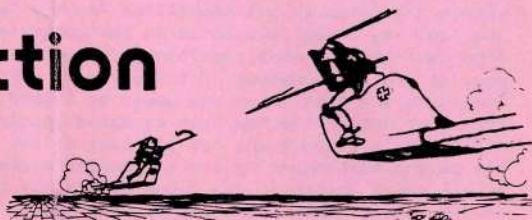


Birmingham Science Fiction Group

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



NEWSLETTER 182

THE BIRMINGHAM SCIENCE
FICTION GROUP MEETS
ON THE THIRD FRIDAY
OF EACH MONTH 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 21st
November at 8.00pm and will feature:-

The Great Debate

The motion to be debated is

THIS HOUSE BELIEVES CHRIS PRIEST
WAS RIGHT, SEQUELS ARE STRANGLING
SCIENCE FICTION.

The BSFG will be speaking for the motion,
and Birmingham University Science Fiction
Group will be speaking against. Will the
University gain revenge for last year's
whitewash? come along to the meeting
and find out.

Future meetings

December 12th - Christmas Party. This
year the christmas party will be held
in the AVON ROOM at the Ladbroke
International Hotel, New Street. Details
of the event are enclosed with this
newsletter.

January 16th - AGM and Auction. After
the AGM has finished Rog will auction
off any old books, posters etc. Now is
your chance to get rid of all your old
books.

NEXT YEAR'S COMMITTEE

It's that time of year again. We - the committee - are asking for people within the group to put themselves forward for next year's committee. If you feel you would like to be on the committee, and that you could do a good job (this is most important) you will have to get someone to nominate you. So you get a member of the group to write a letter to the committee outlining why they think you would be a good, say, publicity officer, and once your nomination has been accepted you must find someone else, not your nominator, to second you for the post at the AGM. Now, if there is more than one person nominated for any one position, each of the nominees will have to give a short speech to the group saying why they think they would do well in that post, after the speeches the members will vote for the person they think will do best in the job. The only position on the committee not to be finalised at the AGM is chairman of Novacon 17 this has already been filled by Bernie Evans.

The positions to be decided at the AGM are :-

Chairman - to be Chairman of the group you must have been on a previous committee.

Treasurer - There is already one nomination.

Secretary.

Newsletter Editor - There is already one nomination

Publicity Officer.

All nominations must be received by the committee no later than January 1st.

ANDROMEDA'S TOP TEN FOR OCTOBER

1. Dr. Who and the Fury From the Deep.
2. Robots and Empire by Isaac Asimov.
3. The Light Fantastic by Terry Pratchett.
4. Killashandra by Anne McCaffrey.
5. The Colour Of Magic by Terry Pratchett.
6. Helliconia Winter by Brian Aldiss.
7. Free Live Free by Gene Wolfe.
8. The Mammoth Hunters by Jean M. Auel.
9. Neuromancer by William Gibson.
- 9= The Outcast by Louise Cooper.

LAST MONTH'S MEETING

Rog introduced our guests as David Wingrove author of the SF Source Book, and Harry Aldiss (or was that Brian Harrison?) who were here to talk about their collaboration on TRILLION YEAR SPREE an update of BILLION YEAR SPREE. Brian (Aldiss of course) put Rog right about his name and then proceeded to offer a prize - well prizes- for guessing the number of words that they had guessed were in TRILLION YEAR SPREE, the prizes were an original hardback of the Doubleday edition of BILLION YEAR SPREE and also a paperback of TRILLION YEAR SPREE (they had guessed at 270,000 words).

We wondered that as no 2 people can agree on what is SF, how did they manage to collaborate on such a book? The answer it seems, is that they both have their own opinions and then thrash out any differences with the publishers. Billion year spree was originally printed (and re-printed) in hard cover in 1973. In February last year Brian's publishers rang his agent and said that they wanted to re-print BILLION YEAR SPREE; Brian's agent rang him to tell him this and Brian said as so much had happened since 1973, he felt it unwise to do so and suggested he would revise it-- "OK" agreed the publishers. Brian then rang David and asked him if he would like to do a collaboration. David said yes and promptly went to bed ! Enthusiasm ?

Brian did some sections, David did others and finally in June last year they got it all together: after it had been through both of their word processors- it came to a staggering 860 pages - they sent it off to the publishers and ...silence. You would have thought the publishers would be jumping up and down with glee but no, silence. Undaunted by this, Brian and David sent a revised chapter 1 to the UK publishers but the only answer received was

" We think that for such a long book your paragraphs are too short"

Eventually Brian and David decided they would get nowhere with these publishers so Brian phoned his agent who advised him to get the manuscript back. Brian then phoned the publishers and said that he would return their cheque if they would return the manuscript. One hour later the publishers phoned back and agreed. Next Brian phoned Malcom Edwards at Gollancz, who immediately went to David's to get the manuscript (this was Friday), and by Sunday (of the same week) the manuscript was accepted. Within 22 weeks Brian and David received the first volumes (incidentally, Gollancz paid them 5 times the original publishers advance).

Brian told us this tale to highlight a major problem in SF publishing; it is very difficult to publish SF if there is no one in the publishing house who understands SF. Because of this he said TRILLION YEAR SPREE was "snatched from the jaws of indifference and then thrust up the rectum of enthusiasm".

David got interested in SF in his 20's, one of the books he read was BILLION YEAR SPREE and he read the books mentioned in it and thus it became his 'bible'. He said he therefore found it very easy to do TRILLION YEAR SPREE with Brian there was a lot they agreed upon. David thinks of SF as 'Dark Continent' fiction- like Africa with all those white spaces on the map before it had been explored fully. SF provided him with the need to explore new worlds and BILLION YEAR SPREE was his guidebook to exploration. For TRILLION YEAR SPREE he needed to rebuild, he hadn't read much from the 80's. One thing he did find was that there was no British SF novelists under 35, but he did discover new and exciting authors in the US. He said that Star Wars caused a great escalation in SF, not only the movies but in books too. In fact there has been a quantum leap from SF in the 40's and 50's to what it is now.

The question and answer session seemed to be dominated by the question of Jack Vance - he is in TRILLION YEAR SPREE, Brian pointed out that there were people he wished he had included - but once the manuscript is at the publishers it is too late.

Brian closed with a very amusing anecdote: He was with Harry, Bester, Sheckley and Anderson on Copacabana Beach - drinking of course when he looked round and saw Paul Anderson waving to them from the sea. "Do you think he is drowning?" Brian asked, "NO - have another drink", Harry said. Paul's waving seemed to get more frantic, they had yet another drink and finally decided to go and pull him out. "You b.....ds, I was only waving to you".

You can see from this report that Brian was his usual self and it was an additional pleasure to meet David.

NOVACON 16 - A Report by Bernie Evans.

"Write a Conrep for the newsletter" asked Carol and Tony. "Yeah, sure I will" I replied, and so here it is.

The con got off to a very shaky start on Friday night, with an absolute shambles of an opening ceremony, followed by a cancelled programme item because every-one went off to the bar, and never came back!! After this things could only get better, and they did, up to a point.

In fact I missed the rest of Friday night's programme going for a meal, which took hours. The restaurant in the hotel served delicious food, very slowly. Considering the fact that the place was almost empty, and we had the set meal, I think unforgivably slowly.

Saturday dawned, together with the promise of a bright and lively programme. Again I missed much of it, (I don't go to many programme items these days), but those which I did go to lived up to my expectations. I did, however, find Kim Stanley Robinson a little dull.

Saturday's disco was not my idea of heaven. The music was too loud and not very good to dance to, but as the night went on it got better, (or I got drunker!!).

Sunday was the best day, the programme was more interesting, the atmosphere had finally "come right", and I really got into the swing of things.

One or two quibbles I'm afraid. The back room was again out of the main hotel, which precluded wandering in and out of it between doing other things. The programme was continuous, with no set meal breaks. The atmosphere was somehow missing, I can't explain it better than this, and several other people said the same thing. I think that the lack of meal breaks, which do add structure to a con, may have had something to do with this.

On the whole though a very enjoyable con, which should have helped kill the memory of Novacon 15. Tony and his team had obviously worked very hard on our behalf, and were rewarded with a good con.

BOOK REVIEWS

SILVERTHORN by Raymond E. Feist, Grafton, £2.95
432 pages, reviewed by Carol Morton.



At the end of MAGICIAN all of the Kingdoms of the West were at peace after the ending of the Riftwar. Peace has reigned in Rillanon for nearly a year, when the young Master-Thief Jimmy-the-Hand surprises an assassin waiting for his victim on the rooftops of Kondor. The assassin's victim it seems, is Prince Arutha who is returning to Kondor for his wedding to Princess Anita.

Jimmy faces a dilemma: does he - as he should - report this to the Upright Man - the leader of the Guild of Thieves - and risk Arutha's death, or should he tell Arutha and put him on his guard. Jimmy does the latter, and in doing so, breaks the rules of the Guild and is expelled from it. During the course of the investigations it is discovered that the assassin was not an ordinary killer but a member of the Guild of Death, whose members have all sworn to kill Arutha so that a prophecy concerning the death of the Lord of the West will be fulfilled.

Jimmy is taken into the household of Arutha and made a squire. But his talent for rooftop encounters is once more brought into action when he surprises yet another assassin, this time on the Cathedral roof, during the wedding service. Jimmy manages to deflect the assassin's crossbow but unfortunately the bolt hits Anita. The bolt was poisoned with a poison called silverthorn, and it turns out that the only antidote is to be found on the shores of the Black Lake, a place sacred to the Moredhel, the enemies of all of the Kingdoms of the West, and incidentally the ones behind the Guild of Death. So Arutha, Laurie Martin and Jimmy set out on the quest to find Silverthorn.

This book is the long-awaited sequel to the staggeringly excellent MAGICIAN. If you enjoyed MAGICIAN you will most certainly enjoy the equally excellent SILVERTHORN.

DAYWORLD by Phillip Jose Farmer, Grafton, £2.50, 322 pages, reviewed by Tony Morton

Lots of ideas in this book. The story is weaved around the 'lives' of Caird, who through 'longevity' by a special biological form which suppresses the ageing cells (idea 1), lives the week. Here it gets complex, in this future people live 'vertical' rather than our 'horizontal' life: so every (say), Tuesday they exist in this day only and spend six days in suspended animation (idea 2) or "stoned". This effectively reduces the population to one seventh! So by living seven separate identities our hero Jeff becomes a "daybreaker" to forward the ideologies of his longevity family (called "immers" after the discoverer of the serum Immerman) who intend to take over what they consider a despotic government (idea 3).

Of course something fouls it up and Jeff must fight to save himself from the forces of both sides after numerous problems. How he does this I leave to you to read for yourselves in this entertaining novel. Many more ideas and twists are in the book, I am not going to allude to them, but suggest you obtain a copy for yourselves. An entertaining read.

THE ROAD TO CORLAY, £2.25, 202 pages. A DREAM OF KINSHIP, £2.50, 239 pages.
A TAPESTRY OF TIME, £2.50, 186 pages. All by Richard Cowper, all published
by Orbit and reviewed by Tony Morton.

These novels, forming a trilogy entitled THE WHITE BIRD OF KINSHIP, explain the fundamental bias of religious doctrine, of how man interposes his own values upon it. Beginning with the tale called 'Piper at the Gates of Dawn', which relates the story of Tom, a piper of magical excellence, his travelling companion Old Peter and the events surrounding them on New Years Eve 2999, which provide the spark of a religion called Kinship and The White Bird. From this base the religion flourishes - despite the persecution by the Church who through fear and ignorance try to stamp it out.

We find the Britain of this time split by "the Drowning" into seven Kingdoms with passage between them by boat. Here the elements of 'reality' of the stories is keenly clear; a Britain divided by water due to the melting of the ice-caps because of technology forces people to return to the sanctuary of the church and the 'righteous path' - could this happen? Maybe.

A DREAM OF KINSHIP continues the tale and the growth of the 'religious sect' with stories of people's involvement with the relics left by 'The Boy' and the prophecy he lived to fulfill and which continues to influence others. Who are the players who will complete the prophecy? Here, the religious aspects involved are wonderfully worked out and analysed giving an insight into how man rejects the miracles he witnesses.

A TAPESTRY OF TIME culminates the story by the fulfilment of the prophecy only to have the acclaimed leader of the sect reject it as implausible. The book culminates by jumping forward to the unearthing of the truth and completion of the prophecy. I am not going to give too much away suggesting you read this enthralling trilogy. All in all I found the books well written with realistic insights into the beliefs of man and their stubborn refusal to see the truth in front of their eyes. I particularly liked the position of the church in these novels and how they oppose the 'new sect'. It all sounds so plausible and believable it wouldn't surprise me to see it come true! A beautiful tale well told and well written with characters very lifelike in a story of gigantic proportions. A must to read.

MINDSWAP by Robert Sheckley, Grafton, £2.95, reviewed by Chris Chivers.

Reprinted after 20 years Robert Sheckley's MINDSWAP still has all the quality of an SF classic. The principle character of Marvin Flynn is a mixture of bumbling fool and world-weary traveller, who decides on an interstellar trip by mindswapping with other beings on various planets, as the quickest and cheapest form of travel round the galaxy. On his first leg he lands in trouble, as the other body that he is to occupy is to be loaned to someone else, and his own body on Earth has been stolen. To help him resolve his problem Flynn hires a private detective. This is only the start of his troubles as Detective Undorf has had a string of 158 unsolved cases and Flynn looks like being his 159th.

The story that unfolds is a highly humorous chase as Flynn and Undorf try to regain Flynn's body and return Flynn to Earth. Robert Sheckley's novel is still as fresh as when it was first published in 1966 and it is nice to find a reprint that is still as good the second time around.

THE MERCHANTS' WAR by Frederik Pohl, Futura Orbit, £2.50, 209 pages, reviewed by Chris Morgan.

The future Earth dominated by advertising agencies that was the background for the famous THE SPACE MERCHANTS (which Pohl wrote with C.M. Kornbluth and which was hailed as one of the great SF novels of the 1950s) is back again in this sequel. It's a fast-paced, tongue-in-cheek piece of satire. In fact it's a romp, full of sharp comparisons to our own time, as it chronicles the fortunes and misfortunes of a copywriter on Venus and various parts of Earth.

FLIGHT OF HONOUR by Richard McEnroe Orbit £1-95 149 pages .
Reviewed by Tony Morton.

Supposedly the second volume in (quote)'the epic new Future History Series'
(oh, boy) FAR STARS AND FUTURE TIMES, this bears as much resemblance to
THE SHATTERED STARS (vol.1 in the 'epic.. ' etc.) as rice to loo paper. Is
there a connection between them ? All will become apparent once the series
is complete , we were told by Toby (September meeting). Well, to be frank,
I ain't gonna hold my breath... Not a particularly 'good' book- though again
(NEWSLETTER 176) some good ideas emerge such as assassins professionally
kill people who upset the ecology of Earth.

The story revolves around a confrontation on some remote backwater planet
between two 'dwarves' over honour to be found in the rest of the galaxy
(presumably explaining the title) and the Assassins Guild 'standing therein'.
I make no judgment of this and leave you to make up your own minds, though
personally I would put the money to better use...Not really recommended.

HART'S HOPE by Orson Scott Card, Unwin Unicorn, £2.95, 301 pages, reviewed
by Bethan Davies.

This is a story of usurpation, revenge and the intervention of the Hart
of the title. The plot is unoriginal and predictable, although the quality
of the writing is quite reasonable. As a whole, the novel was not very imp
impressive - it took great determination just to bother to finish it.

CHANUR'S VENUTRE by C.J. Cherrh, Methuen, £2.50, 293 pages, reviewed by
Pauline Morgan.

Pyanfar Chanur is female, feline and arrogant. To hold her position in hani
society she has to be. She is also captain of a space-faring merchant ship
and has an attitude to life that attracts trouble. Spitting in the face of
convention, she has taken a male aboard her ship---her now landless mate.
To compound matters the human, Tully, who caused her so many problems in
THE PRIDE OF CHANUR, reappears in hani space requesting her help.
The hani and the other alien races are excellently portrayed, though Tully
comes over as a bit of a wimp. My only objection to this novel is that the
fact that it stops just as the excitement reaches a peak. I would recommend
readers to wait for the sequel (and second half) then read both together.

Thankyous this month go to ;

Bernie for sending us the Novacon report.

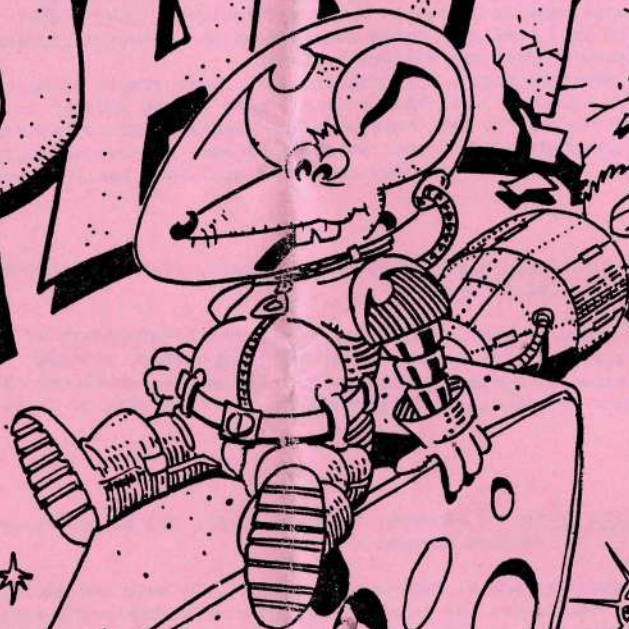
Chris Chivers, Chris and Pauline Morgan and Bethan Davies for their reviews.

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

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 1st December 1986.

DON'T PANIC



HOLLAND

1990

CHRISTMAS EVENT 1986

This year's Christmas Event will be a buffet meal in the Avon Room at the Ladbroke International Hotel, New Street, Birmingham, and will take place on FRIDAY 12/12/86. We realise this is only the second Friday in December, but the third Friday was fully booked everywhere, (it seems everyone booked early this Year!).

The Menu is as follows:

Hot Chicken Drumsticks
Quiche Lorraine
Savoury Vol-au-Vents
Danish Open Sandwiches
Cheese & Pineapple Sticks

Chocolate Eclairs

Coffee

The cost to you will be £6.75, this is £5.75 for the meal and £1.00 towards the hire of the room. The cost is the same whether you are a member or not. We have a few surprises lined up for you, so book early to avoid disappointment.

Please will you let me have the tear off portion below, together with FULL PAYMENT no later than the November meeting. It isn't necessary to pay a deposit to secure your ticket, but I must have full payment as stated, as we have to give the numbers to the hotel shortly afterwards.

This leaflet will be available at the October & November meetings, and will also be sent out with the November Newsletter, but if you are not at either of those two meetings and wish to come please contact me at once on 707 6606 evenings and weekends, 373 8131 ext 2630 office hours.

In the event of overbooking tickets will be allocated on a "First-come First Served" basis.

Please return form to : BERNIE EVANS
7 GROVE AVENUE
ACOCKS GREEN
BIRMINGHAM
B27 7UY.

NAME. _____

ADDRESS. _____

ADDITIONAL NAMES. _____

(if more than one
Ticket) _____

I ENCLOSE £..... FOR TICKETS.

(Please make cheques/postal orders payable to the B.S.F.G.)