

# Birmingham Science Fiction Group

Honorary Presidents : Brian W. Aldiss  
and Harry Harrison

## NEWSLETTER 192



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 is on 18 September at 8.00pm, and the speaker is:

### PATRICK COLLINS

Back in 1981, Bob Shaw (who visits the Group next month) and Dave Hardy gave a talk based around their then new book *Galactic Tours* - a purely, fictitious travel brochure. Today a US travel company is taking bookings for a trip into orbit for those who can afford it, and it begins to look as if space tourism could be a driving force in the commercialisation of space.

Patrick Collins, who did a programme event at Worldcon, has some strong, interesting and sometimes controversial ideas on this subject. His talk is illustrated with slides, both 35mm and OHP, and you will be given an opportunity to participate; start thinking about what you would like to be able to do in weightless space (but keep it clean - well, reasonably!).

Come along - and prepare to start saving up for your holiday in space...

### LAST MONTH'S MEETING

There is, according to David Brin, a 2 to 1 chance that civilisation will not only survive but thrive ; this gives enough hope to do things. As an optimist view a 33% chance of being nuked is good? We all have our view of life.

The Postman has been optioned by Warner who have turned the story on its head to give a postman who lies and likes it and brings evil rather than good (Hollywood ruin another book !). Hopefully David will be asked onto the script to retrieve it.

SF is the only field of writing where collaboration takes place on any scale, where 'senior' authors help newcomers. In general sf writers meet, talk and discuss ideas more than in any other field (hence cons). David is no exception (Heart of the Comet with Greg Benford) especially so as all his work is proofed by at least a dozen people prior to publication - and if no criticism is forthcoming that person is thanked but dropped !

Here the meeting deteriorated into a political side argument as Brin expressed his propagandist view of the world while Jack Cohen and Pete Weston replied.

"There is only one contribution from Western civilisation to the world ; the realism that objective and subjective reality are not the same thing" David expounded. What I think I see may not be true therefore I question through other opinions.

David hopes to keep his work diverse and write new SF rather than sequels or same universe stories. In fact his brother has power of attorney to prevent David writing in the same universe after his fifty-fifth birthday and no self-indulgence past sixty (oh, that other writers had done this!). He feels an ability to 'laugh at one's own metaphors' is a good thing. To thine own self be true rather than self indulgence. Interesting night.  
Keep up the good work.

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## CONSPIRACY 87

A CONREP BY BERNIE EVANS

Where the hell do you start to do a conrep on something as big as a Worldcon? This was Big, and I mean BIIIIIG, it took over an hour to check the programme booklet and decide what we would go to, and as for finding our way round the various venues, I don't think we ever did!!

The programme was extremely varied, there was so much going on that only a moron would fail to find something of interest. Whatever ones main interest it was sure to be covered, with serious talks and panels, not so serious talks and panels, items on politics, role playing games, a Masquerade, far too much to tell it all here.

A Worldcon, I have decided, is 5,000 different conventions, one for each person there, as no two people will have done exactly the same thing for the entire convention.

My convention centred on the main programme stream and the Fanroom, with occasional forays into one of the other 3 programme streams, the Artshow and the Bookroom. The latter two were so large it took 3 separate visits to each, between programme items, to look at everything.

One problem I had was getting from one programme item to another where they followed consecutively but in different buildings. As they tended to run the full hour allotted I either had to leave the first one early, or get to the next one late. I went to more programme items at this convention that I have in the last two years conventions added together, and enjoyed every one of them.

The highspot was Bob Shaw's "Serious Scientific Talk", and the room was completely packed, standing room only even before it began. This time he told the tale of 2 overworked mature students who went back in time to try and reduce the amount of learning needed by preventing a Greek mathematician from discovering geometry theorems, by hindering Shakespeare's efforts to write, and by turning Columbus back before he discovered America. Needless to say, they botched it totally, and in all three cases inadvertently rendered assistance. Peppered as it was with Bob's totally outrageous puns, this item nearly brought the house down.

The lowspot was the Hugo awards ceremony. Interesting though it was to learn the results, the actual ceremony was long, drawn out and boring, Brian Aldiss providing the only light relief with one of his famous remarks in impeccable bad taste. On winning the Hugo for best Non-fiction he said "It's a long time since you gave me one of these, you bastards" I wish I had waited for the convention newsletter to come out to find who had won.

The Convention newsletter was a mine of information produced a total of seven times by Maureen Porter and a small team of helpers, and concocted from blood, sweat, tears and much very hard work.

Much very hard work was also put in by a number of unofficial gophers, as the official ones had, in some cases, collected the much prized gopher badges and then promptly disappeared for the rest of the convention. This was on the Fan Programme, I have no information on the other programme streams.

The Fan Programme was put together by Martin Tudor, in a room which was put together just hours before the start of the Convention as a "make-do", due to hotel refurbishments not being completed. Seems to me we've all heard that one before. It is thanks to Martin, Tony Berry, Steve Hubbard, and several others too numerous to mention, that the Fan Programme was so enjoyable. It was certainly no thanks to the Hotel Manager, who seemed to be doing his best to be obstructive.

I was part of a Fan Programme item myself, and I was SCARED, to say the least, but it all turned out very friendly and I quite enjoyed the experience.

I am sure I have left out much more than I have said, the main impression I got was of hugeness, and I couldn't possibly tell you everything in one short article. I hope I have given you an idea of what it's like to attend a Worldcon, roll on the next one!!!

#### ANOTHER CONREP BY CAROL AND TONY MORTON

"The 45th World Science Fiction Convention" announced the Brighton Centre billboard, and here we were at last. Thursday arrived a little clearer after days of rain, so we risked a quick trot 'round the Dealers Room prior to the opening ceremony. Brian Aldiss (as Toastmaster) introduced us to Conspiracy and of we went to get on with it. Slight disappointment immediately, I wanted to see Bester : Carol would have liked a few words from each GDM as an intro to the event. Managed to miss next bit as we ploughed through the programme booklet to find where things were. Luckily we'd wandered into the Metropole so leaped in to catch Brian Aldiss and Harry Harrison doing their double act-wonderful ! Fan Room in a bit of a state - decorators STILL here : good luck to Martin in his efforts, must pop in to see how it goes. And do over the days, his programme runs smoothly even with the chaos of decorators at work throughout. How DOES he do it ?

This is BIG, bigger than the biggest thing ever..oops, apologies to Dougie Adams but it IS big. How on earth do you get to SEE anything ? By the time one item finishes you've no time to get to the next unless its in the same venue.Ah, a way out - stay put if it looks interesting. Carol has disappeared elsewhere as I stubbornly refuse to dash around madly in search of some item. We meet in the bar above the Dealers room and decide to visit the Art show - wonderful artwork, mostly reasonably priced ; Carol impressed with Harrison Ford pictures (sigh). Back to Third Programme (nice pun) for item, Carol off again....

Godsend ! The in-laws come down and take Iain off to the beach, maybe we can get places now (creche was good but he can be imposing at times). Good grief, ANOTHER bit, how big is this con ? I'm getting the feeling this is TOO big. Interesting talk/interview of Gerry Anderson, most enjoyable. Ten Worst Cliches a good laugh. Highlight of the whole con came on Sunday with 'The Serious Scientific Talk' by Bob Shaw. Hilarious is the only word I can use ; who else can tell the same joke three times and get bigger laughs each time ? This was how Euclid, Shakespeare and Columbus managed their achievements with the aid of two time travelling mature students bungling attempts to stop them. Excellent. Holland won the 1990 vote for a WorldCon - no surprise really. The Hugo ceremony was, I felt, slightly drawn out, but had some entertaining bits- notably Brian Aldiss' acceptance speech and Bob Silverberg's echoing sentiments.

Nice to have a daily newsletter keeping us all 'in touch'- well done to all concerned, we KNOW it ain't easy.

Overall we both had an enjoyable time at our first WorldCon, although the steps in the Metropole caused us some problems (with the pushchair),as did the somewhat spaced out programme sites. You can't convey the feelings/emotions or all you did at a WorldCon in mere words, as the saying goes - you had to be there. Highlight - Bob Shaw for his 'Serious' talk ; Pits - Metropole Hotel Manager for his obstruction.

#### WINNERS OF THE HUGO AWARDS 1987

BEST NOVEL - Speaker for the dead - Orson Scott Card  
BEST NOVELLA - Gilgamesh in the Outback - Robert Silverberg  
BEST NOVELETTE - Permafrost - Roger Zelazny  
BEST SHORT STORY - Tangents - Greg Bear  
BEST NON FICTION - Trillion Year Spree - Brian Aldiss with David Wingrove  
BEST DRAMATIC PRESENTATION - Aliens  
BEST PROFESSIONAL ARTIST - Jim Burns  
BEST PROFESSIONAL EDITOR - Terry Carr  
BEST SEMIPROZINE - Locus - edited by Charles N. Brown  
BEST FAN WRITER - Dave Langford  
BEST FAN ARTIST - Brad Foster  
BEST FANZINE - Ansible -edited by Dave Langford  
JOHN W. CAMPBELL AWARD - Karen Joy Fowler

## FANTASYCON

A CONREP BY BERNIE EVANS

I went to Fantasycon partly to ease the withdrawal symptoms after the Worldcon, and partly to find out for myself what it was like. I had heard that the British Fantasy Society doesn't like fans, and tried to keep them out of their annual convention. On the other hand I had also heard the complete opposite. As usual in cases like these the truth was somewhere inbetween.

The feeling I got was that fans are welcome, but not FEN. If you wanted to go to programme items, buy books, and meet authors and publishers that was great. If however you also wanted to sit in a fanroom until the small hours, trade fanzines, and indulge in all the other Fanac you expect at an S.F. convention, then you were out of luck. There was no Fanroom, nowhere to display fannish material, and no encouragement to do so.

There was a small convention bar which was used as a meeting place, which very soon almost had the "feel" of a Fanroom, but didn't quite make it.

It was, however, a quite enjoyable con on its own terms, and I would recommend anyone to go to future ones, provided you are not looking for a high level of Fan Activity.

# BOOK REVIEWS

THE RAGGED ASTRONAUTS by Bob Shaw, Futura, 310 pages, £2.95  
Reviewed by Graham Morton.

Kolcorron has reached a critical period of its history, serious shortages of brakka trees - the only source of power crystals, has forced a crisis meeting of the king and his advisors. At this point the Ptertha, for centuries an occasionally deadly but largely ineffectual airborne menace, transforms into a supreme killing machine laying waste to huge areas of the country. So starts the first book of Bob Shaw's new trilogy concerning Land and its twin planet Overland, with which it shares one atmosphere. As the crisis continues a daring plan emerges - a mass evacuation by balloon to the safety of Overland. This necessitates waring with the mysterious neighbours of Chameth to secure new supplies of power crystals and the inevitable civil panic of those to be left behind to die when the migration fleet is set to leave. I greatly enjoyed this book, finishing it all in just half a day. The characters are well drawn and the background detailed and inventive (though I did doubt the shared atmosphere aspect of the two huge planets approx. 4700 miles apart). All told, a well-crafted fantasy novel that I would recommend and I await the remainder of the series.

A DOOR INTO OCEAN by Joan Slonczewski, Women's Press, 403 pages £4.95  
Reviewed by Anne Gay.

In a future galactic empire, genetics is a forbidden science since it may lead to war and revolution. Most advanced technology of any sort is suspect; those who go too far are wiped out. There is now contact between an outpost of empire and a sister planet called Ocean Moon, and the Emperor's Envoy is due any day... Joan Slonczewski has crafted a fine maze of intrigue- will the women of Ocean prove dangerous? Will the planet's overlord be responsible for them? Which will win - force or non-violence? Wonderful escapism, intelligent philosophy as displayed - not propounded or lectured - by flesh and bone people, a radical departure in the concept of alienness: with all this, A Door into Ocean is, quite simply, a marvellous read.

THE COMPLETE TRAVELLER IN BLACK by John Brunner, Methuen, 233 pages, £2.50, Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

This is the first time that all the Traveller in Black stories have been published together in English. The additional story is the fourth (out of five) "The Things That Are Gods" and fits neatly with the others. But even they are not identical with earlier imprints. Brunner has revised all the stories making them neater and stylistically tighter. It has been an act of polishing rough edges rather than rewriting.

The traveller is a mysterious wish-granter in a land on the borders between Chaos and Time. His task is to help the world from superstition to reason by the banishment and dissolution of demons but he cannot act until asked. But the granting of the wish does not always have the effect the asker expects as people rarely express themselves literally. Brunner is a fine British writer and although most of his novels are SF rather than fantasy they will give an idea of the quality of his writing.

THE SIDHE LEGENDS III: CHAMPIONS OF THE SIDHE : 277 pages; IVMASTERS OF THE SIDHE 248 pages, by Kenneth C. Flint, Bantam, £2.50 each, Reviewed by Steve Jones

Aaaaarrrgh! Some of my favourite Irish legends reduced to hack fantasy. These books are part of a series of novelisations of the wars between the Tuatha de Danann (goodies) and the Fomorians (baddies). The idea that the Fomorians are the degenerate descendants of a technological civilisation and Balor of the Eye is a heatray-equipped cyborg is quite effective, but the idea is not developed. Both heroes and villains follow the time-honoured conventions of capturing opponents, gloating about their plans and then letting them escape. I liked the fight against the Fomorians on the combine-harvester, but the story lacks the underlying grimness of the original myths. This is reading so light I had to hook it back down from the ceiling several times.

TALES OF WONDER by Jane Yolen, Future Orbit, 275 pages, £2.95, Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

Kings, princesses, flying horses, magicians, dreams : Jane Yolen has taken some of the commonest ingredients of fantasy and made them into bright jewels. She has written a collection of myths or fables, mostly very short, which are beautifully crafted. Better still, these are highly original stories that will make you stop and think. By contrast, the two longer pieces, "Wild Goose and Gander" and "Cockfight", seem slow and a trifle clumsy. This is one of the best fantasy collections of the year--- of any year.

THE SILENT TOWER by Barbara Hambly, Unwin, 349 pages, £2.95, Reviewed by Carol Morton.

Once again Hambly tells a tale of a world across the void accessed from ours only by magic. It is the story of Joanna Sheraton, a computer programmer, who is taken from our world by a mad wizard, and accompanied by a swordsman they journey to the Council of wizards to warn of the resurrection of the Darkmage and the threat he poses to all the worlds joined by the void.

I think Hambly has done it again, this compares favourably with her excellent DARWATH TRILOGY. It is a well-written novel, with excellent characterisation and intricate plot. Can't wait for the next installment.

THE RIVER OF TIME by David Brin, Bantam, 295 pages, £2.50 Reviewed by Tony Morton

A short story volume of eleven stories including five debuts and author afterword. There isn't a bad story in it; in fact I found all eleven good reading. The stories cover techno SF ("Tank Farm Dynamo"), 'what if..' stories (Thor meets Captain America) and mythology re-born ("Loom of Thessaly"). They are well written and entertaining, creating real situations easily imaginable. If you like Brin's other novels read this, otherwise read it because its good SF. Highly recommended.

THE STALKING by Robert Holdstock (writing as Robert Faulcon), Arrow, £3.50, 400 pages.

THE GHOSTDANCE by Robert Holdstock (writing as Robert Faulcon), Century, £11.95 (hardback), 411 pages.

Reviewed by Geoff Williams.

These two volumes contain the first four (of six) novels in Holdstock's "NIGHTHUNTER" series. In the first volume is THE STALKING and THE TALISMAN, and in the second is THE GHOSTDANCE and THE SHRINE. In this series one man, Daniel Brady, takes on the might of an occult organisation, Arachne, in order to find his family, who have been kidnapped. He is hampered by the fact that Arachne want him dead, his inexperience in the ways of the occult, his overwhelming hatred and anger at what has happened to his family and the almost complete lack of knowledge he has about the organisation, its purpose and its members.

If the bare outline of the plot I have given above sounds hackneyed, you will be relieved to know that Holdstock's treatment is anything but. Indeed, having read the publisher's blurb on the back of THE STALKING, I approached it with some caution. However, reading the book produced an agreeable surprise. I found it well-written and entertaining. Holdstock makes the situation that Brady finds himself in believable; indeed he makes Brady himself believable.

I have to admit that this is not normally the sort of fiction that I would buy as it can be found on the Horror rather than the S.F. and Fantasy shelves. I must admit to having enjoyed reading these volumes and look forward to reading the last two.

BLACK STAR RISING by Fred Pohl, Orbit, 282 pages, £2.95, reviewed by Carol Morton

Imagine this - an alien spacecraft approaches earth and demands to speak to the United States' President - fair enough today, but this novel is set in the latter half of the 21st century in the aftermath of a nuclear war, when Russia and America destroyed each other, and China stepped in to rule the U.S.A.. So there hasn't been a President for many years, but the aliens don't believe this and obliterate a Pacific island. The Chinese authorities have to educate - in a hurry - one of the native Americans to play the part of a President and accompany the aliens back to their own galaxy.

This is Pohl at his best; the novel seems to be written very much tongue-in-cheek, describing the Chinese's frantic efforts to produce a President and placate the aliens.

THE UNLIKELY ONES by Mary Brown, Arrow, 426 pages, £3.50, reviewed by Steve Jones

A band of heroes from varying backgrounds sets out on a quest to right wrongs and destroy evil. A standard plot (groan), but with a few things to set it apart. An evil witch dies, leaving a wide variety of curses behind. Trying to reverse them are some of her victims, consisting of a dehorned unicorn, a rusty knight, and a 12 year old girl, a cat, a crow, a toad and a carp (yes, a fish!) with magical gems stuck in various parts of their bodies. As well as solving their own problems they are trying to rescue a frozen prince and return the magical gems to the dragon the witch stole them off. I wonder at what age range this book is aimed; the plot is very simple yet there is a rather more sexual activity than one expects in an early-teen story. Reasonably recommended.

LETTERS FROM THE DEAD by Campbell Black, Grafton, £2.95, reviewed by Chris Chivers

There was something odd about the little town of Cockrane Crossing or so the blurb on the back cover would have you believe. Is the whole of America filled with haunted houses and malevolent spirits? LETTERS FROM THE DEAD is a slightly better than average horror story, that starts when two kids and their parents rent a house for a summer vacation in the small Virginian town of Cockrane Crossing. The discovery of an ouija board starts the fateful events in motion. As usual the house they have hired has a horrendous murder associated with it. Slowly the evil presence that prevades the house is drawn towards the two children and gradually takes them over. Campbell Black's story has a slightly above average plot, but by and large it is a run of the mill horror story.

SILVERGLASS by J.F.Rivkin, Orbit, 186 pages, £2.50, reviewed by Anne Gay

A novel of sword and sorcery with two heroines. One takes care of the swordplay in her own rambunctious fashion, The other - well, guess. While it's fun to read about a female Conan and a beautiful witch of the royal line, there's not much that's new until the denouement. Then Rivkin produces top-flight magic like a rabbit out of a hat (?) The last set pieces really scintillate. Rivkin has done a good, craftsmanlike job with flashes of brilliance. Let's hope she/he goes on to greater things.

ELRIC AT THE END OF TIME by Michael Moorcock, illustrated by Rodney Matthews, Paper Tiger, 120 pages, £7.95, reviewed by Tony Morton.

Moorcock combines two of his creations into one with this volume, and does so reasonably successfully. Elric finds himself flung to the End of Time due to a disruption in the megaflow of time and to prevent the complete collapse of the space-time continua, Una Persson must return the prince of Melniboné to his own time. The interaction between Elric and the usual residents at the End of Time works well, with them eager to please and Elric suspicious of 'Chaos'. Worth a read - in fact with the excellent addition of Matthews' artwork, worth buying.

DEMOGORGON by Brian Lumley, Grafton, 333 pages, £2.95, reviewed by Graham Morton.

A certain winner of the 'worst back page blurb' award, it was with great relief that I found the story as good as expected from one of Britain's foremost horror fiction writers. The plot revolves around Khumani (the Anti-Christ) and Charlie Trace (non-identical twin of Khumani's still-born son). As the time approaches for the Anti-Christ to be reborn, he must bring together his three sons to be merged into a new resurrection. A few people know Khumani's real identity and enlist Trace's help in attempting to defeat his "father" at his most vulnerable time. An enjoyable read, not relying on the usual 'blood and gore' recipe of much modern horror writing. Well written, with an unexpected twist at the end.

FINISHING TOUCHES by Thomas Tessier, Grafton, 253 pages, £2.95, reviewed by Glynn Jackson.

Any preconceived misgivings anyone may have concerning a horror novel about a cosmetic surgeon, would soon be dispelled with Tessier's FINISHING TOUCHES. The story revolves around an American doctor (Tom Sutherland) who is in London on a six month exchange. While taking in the more seadier sights of London; via the West End bars and clubs, Tom encounters the strange and enigmatic Dr. Nordhagen. Although not totally enamoured with Nordhagen, Sutherland nevertheless is sufficiently intrigued to accept the Doctors' offer of a visit to his private club - "The feathers". Through Nordhagen, Sutherland happens upon Lina Ravachol; his personal assistant, and subsequently through her he not only enters a world of horror and degradation he had previously thought impossible, but discovers the dark secret of Nordhagen's cellar and of his own inner being. The novel is a worthwhile read; especially enhanced by Tessier's insights into British way of life, as seen through the eyes of an American visitor.

#### REISSUES :

ORPHANS OF THE SKY by Robert Heinlein, Grafton, £2.50.

Originally published in 1941 (Astounding Stories) and set on a multi-generation starship where the original purpose has been lost in the mist of time. Worth reading.

THE BLUE WORLD by Jack Vance, Grafton, £2.50.

Intriguing story of the break up of a static society and the ensuing conflict. Holds up well (as expected from Vance), refreshing change from present fantasy.

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Thankyous this month to :

Bernie Evans for Conspiracy report; and Fantasycon report.

Graham Morton, Anne Gay, Pauline Morgan, Steve Jones, Chris Morgan, Glynn Jackson  
Geoff Williams, Chris Chivers for book reviews.

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Deadline for next month's Newsletter is 3rd October.