breakfast. At the Central there was nothing but kindness and friendliness from everyone, and the staff serving breakfast somehow made sense of the confusion around them each morning with a degree of devotion to which I am simply not accustomed. And let's hear it for the chef who consistently address the clientele as Sir and Madam whatever they looked like. And the food was excellent and also good value - other cons take note. Cheap and edible food is not an unrealistic pipedream.

Of the con programme itself I can say little, mainly because I was usually ensconced in the bar chatting to someone, but parts of it looked interesting enough for me to regret missing certain items, though this was inevitably balanced by relief at avoiding some hoary chestnuts again. Some items showed a serious lack of preparation, the book review panel being a ghastly case in point and an embarrassment to all concerned including chunks of the audience, but on the whole it was standard Eastercon programming and reasonably well-executed, though a small injection of originality wouldn't come amiss.

There are certain things that need to be said. Beccon, not surprisingly, won the bid for next year, though two spoof bids were put up, and more than one person was heard to observe that it was hard to distinguish the real bid from the spoofs. My own reservations about this choice you already know so I won't air them again, but the progress report doesn't cheer me up a great deal. It was also decided to vote on Eastercons two years in advance. At present it is hard to see what effect this will have on Eastercons to come, particularly when so many people are not too sure about the wisdom of continuing Eastercons anyway. We shall see, but I know a good few people who didn't turn up this year and a lot who won't bother next year either.

On the whole though it was a competent and enjoyable convention, with a great atmosphere. I always felt at ease there which is more than I can say for some cons of late, and I'm glad I went. What more can one say at the end?

Andromeda's top ten for March.

1. Chapter House Dune by Frank Herbert.
2. Dr Who : The Twin Dilemma by Eric Seward.
3. Dealing in Futures by Joe Haldeman.
4. Mythago Wood by Robert Holdstock.
5. Queen of the States by Josephine Saxton.
- 6=. The Forever War by Joe Haldeman.
- 6=. A Stainless Steel Rat is Born by Harry Harrison.
8. Wasp by Eric Frank Russell.
9. Leaky Establishment by Dave Langford.
10. Schismatrix by Bruce Sterling.



FUTURE PROGRAMME EVENTS.

Listed below are some of the programme events that we have lined up for the future.

MAY - Yet to be confirmed.

JUNE - Kim Stanley Robinson.

JULY - Debate with Birmingham University.

AUGUST - Dr. John Davies.

SEPTEMBER - Brian Aldiss.

All of the above are subject to final confirmation and may change due to circumstance.

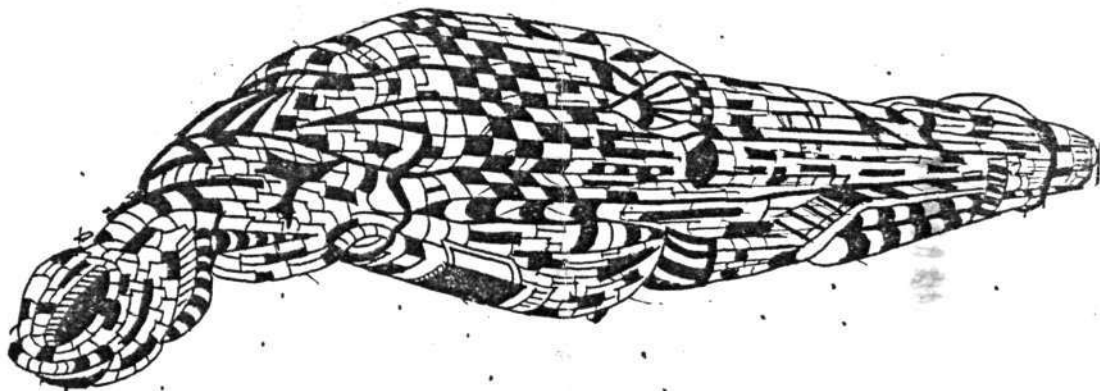
Treasurer's Report on the A.G.M. held 17.1.86.

I must apologise to the members who attended the meeting of the A.G.M. that in giving my report for the previous years accounts, that an error of £5.00 was made in the group's expenditure for the year ending 1985. This was due entirely to a typographical error in the total at the bottom of the top page.

The amount of the SUB TOTAL, "Exceptional Payments" should read £722.25 not £727.25 so giving a GRAND TOTAL OF ALL PAYMENTS IN YEAR of £2,291.84 not £2,296.84 so giving the group a surplus of £68.76 not £63.76.

I would like to thank the group member who brought this matter to my attention, and may I also say that I am looking at ways to simplify the annual audit sheet so that members can find it easier to understand.

Chris Chivers, Treasurer.



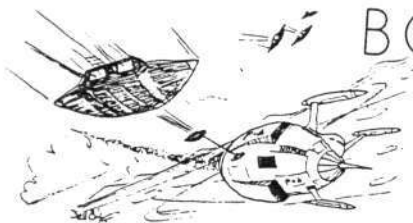
With our 15th anniversary looming ever closer just what were we doing all those years ago?

April 1972 - Colour Slides of Three Cons - Jeff Hacker.

April 1976 - Prof. John Taylor "From Black Holes to ESP".

April 1981 - Thomas M. Disch.

These were the meetings held by the BSFC 14, 10 and 5 years ago.



BOOK REVIEWS

THE ANVIL OF ICE by Michael Scott Rohan,
Maddonald, £9.95, 348 pages.
reviewed by Tony Morton.



Representing the first volume of the winter of the world which chronicles the land of Brasayhal, (already looking forward to the second volume - most unusual), this volume recounts the events of the book of the sword and the beginnings of Elof to becoming a 'Mastersmith'. The book opens with Elof (known early in the book as Alv) as a thrall in Asenby which is subsequently destroyed by Ekweh (raiders), Elof becoming slave then apprentice to Mastersmith Mylio - not all he seems! Trained in the Mastersmith's tower adjacent to the Ice, Elof learns the ways of the guild, becoming adept; but is forced to flee the power of Mylio with his friend Roc to roam (and be manipulated by "Powers"). After many adventures a final encounter between the characters is fought. To steal a phrase from last month's speaker, the author has a knowledge of mythology and uses ORIGINAL sources. This book has a refreshing approach, particularly with the recent trend in fantasy to copy other (non-original) sources.

A good, gripping story, well written and told. There are interesting descriptions of the peoples of the era (Appendix particularly good) and their interaction. Also of climatic conditions (with plausible reasoning) and the fauna and flora of the period. Not your usual fantasy novel- this book is both entertaining AND believable. A must to read - buy it!

HERLAND by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, The Women's Press, £1.95, 146 pages.
reviewed by Bethan Davies.

This book was originally written in 1915, so I approached it with some caution, thinking that, like many books of its time it would be extremely 'stodgy' and difficult to read, happily, I was proved wrong. I would not say that it is compulsive reading, but it is easy to read, interesting and thought-provoking. It describes three men's experiences in a female Utopia which they discover in a tropical rain forest, and in the meantime makes some devastating swipes at contemporary ideas of sex-roles, femininity and the state of modern society by wittily destroying the men's preconceived ideas of the Utopia - all of which is still very relevant. There is rather a long introduction which, although not strictly necessary, is quite interesting and worth reading. Personally, I enjoyed it, but it does have definite feminist tendencies, so if you have a phobia about feminism - avoid it!

QUEEN OF THE STATES, by Josephine Saxton, The Women's Press, £1.95, 175 pages
reviewed by Helena Bowles.

Magdalen Hayward - in contact with aliens, in a psychiatric hospital, Queen of the United States, ordinary person...all or any of these depending on how the book is read. The main theme is that of Magdalen having 'seven concentric selves all interlocking, making forty-nine states of being'. With the aliens' help she explores these other selves making a profound impact on the lives of others, most especially the men in her lives. Touched upon are mysticism, enlightenment through drugs, the nature of insanity, and, as might be expected from feminist press, the relationships between men and women. However, surprisingly, for feminist press, the book is neither strident nor violently anti-men. An interesting, if slightly confusing read.

QUEEN OF THE STATES by Josephine Saxton, The Women's Press, £1.95, 175 pages
reviewed by Chris Morgan.

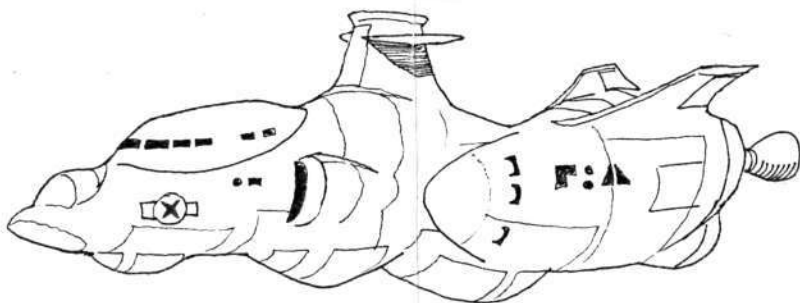
Queen of the States is a wild and witty novel, full of bizarre events and mystical beliefs. Its heroine, Magdalen, is an Englishwoman in her forties, married to Clive. She may or may not be undergoing treatment in a mental hospital, may or may not have been abducted by tiny aliens in flying saucers who want to find out about the human race and who provide her with any comforts she requests while she astonishes them with her lively conversation. Indeed, many of the scenes here may be the result of the aliens' ability to fulfil instantly her wildest requests for decor, food and male company. Royston, a handsome articulate Rasta complete with dreadlocks, seems to have been created for her except that he comes to take on a life of his own, interacting with other characters. A dream-like quality pervades the novel. This is a psychological fantasy rather than SF, since the only true SF element---the aliens in their saucers---is intended as an ironic metaphor, because the aliens are the only internally rational element in the book.

I HOPE I SHALL ARRIVE SOON by Philip K. Dick, Gollancz, £8.95, 179 pages.
reviewed by Chris Morgan.

Fortunately Dick left quite a few uncollected stories behind when he died in 1982, so it isn't bottom-of-the-wastepaper-basket time yet. The ten stories and one article here (two of the previously unpublished) make up a collection almost as good as any of Dick's work. There are early and recent stories, and most of Dick's themes and interests are included. Twists and paradoxes abound in "Explorers We" and the title story. Logical arguments make up "Holy Quarrel" and the article, "How to Build a Universe...", the transcript of a speech given in 1978---a most interesting and astonishing piece of writing. Pre-cog talent is at the heart of "What'll We Do With Ragland Park?". Religion and the afterlife, which become so much apart of Dick's last novels, feature in "Chains of Air, Web of Aether" and "Rautavaara's Case". And "The Exit Door Leads In" is a typically sad, anti-establishment satire. It's a good collection.

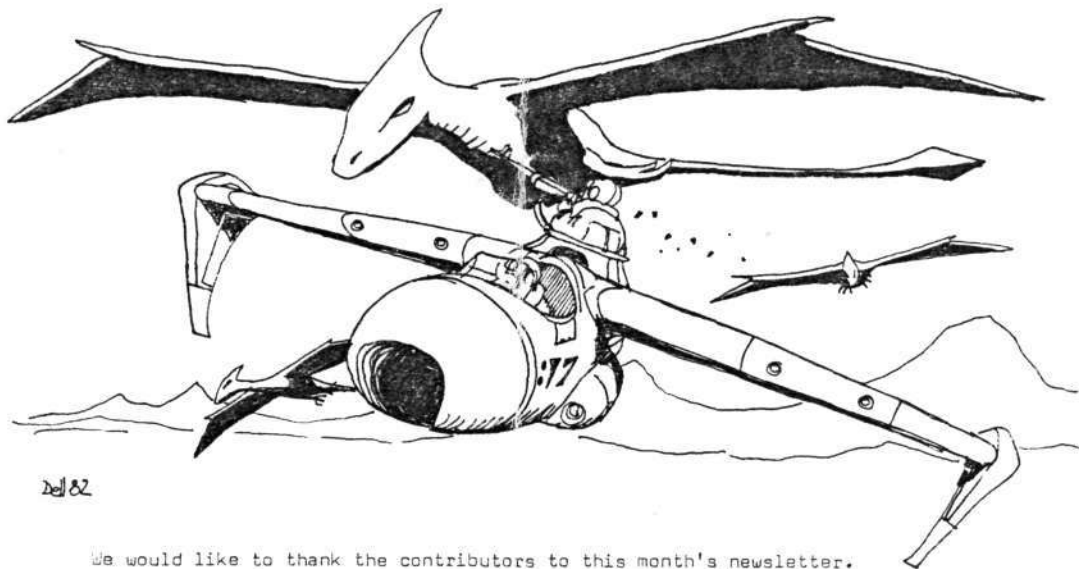
THE CATCH TRAP by Marion Zimmer Bradley, Sphere, £3.95, 691 pages.
reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

Unlike most of Bradley's work, this is not SF or fantasy---it is a well written fast-paced love story set against a background of circus life in America of the 1940's and 1950's. It follows the fortunes of a circus family, the Santellis, from the time that the young Mario Santelli begins to teach Tommy Zane to fly on the trapeze. The romance is not a conventional one as Mario and Tommy are homosexuals. We are shown the frustrations of their need to keep their relationship secret. Gradually the bond between the two men strengthens until it reaches a stability that is rare even in heterosexual partnerships. Put aside your prejudices and read this for what it is---a magical story of love under the big top. By the way, did anyone else notice that the cover art is upside down.



Demons of the Dancing Gods contains the further adventures of Joe and Marge, 2 misfits who were plucked from our world, and saved from death by Master Sorcerer Throckmorton P. Ruddygore, in volume one of the trilogy(?) River of the Dancing Gods. In this the sequel Joe and Marge do battle with the Dark Baron who threatens to take over the world of Husequahr. However before they can do this, Marge must complete her transformation started in volume one. So she and Joe travel to Mor Jerahl - the land of the Kauri - where Marge is bathed in a fiery volcano and emerges as a Kauri who are an all female race of flying fairy. Thus transformed and complete Marge and Joe rejoin Throckmorton P. Ruddygore - Ruddy to his friends - at an annual sorcerer's convention where they plan their campaign against the Dark Baron. Joe and Marge are sent to spy on the Baron on his home ground. Just how they find out who the Baron is, what nether-worldly help he has, how the council of wizards banish him to our Earth and how Joe becomes a God(!), make up the rest of this very amusing and entertaining book. If you want a light pleasant read, I recommend this.

NOTE Mr Chalker has the most original way of making sure that if his trilogy needs expanding - he is covered. Well worth a read.



We would like to thank the contributors to this month's newsletter.

Con reports - Bernie Evans and Maureen Porter.

Reviews - Bethan Davies, Helena Bowles, Chris and Pauline Morgan.

Artwork - John Dell, Phil Probert & Bill Rotsler.

We would also like to thank Tim Stannard for the use of his photocopier to print this. Just one last point, as of now we have only received one entry to the short story competition, remember entries must be in by 15th May, so get writing.

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

Anyone wishing to contribute to next month's newsletter please send your reviews, con reports, articles or artwork (especially artwork) to the above address. Deadline for the May newsletter is 5th May.