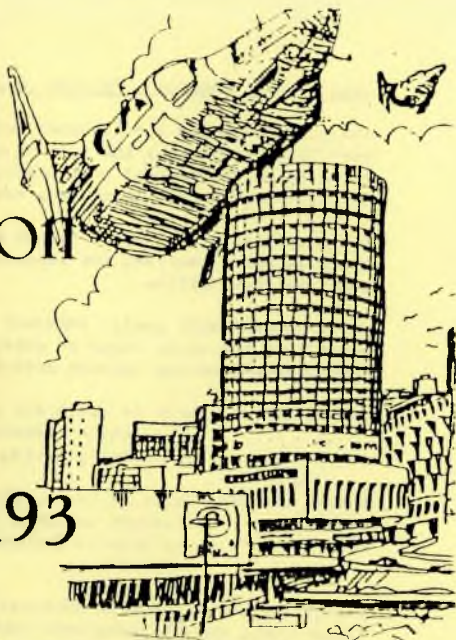


Birmingham Science Fiction Group

Honorary Presidents : Brian W. Aldiss
and Harry Harrison

NEWSLETTER 193



THE BSFG MEETS ON THE
THIRD FRIDAY OF EACH
MONTH IN THE LABROKE
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
COLEFIELD WEST MID'S.

This month's meeting is on 16 October at
8.00pm, and we are delighted to welcome back!

ROB SHAW

"He was three thousand meters above Birmingham when the attack began; there was no human sound, only the growing rush of air..." No, we're not expecting Bob to arrive from the sky - that's an excerpt from his 1979 novel *Vertigo*, and we hope the only attack will be the rush to get books signed...

Bob is an old friend of the Brum Group, and has the distinction of being as well known for his fan writing as for his professional work - for concepts like 'slow glass' and 'CG' (contragravity), for novels such as *Orbitsville*, *Dagger of the Mind*, *Fire Pattern* and *The Ragged Astronauts* (which should have won a Hugo at the recent *Worldcon*), and for Guest of Honour speeches which have the audience rolling in the aisles while he remains deadpan.

Bob was born in Belfast, has worked as an aircraft engineer in Britain and Canada, and has been freelance since 1975. He may give one of his famous "serious science" talks at our meeting - we have to wait and see, but whatever he does, it's not to be missed!

Last Month's Meeting - Patrick Collins

The present demand for launches deriving mainly from satellites (for whatever use) fails to justify the cost of development of a fully reusable launch vehicle. It is therefore crucial to investigate any proposal which can generate higher rates of launch traffic thereby reducing launch costs.

One potential use of space flight arising from a wide popular interest in space is space tourism, the implications of which were forwarded by our guest Patrick Collins.

While considerable public interest exists for space travel few people actually appreciate the wider range of entertaining activities that become possible. The following unique leisure activities can be enjoyed :

- Observation - both of earth and its terrestrial phenomena and astronomical observation (planets, the sun, stars etc.)
- Low Gravity - gymnastics, flying, ball games & swimming.
- Sport
- Extra-vehicular Views of earth, visits to other facilities.
- Gardens - abundant growths, 'Giant plants', exotic low gravity adaptations.
- 'Laboratory' - low gravity phenomena on liquids, electrics, animal and plant behavior.

Little equipment would be necessary for observation or laboratory activities (telescopes, cameras, panoramic dubble/porthole) and low-gravity sport would basically be large unobstructed areas with padded walls and hand holds.

Indeed the potential for the development of space hotels to enjoy these activities begins to become apparent when considering the numbers likely to want to participate - the costs however may initially prove prohibitive.

By past commercial developments a reasonable figure for the demand for space tourism services can be assessed. The demand will pass through several phases:

1st Phase - The 'Pioneer' phase where the market for space tourism comprises of individuals who are prepared to pay a very high price for a trip into orbit (say \$100,000 upwards). Potential clients would not necessarily require elaborate facilities or a prolonged stay in orbit (in early stages) - the experience being the important part.

2nd Phase - The 'Exclusive' phase where the service becomes available on a regular basis. The price would initially stay high - \$100,000 dropping to say \$10,000 and the quality of the service would be better than phase 1.

3rd phase - The 'Mature' phase; here costs have dropped from the \$10,000 to 2,000 through scale economies and technological advances to bring the service within range of a significant proportion of the population. Facilities would be available on a large scale and turnover be much higher.

4th Phase - 'Mass Market' phase eventually it would be possible to envisage a service on the scale approaching that of present day air travel.

All this could be nearer than you think!

Patrick emphasised his talk with slides and diagrams and concluded space tourism, by reducing launch costs, will make other things possible (such as solar power satellites)

A very entertaining evening.

THE BIRMINGHAM READERS AND WRITERS FESTIVAL 1987 (14-28 NOVEMBER)

BRIAN W. ALDISS

On Monday 16 November, the *Brum Group's own co-President* will be presenting an extravaganza entitled

SCIENCE FICTION BLUES

With the aid of two actors - Ken Campbell and an actress yet to be announced - Brian will introduce a selection of his more recent stories, speculations and poetry. As well as linking the stories, he will read the central characters of his own narratives. The production is said by Frank Hatherley to be 'a feast of modern science fiction, packed with the style, leaping ideas and humour that are the trade marks of Aldiss's work'.

The production starts at 7.30pm in the Midlands Arts Centre Studio Theatre, Cannon Hill Park, and the organisers have agreed that members of the BSFG will be admitted for £2.50 (normally the rate for pensioners and students - anyone qualify for the former?) instead of £3.50. We hope that many of you will take advantage of this offer and turn up - it would be nice to see the whole front row, at least, full of Brum Group members!

HOWEVER: WHETHER OR NOT YOU GAVE YOUR NAME TO DAVE AT THE LAST MEETING. YOU MUST LET CHRIS CHIVERS, OUR TREASURER, HAVE YOUR £2.50 AT OR BEFORE THE BOB SHAW MEETING. His address is on the front page, if you want to send a cheque. (You can bring friends etc.)

Andromeda's Top Ten for September.

Page Backs.

- 1 Winter in Eden by Harry Harrison.
- 2 Dr. Who and the Romans
- 3 Mirage by Louise Cooper.
- 4 Guardians of the West by David Eddings.
- 5 Sector General by James White.
- 6 Romulan Way (Star Trek)
- 7 Dark Feasts by Ramsay Campbell.
- 8 The Witches of Wenshar by Barbara Hambly.
- 9 Welding a Red Sword by Piers Anthony.
- 10= Place Among the Fallen by Adrian Cole.
- 10= Redwall by Jacques.
- 10= Dreams of the Raven (Star Trek).

HARJOVERS.

1. Bones of the Moon by Jonathon Carroll.
2. Espogair Street by Iain Banks
3. Dark Feasts by Ramsay Campbell.
4. The Urth of the New Sun by Gene Wolfe.
5. Ancient Light by Mary Gentle.

SIGNING SESSIONS AT ANDROMEDA (84, SUFFOLK STREET, BIRMINGHAM B1.)

Wednesday 28th October 12 to 2pm Clive Barker
Saturday 31st October 12 to 2pm Terry Pratchett.

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.

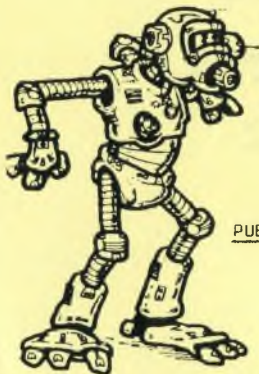
CHAIRMAN: Must introduce and try to keep order at all BSFG and Committee meetings. Should preferably be a good public speaker. Is usually responsible for contacting prospective speakers and arranging the future programme. Must have previously served on the committee in another position.

TREASURER: Must be honest and reliable, keeping track of all the group's receipts and payments. Needs to get to every BSFG meeting early in order to take money at the door. Must also attend each committee meeting to report on the state of the group's finances. Has to produce end-year accounts. Ability to add figures a distance asset.

SECRETARY: Needs to attend monthly committee meetings take notes, and produce several copies of the minutes, typed. Also required to do other occasional bits of typing on behalf of BSFG. Ability to type and access to a typewriter essential.

NEWSLETTER EDITOR : Has to attend committee meetings gather news, beg articles and artwork; (especially artwork) obtain review copies from publishers and distribute them to reviewers; compose most of the newsletter type and paste up all of it; get the whole thing photocopied, collated and mailed off. This has to be done every month to a deadline. At the moment this takes 4 to 5 days a month. Access to a decent typewriter and an ability to type are essential.

PUBLICITY OFFICER: He/She must produce and distribute posters each month advertising forthcoming events. Ought to get the BSFG mentioned in newspapers or on local radio several times a year. Dynamism is an advantage, also the ability to think up crazy ideas.



MEMBERS' FORUM

On this page YOU have the opportunity to share with fellow-members your comments, complaints, praise (?), reviews of favourite books, new films or videos, information, articles on pet SF-related subjects, artwork, cartoons, computer graphics, short fiction, anecdotes — whatever. We will also accept small-ads for sales and wants. As explained in the last Newsletter, if this page is empty it is because it is waiting for





BOOK REVIEWS

Nightwings, by Robert Silverberg, Orbit, 192 pp., £2.50.
Reviewed by Anne Gay.

In the Third Cycle of Earth's civilisations, Watchers hurl their minds out in glorious flight to scan for the invaders - whom Earth once enslaved our new Masters by galactic law.

One old Watcher is in the thick of the battle, while his hybrid love is maltreated - by a Prince of our own world. And the man she loves isn't a man at all. Amidst our degeneracy, what chance of salvation have we got?

Glittering innovation on old themes and a soaring conclusion will make you want to find out if you haven't read this in a previous imprint.

BONES OF THE MOON by Jonathan Carroll, Century £9.95, 216 pages
Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

Cullen is a young American woman. She lives with her husband and baby daughter in a typical New York apartment house, with both an axe murderer and a friendly gay living downstairs. Sequential fantasy dreams come to her; they are connected with her childhood, and are set in a magical land where she travels with a son she has never had. That the dreams should come to affect her everyday life is predictable, though the way in which dream and reality mingle is inventive, zany and highly entertaining.

Jonathan Carroll writes fluently and convincingly about the real world, with offbeat characters and quirky details. It comes almost as a shock to find that his fantasy world is sparkingly original and described with poetry and a satisfying symbolic depth. His earlier novels, The Land of Laughs and Voice of Our Shadow had a similar mix of fantasy and reality, though in both it took far longer for the fantasy to show itself. Bones of the Moon proves Carroll to be a writer of rare talent. And he's an extremely charming person, too, as those who met him recently at Fantasycon or his Andromeda signing session discovered.

SONG OF KALI by Dan Simmons, Headline £2.95, 311 pages
Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

This is a well deserved winner of the World Fantasy Award which it received in 1986. It is excitingly original. It is also one of those books that can sit equally well alongside contemporary mainstream novels or horror and be noticed. The narrator, Bobby Luczac, travels with his Indian wife and baby daughter to Calcutta to pick up a new manuscript by a Bengali poet who, it was thought, had died eight years previously. On the surface it seems an innocuous assignment but gradually, as we are introduced to the poverty, filth and decay of the city, the atmosphere changes. Somehow involved are the worshippers of the black goddess, Kali. This is Kali in her most demonic personna, a creature of insidious evil whose tendrils pervade Calcutta's underworld.

The book is what the reader perceives it to be --- fantasy, horror or a chilling psychological thriller. It doesn't matter which. Considering that this is Simmons first novel it is a remarkable achievement. Read it.

THE LOST ROAD AND OTHER WRITINGS by J. R.R. Tolkien, Unwin Hyman, 455 pages
£16.95, reviewed by Steve Jones.

Or Tolkien's Collected Laundry lists Vol 5. Tolkien wrote and rewrote everything he published several times, which is why he published so little and what he did publish is so good. Unfortunately he forgot to destroy his rough drafts, and now each and every version ends up in print with pages of comment from his dotting offspring over every changed comma. The most interesting part of this book is the unfinished novel THE LOST ROAD, which is about a twentieth-century father and son who travel psychically back in time and find themselves in the minds of Elendil and his son in Numenor just before the downfall. This is Tolkien's version of the Atlantis myth which later found its way into the LORD OF THE RINGS and the SILMARILLION. For Tolkien junkies only.

THE BUS by Paul Kirchner, Futura, 12.95, 158 pages (including 70 blank)
reviewed by Graham Morton.

If you never saw the original series in 'Heavy Metal' then you are in for a very pleasant surprise. A collection of cartoons about a bus may not sound very promising but I doubt whether anyone with a sense of humor could go through the book without being greatly amused. Ideal as a Christmas present for anyone who likes slightly surrealistic humour. Highly recommended.

STAR REBEL by F. M. Busby, Orbit, £2.50, 216 pages, reviewed by Tina Hewett

This book proved to be compelling reading although in parts the story shows just how vicious man can be to others of his race. The story paints a very bleak future, although the man, Bran, the main character, has his cruelty tempered by some sensibilities which is surprising considering what he went through in his upbringing in the main body of the book. It is the gradual maturing of Bran, with his determination to wreak revenge on the harsh society that birthed him, that is the main theme. Such is the quality of the story, writing and characterisation, that I eagerly await the sequel.

PLANET ON THE TABLE by Kim Stanley Robinson, Orbit, 241 pages, 12.95, reviewed by Mick Evans.

This first collection of eight short stories which were originally published in 1976 and 1985 covers a very impressive range of settings. They range from a drowning Venice to a Dixieland revival on the far reaches of the galaxy. The collection includes the award winning 'Black Air'. Most of these stories carry a lot of pathos but are never overtly sentimental. Perhaps there is a slight lack of humour in his work but it seems churlish to find fault in such a fine collection as this.

Anybody who has read his novels should be delighted with this book, to those who haven't it would be a good introduction to one of SF's better writers. Highly Recommended.

SOLDIER OF THE MIST by Gene Wolfe, Orbit, 335 pages, 12.95, reviewed by Steve Jones

"Never use a diary format!" we are told in creative writing classes, and anyone who has read Lovecraft will agree. You know those stories where at the end the monster attacks the hero and he stops to write "Gaaargh in his diary instead of running away like any sensible person. Fortunately Gene Wolfe doesn't seem to have been to writing classes, as SOLDIER OF THE MIST is written in diary format and is the best book I have read this year. Iatro is a mercenary in the Persian army during the invasion of Greece of 479 B.C. He has suffered a head wound which has affected his memory so he can only remember what happened in the last 12 hours and he can see all the invisible gods and spirits with which Greece abounds. Each day he meets his friends and enemies for the first time, aided only by his "diary" in which he attempts to keep his past. Recommended without reservation.

THE ORBIT POSTER BOOK Artwork, Futura, £6.95 softcover, 16 pages,
Reviewed by Bernie Evans.

This book is exactly what its title says it is, a book of A3 sized posters, 16 in all, with no text, just the title of the piece and the name of the artist on the reverse of each poster.

Much of the artwork is not to my taste, but as ones appreciation of art has to be very subjective don't let that put you off, you really need to look at it for yourself. Much of it is by people I've not heard of, whether through ignorance or because they are new I couldn't say. Much of it is rather derivative also. I noticed disciples of Peter Jones, Peter Goodfellow, Chris Fossand Tim White to name but a few, but that isn't necessarily a bad thing, there are fashions in art as in everything else and these people are fashionable just now, and work in their style is what art editors are demanding.

If you are the sort of person who sometimes longs to tear a page out of a book to put the picture on your wall this book is for you. If you want to buy posters this book is for you, and is very good value, working out at less than 50p per poster.

If on the other hand you are a person who likes to collect art books I am delighted to say this book is also for you, demonstrating as it does what is typical in S.F. artwork at present.

The only person likely to be disappointed by this book is one who likes descriptive text and/or stories to go along with the artwork, as there is neither in the book.

It is delightfully unpretentious, is exactly what the publishers claim it to be, and I recommend it very highly.

HEROIC DREAMS Text by Nigel Suckling, Paper Tiger £14.95, 159 pages.
Reviewed by Dave Hardy

Only the author gets any credits (apart from names) for this book, though it contains some 147 colour illustrations by 21 artists - not all of them SF or fantasy, as some Western artwork by Gordon Crabb is included too. Some artists get only one or two inclusions; others, notably Jim Burns, Les Edwards, Peter Goodfellow, John Harris and Tony Roberts get 15 or even 20 or more. Most of the illustrations are excellent, though several have appeared in other collections and a few are real 'potboilers'.

So far, so good. But the text is a dissertation on 'the heroic ideal through the ages', referring to and attempting to psychoanalyse Conan, Elric, Arthur, the Holy Grail and other examples in the eternal fight of good against evil. The trouble is that the illustrations generally bear no relation to the text. And worse, the captions are almost totally non-informative: for example, *Pluto*, *Colin Hay* (not even a different type-style for the title. But is it the title of the book on which this illustration first appeared, or just a title given by the artist to his work? We are not told...)

The only justification for a book of this sort is an excuse to bring together a lot of paintings. As such, the artists deserve a lot more explanatory text than they get. With respect to the author, it is they who will sell this book!

Thank yous this month to :

Anne Gay, Chris Morgan, Pauline Morgan, Steve Jones, Graham Morton,
Tina Hewlett, Mick Evans, Bernie Evans and Dave Hardy.

This Newsletter was produced by Tony and Carol Morton with a broken typewriter.
Deadline for next month's Newsletter is 7th November.