

# Birmingham Science Fiction Group

**NEWSLETTER 196**

January 1988

Honorary Presidents : Brian W. Aldiss  
Harry Harrison



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

MEMBERSHIP OF THE GROUP  
COSTS A MERE £5.50 PER YEAR  
FOR ONE PERSON,, OR £8.00  
FOR TWO PEOPLE AT THE SAME  
ADDRESS. ALL CHEQUES AND  
POSTAL ORDERS SHOULD BE  
MADE PAYABLE TO BSFG AND  
SENT TO :- THE TREASURER  
CHRIS CHIVERS AT  
51, BOUNDARY ROAD,  
STREETLY,  
SUTTON COLDFIELD,  
WEST MIDLANDS

**THIS MONTH'S MEETING**  
*15th JANUARY 1988*

**A. G. M.**  
*followed by AUCTION*

The meeting will start at 8.00pm prompt.  
The Standing Orders for an AGM are  
on page 3.

Following the AGM there will be the  
**GRAND AUCTION.**

**IF ANYONE HAS ANY BOOKS ,MAGAZINES ,SF  
TRIVIA ,POSTERS OR ANYTHING YOU NO  
LONGER WANT (?) ,WE WOULD LIKE YOU TO  
BRING THEM ALONG FOR THE AUCTION ,AND  
ROG WILL AUCTION IT.**

This newsletter was produced by Carol and Tony  
Morton, 45 Grosvenor Way, Quarry Bank,  
Brierley Hill, West Midlands, DY5 2LJ.  
Deadline for next month is 2nd February 1988

THE BIRMINGHAM SCIENCE FICTION GROUP

CONSTITUTION

(as approved by the Annual General Meeting of 21 January 1983 and amended at the ExtraOrdinary General Meeting of 11 March 1983).

- 1 THE NAME of the society is to be THE BIRMINGHAM SCIENCE FICTION GROUP, (hereinafter called 'the Group').
- 2 THE AIMS of the Group will be to further the interests, knowledge and social activities of readers of Science Fiction, and the promotion, encouragement and participation in writing, publishing and producing books, magazines, films and any other projects connected with Science Fiction, and in particular the management of a yearly convention known as 'Novacon'.
- 3 THE GROUP will consist of the elected Committee, the Chairman of Novacon, the Legal Officer and the Ordinary Members. The Committee will consist of the Chairman, the Treasurer, the Secretary, the Publicity and Recruitment Officer, the Newsletter Editor, and not more than two Ordinary Committee Members, who shall be elected at the AGM. The Chairman of Novacon, appointed by the Committee, will automatically be a member of the Committee for the year in which his convention falls. The Legal Officer shall be a supernumerary member of the Committee, who shall appoint him.
- 4 THE OFFICE of Treasurer and Secretary may be held by one member of the Group, at the Committee's discretion.
- 5 THE COMMITTEE will be the governing body of the Group and will have full power:-
  - (a) To manage and control the finances of the Group.
  - (b) To suspend any officer or member of the Group, upon such cause being shown as they may deem sufficient.
  - (c) To fill such vacancies as may occur.
  - (d) To manage the Novacon Convention.
- 6 THE WHOLE COMMITTEE stands down at the AGM and can stand for re-election.
- 7 RESIGNATIONS from the Committee must be made in writing to, and submitted for acceptance at the next Committee Meeting by the Treasurer.
- 8 A QUORUM of the Committee shall be four (4) members.
- 9 A FINANCIAL YEAR of the Group will commence on 1st January. Membership will run for 12 months from the date on which payment of subscription is due. The amount of the subscription will be reviewed at each AGM.
- 10 CHEQUES drawn on the Group account must be signed by the Treasurer and by one of two other appointed officers of the Committee.
- 11 THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING of the Group will be held in January each year.
- 12 THERE WILL BE at least one Committee Meeting per quarter.
- 13 THERE WILL BE one ordinary meeting of the Group per month, at the Committee's discretion.
- 14 THE COMMITTEE can convene an ExtraOrdinary General Meeting at any time with a minimum of 14 days notice.
- 15 ANY MEMBER can call an ExtraOrdinary General Meeting at any time when so petitioned by at least one-third of the total paid-up membership of the Group, and at such EGM there must be a quorum of at least 15 members in addition to the Committee.
- 16 AMENDMENTS to the Constitution shall only be made at the AGM or at an EGM, and a member calling such EGM shall give 21 days notice in writing to the Committee of the suggested amendment.
- 17 THE CHAIRMAN of the Group shall have served on the Committee of the Group for at least one full year.
- 18 Acceptance of these rules is a condition of membership of the Group.

Typed and issued, January 1987

STANDING ORDERS FOR GENERAL MEETING OF THE  
BIRMINGHAM SCIENCE FICTION GROUP

1. THE MEETING SHALL BE CHAIRED BY THE LEGAL OFFICER OR HIS APPOINTED DEPUTY.
2. THE WORD CHAIRMAN IN THESE STANDING ORDERS SHALL REFER TO THE CHAIRMAN OF THE MEETING, NOT THE CHAIRMAN OF THE GROUP.
3. ALL MOTIONS SHALL HAVE SPEECHES FOR AND AGAINST UNTIL IT IS DEEMED BY THE CHAIRMAN THAT THERE HAS BEEN PROPER DEBATE, AT WHICH TIME THERE SHALL BE A VOTE OF MEMBERS PRESENT.
4. AN AMENDMENT TO A MOTION SHOULD BE PROPOSED BEFORE THE SPEECHES ON THE MOTION CONCERNED BUT MAY BE PROPOSED ANYTIME BEFORE THE VOTE AT THE DISCRETION OF THE CHAIRMAN. THERE WILL BE ONE SPEECH FOR THE AMENDMENT AND ONE SPEECH AGAINST, FOLLOWED BY A VOTE OF THE MEMBERS PRESENT ON THE ACCEPTENCE OF THE AMENDMENT INTO THE MOTION.
5. ALL CANDIDATES FOR COMMITTEE POSTS SHALL HAVE AN OPPORTUNITY OF ADDRESSING THE MEETING BEFORE A VOTE IS TAKEN, AT THE DISCRETION OF THE CHAIRMAN.
6. QUESTIONS MAY BE DIRECTED TO THE SPEAKER AT THE END OF HIS SPEECH AT THE DISCRETION OF THE CHAIRMAN, THROUGH THE CHAIR.
7. THE CHAIRMAN MAY RULE THE MEETING CLOSED AT ANY TIME, AT HIS DISCRETION. ANY BUSINESS REMAINING WILL BE DEFERRED TO THE NEXT APPROPRIATE MEETING, THE DATE OF WHICH TO BE ARRANGED BY THE COMMITTEE.
8. A CHALLENGE TO A RULING OF THE CHAIRMAN MAY BE MADE BY ANY MEMBER AND WILL TAKE PRECEDENCE OVER ALL OTHER BUSINESS. THERE WILL BE ONE SPEECH FOR THE RULING BY THE CHAIRMAN, AND ONE AGAINST BY THE CHALLENGER, FOLLOWED BY A VOTE OF MEMBERS PRESENT.
9. THE CHAIRMAN MAY PLACE A TIME LIMIT ON ANY SPEECHES, INCLUDING THOSE BY NOMINATED CANDIDATES.
10. THE ORDER OF PRECEDENCE OF MOTIONS IS:-
  - 1) A CHALLENGE TO A RULING OF THE CHAIRMAN.
  - 2) AMENDMENT TO A MOTION.
  - 3) THE BUSINESS IN HAND.

# MEMBERS' FORUM

Well, this is our last newsletter so we'd like to take this opportunity of thanking all contributors over the last two years for their input.

Its not been as easy to gain material sometimes (particularly on the artwork side) as we expected - after all, SF and fantasy readers having such imaginative reading as background ought to come up with all sorts of ideas, so we thought. Strangely, this doesn't seem to be the case; maybe too much time reading to participate?

Overall we've enjoyed the experience and found some interesting sides to SF we never realised existed! Thanks again to you all out there, best of luck to the new Editor.

Finally thanks this month go to:-

Steve Jones, Glyn Jackson, Tina Hewett, Maureen Porter, Chris Chivers  
Pauline morgan and Mike Jones for their reviews.

Carol and Tony Morton,

# BOOK REVIEWS

THE SECOND EARTH by Patrick Woodroffe, Paper Tiger, £7.95, 143 pages, reviewed by Tony Morton.

Subtitled 'The Pentateuch Re-Told', we have the story of mankind, from creation to establishing 'Second Earth' (hence the title). However, while it IS our history this is also Second Earth, having been colonised in the past. The preface tells of how man reaches for the outer planets only to find a derelict spaceship in orbit around Saturn with the secrets of our origin. Once translated, the books reveal a colourful history around which the novel is based. Purely on the basis of the remarkable illustrations this book is worth a look, but with the tale told it reaches greater heights. Highly recommended.

THE THRONE OF SCONE by Patricia Kennealy, Grafton, £3.50, 479 pages, reviewed by Steve Jones.

This is the second volume of THE KELTIAD trilogy (it actually tells the end of the story as the third volume is set before the other two). In 3512 A.D. an exploratory ship from Earth discovers a civilisation with a strangely Celtic culture. They learn that the "aliens" are descended from the Celtic tribes of Earth, who apparently had discovered interstellar travel in the year 453 A.D. and emigrated due to Christian persecution. I find this rationale completely unconvincing as, for instance, it is not explained how people who can make starships and blasters could be driven off by sword-wielding barbarians. Later on in the 21st century the Celts were saved from alien invasion by "Arthur", whose wife was "Gweniver", his sister "Morgan", his mage was "Merlynn" and his treacherous nephew was called "Mordryth". These names are not very original. While the author does admit taking some elements from mythology, this is wholesale pillaging. I could forgive all this if the actual story was any good, but it isn't. The characters fight with swords, the power of sorcery/psionics varies according to the dictates of that mystic force known only as "The Plot", and the story drags along building up to a dull anticlimax. I suppose, with its use of Celtic legend and magic-as-psionics, it is similar to THE SAGA OF THE EXILES, but Julian May does it much better.

MAN OF TWO WORLDS by Frank and Brian Herbert, Orbit, £3.50, 397 pages, reviewed by Glyn Jackson.

This book concerns two people, Ryll (a dreen) and Lutt Hansen (an earther) and one body - which they are both attempting to control! Ryll has travelled, via a stolen spaceship, to Earth from the planet Dreenor. His race, the Dreens, have the power to idmage - to turn their thoughts into reality - and thus have created all of the universe. Unfortunately, Ryll, on approaching Earth, collides with another spaceship and is forced to merge with the injured occupant, Lutt Hansen, to save both their lives. Lutt takes some convincing that Ryll exists within him and has many interesting conversations with himself! Reminiscent of Heinlein's I WILL FEAR NO EVIL. Eventually Lutt comes to accept Ryll and relies on him in times of trouble. The story continues with Lutt, both aided and hindered by Ryll, trying to discover interstellar travel which would subsequently result in him gaining access to Dreenor - a feat which would force Dreenor to eliminate the human race. Although the book is often amusing it does not benefit the end of such an illustrious career.

THE SWORD OF SHELEU by Lawrence Watt-Evans, Grafton, £2.95, 301 pages, reviewed by Tina Hewett.

This book is book three of THE LORDS OF DUS, and having not read the previous books, the thread of the story meandered a bit. The book also appeared to be a bit empty, in the storyline department, and seemed as if half a plot had been stretched to fill the entire book. Although quite interesting in parts the plot was fairly predictable, and was overall quite disappointing.

IN YANA, THE TOUCH AND DYING by Michael Shea, Grafton, 332 pages, £3.50, reviewed by Steve Jones.

Another "Dying Earth" book from the author of NIFFT THE LEAN and A QUEST FOR SIMBELLIS. The curious title refers to a place called Yana, where immortality is given to anyone who asks for it. Grant Hex, a student who is considering revising for his exams to become an infamagus some time soon but why rush it, decides to go and find it. Of course there must be a catch.....The trouble is the book is too much of a travelogue; all the weird and wonderful creatures and cultures are merely obstacles for the hero to overcome on his quest. Jack Vance himself had similar problems in CUGEL'S SAGA. I think these sort of tales work best as short stories, where the hero is dealing with one situation in detail rather than just passing through, as in THE DYING EARTH and NIFFT THE LEAN. Reasonably recommended. Just remember "Never sell a brothel to a demon"!

GABRIEL by Lisa Tuttle, Sphere, £2.99, 216 pages, reviewed by Maureen Porter.

Much as I hate to categorise anything, this is not SF, nor horror, fantasy, anything you could put a name to. It hovers in that strange country close to the mainstream of fiction but not part of it. All the events can be explained away satisfactorily, the product of over-active minds and a grief that won't heal, but at the same time the narrator seems truly to be haunted by her dead husband, Gabriel, through Gabriel's son, not her child, and through other people who carry his memory. It's an odd enigmatic book, absorbing, strangely unsatisfying, and yet the frustrating uncertainties draw the reader back a second time. It's worth reading, but with reservations about the strength of the plotting.

EON by Greg Bear, Legend, £4.95, 502 pages, reviewed by Tony Morton.

When a book gloats "the greatest science fiction novel of our time" on the front cover, I get suspicious. Well, I was somewhat correct in my fears, once again Bear fortells the demise of our planet in the foreseeable future, so if you've read similar outcomes it's a little predictable. Somewhat originally, he conjures up an asteroid arrival into Earth orbit which is far more than it seems. And - whoosh - we're flying into the future of the 'Thistledown' - this is the best part of the book and I found it fascinating, unfortunately the ordinary Earth characters brought me down to reality with the proverbial bump. A mixed book of highs but low lows.

THE DEEP by John Crowley, Unwin, £2.95, 176 pages, reviewed by Steve Jones.

This is a reprint of the first novel of LITTLE, BIG author John Crowley. It is about the Visitor, a sliver-skinned sexless being with amnesia after an accident as he arrives in the world. He wanders about trying to discover who he is, why he was made and by who. We soon learn that the world is not ours; for a start it is disc-shaped and surrounded by the Deep. Two noble factions, the Reds and the Blacks, are fighting for supremacy. Meanwhile the Just, a peasant resistance organisation, seek to destroy both factions. Their struggles are shown in their true light as the Visitor discovers his purpose. Highly recommended.

NICOR by Peter Tremayne, Sphere, £2.50, 211 pages, reviewed by Chris Chivers

Off the Venezuelan coast stands drilling rig E.S.127 exploring for oil but what they find is a Nicor. Through a series of ever increasingly serious accidents, the crew on the drilling rig are drawn into tighter and tighter circles.

With the police hunting a sadistic murderer that turns out to be one of the rig's crew, and with the imminent arrival of a hurricane Peter Tremayne piles on the action with the Nicor.

The plot line is certainly slick considering the improbable nature of the monster and this is to Peter Tremayne's credit as a novelist. The threads of the story are skilfully woven together to make an enjoyable novel.

THE DESTROYING ANGEL by Bernard King, Sphere, £3.50 272 pages, reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

Although promoted as the first of a fantasy trilogy, THE DESTROYING ANGEL also contains elements of SF (in the form of UFOs) and horror. The main story involves an attempt to bring an evil power back into the world. This a myth figure known as Our Lady of the Woods and is intimately associated with a deadly fungus called the Destroying Angel. Working against this is the mysterious Pythonius Meeres. To add to the confusion there are a series there are a series of murders and the savaging of animals by a previously unknown species of "vampire-rat". There are interesting ideas in this volume but they are not given the opportunity to flourish. Almost a third of the book is made up of historical fragments, the significance of which is not made clear until much later and consequently there is no view point character for the reader to identify with. Also, these fragments are identical in style although meant to reflect events taking place between 63,429 BC and 1948 AD.

Some of the scenes in the main story resemble a poor imitation of early James Herbert with characters being introduced merely to be wiped out and people dying horribly beneath the teeth of packs of small furry animals. It is a pity that the originality did not have a stronger vehicle to carry it.

VOYAGER II (THE ALIEN WITHIN) by Ben Bova, Methuen, £2.95, 334 pages, reviewed by Glyn Jackson.

I "Voyagers" Dr. Keith Stoner (ex astronaut and astrophysicist) had been responsible for discovering certain radio transmissions from an alien spacecraft somewhere in the vicinity of Jupiter. Thus, as a member of the US-Soviet space mission sent to capture the alien spaceship, Stoner offers his body as hostage to the alien craft in a bizarre exchange.

"Voyagers II" takes up the story 18 years on, where Jo Camerata (the student who fell in love with Dr. Stoner in "Voyagers") is now the head of the powerful multinational Vanguard Industries. Consequently, it is her job to see to the recovery of the alien craft in which Stoner exists.

However, all is not well; since in the last 18 years, the alien technology responsible for Stoner's existence in a state of suspended animation has imposed an alien consciousness upon his own mind.

Needless to say this alien consciousness has no intention of being subservient to man, and embarks on an exploration of its new world. Not exactly an original idea, and difficult to stifle the yawns.

SWORDSPPOINT by Ellen Kushner, Unwin, £3.95, 269 pages, reviewed by Mike Jones.

Richard St. Vier is a professional swordsman, the best there is. Together with the mysterious ex-student Alec, his companion and lover, he moves confidently through the layered society of the city, in charge of his own destiny until he becomes an unwitting tool in a plot to seize political control. Involvement in this complex intrigue may cost him his freedom, even his life.

I found this book thoroughly absorbing in spite of the fact that it contains no element of fantasy other than the (presumably) imaginary city-state in which it is set. The writing is of a high standard with beautiful descriptive passages and deft characterisation. Well worth reading.

MARTIANS GO HOME by Frederic Brown, Grafton, £2.95, 203 pages, reviewed by Tony Morton.

The title originates from a heart-felt plea from a beleaguered human race after the simultaneous appearance of x billion Martians (one for every 3 Earth people) who are annoying, belligerent, wiseacre types with not a good word for our ways. On top of this they have the ability to instantly appear ANYWHERE causing further grief as nothing is sacred (or above their contempt).

The story zaps along, and except for a few irritating passages, stands up well considering it was written 30 years ago. However once the conclusion arrives I felt a little let down on finding even the author fails to come up with a (satisfactory) answer.

BAGDAD by Ian Dennis, Unwin, £2.95, 210 pages, reviewed by Maureen

Porter

I seem destined to spend my life complaining about sequels. This book stopped in mid action and I only hope I will get hold of Book Two, it clearly seems to be a story divided, and as such I hate a cliffhanger. Definite shades of The Arabian Nights here, with many stories within stories but no sense of the stories being used to prolong a life or avert disaster, more to pad the novel. For all that, it is a pleasant novel, with some amusing re-interpretations of standard Oriental fairytales - check out the Genie and the Civil Servant on p162. The framing story is perhaps rather thin, the uprising led by the Ripe Fruit Party against the Caliph and its consequences, and sadly, however charismatic Zardin al-Adigrab may be to his followers, he is very much a cardboard Errol Flynn swasbuckler to me. And despite the fact that lush descriptions are highly two-dimensional, this is a light and entertaining fantasy with only a map, and no list of characters. Can't be bad.

#### RE-ISSUES

NON-STOP by Brian Aldiss. Brian's first novel, based on the idea of starship flight and generations born thereon.

CHRONICLES OF CORUM by Michael Moorcock. Second trilogy of the Corum books. Taking place after he has slain the gods so man may rule... Heroic fantasy series.

PEBBLE IN THE SKY by Isaac Asimov. Asimov's first published novel where a man from the past becomes a hero.

THREE TO CONQUER by Eric Frank Russell. How a telepath saves the world from invasion through possession of mens minds and persuades authority to believe him.

SENTINELS FROM SPACE by Eric Frank Russell. Mens colonies seek independence and may spark a war. Raven and others like him 'protect' us from a greater threat, Denebian aliens and their search.



# **Birmingham Science Fiction Group**

**MINUTES OF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING HELD ON 16 JANUARY 1987 (& 20 February)**

The meeting was opened by the Group's Legal Officer, Tim Stannard, as AGM Chairman. The official from NSPCC was unable to attend to receive the £200 donated by Fifteencon.

1) **Group Chairman's Opening Remarks:** Rog Peyton said that he could remember hardly any of the programme events from 1986, and was reminded when the Secretary provided him with a list that it had been a pretty good year! Speakers had included Anne McCaffrey, Kim Stanley Robinson, Mike Scott Rohan, Brian Aldiss and David Wingrove, Dr John Davies, etc., as well as debates and quizzes. He asked members for their continued support of the Group.

2) **Treasurer's Report:** Chris Chivers explained the Statements, with which all present were provided. Stan Eling, from the floor, asked why it had been necessary to increase the subscription. The Committee pointed out that this is only a 50p increase, after three years, and is to bring us in line with inflation and increased postage costs. It was agreed that the Committee should examine the way in which the Accounts are presented, in time for the next AGM, in order to make them more understandable to non-Accountants.

3) **Publicity Officer's Report:** Bernie Evans said that only a necessary minimum of advertising had been done during the year, mainly due to the fact that she had run out of ideas - which is why she is retiring from the position.

4) **Novacon 16 Report:** Tony Berry said that after a rather shaky start on the Friday night, and despite various problems with speakers who did not turn up, the convention had been a success. £250 had been raised at Novacon 15 by the raffle for Talking Books' version of *Mythago Wood*, to which £100 had been added by the Group. The book has now been produced, and a reader's copy and certificate from RNIB were shown. Only £150 was raised at Novacon 16 for another Book, so this was carried forward.

5) **Adoption of Reports. Treasurer:** Proposed by Laurence Miller, seconded by Pat Brown.

**Publicity:** Proposed by Pat Brown, seconded by Vernon Brown.

**Novacon 16:** Proposed by Stan Eling, seconded by Laurence Miller.

6) The 1986 Committee stood down.

7) Dave Hardy was elected as Group Chairman (proposed by Rog Peyton, seconded by Vernon Brown).

8) **Election of Committee Members:** (a) Secretary: no nomination received, and none from the floor. The Committee will (hopefully) appoint one later.

(b) Treasurer: Chris Chivers was re-elected. (Proposed by Laurence Miller, seconded by Peter Weston.)

(c) Newsletter Editor: Tony Morton was elected. (Proposed by Bernie Evans, seconded by Pauline Morgan.)

(d) Publicity Officer: no nomination received, and none from the floor. (see [a])

(e) Ordinary Committee Members: Carol Morton was elected (Proposed by Tony Morton, seconded by Bernie Evans.) One vacancy remains.

9) Confirmation of Novacon 17 Chairman: Bernie Evans has been appointed to this post: confirmed.

10) Any Other Business: Stan Eling, from the floor, asked if the Committee could confirm or deny a rumour which is circulating, to the effect that there will be no Novacon in 1988. This was due to rumoured plans for a Mexican to be held around 5-6 November, to take advantage of the arrival in the country of big-name guests of the World Fantasycon being held in Brighton at Hallowe'en in 1988. Much discussion followed (Full Minutes are available on request), but the eventual outcome was that Greg Pickersgill was approached, and stated (as a member of the original Mexican committee) that Mexican would never be held at a time to clash with Novacon.

AOB (cont'd): Vernon Brown, from the floor, proposed a motion that because Fifteencon had made a donation to the NSPCC (not an SF-orientated charity), in future any donation outside the SF field should be approved by the Group as a whole. It was pointed out that this was a 'one-off' and unlikely to occur again. The motion was seconded by Rog Peyton but discussion was deferred until the February meeting. At this the motion was amended to read ". . . must be approved by a majority vote" and carried.

AOB (cont'd): Bernie Evans proposed a Vote of Thanks to the retiring Secretary for his efforts over the last two years - producing Minutes on time each month, etc.

12) Rog Peyton proposed a Vote of Thanks to our two Presidents.

13) The 1987 AGM was concluded (in the confusion, I did not notice the time!) DA

At future AGMs, Item (1) is to be 'Minutes of last AGM'.