

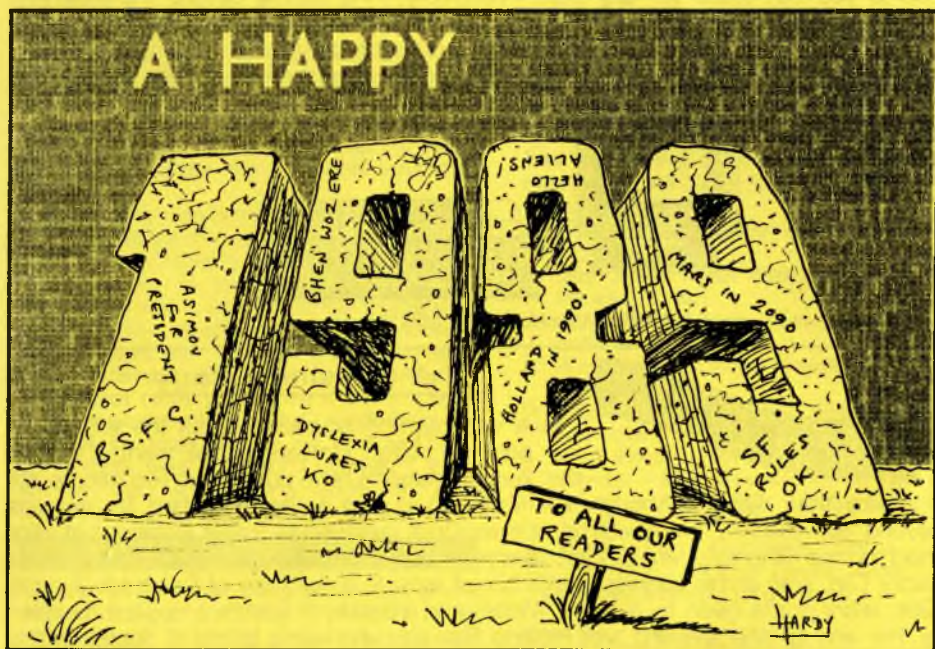
BRUM GROUP NEWS

January
1989

Issue
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The monthly Newsletter of the
BIRMINGHAM SCIENCE FICTION GROUP
(Honorary Presidents: Brian W. Aldiss and Harry Harrison)

1988 Committee: Chairman - Bernie Evans Secretary - Chris Murphy
Treasurer - David Wake Newsletter Editor - Dave Hardy Reviews Editor -
Mick Evans Publicity Officer - Andrew White Novacon 18 - Tony Berry



The BSFG meets on the third Friday of every month (unless otherwise notified) at the PENGUIN (ex LADBROKE) HOTEL, New Street, Birmingham at 8.00pm. Subscriptions for 1989-90 will be announced at the AGM.

Cheques etc. payable to the BSFG, via the Treasurer at 160 Beaumont Road, Bournville, Birmingham B30 1NY (telephone 021-451 2287)

Book Reviews to Mick Evans at 7 Grove Avenue, Acocks Green, Birmingham B27 7UY (Telephone 021-707 6606), which is also the Chairman's address.

Other contributions and enquiries to Dave Hardy, 99 Southam Road, Hall Green, Birmingham B28 0AB (telephone 021-777 1802)

This Month's Meeting is on:
Friday 20 January at 8.00pm

This Month's Programme

Admission: Free (N.B. Only
paid-up members may vote)

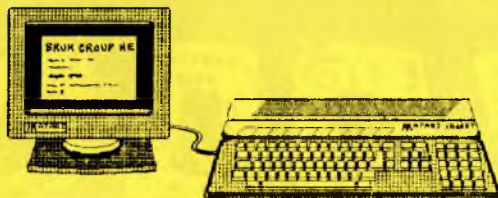
This month is the

Annual General Meeting

Yes, it's that time of year again: the meeting at which we make all the important decisions that will affect the future of the Group. It's your chance to stand for election to a Committee post, to vote for the next year's Committee, to hear (or make) proposals intended to ensure that this is the sort of Group that YOU want. So come along - or don't complain at the motions that are passed in your absence...

We still have vacancies for the posts of Publicity Officer and Treasurer; but of course you can stand for any post. Preferably, ring Bernie before the meeting.

In addition, there will be our usual Auction. Please scan your bookshelves for unwanted review copies etc. Books, posters, artwork, duplicated Christmas presents, it's all mist for the grill (or something) - otherwise there *won't* be an Auction.



A rare photograph of your Editor

Last Month

The Christmas Party

There was nothing academic about the setting for our party at Aston University last month (though the venue seems to have put one or two people off - it was their loss!). Although the Video Quiz had to be cancelled for reasons beyond our control, there was a written Quiz, supplied by Roger Robinson at very short notice (thanks), which kept everyone busy for a while. There was also a Lucky Dip, with prizes varying from a bar of soap to a portfolio of Ralph McQuarrie *Star Wars* prints (won by Andrew White) and a bottle of Scotch. Happiest member by the end of the evening was Helena Bowles, who won a bottle of Scotch in the Luck Dip - then won one in the Quiz too, and drank them both herself. (Well, perhaps not.)

Bernie promised that I would print the answers to the Quiz in this issue of the *BGN*, but unfortunately the list of answers mysteriously disappeared. Does anyone have them? Second prize in the Quiz went to Chris Morgan.

There was a good buffet, with plenty of food for all, and the drink flowed like ...drink. A good time was had by all.

NEXT MONTH: Terry Pratchett (who needs no introduction...)

NEWSFILE

News and Gossip from the world of SF, including, this month, TV and Video News and a few other items... If you have any information, don't keep it to yourself - send it in. (This does mean YOU!)

ON THE BIG & SMALL SCREEN

On the box over Christmas was *Back to the Future*, which I personally find a most enjoyable movie. *The Philadelphia Experiment* was also a story in which the characters get displaced in time - and quite well done, too.

Here's a brief plot: An old scientist makes an invention which enables things to travel through time. A boy is sent back to the USA in pre-computer times, where his actions could affect the future. He gets stuck in the past, and must get hold of a special substance to power the 'time machine'; and in order to get back to the future he has to be at exactly the right place at the right time. After meeting a few friends and enemies our hero manages to return in the nick of time.

Sounds familiar? *Back to the Future*? Well, actually, no. The boy's name is Billy Mumy (or Will Robinson), and it's from an episode of *Lost in Space* entitled 'Return from Outer Space', written 20 years earlier. Well, they say there's nothing new under the Sun (ANY sun), don't they?

As you may have noticed, Central is screening a 13-part series of *Superboy*, starring 'unknown' John Haymes Newton. I certainly didn't believe that a boy can fly when I saw that black matt line around him - and some of the Shuttle shots in the first episode were very obviously superimposed, too. If the SFX in such a series aren't believable, what's the point of it?

But what really puzzles me is that it is set in the present day. How can the juvenile Superman exist at the same time as his adult self? (Oh, it's a time warp they didn't mention?) In my opinion the whole thing would be more enjoyable in a 50s or 60s setting.

IN YOUR VIDEO LIBRARY NOW

Many of us first saw the short version of *The Wizard of Speed and Time* in Liverpool at the last Eastercon (forwards, backwards, etc.), and the full version at Novacon. It's now out on video, and well worth seeing again, with its over 200 special effects and a 'zany' script.

Also on the shelves are of course *Robocop* and *ET*, plus the new Spielberg *Batteries Not Included*: like *ET*, this is either a heartwarming story or sloppily sentimental, depending on your own attitude. Five people are due to be evicted from their block by a corrupt developer, though they hang on grimly. Unexpected help comes from a 'family' of tiny flying saucer-like creatures. *An American Tail* is now out, too.

NOTES AND NEWS

Just before the Christmas Party, Dov Rigal 'phoned me with the good news that Edward Markov (see October issue) has been allowed to leave Russia. He would go via Vienna to Israel, and probably ultimately to the USA. Dov wishes to thank everyone who wrote letters, etc., enabling this to happen.

DON'T FORGET the WordSquare published in the last issue. Entries must be in by or at this month's Meeting - to Pauline or myself. There will be a prize for the winner, and the result will be announced next month. And don't forget the **Signing Session at Andromeda** by Jonathan Wylie on 21 January at noon.

THE ANDROMEDA TOP TEN

The ten best-selling paperbacks last month at our well-known SF Bookshop were:

1. *Dr. Who: Paradise Towers* - Stephen Wyatt, Target.
2. *Star Trek: Final Nexus* - Gene de Weese, Titan.
3. *Wizard at Large* - Terry Brooks, Futura.
4. *Azure Bonds* Kate Novak & Jeff Grubb, TSR.
5. *The Sky is Filled with Ships* - Richard Meredith, Venture.
6. *Still River* - Hal Clement, Sphere.
7. *Replay* - Ken Greenwood, Grafton.
8. *Another Fine Myth* - Robert Asprin, Arrow.
9. *Mort* - Terry Pratchett, Corgi.
10. *Philip K. Dick is Dead, Alas* - Michael Bishop, Grafton.

TOP FIVE HARDCOVERS:

1. *Dragon's Dawn* - Anne McCaffrey, Bantam.
2. *Hitch Hiker's Guide to Oh Come On You Don't Really Want Me to Type the Whole Title Do You?* - David Langford, Drunken Dragon.
3. *Wyrd Sisters* - Terry Pratchett, Gollancz.
4. *Lavandys* - Robert Holdstock, Gollancz.
5. *Demon Lord of Karanda* - David Eddings, Bantam.





All books reviewed in these pages by members have been provided by the publishers, who will receive a copy of this Newsletter. Members may keep books reviewed by them (or may donate them as Raffle Prizes, or Auction Items, if feeling generous...)

Please keep reviews to under 150 words, unless instructed otherwise. Deadline for reviews: at least 2 weeks before next meeting

CLAN GROUND by Clare Bell; Grafton; 252 pages; £2.95 paperback.

Reviewed by Andy Wright.

In this rather predictable follow up to *Ratha's Creature*, Ratha is now leader of the clan of intelligent felines through her discovery of fire introduced in the first book. Her rule is complicated by several factors, not least the arrival of what could best be described as an intelligent sabretoothed tiger. In addition the keepers of the fire are forming a religion which is rapidly getting out of control. The writing style is the best attribute of the book, the actual plot and devices introduced being far too obvious. For instance one of the characters acquires a pet, amazingly, it is just what the clan needs since it has hands which the felines lack, predictably it learns quickly and is also female and pregnant. The style of the book is such that the reader can guess what is going to happen from the moment of the creature's introduction. An interesting aspect of the book is in it's tracings of a civilised society, unfortunately the predictable plot made the book disappointing.

STAR OF GYPSIES by Robert Silverberg; Futura; 400 pages; £3.99 paperback.

Reviewed by Mick Evans.

I could not help comparing this 1986 novel with a latterday Dylan album, enjoyable and familiar, but you know the heavier stuff went down earlier. Set in the far future, the idea is that the Gypsies, a race of whom Yakoub is king, populated Earth in Atlantis's time after escaping from their own star (Romany) which was temporarily hostile to life. Every Gypsy's goal is to one day return. The Gypsies have the ability to 'ghost' - move through time in wraithlike form. The rest of the human population, referred to as Gage, seem rather limited in comparison. Yakoub abdicates from the kingship and most of the book is concerned with his reflections on his earlier life and his attempt to reclaim his throne from his villainous son Shandor. Enjoyable if a little long winded, he's still a good storyteller, and if this were someone with less of a track record I may have been more impressed.

THE DEMON LORD OF KARANDA by David Eddings; Bantam; 377 pages; £11.95 h/b.

Reviewed by Carol Morton.

The *Belgariad* was one of the better fantasy series to come along for many a year, and when the idea of a sequel series was mooted about I was, to say the least, pleased and looked forward to reading it, but as the series has developed I have become more and more disenchanted with it. This new series seems to be a repeat of the *Belgariad*, with some new characters, only this time they are not chasing after the Orb but Belgarian's son. There is also a further meeting of the Child of Light and the Child of Dark in the misty future. There are a few good points in the series, notably the development of Sadi's character and the "romantic" tussle between Silk and Liselle (who has turned out to be more than she seems). There is a twist at the end of this novel that will make you sit up, and it could make the opening chapters of the next novel interesting to say the least. For that reason alone I'll read the rest in the hope that the series will come somewhere near to the quality of the *Belgariad* - but I doubt it.

DAGGERSPELL by Katherine Kerr; Grafton; 528 pages; £3.95 paperback;

Reviewed by Maureen Porter.

This is a sprawling narrative, with all the trappings of another trilogy - we don't need go into that - but for all its awkwardness there is an interesting story at the heart of the novel, namely that of Cullyn, the disinherited mercenary, his hoyden daughter, Jill, and Rhodry, disinherited prince of the realm. Magic, of course, appears - Jill possesses the mysterious dweomer skills, as does Nevyn, doomed to wander through time in an effort to atone for sins committed. The basic narrative is quite strong but the use of flashback sequences to explain Nevyn's presence in the world is done rather clumsily, and the whole book would have benefited from a stronger editorial hand. *Daggerspell* is better than many, not as good as others. I may not be dying of impatience for the second volume, but my curiosity is piqued.

MEN WENT TO CATRAETH by John James; Bantam; 237 pages; £2.55 paperback.

Reviewed by Maureen Porter.

I admit to being partisan. I've loved John James' retellings of legends and quasi-historical events since I first discovered them fifteen years ago, and the systematic reissue of these titles has finally given me the chance to say how much I enjoy them. Enjoyment was the key word with the first two titles, but a more sombre tone is apparent in *Men Went to Cattraeth*, the story of an abortive battle in which men are sacrificed to a hopeless challenge in order to preserve the life of one very important small boy, Arthur. The tone of this is almost elegaic. It moves inexorably on to the inevitable, but still shocking, conclusion. Only Anéirin the Bard survives, to tell the tale, better known to those familiar with the literature as the Gododdin. But for all that, the story is still marked with James' consummate skills as a storyteller, as ever I recommend it unreservedly.

WAR WORLD by William C. Dietz; N.E.L; 247 pages; £2.99 paperback.

Reviewed by Andy Wright.

This book is refreshingly unpretentious. The lurid cover and blurb on the back leave the reader in no doubt that the book is basically a space western complete with hard bitten hero striding through the universe gunning down the bad guys. Sam McCade is the bounty hunter who is railroaded into a mission to 'save the universe' and is the usual 'only man who can do the job'. There are the usual nasty aliens out to get him, girl for him to get, etc, etc. As space opera the book is actually very good and the somewhat cliched ingredients listed above are never what they seem so that the resolution of the story is somewhat less predictable than might be expected. All in all the book is a good bit of light reading for a wet afternoon if you don't feel like trying to handle anything too heavy.

INVOLUTION OCEAN by Bruce Sterling; Legend; 175 pages; £2.50 paperback.

Reviewed by Tony Morton.

Set on the planet Nullaqua, only inhabitable on small islands at the bottom of an immense crater, Sterling weaves a tale revolving around drug addiction (to Flare) and the journeys of John Newhouse to satiate that longing. Flare can only be extracted from 'dustwhales', so when the drug is outlawed Newhouse sets sail as cook on a whaler, to find and process his own supply. His weird experiences and adventures could be typical 18th century whalers stories transported onto an alien planet with suitably alien fauna. The story of his interrelation with the other characters binds the book, though not always successfully. The local inhabitants beliefs in 'something existing in the deeps', the curious antics of the ships captain (Desperandum, the discoverer of Flare) who supposedly studies the dustsea life, and the lovers relationship of Newhouse and Dalusa (a bat humanoid allergic to Earth-humans touch?) provide an unusual tale. All in all I felt something was missing when I finished it.

LIEGE-KILLER by Christopher Hinz; Methuen; 458 pages; £3.50 paperback.

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

This is a magnificent first novel. It may contain old ideas (a poisoned Earth and humanity surviving in orbital colonies) but it also has some totally original concepts (the Paratwa - a single being in two bodies). The Paratwa are extremely efficient killers. When one is resurrected from stasis, E-Tech (with its policy of close control over scientific development) finds its credibility rising. E-Tech's director, Rome Franco, begins to realize that this might not entirely be a good idea. The action leaps forward at a cracking pace and in such a way that the reader has the satisfaction of being one step ahead - but no further. This is a must for anyone who enjoys science fiction.

WINDMASTER'S BANE by Tom Dietz; Futura; 277 pages; £3.50 paperback.

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

This is a delightful and unusual fantasy. The trouble starts when David Sullivan develops second sight and sees the Sidhe riding through a Georgia valley. To Ailill, the Windmaster, David represents a threat to the Sidhe. Instead of leaving the boy to struggle with adolescence, he tries to coerce him into the Sidhe worlds. Fortunately, David has a champion in the form of Nuada Silverhand who, though unable to directly intervene, is able to check Ailill's efforts. In many ways, this is a story of growing up, sprinkled liberally, but not over-sweetened, with Celtic magic. Well worth reading.

THE FIRST BOOK OF LOST SWORDS: WOUNDHEALERS STORY by Fred Saberhagen; Futura; 281 pages; £3.50 paperback.

Reviewed by Steve Jones.

The first book in the third trilogy! The trend towards "trilogies of trilogies" continues relentlessly. Saberhagen writes fantasy in the same vein as Larry Niven's *The Magic Goes Away*. He defines the rules of magic, and then ruthlessly pursues the logical consequences. In analogy to 'hard S.F.', I call this 'hard fantasy'. This book continues the story of the characters from the last trilogy. Twelve gross magic swords proved too much for one trilogy, and so this was written about the spares. Its one redeeming feature is that while it has one of those irritating 'little old men' who appear, tell the dumb hero what to do next, and then disappear, it does have the only convincing explanation for this that I have ever seen.

THE SHADOW OF HIS WINGS by Bruce Fergusson; Grafton; 333 pages; £3.50 p/b.

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

Lukan Barra, the protagonist of this standard fantasy novel, is not really a hero - things just happen to him. He would much rather live a quiet life as a wood carver, but as his country's enemies come closer to the city of Castlecliff he is drafted, imprisoned, and forced to go on a quest to persuade the Erseiyr (a huge winged beast) to intervene on the right side. Although the story is well written, it does become predictable. There are some interesting passages, but not enough to make the book memorable.

SEA OF GLASS by Barry B. Longyear; Legend; 375 pages; £3.50 paperback.

Reviewed by Michael Jones.

Longyear made an impressive debut, winning three major awards in 1980 for *Enemy Mine*. This book sadly fails to live up to that early promise. The first third is a very unoriginal story about a little boy taken away from his parents because he is an illegal child in a world where repressive legislation has become necessary to control overpopulation. Up to that point there seemed to be little I had not encountered elsewhere. Then I thought it was getting better and the final third looked as though it might be going somewhere. Unfortunately, the ending is just a copout which resolves nothing and left me wondering what it had all been for. Just an average book, not really bad but not particularly good either.

THE SMOKE RING by Larry Niven; Orbit/Futura; 362 pages; \$3.95 paperback.

Reviewed by Dave Hardy.

This is of course the sequel to *The Integral Trees*, which I reviewed in 1985. It continues the adventures of the inhabitants of 'Citizen's Tree' but with added characters who describe themselves as loggers. They visit the Clump and come to grips with the Admiralty, after a brush with Happyfeet. If none of this makes sense, it is because Niven's vividly imagined environment (his most original since Ringworld) is totally unlike any other. I suppose it is inevitable that a sequel cannot have quite the impact of the original novel, but the ecology and orbital mechanics, as well as the interaction of characters, are so well drawn that the fascination remains. Niven leaves enough loose ends for a trilogy, too.. I must, however, take exception with the cover of both this and the original book; there is NO red giant star involved in the Voy/Sun/Smoke Ring system!

BRIGHT AND SHINING TIGER by Claudia J Edwards; Headline; 218 pp; £2.99 p/b.

Reviewed by Steve Jones.

Exiled sorceress Runa finds a possible haven at Silvercat Castellum, an old abandoned fortress. Both the local peasants and the Silvercat (the castle's supernatural guardian) want her to become 'mantic' (resident sorceress, but a mantic needs a 'margrave' (warrior lord). The only candidate is the unwashed barbarian Taharka. They agree to a marriage of convenience, but complications set in. Rog said during the debate that the great tide of fantasy is being bought by housewives. *Bright and Shining Tiger* supports this view, as it can be summed up as a fantasy 'Mills and Boon'. Sorceress meets barbarian, loathes him, comes to respect him, loses him, admits she loves him, happy reunion and fades to sunset. On the other hand I did quite enjoy it. Maybe my brain is overdue for its annual service.

THE VALE OF THE VOLE by Piers Anthony; N.E.L.; 287 pages; £6.95 paperback.

Reviewed by Carol Morton.

The Kiss-me river meanders through the Vale of the Vole bestowing affection and tranquility on all who drink from it. This all changes when demons dam the rivers curves, the river floods, changes its personality to become the Kill-me Lake. The voles that live in the vale send one of their number to get help in removing the demons and their dams. This is yet another in the ongoing saga of Xanth, I suppose the series is too lucrative for Mr Anthony to abandon but I wish he would. On the whole though this is marginally better than some of the previous stories in that the author seems to forget those dreadful puns every now and then and something like a good story begins to show itself, but before anything can develop, back come the puns and the story sinks under the weight of them. If you have the other 11 novels in this series (yes eleven!) and you have £6.95 to spare with nothing better to do, then buy this, otherwise don't bother.

GALACTIC EMPIRES ed by Brian Aldiss; Legend; 650 pages; £4.99 paperback.

Reviewed by Tony Morton.

This two volume paperback captures 26 short stories covering a 34 year span of SF from a variety of sources. A unique anthology preserving 'lost' or 'forgotten' stories by a spectrum of authors both famous and unknown, within the Galactic Empire/Space Opera sub genre. Tightly sectioned by Aldiss the editor, each portion is temptingly offered as wrapped, with no frills but the original blurb, presented as he feels they were envisaged - written in fun and not to be taken too literally. The anthology contains many stories I've not come across before as well as others I'm not familiar with, but overall provide some good stories within this sub-genre. The impression of how different authors handle the topic gives an insight into both the SF of the period and how it was influenced by issues of the day. A collection of authors whose imagination expanded the mind, it's all here for consumption. A good read.