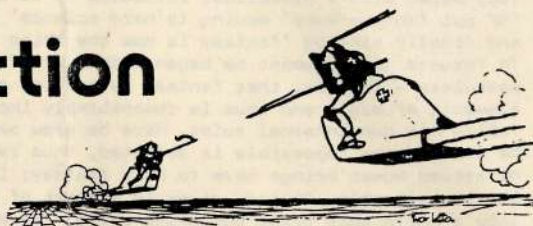


Birmingham Science Fiction Group

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



NEWSLETTER 181

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.

The meeting will start at 8.00pm prompt
on 17th October.

Our guest this month is

Brian Aldiss

Well, what can one say about Brian, for those of you who were at Fifteencon and saw his double act with Harry Harrison, I need go no further, you will be there to listen to another of his enjoyable talks, for the rest, Brian is one of, if not THE premier British SF writers. He is of course one of the Honorary presidents of the BSFG along with Harry Harrison and has been to talk to the group on many occasions. On his last visit to us in April of last year he spoke to us about the Helliconia Trilogy more specifically about Helliconia Winter and the plans to dramatise Non-Stop. This time he and his co-author David Wingrove are coming to talk to us about their book Trillion Year Spree, but no doubt Brian can be persuaded to give us some more of his delightful insights on SF publishing and publishers. Do try to attend this meeting I promise you it will be entertaining, informative and most certainly amusing, be early if you do decide to attend as last time Brian was with us we very nearly had to turn people away.

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

The deadline for next month's newsletter is
5th November.

Last month we were entertained by editor Toby Roxburgh, a paragon in the SF field. His talk was to be on aspects of Fantasy - but the audience got much more! Toby began with a historical reflection by referring to the Gernsback era where 'SF put fantasy away' moving to 'hard science' which now seemed out dated, and finally stating 'fantasy is now the thing keeping SF alive'.

To forward his argument he began with a brief explanation - a theory to postulate - firstly, that fantasy is the art of the impossible, having some elements of magic and thus is demonstrably impossible. Good fantasy will follow its own internal rules. Here he drew parallels with religion where, he claimed the impossible is accepted, thus religion is fantasy. Secondly he argued human beings have to have fantasy; it implies imagination, it allows the inexplicable. Fantasy gives an element of mysticism, a means of escape into a world which gives something extra. The attraction is of moving away from 'reality'. 'High' fantasy says something specific about life and creates a complicity between writer and reader.

From this thesis he then suggested he should explain with examples :- There are obvious 'benchmarks' in fantasy quoth Toby, Islandia and Middle Earth being the major two. Here the authors create a world which can be related to the real world, other novels in 'classic' literature of this ilk being Gulliver's Travels and Robinson Crusoe. He also forwarded Robin McKinley as a recent writer who has this enviable talent. It is from such 'benchmarks' that all other fantasy flows, although he stressed the Sword and Sorcery offshoot as "awful" and "dire" - the exception being (of course) Leiber's Grey Mouser books. Sword and Sorcery forms a low branch of fantasy, being 'pure cartoon', fantasy is more than this - it can be so complex that statement can be read into it. Although the division of fantasy and statement is hard to define.

Toby's next comment caused some disruption when he said "some of the most unpleasant people in the world write the best fantasy, for instance Watership Down".

His penultimate statement was that, in the end fantasy is not original but derives its roots from myths and legends we all know. Here an interesting analogy arose as Toby pointed out that in the thirties SF ignored fantasy while myth and legend (Greek, Norse, et al) were taught at school but today fantasy is widely read and the myth/legend syllabus has ceased. This he felt allowed publishers to sell fantasy where as thirty years ago people knew the stories through schooling!

Lastly, Toby enlarged on the publishing side by oblique references - categorising SF & Fantasy allows growth; if one area does not sell another will: once the 'bandwagon' begins to roll everybody jumps on until the axle breaks; being two such remarks. He concluded by saying 'pun' fantasy is now past its peak, while 'high' fantasy is in good shape.

Well, on prompting Toby continued ... fantasy conventions are now possible because of educational changes, there is now an active desire of fandom rather than passive. The realisation that science is seen not to be true, there are no hard fast rules. Hence through fantasy, publishers give something essential; people who read fantasy DONT mug old ladies or set fires at football matches. Fantasy is all about being human...

During questioning some very interesting items came up about Uri Geller, Doris Stokes, Cats and of course Richard Adams (snigger) - but you had to be there.

A truly excellent meeting Toby is one of SF's more gifted speakers. The meeting finally adjourned to the bar at the Midland Hotel where Fantasycon was being held, (Rog said we could drink there until 6am for all we know he and Toby are still there).

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 SEPTEMBER.

1. Harry Sullivan's War by Ian Marter.
2. Light Fantastic by Terry Pratchet.
3. Helliconia Winter by Brian Aldiss.
4. Footfall by Larry Niven and Jerry Pournelle
5. Dr. Who and the Savages by Ian Stuart.
6. Killashandra by Anne McCaffrey.
7. Aliens by Alan Dean Foster.
- 8=. Waylander by David Gemmell.
- 8=. I Vampire by Jody Scott.
- 8=. Limits by Larry Niven.



UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

Department for External Studies

This day school will examine SF as imaginative writing, its connection with science fact and achievement as well as looking at science anticipations in mainstream literature. The day ends with an example of SF from the cinema.

PROGRAMME

- 10.30 am Registration and coffee.
- 11.00 am LECTURE. Imaginary lines - SF and the unknown. Dr. Colin Greenland.
- 1.00 pm Lunch.
- 2.15 pm LECTURE. Science based SF. Dr. Bob Lamborne
- 3.45 pm Tea.
- 4.15 pm LECTURE. The futures of the past - writers as antennae. Dr John Morris.
- 6.00 pm ILLUSTRATED TALK. The pictorial art of SF. Dr. Willem Hackmann
- 7.00 pm Dinner.
- 8.15 pm INTRODUCTION. SF on film. Dr. Michael Shallis.
- 8.30 pm FILM. METROPOLIS by Fritz Lang (1926).

SCIENCE FACT AND SCIENCE FICTION



A day school to be held at Rewley House,
Wellington Square, Oxford
on

Saturday November 22 1986

Anyone interested in the above
contact Dave Hardy for cost and other
details.

An extract from a letter from Helena Bowles.

... I have a (hopefully) interesting news bulletin about a certain member of our exclusive little group of reality's-rejects.

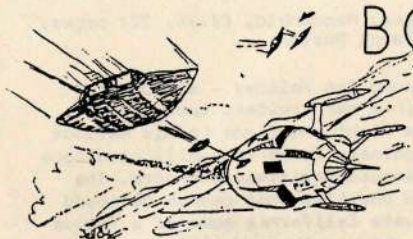
Do you remember Terry Pratchett's "Colour of Magic" ? Good. Now you may or may not remember that he did a signing session at Andromeda (Yes, there is a point to all this rambling). Bethan had a copy autographed :

To Bethan,

What a great name look out for yourself in the next book.
(or words to that effect).

Bethan has now achieved stardom in that she appears in "The light Fantastic" (the sequel) from P 78-P 216 as a little blonde with long hair.

Thanks for the letter Helena. Now that Bethan is infamous will she still talk to us?.



BOOK REVIEWS

THE COPPER CROWN by Patricia Kennealy,
Grafton, £2.95, 511 pages,
reviewed by Carol Morton.



If you were at the Anne McCaffrey meeting in February you may remember she recommended several forthcoming books to us, this is one and I can only further endorse her enthusiasm this is an excellent book.

Imagine this if you can, it is the year 3512 A.D. and the Terran probe ship SWORD is on a 5 year mission (now where have I heard that before?) to investigate habited and uninhabited planetary bodies with a view to diplomatic relations (the former) or colonisation (the latter), when they do encounter aliens they have a surprise in store these aliens speak LATIN!!

As it turns out the explanation is quite simple, they are the descendants of the survivors of Atlantis who originally settled in the Keltic areas of Europe but were driven out of Ireland by Patrick (remember he is supposed to have rid Ireland of snakes - for snakes read Kelts). But instead of crossing the Atlantic to the Americas they crossed the stars to a new star system they called Keltia, and established a new and highly

sophisticated colony there.

The crew of the Sword are welcomed into the royal court on Keltia and there is talk of an alliance with Terra. This is seen as a threat by Keltia's enemies the Imperium and The Phalanx and they wage war on Keltia. The Sword's crew become instrumental in this war in more ways than one.

I must admit this is an excellent novel, I can't wait for the sequel THE THRONE OF SCONE, to come out. If I had to pick one fault with this book I would perhaps say that this is an SF book, so who put a Fantasy cover on it?

TAILCHASER'S SONG by Tad Williams, Futura, 330 pages, £2.95, reviewed by Tony Morton.

As quoted on the blurb, this is the cat equivalent of Watership Down. It is a well written fantasy novel revolving around the Tailchaser of the title, who becomes involved in mysterious and macabre goings-on in the cat world while undertaking a 'quest' for a lost friend. Interestingly, Tailchaser is not the hero of the novel, but 'plays his part'. I found it an interesting and balanced fantasy and although there are long passages explaining journeys undertaken, which may become tedious, it does give a feel of time being taken to travel to places (a la Tolkien). The settings are well thought out and explained as are the characters involved. Like Watership Down it is more a juvenile fantasy - but that's not a rebuke. Well worth a read if only for the author's knowledge of cats. I enjoyed it.

MAGIC KINGDOM FOR SALE - SOLD, by Terry Brooks, Macdonald, £9.95, 324 pages,
reviewed by Carol Morton.

This light-hearted and easy read revolves around Ben Holiday - a widower (his wife Annie and their unborn child died in a car accident two years before this story starts). Ben comes home one night and finds in his mailbox a catalogue addressed to Annie. This is no ordinary run-of-the-mill catalogue it is from Rosen's Ltd. and is the store's annual Christmas Whshbook. The offerings in the catalogue were one-of-a-kind oddities that cannot be found elsewhere, such as dinner for two in the private California home of a famous movie star, a bottle of 150 year old wine, a gold toothpick, mink coats for little girl's dolls and a magic kingdom called landover. Ben is intrigued by this last offering and at first doubts the authenticity of such an offering, but it turns out it is genuine, Rosen's do have a magic kingdom for sale, in which the purchaser would become King. The price is \$ 1,000,000. Ben, who since the death of Annie has become idsenchanted with life, buys the kingdom and is magically transported there. However all is not as it seemed, the kingdom is magic but without a King to uphold the magic in the kingdom th magic has been leaking away leaving behind a sadly tattered and tarnished kingdom. Ben decides that he will stay on as King and try to bring the magic back, but he must first meet the challenge of a duel to the death with the Iron Mark an 'ugly and terrible demon'. If you like deep thought-provoking novels - leave this alone. This is a very lightweight easy to read books, just right for those days when you don't want to have to think too hard but you want a book that helps you escape the real world and its worries.

THE OTHERS by Alison Prince, Methuen, £7.95, Reviewed by Chris Chivers.

Alison Prince has created a pleasant post-holocaust story for teenagers in her book THE OTHERS. The story is set between two cultures of the Underhills and the ruling class of The Others in Air City. The plot concerns Ergo who, like most of the underhill people, is mutated to do a specific task in the anthill-like world that he lives in. During his routine work he meets with a girl from The Others, and as their relationship develops Ergo finds out there are dissident elements in both societies. Through Ergo's escapades he is elemental in helping to break down the Barriers between both groups. Very much a teenager's book, THE OTHERS is a well-written story and a good introduction to the world of Science Fiction literature, and Alison Prince has created a set of characters that the reader would like to find out more about.

THE DOINGS OF RAFFLES HAW by Arthur Conan Doyle, Greenhill £8.95, 257 pages

Reviewed by Chris Morgan

This lesser known novel of Doyle's (first published in 1892) is a morality story on the basis of the love of money being the root of all evil. The curiously named Raffles Haw is an enigmatic young man possessing unlimited wealth, who comes to live in a purpose-built mansion near the town of "Tamfield", not far from Birmingham. He tries to use his money wisely to help those in real need, yet many of the people so helped come to expect a handout---in other words, are corrupted. In particular, Haw falls for Laura McIntyre, and the prospect of her marrying into wealth makes her father and brother greedy. Even Laura herself is prepared to dismiss her existing fiancé with barely a thought in the excitement of sharing such a fortune.

The SF elements of the book stem from two sources---the scientific discovery that produces Haw's wealth and the gadgets with which he has surrounded himself. The latter are amusingly mechanical in the manner of Heath Robinson's illustrations, and they include automatic doors and a primitive automatic drinks machine. Brian Stableford's brief afterword places the novel in its historical context.

OLYMPIAN NIGHTS by John Kendrick Bangs, Greenhill £8.95, 225 pages

Reviewed by Chris Morgan

Around the turn of the century Bangs was renowned for his very silly novels of humorous fantasy, particularly A Houseboat on the Styx. Olympian Nights, first published in 1902, is typical of his work. The novel's unnamed narrator, an American writer, is visiting Greece when circumstances allow him to meet the gods, still living on Mount Olympus. The romp that follows is aimless, taking in long dialogues with several gods including Cupid (now an elevator boy), Adonis (a valet) and Jupiter himself, who still rules the gods but also enjoys a game of golf (on an 18-hole course that girdles the planet Mars!). The book is a quick read, still very amusing in places. It consists mainly of verbal humour, telling the reader a little of how the Americans of 1902 viewed the ancient Greeks, but without reaching the peaks of satire. This edition has the benefit of an interesting afterword by Brian Stableford.

A PRINCESS OF THE CHAMELN (£3.50, 275pp); YORATH THE WOLF (£2.95, 178pp) both by Cerry Wilder, Unicorn.

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

These are the first two parts of a fantasy trilogy. The first, A Princess of the Chameln, deals with the escape of Aidris when the Chameln lands are invaded by the armies of Mel'nir and her waiting until the time comes for her to reclaim the throne. The second, Yorath the Wolf, follows the life of the grandson of the Great King of Mel'nir, the one it is prophesied will kill him. Thus he is raised secretly. The volumes may be read separately as the paths of Aidris and Yorath cross only once, and that briefly.

Although they are nicely written there is something missing. Perhaps the problem is that these characters spend much of their life away from where the real action is---true each is involved in battles but mostly they do not initiate them. There is never a feeling that they are in real danger, they come through their trials with charmed lives. Since neither Aidris or Yorath are truly in control of their own lives they seem of lesser importance than those that hover at the edge of vision, who pull the strings and order the events that affect these two. These are the ones who need to take centre stage.

HEART'S BLOOD by Jane Yolen, Futura £2.50, 238 pages

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

This makes quite a good juvenile fantasy though I feel this is not what the author intended it to be. It is the sequel to Dragon's Blood in which the young hero, Jakkin, won his dragon. In this novel Jakkin is dragged into political intrigue because of Akki, the girl he loves but hasn't seen for a year. Everything about this book is sentimental and most of the nasty things happen at a distance and never do we feel that the characters suffer.

It is perhaps no coincidence that the native population are Austarians and that the planet was once a penal colony. On the whole, the book lacks imagination.

MAN OF TWO WORLDS by Frank and Brian Herbert, Gollancz £9.95, 317 pages

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

A Dreen is an alien that can 'idmage'. It rearranges atoms to create something new. One of them idmaged Earth, and that, some Dreens think, was a mistake.

Ryll is a young Dreen who goes joy-riding in a space ship designed to erase Earth. He collides with an Earth ship piloted by Lutt Hanson Jr. Both are potentially fatally injured but Ryll is able to use Lutt's body mass to mend his own body but as he has to take on Lutt's appearance he finds himself stuck with Lutt's personality as well. The Earthman tends to be the more dominant.

The novel begins slowly but as it progresses a sense of fun on the part of the authors begins to show through; Dreens get high on basil and the French Foreign Legion is at war with the Chinese on Venus (its troops are served by a huge floating brothel). Throughout the Dreen/Human interactions are the most interesting parts of this book.

The Earth has been destroyed in a battle with the planet and power-hungry Sejiedi. Earth's survivors are treated as refugees and are not really accepted into the Galactic League. The one way that "Earthers" can gain any measure of honour and pride is to join the White Wing of the title. The League fights the Sej out in space in a one-to-one combat, like the dogfights in the Battle of Britain but using spacecraft not spitfires. These spacecraft are grouped into wings each wing coming from a planetary system and each having its own colour. Thus when "Earthers" join the wings they are given the colour white which seems apt as it is the universal colour of mourning.

Naturally the White Wing become the best pilots, and hence, the best fighters. This makes them even less popular and there are frequent calls for the White Wing to be disbanded and for them to give up their home, a moon which has been partially terra-formed. The story revolves around one 'flight' of the White Wing, and how they are picked out by intelligence to do some dirty and hence enemy-making jobs.

The blurb-writers do no justice to this book, in fact the blurb is a complete put-off. This is a tightly-written work, with fast-paced action and suspenseful plot, it is somewhat in the vein of E. E. 'Doc' Smith's LENS MEN books but without the gung-ho hero style.

TRUMPS OF DOOM by Roger Zelazny, Sphere £2.50, 217 pages

Reviewed by Chris Morgan

If you've read Zelazny's Amber series you'll want to read this, because it's number six in the series. This time, instead of Corwin telling the story it's Merlin, Corwin's son. In fact, Zelazny plays with his readers, not mentioning Amber or letting on that this is Corwin's son for the best part of 100 pages. I found the first part interesting, even if a little slow (but with some marvellous descriptive passages). Then the action moves to Amber itself, we meet various of the princes and princesses, and the story really takes off. Unfortunately, it stays (to extend my metaphor) up in the air, with too many questions or unexplained events and too few answers. I hope the next volume comes soon.

THE MAGIC COTTAGE by James Herbert, Hodder & Stoughton £9.95, 308 pages

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

When Midge, an artist, and Mike, a musician, are seeking a house out of London, one isolated cottage in the depths of the New Forest draws them. The potential obstacles to the purchase disappear overnight. Initially everything is perfect, magic even. But almost from the moment that they meet the Synergists, members of a strange religious sect, things begin to change, subtly at first but with gathering momentum.

James Herbert continues to develop away from the novels that brought him early success. Gone is the buckets of blood approach with something grisley on alternate pages. Instead there is a build up throughout the novel from a benevolent beginning to a horrific climax. By abandoning the gruesome and concentrating on the supernatural he has allowed the skill of his writing to show through.

Thankyous this month go to

Chris and Pauline Morgan for the reviews.

Helena Bowles for the letter.

Dave Hardy for the Oxford University day school.

Chris Chivers for his review.

Tim Stannard for letting us use his photocopier to print this.