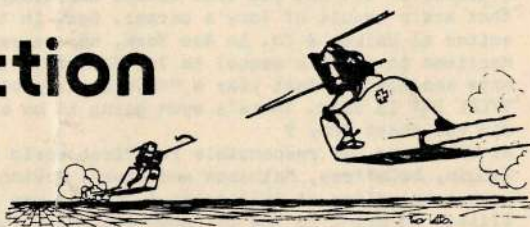


Birmingham Science Fiction Group

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



NEWSLETTER 180

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 MONTH'S MEETING
ARE GIVEN BELOW.
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 PAYABLE TO BSFG
AND SENT TO THE TREASURER
CHRIS CHIVERS AT 51,
BOUNDARY ROAD, STREETLY,
SUTTON COLDFIELD, WEST
MIDLANDS.

This month's meeting will be on 26th September at
8.00 pm and our guest this month is :-

Toby Roxburgh

See page 2 for some info. on Toby.

REMEMBER this month's meeting is one week later
than usual.

FUTURE MEETINGS

- October -- Brian Aldiss. Trillion Year Spree
will be published around then so
no doubt Rog will have some copies
of the book at the meeting.
- November -- Debate with Birmingham University.
This is their chance to get revenge
for last year's whitewash.
- December -- Christmas Party. Details (hopefully)
will be announced at this month's
meeting, or in next month's newsletter
- January -- A.G.M. and auction. Your chance to
see Rog in action, if you have never
seen one of Rog's auctions treat
yourself to this one.

Toby Roxburgh is one of the giants of Science Fiction. No, you won't have any of his books in your collection because Toby is an EDITOR rather than a writer of SF. But you will almost certainly have books in your collection that are a result of Toby's career. Back in the late 60s, when Toby was editor at Walker & Co. in New York, he was responsible for getting Harry Harrison to write a sequel to THE STAINLESS STEEL RAT. That sequel begat more sequels and last year a PREQUEL was published in the form of THE STAINLESS STEEL RAT IS BORN. There's even going to be a sequel to the prequel!! What did you start Toby?

At Walker he was responsible for first world hardcovers by authors such as LeGuin, McCaffrey, Matheson and Niven. Moving to the UK in the early 70s he became editor at Millington & Co. and was responsible for getting Harlan Ellison in print in the UK. When moving to Futura he commissioned Anne McCaffrey to write the DINOSAUR PLANET books.

For the past few years he has, along with Richard Evans (who visited the Group earlier this year), been responsible for the massive SF and Fantasy output from Futura Books.

From the above you might be forgiven for thinking Toby's life is dominated by SF but he has, in fact, taken part in amateur stage productions notably Gilbert and Sullivan. At Eastercon this year he was in fine voice at 6 o'clock in the morning remembering all the words despite his all-night input of alcohol! A regular attendee at NOVAcon he has over the past few years given excellent talks on publishing. This month (ONE WEEK LATER THAN USUAL) Toby will be giving a talk titled "Aspects of Fantasy" - no doubt to encourage members of FANTASYCON (at the Midland Hotel) to visit the Group. I'm sure that Toby's talk will be up to his usual high standard - don't miss it.

Rog Peyton.

LAST MONTH'S MEETING

The August meeting saw the welcome return to the Brum Group of Dr John Davies. His subject was 'Cosmic Impact', which also just happens to be the title of his new (and first) book - see review in last Newsletter. He showed slides of craters on the Earth, most of them almost obliterated by the sands of time, and on the Moon, Mercury and other bodies in the Solar System, then explained how they were formed - going back to the origins of the system. The original cloud of gas and dust accreted into 'planetesimals', most of which formed the planets and moons, but some remain as asteroids and comets. Some of these approach Earth periodically; many have struck, possibly wiping out the dinosaurs (as depicted in a dramatic back-to-front slide by ydraH divaD, who also chaired the meeting due to Rog's professed ignorance of scientific matters!). Sooner or later, a large asteroid or comet is bound to hit us again, with results similar to an atomic war, Nuclear Winter and all. Let's hope it doesn't happen just yet... Fortunately, all this gloom and doom was enlivened by John's humorous asides.

P.S. The raffle, with John Davies' book as prize, was won for the first time ever by Dave Hardy. Unfortunately he already had a copy, having supplied the jacket illo, so it was re-donated and won by one of your Editors.

HUGO AWARDS

The Hugo results are out and are as follows :-

Novel - ENDER'S GAME by Orson Scott Card.

Novella - 24 VIEWS OF MT. FUJII BY HOKUSAI by Roger Zelazny.

Novellette - PALADIN OF THE LOST HOUR by Harlan Ellison.

Short Story - FERMI AND FROST by Fred Pohl.

Nonfiction - SCIENCE MADE STUPID by Weller.

Semiprozine - Locus.

Dramatic Presentation - Back to the future (Brazil got lots of applause).

Professional Editor - Judy-Lynn del Ray (see note below).

Professional Artist - Michael Whelan.

Fanzine - Lan's Lantern.

Fan Writer - Mike Glyer .

Fan Artist - Joan Hanke-Woods.

John W. Campbell Award - Melissa Scott.

Note

Owen Locke went up to collect Judy-Lynn's award and read out a letter from Lester. The gist of it was that Judy never believed in posthumous awards so he was not going to accept it on her behalf especially as it was not seen fit to give her an award while she was still alive. This prompted calls of "F...in integrity" from the audience. (Good for you Lester. Ed.)

The following bids for Worldcons were also voted on or accepted as runners.

1988 New Orleans - Nolacon.

1989 Boston (again) - Noreascon 3.

1990 will be between Los Angeles and Holland. (so be in Brighton to vote for Holland next year).

Bids Received

1992 Washington D.C.

1994 Milwaukee.

There was an attendance of 5,500 at Confederation in Atlanta this year.

Above details courtesy of SMALL MAMMAL, (Martin Easterbrook & Margaret Austin).

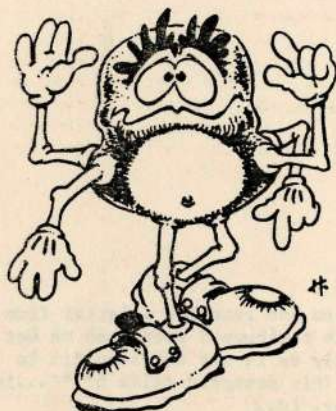
NOVACON 16

31st oct - 2nd nov 1986

de vere hotel, coventry.

g.o.h e.c. 'ted' tubb

special guest chris evans.



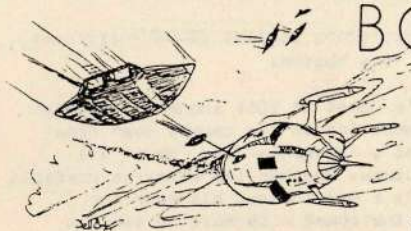
REGISTRATION : £8.00
(£10.00 on the door)

ROOM RATES :
£21.50 single,
£16.50 per person in double
Inc. Full English Breakfast.

FOR REGISTRATION SEND CHEQUES
PAYABLE TO 'NOVACON 16' AND
SEND TO : GRAHAM POOLE ,
86 BERWOOD FARM ROAD ,
WYLOE GREEN ,
SUTTON COLDFIELD ,
WEST MIDLANDS.

Andromeda's Top Ten For August.

1. Aliens by Alan Dean Foster.
 2. A Tapestry of Time by Richard Cowper.
 3. The Outcast by Louise Cooper.
 3. With A Tangled Skein by Piers Anthony.
 5. Trumps of Doom by Roger Zelazny.
 6. Waylander by David Gemell.
 7. Darkness at Sethanon by Raymond E. Fiest.
 8. Limits by Larry Niven.
 9. Keys to Paradise by Robert Vardeman.
 10. Corpse by Mick Farren.
- *****



BOOK REVIEWS

THE POSTMAN by David Brin, Bantam, £9.95 (hard-cover), 294 pages, reviewed by Tony Morton.



Once in a while a book lands on your lap which promises everything. Of these one in say, ten deliver this is THE ONE. I once thought Aldiss had sewn-up the post-holocaust story with GREYBEARD, but this one is better (sorry Brian).

Set in the near future after a 'mini war', the weather settles down a bit after a short nuclear winter and finds humanity in a sort of medieval serfdom based near the old cities. Our hero stumbles onto a post van that was forced off the road and takes on the persona of a postman (hence the title). By riding his luck and finding the survivors hoping he is real, he infact becomes a sort of postman. How he does this and what he achieves in the USA of that time I strongly recommend you find out for yourselves. If you never buy another book buy this. How this failed to win the Hugo I don't know. (Most) highly recommended.

DOCTOR ON THE DISSECTING TABLE

Doctor Who Special Effects by Mat Irvine, Beaver Books (by arrangement with the BBC), £5.95, 96 pages reviewed by Dave Hardy.

At first this may appear to be a children's book, but it is written in a manner that makes it suitable for anyone interested in special effects on TV (with occasional asides about the cinema - usually rather enviously comparing the amount of time and money available to the latter; though the small budget and time-saving devices could be said to be one of the virtues of Doctor Who. That's the way its makers tell it, anyway.)

The book is divided into twelve sections, with titles such as 'Constructing Effects', 'On Location', 'Models and Miniatures', 'Monsters and Creatures' and 'Doctor Who in the Future'. Although the author seems confident about the Doctor continuing from his current sixth incarnation to the twelve allotted him, there are in fact doubts on how much longer this longest-running SF serial will continue, but that does not concern this book, which goes back to the programme's beginnings in 1963 and tells, in a straightforward style, of its development to the present day. It is full of amusing anecdotes, mainly concerned with 'what went wrong', illustrated with photographs taken by the author. It may seem that he had this book in mind all along, in his job as Visual Effects Designer and occasional string-puller, but as most of us know, he gives a very entertaining talk to SF groups and the like, illustrated with slides taken in the workshops and studios as well as actual models. If you are a Doctor Who fan and don't want all your illusions shattered, leave this book alone; would-be SFX designers will find here some of the pleasures and pitfalls (some literal) of the job.

HEART OF THE COMET by Gregory Benford and David Brin, Bantam, £9.95 (hardcover), 468 pages, reviewed by Tony Morton.

The book opens with the next visit of Halley's Comet in 2061 and man's attempt at scientific advancement - by placing an expedition ON the comet! Seen from three viewpoints as the story progresses 'Carl', 'Virginia' and 'Saul' all have amazing influence on the shape of the future. Whether the story is possible I leave to scientists, but as a story it ain't a bad theory, although the presence of 'Halleyforms' - natural life on the comet - is hard to swallow as is the symbiosis of humans to them.

Frankly, the eighty years the book spans in its 468 pages I felt as though I was there - not in the story sense but in the time it took to read. Somewhat tedious. May be worth slogging through if you have the time or have the science to understand some of the more technical explanations.

ALIENS (book of the film) by Alan Dean Foster, Futura, £2.50, 247 pages, reviewed by Carol Morton.

The blurb for the film says "the nightmare continues....", after reading this book I can only agree.

After drifting in space for 57 years in the life-craft Narcissus, Ripley and Mr Jones are picked up and transported to a medical station on the Moon, and then transferred to the Earth. Ripley's story is not believed - someone tampered with the log of the Narcissus. She is not actually accused of the murder of the crew and the destruction of the Nostromo, but she is grounded and ordered to undergo a six month period of psychometric probation. After her 'trial' Ripley finds out that the planet LV 426 - now called Acheron - has been colonised and people have been living there for twenty years with no reports of hostile aliens.

The company orders a family to go to the crashed alien ship and to investigate the site, and guess what happens - yes, one of them comes back with an alien attached to his face. Not long after this all contact with the colonists on Acheron is lost and suddenly Ripley's story does not seem so impossible. Ripley is persuaded - by the promise of her licence back and all reprimands removed from her records - to return to Acheron with a small squad of marines with the intention of totally destroying the aliens. What they find when they arrive on Acheron is an almost totally devastated and deserted base - however there is one survivor.

The rest of this novel is of course somewhat predictable, but none the less it is gripping stuff. I did not go to the cinema to see Alien, I waited until I could hide behind a cushion in the privacy of my own home, I am even more determined to do the same with this film. If you are into SF horror you will love this one.

THE OUTCAST by Louise Cooper, Unicorn, £2.95, 301 pages, reviewed by Bethan Davies.

This book continues the story of Tarod and Cyllan, which was begun in THE INITIATE, and is to be finished in THE MASTER - yet another fantasy trilogy. I read the first book in the series and found it surprisingly good, but I think this one is better. The book has its faults, notably the characterisation, which could be improved in places, especially where Tarod himself was concerned, but it is certainly the most compelling book I have read this year.

What I like about it is that it totally absorbs you, you can identify with the characters easily, and consequently you become totally involved with events, causing a racing pulse and bitten fingernails - who said reading was a nice relaxing hobby?

All I can say is roll on the time the final book comes out - I hate not knowing what is going to happen.

THE CELESTIAL STEAM LOCOMOTIVE by Michael Coney, Orbit, £2.95, 302 pages,
reviewed by Tony Morton.

This book constitutes volume one of the Song Of Earth and is concerned with The Triad, three people who are 'chosen' by Starquin to fulfil a destiny. The three, Manuel (the Artist), Zozula (the Oldster), and the Girl With No Name meet apparently by accident and tumble through adventures toward this destiny; although in this book they do not fulfil it just "accomplish the first part of their purpose", another way to ensure sales of future books.

In case you wonder one of their adventures 'In the Land of Lost Dreams' contains a trip on the Celestial Steam Locomotive of the title, which is novel and entertaining.

The book is interesting, well written and entertains, it is introduced as a tale of the year 143,624 cyclic which is incongruous with the rest of the book and I feel this introduction could have been omitted - perhaps it will make sense in later books? Well worth a read.

EXECUTIVE by Piers Anthony, Granada, £2.95, 336 pages, reviewed by Anne Gay.

This is volume 4 of Bio of a Space Tyrant, but it can be read quite happily without the support of volumes 1-3.

Starting as a de facto dictator of Jupiter, Hope Hubris uses his personal magnetism to govern through a talented group of people. His ends are enviable, his means of necessity less so. Jupiter's public is what the public actually is - selfish, self-interested, apathetic, mixed of race, gender and morals. But with his Tyranny established, Hope Hubris finds out what life is like as an underdog.

Unlike the blurb-writer, I wouldn't call Anthony's style imaginative or mind-twisting. It's competent and conveys - rather coldly - the content, which is varied and original in parts.

It is not one of the greats, but it gives you several things to think about - like sex by remote control.

To sum up : Piers Anthony on a soapbox. With explosions.

ISLE OF THE DEAD by Roger Zelazny, Methuen, £2.50, 190 pages, TO DIE IN ITALBAR by Roger Zelazny, Methuen, £2.50, 183 pages, both reviewed by Dave Packwood.

These two books combined form a thought-provoking odyssey into the mind of Roger Zelazny. Running throughout these two novels are Zelazny's pre-occupation with such themes as immortality, religion and philosophy - all very significant to this very talented author.

ISLE OF THE DEAD is a typical Zelazny novel, the themes revolving around theology, immortality and the confrontation between good and evil.

The protagonist, Francis Sandow born on Earth in the middle of the twentieth century is eminently successful, immensely wealthy (the 87th wealthiest man in the galaxy), very respectable - something of a Renaissance Man. Centuries in the future Sandow is kept alive by "advanced technological means" and therefore has achieved near status as a God; indeed he bears a name, "Shimbo of Darktree" and occupies a place in the pantheon of Pie'an deities on the planet Megapei.

Sandow receives tri-dimensional pictures of six people who died years ago but who can be recalled to life by dint of a recall-tape (a device to retrieve information from the point of death). The central intelligence department (on Earth) believe that Sandow has access to these tapes. Sandow has not,

but knows where they are, and so, in his spacecraft the "Model T", he roars off in search of them. The trail leads to Megapei and a confrontation with Belion, the God traditionally opposed to Shimbo (Sandow).

TO DIE IN ITALBAR is set in the same universe, the action taking place many years on because a radical, political transformation has taken place, the galaxy being divided into two camps, the C.L. (Combined League) and the Dynab worlds.

The story itself centres on several characters' attempts to acquire the supreme weapon that will enable the DYNAB to destroy the C.L., the weapon being a human known as Heidel von Hymak or "H" - a living pool of diseases. Among the characters seeking "H" are Malacat Miles who want "H" as an instrument of war and Dr. Pels, a pathologist who is kept alive, whilst in a state of clinical death!

There are elements of "space opera" in this book but they do not detract from the enjoyable and stimulating plot. Zelazny even manages to incorporate Francis Sandow from THE ISLE OF THE DEAD into the book, to destroy an evil Goddess who inhabits the body of "H" as a parasite.

All in all two very fine re-issues. Highly Recommended.

WITH A TANGLED SKEIN by Piers Anthony, Grafton, £2.95, 381 pages, reviewed by Carol Morton.

This is the third volume in the INCARNATIONS OF IMMORTALITY series and is concerned with Fate. The previous two have covered Death and Time. The theory behind the incarnations is that they are all "jobs" done by mortals. Death weighs souls in balance and sends them to Heaven, Hell or Purgatory, Time controls all aspects of time living his life backwards - very confusing, and Fate is the spinner, weaver and cutter of the threads of each person's life. Fate has three aspects there is Clotho, the youngest, who spins the threads of life from the material of the void, Lachesis who weaves the threads into the tapestry of life and Atropos who measures and cuts the length of each thread.

The story revolves around Niobe a beautiful young woman who's husband, Cedric, is killed and she is persuaded to take on the aspect of Clotho. Whilst in this office she finds out that Satan wanted her dead but Cedric sacrificed himself because of a prophesy that foretold of Niobe being instrumental in thwarting one of Satan's plots in twenty years time. In due time Niobe retires as Clotho and marries again. Satan however has not finished with Fate, years later events are so placed that all 3 aspects of Fate must retire at the same time, and so that there will be someone in the office of Fate with experience Niobe - who by now is middle-aged and again a widow - agrees to become Lachesis. I won't spoil the rest of this book by telling you any more - just read it it is an excellent novel, it does however make you think in places with Anthony's love of riddles and puzzles showing up now and again. I also enjoyed the author's note - though they do seem to get longer each time.

Thankyou's this month go to
Martin Tudor for phoning the Hugo results to us.
Dave Hardy for the review of Mat's book and the piece on last month's meeting.
Reg Peyton for the piece on Toby.
Anne, Bethan and Dave (Packwood) for their reviews.
Finally Tim Stannard for letting us use his photocopier.

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

Deadline for next month's newsletter is 4th October.