

Birmingham Science Fiction Group

Honorary Presidents : Brian W. Aldiss
and Harry Harrison

NEWSLETTER 187

APRIL 1987

THE BSFG MEETS ON THE
THIRD FRIDAY OF EACH
MONTH IN THE LADBROKE
INTERNATIONAL HOTEL,
NEW STREET, IN THE
CENTRE OF BIRMINGHAM.
DETAILS OF THIS MONTH'S
MEETING ARE GIVEN
OPPOSITE.

MEMBERSHIP OF THE
GROUP COSTS A MERE £5.50
PER YEAR FOR ONE PERSON
£8.00 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 MID'S.

THIS MONTH'S MEETING- APRIL 10th IS ONE WEEK
EARLY

This month we are pleased to have as our
guests:-

Greg and Linda Pickersgill

To talk to us on:-

The World of Fandom

For the second month in a row, our guest
speakers are a husband and wife team. Not
authors, not publishers, not involved in
the sciences but, like us, they are SF
fans.

Greg and Linda Pickersgill are well known
to anyone involved in SF fandom or conventions.
In the late 60's/early 70's Greg became
notorious for his outspoken views - views
that rocked the foundations of the fannish
establishment of the time. He is still
outspoken! His motto could well be "No
Compromise". He has edited fanzines, been
involved in convention organisation and
attended virtually every British convention
for almost 20 years including every Novacon.
In 1978 he won the Doc Weir award for
"Most Deserving Fan".

On the other hand Linda is a quietly spoken
American from New Orleans who had attended



conventions in America but had little contact with Fandom. In 1979 she came over to Britain for the Worldcon. She met Greg, liked Fandom, liked the UK and ended up staying over here and getting heavily involved in Fandom. They were married in 1984. In 1985 Linda was Fan Guest of Honour at Yorcon III. This year they are jointly responsible for the FanRoom at Conspiracy 87 - this year's Worldcon in Brighton.

One of the nicest, most intelligent couples in Fandom - DON'T miss what promises to be a Most Interesting Evening!

Rog Peyton.

LAST MONTH'S MEETING.

We were introduced to a real SF creature last month, a genuine bi-sexual, two-headed, four-legged author Jonathan Wylie, or in human guise Mark and Juila Smith (they recently married). As editors they are responsible for SF and Fantasy at Corgi.

The meeting was divided into two parts, beginning with the Editor part where Mark and Julia explained the intricacies of editorial work. They work for Transworld Publishers which comprises Corgi, Bantam and Transworld and 'handle' Anne McCaffrey, Judith Tarr etc.

As they are the responsible editors for SF and Fantasy they receive manuscripts from Literary Agents; Publishers (for paperback versions of existing works) or in certain instances direct from the author (this is somewhat irreverently called the slush pile). But don't worry would-be authors they all get read!

However, prior to publishing several steps need to be taken; they need to convince the Sales Department and evaluate the book financially, work through the acquisition process so that monies can be offered for the novel. Obvious limitations are financial; how much can they afford to pay for a book, and production which gives a fourteen month delay once bought before a book is published! This allows for artwork to be commissioned and typescript to be set and corrected. A new move for artists from Transworld is that they will be credited from now on for cover artwork used!

The Sales Department's concern is 'how many books can we sell?' and this is of course dependant UPON the track record of the author. The input of the Editorial Department is thus important for a new author, as if they consider a novel 'good' they will try to push it for publication.

A book will receive a print run of 15,000 for the US market and 10,000 for UK market, this being the economical minimum required.

Of around 30 books published each month by Transworld 1 or 2 are SF or Fantasy; however, of these 30, one will be a 100,000 plus run. This somewhat puts into perspective the readership of SF and Fantasy, although in recent years the genre has gained impetus with emphasis (ie month's lead title) going to better known authors - David Eddings was cited as an example.

The length of a novel (the ideal considered to be 352 pages by the Sales Department) is left to the author; as is the option to 'split' the story into multiple books - where obvious breaks occur and can be agreed with the publisher.

Both Mark and Julia receive so many novels at Corgi that their workload is

sufficient for the output without 'head hunting' known authors, reissuing old novels (books are kept in print until it is uneconomical to re-print) or release collections or anthologies (Corgi did issue New Writings In SF but this was dropped due to low sales)

At this point the meeting adjourned to allow Mark and Julia a breather - and allow those present to go to the bar.

Part two of the meeting revolved around Mark and Julia as authors and the release of their first novel THE FIRST NAMED (see review on page 6) Book one of SERVANTS OF ARK a fantasy trilogy. Both of them had ambitions to write and during a 'light hearted ideas session', the ideas 'took over' leading to a first draft. After a re-write (or two) the finished article was shown around (notably to outside readers for an honest reaction) and the decision was to publish.

However by this time Mark and Julia has decided the story would be a trilogy and had to write book two in three months!! This they duly just managed then 'had a breakdown'. So at the time of the meeting Book 3 had also been finished - so watch for volume 2 CENTRE OF THE CIRCLE and volume 3 THE MAGEBORN CHILD.

At the conception they had to decide what to include and how to develop the story. They chose - a good story, humour, romance (with some sex) and magic elements (with a rationale of scope to powers rather than an "all powerful wizard" as this can clog up the believability of a story).

The next stage was to decide on the complexity; which can go either way. If too complex it can become difficult to follow, if too simple it becomes too childish and embarrassing. A criterion they felt should be included was to leave scope for the reader's imagination.

Actually collaborating on the novels took the form of having a basic synopsis (although this could deviate due to the plot expanding), expanding this into a first draft which is edited and suggested changes made by the other party thereby giving a consistent style. Interestingly, the draft was in longhand rather than typed!

The name of Jonathan Wylie emerged due to a number of reasons, of which the main ones are a dislike of seeing two names on a book and 'personal reasons'.

Mark and Julia intend to write more and already have notebooks of ideas. We wish them well in their new occupation and thank them for an entertaining evening.

Obituary

Earlier this week the sad news of the death of Patrick Troughton at a Dr. Who convention in the US was broadcast. Patrick was (arguably) the best Dr. Who, bringing his unique talents to the role between 1966-1969. He will be sorely missed. Our commiserations go to his family along with our grateful thanks for his talent.

THE BRUM GROUP SUMMER OUTING, or,
life is all beer and skittles!

Friday, June 12 is the date for your diaries. It doesn't matter if you've never gone Ten Pin (or Nine Pin) Bowling in your life - most of us haven't, either. But we have had Beer and Skittles evenings in the past, usually at the White Swan in Harborne, and a good time was had by all. Most of the time is spent eating, drinking, chatting and drinking - just occasionally it's your turn to hurl a ball down the alley and see what you can hit (not the barmaid). But there will be prizes for the winners. This year we have a new venue: the Kinfayre Restaurant at Kinver. A coach will be laid on, with a central picking-up point (mystery tour optional). And it's all for an inclusive price of only £5.00 per person (how do we do it?).

For the menu, you have a choice of the following:

Hungarian Goulash & Rice
Roast Chicken, Chips and Peas
Beef Curry and Rice
Cottage Pie, Potatoes and Peas
Chilli Con Carné and Rice

See Carol Morton at the next meeting to put your name down, or send your money to the Newsletter address. Bring your wife, husband, boyfriend, girlfriend, or all the lot - we need about 40 to make a good evening.

P.S. Oh yes - if anyone knows the *right* way to score, etc., please let the committee know!

Andromeda's top ten for March:

Paperbacks.

1. Dr. Who - The Ark
by Paul Erickson.
2. The First Named
by Jonathan Wylie.
3. Anvil of Ice
by Mike Scott Rohan.
- 4= The Postman
by David Brin.
- 4= Speaker for the Dead
by Orson Scott Card.
6. Galapagos
by Kurt Vonnegut.
7. Strangers
by Dean R. Koontz.
8. Enders Game
by Orson Scott Card.
- 9= Deathlands : Pilgrimage to Hell
by Jack Adrian.
- 9= The Colour of Magic
by Terry Pratchett.

Hardcovers.

1. Cosmic Puppets
by Philip K. Dick.
- 2= Nerilka's Story/The Coelura
by Anne McCaffrey.
- 2= The Journal of Nicholas the American
by Lee Kennedy.
4. The Forge in the Forest
Mike Scott Rohan.
- 5= Mysterious Motoring Story
ed. by William Patrick*
- 5= Evil Water
by Ian Watson.

*Note - Mysterious Motoring Story is selling on the strength that "Duel" by Richard Matheson appears for the first time in print.

MEMBERS' FORUM

RECORD REVIEW.

Maggots : the record by Wendy O Williams/Plasmatics, GWR Records,
Reviewed by W.A.McCabe.

Do you think Cronenburg is the greatest film-maker ever ? Is Shaun Hutson your idea of a literary genius ? If so this is the record for you.

The Plasmatics were a heavy metal/punk outfit of the very late 70's from the USA, their lead singer (Wendy O) frequently appeared on LP covers wearing only 2 pieces of elastoplast above the waist. Their "instruments" used to include at least 1 chainsaw. The band's contribution to this "musical" are 5 songs and one instrumental piece that are well in keeping with their old image. These songs appear to represent the point of view of the maggots with titles like "You're a zombie", "The day of the humans is gone".....

And now the plot -

Some years ago (our future though) the Central Research Laboratory "engineered an organism" that was a cross between a "RNA retro-virus" and a "ubiquitous protozoan". "It was an eating, reproducing machine". The idea behind this was that this stuff would eat up all the filth that had been dumped into the rivers of the planet and then starve. Unfortunately it seems to have crossbred with certain maggots so that :- they now prefer living flesh, they reproduce rapidly doubling in population every 12 hours and getting larger every time.

This is the story of a couple of hours in the death of a big city complete with all the ingredients of a nasty horror story. It has sex and people being eaten alive by maggots. The story is narrated and acted by people who are not members of the band.

Warning : this record is obscene.



BOOK REVIEWS

THE FIRST NAMED by Jonathan Wylie, Corgi, £2.50, 347 pages, reviewed by Carol Morton.

This is the first in the series SERVANTS OF ARK and was written by our guests of last month.

It is a competent, workman-like novel but it cannot claim to be wholly original, which is not surprising as the authors are both editors of SF and Fantasy at Corgi, and must have read volumes so something would stick.

The story concerns the three orphaned princes of the Ark royal family, after their father has been killed by a bloody and totally unexpected coup by members of the Royal Guard. The three Princes are spirited away by their wizard-cum-tutor-cum-friend Ferragamo, who takes them to his summer retreat where they plan to regain their throne and avenge their father. The youngest, Mark, is the centre of the tale, and, it seems, is the one mentioned in a prophesy found after he has had a particularly vivid dream.

This promises to be an interesting trilogy - I'll leave it to you to find out just how the throne is regained and who or what is behind the coup.

NERILKA'S STORY & THE COELURA by Anne McCaffrey, Bantam Press, £8.95, 192 pages, reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

This slim volume's two stories are both handicapped by their length—or lack of it. The first "Nerilka's Story" also runs up against the problem that it parallels McCaffrey's novel MORETA: DRAGONLADY OF PERN. It contains many of the same characters and to those familiar with the novel (and you need to be sure of what is going on) it may seem redundant to go over the same ground, albeit from a different angle.

"The Coelura" is far more interesting. Set in a totally different world from Pern, the reader is given glimpses of an interesting society and a fascinating life form which spins a fabulous (and highly coveted) living cloth. The length of the story does justice neither to the society or to the coelura. The idea deserves to be written at novel length. Both stories, however, show off Anne McCaffrey's story-telling skills.

ONE MILLION TOMORROWS by Bob Shaw, Grafton, £2.50, 176 pages, reviewed by Graham Morton.

Set in the 22nd century when the problem of ageing can be cured with one injection - at the expense of male sexuality.

Will Carewe, the book's central character, is 40 years old and rapidly approaching the time when he should face the needle. His employers, Farma Inc., a huge chemical corporation, offer him the chance to be a guinea-pig on a top secret project: a new anti-ageing drug without the side effects. However, not everything is as it seems and when "accidents" begin to occur around him, Carewe finds himself fleeing as he tries to work out who is after him and who his friends are.

Although even I managed to work out what was going on before the end, I found it an enjoyable book though not perhaps as good as others I have read by the same author. It is a re-print, first published in 1971 (when Shaw himself was 40....).

SECOND NATURE by Cherry Wilder, a book review by Tina Hewett

I have rarely found a book that I could not read, but unfortunately, this is one of them.

The beginning is supposedly meant to enthrall the reader sufficiently to ensure that the reader continues to read the story. In this case, the beginning had the opposite effect. I found the story impossible to get to grips with, even after the third attempt.

There seemed to be nothing with which I could identify, and seem overly enigmatic in parts. While mystery often enhances a story, here it seemed to come too early, disrupting the storyline before it had even started. Such discontinuity ruined the story to such an extent, that even after continuing a little further, I had to admit defeat.

OPTIONS by Robert Sheckley, Grafton, £2.50, 156 pages, reviewed by Tony Morton.

Mishkin trying to fix his spaceship lands on Harmonia for a spare part. This expands into an adventure across parallel universes into a tight corner, for the Man of a Thousand Disguises is stuck. Neither Orchidius Uncle Arnold can seemingly help - but can the Fat Man? Well.... no. So poor Mishkin is stuck with a special robot shipped to Harmonia in error and both with no way home. Can the intrepid author save the day?

This book had me in stitches, laughing all the way to the end. I love this type of book and recommend it highly. Another of Grafton's re-issue of classics which is above the average. Great stuff!

DARK GODS by T.E.D. Klein, Pan books, 259 pages, £2.50, reviewed by Helena

Bowles.

I am not normally a horror fan but every so often I experience a perverse desire to be terrified, disturbed and shocked, to lie awake at night sweating, not daring to open my eyes in case IT is there (okay, I agree. I've an hyperactive imagination).

That is not what the collection of four novellas will do. However, I also enjoy the well-crafted spine-chiller which is what these stories are. The best one, in my opinion, is "Black Man With A Horn" which has some genuinely scary moments though it fails, as do all the stories in this collection, in making that all important link between fantasy and reality. I never quite believed in the maggot-race in "Children Of The Kingdom", the monster in "Petey", the rubbish-creature in "Nadelman's God" or the man-size walking catfish thing in "Blackman", which for no real reason, walks round giving people artificial resuscitation in reverse (kiss of death?).

However all the stories (except the rather plodding and pedestrianly written "Petey") are entertaining and worth reading although the title is somewhat misleading as these are 'monster' stories rather than supernatural stories.

THE DOORS OF HIS FACE, THE LAMPS OF HIS MOUTH by Roger Zelazny, Methuen, £2.50, 271 pages, reviewed by Chris Morgan.

This is an early collection of Zelazny's stories, often reprinted and ever so good. There are adventurous stories like "The Doors of His Face, the Lamps of His Mouth", poetic stories such as "A Rose for Ecclesiastes" and witty stories like "A Museum Piece". A good, varied collection, then, except that Methuen, in their infinite wisdom are positive that it's a novel and have allotted each story a chapter number. Thus, for example, "A Museum Piece" is "CHAPTER TEN". When are SF editors going to start reading the books they publish?

THE PHOENIX LEGACY:BOOK 3:"HOUSE OF THE WOLF" by M.K. Wren, NEL, £2.95,
310 pages,reviewed by Helena Bowles.

This, I felt, did not quite measure up to the preceding two volumes. The action is mainly crammed into the last five or so chapters and the ending is rather abrupt. Perhaps Ms. Wren was planning a sequel series that has hitherto not materialised but I found the rather sudden ending a little unsatisfactory (possibly because I was expecting more having not realised pages 266 onward are devoted to glossaries and identifying characters). However the writing is good quality and the book does not overly jar when read immediately after the first two. I still highly recommend the entire trilogy.

SIRENS by Chris Achilleos, Paper Tiger £7.95 (large format paperback),
128 pages
Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

Any art book will succeed or fail according to the impact of its pictures, and on that basis Sirens---a book of fantasy artwork---is bound to be a best-seller. The quality of reproduction and of colour correctness is first class, and the page design (by Achilleos himself) is usually very attractive. There is a wide range of subjects including barbaric warriors, naked women, Star Trek and Dr Who scenes, naked women, film posters and naked women. In fact, this volume might justifiably have been titled Chris Achilleos's Book of Breasts, and feminists should avoid it or risk apoplexy. The most comical element of the whole thing is the way that the text mentions (no less than four times!) that Achilleos doesn't intend his erotic pin-ups to be taken too seriously.

Achilleos employs various combinations of medium (principally inks, gouache and airbrush, all together) to achieve extremely fine detail and a photographic standard of realism for faces and naked, er... flesh. This is all the more remarkable when he admits that he hires no nubile young women to stand in position and be photographed (as his US counterparts Frazetta and Boris do) but constructs figures from disparate parts---an arm from one source, a leg from another.

The text, by Nigel Suckling, is below the standard that one would expect. Occasionally contradictory and often repetitive, it never once quotes Achilleos but puts all his words into reported speech, a technique guaranteed to promote reader boredom. But who, apart from a reviewer, ever bothers to read the text of an art book?

Our thanks this month go to:

Rog Peyton for his article on Greg and Linda.
Dave Hardy for his 'bit' on the Summer Event.
William McCabe for contributing to the forum.
Pauline Morgan, Graham Morton, Tina Hewett, Helena Bowles and Chris Morgan for their reviews.
Tim Stannard for letting us use his photocopier to print this.

And our illustrious leader (Mr. Hardy) for sacrificing his birthday (It's on April 10th).

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 1st May.