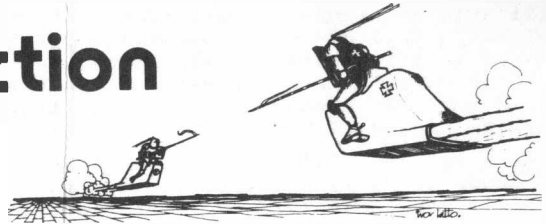


Birmingham Science Fiction Group



The Birmingham Science Fiction Group (BSFG) meets every month on the third Friday of each month. Meetings are held at the Imperial Hotel, Temple Street, Birmingham and the programme commences at 8pm. Membership is £1.50 per year (£1 after July 1st) - our Treasurer is Dave Cox, 2 Allard, Glascote, Tamworth, Staffs. Non-members always welcome. Newsletter Editor - Rog Peyton, 19 Eves Croft, Bartley Green, Birmingham B32 3QL. Assistant Editor - Steve Green.

NEWSLETTER No 85

September 1978

One thing that can be said for the August meeting is that it was certainly different! Brian Stableford's talk/lecture on "The Sociology of Science Fiction Literature" came as a complete surprise to everyone - particularly the committee who understood he was to give an informal talk on his writing career! Personally I found it almost as incomprehensible as Samuel Delany's 'talk' a couple of years ago. If you were attending your first meeting last month and are still wondering what you'd let yourself in for, let me assure you that we try to arrange talks that are normally somewhat less academic. The talk was probably a very good one as academic lectures go, but I read SF for entertainment and I worry at the seriousness of some writers and critics. Who was it who said "Get SF out of the classroom and back in the gutter where it belongs!"

Future Programme

This month, another British author makes his first visit to the Group. Colin Kapp's first novel caused quite a stir but nothing else appeared for several years and now his novels are appearing regularly. For the completists among you, here is a complete list of Colin Kapp's books:-

- 1964 THE TRANSFINITE MAN (Berkley, USA)(Corgi, UK as THE DARK MIND)
- 1972 PATTERNS OF CHAOS (Panther, UK)(Award, USA)
- 1972 THE WIZARD OF ANHARITTE (Panther, UK)(Award, USA)
- 1976 THE SURVIVAL GAME (Ballantine, USA)(Dobson, UK)
- 1977 MANALONE (Panther, UK)
- 1977 THE CHAOS WEAPON (Ballantine, USA)
- 1978 THE UNORTHODOX ENGINEERS (Dobson, UK)

Not a great output for 14 years but there are a good number of short stories that have appeared in NEW WORLDS, NEW WRITINGS IN SF, etc. His most famous work is undoubtedly the short story "Lambda One". His series of stories about the Unorthodox Engineers have been collected in one volume and hopefully the book should be published this month.

In October we will be having a visit from Robert Lionel Fanthorpe...Who? did I hear someone say? Fanthorpe is probably Britain's most prolific SF author having written something like 100 SF novels, yet few SF readers have heard of him. He's quite a character, an excellent speaker and I think I'm right in saying this will be the first time he has spoken to a science fiction group other than the Norwich SF Group of which he is the President.

Other News

BSFG President Harry Harrison will be opening the new extensions to ANDROMEDA BOOKSHOP at 11am on Saturday 23rd September. This extension is the premises adjoining the existing shop at 57 Summer Row. Harry will then be signing copies of his 2 new books - THE STAINLESS STEEL RAT WANTS YOU! and the illustrated large-format book MECHANISM. The latter is illustrated by Jim Burns who, you may remember, did the cover art for Harry's last large-format volume, GREAT BALLS OF FIRE. It is hoped that Jim Burns may also be at the opening and will also be signing copies of MECHANISM.

Bits & Pieces...STAR TREK now back on the box for the umpteenth re-run - wonder if we'll be lucky and get the three episodes never shown on UK TV?...the STAR TREK movie started shooting, complete with original cast, on August 7th...a new SF mag has appeared - ASTROV'S SF ADVENTURE MAGAZINE - large format with centrefold poster, it appears to be in the tradition of PLANET STORIES, etc...Tom Baker, star of TV's DOCTOR WHO, is to visit Solihull Rotary Club in late October - it is not yet known whether he'll travel by car or Tardis...ANDROMEDA 3, an original anthology edited by our very own Peter Weston is now out - be sure to get your copy...did you all spot the use of footage from the classic THIS ISLAND EARTH in the recent WONDER WOMAN two-parter, "Brain Stealers From Outer Space"...the regional TV series LIFE STORY, so far shown only in the West Country, featured "The Happening Worlds of John Brunner" recently - including film shot at NOVACON - anyone wanting to have it networked should try contacting the BBC...TV's BATTLE STAR GALACTICA, starring - amongst many - Lorne Greene of BONANZA and GRIFF, will probably be shown in the States as three movies - no details on UK TV release...published this month are the three volumes of Thomas Covenant the Unbeliever by Stephen Donaldson - possibly the most important publishing event in the fantasy field since LORD OF THE RINGS; all three volumes published simultaneously over here on September 15th - only volume 1 having appeared in paperback in the States...Ben Bova has resigned as editor of ANALOG in order to take over the editorship of the new PENTHOUSE science fiction magazine - it is not yet known who will replace him at ANALOG...John J Pierce has resigned as editor of GALAXY ...The SUPERMAN film will, in fact, be film, cut down the middle in very much the same way as the recent THREE MUSKETEERS/FOUR MUSKETEERS movies (which caused a lot of problems with the cast, who demanded to be paid twice for what they considered two films).

FILM PREVIEW: THE FURY by Steve Green

Perhaps the greatest fault of Brian De Palma's latest movie is that virtually everything that can be said about the murderous powers of the human psyche has already been said in his earlier CARRIE.

There can be no denying that this new study of psychic homicide is often exciting and has a fairly well-written screenplay by John Farris (adapted from his own novel), but there's still some

indefinable element missing that prevents the whole conception from getting together.

The plot is, again, quite reasonable: Government agent Peter Sandza (Kirk Douglas) has a teenage son with latent psychic abilities, a fact also known to Peter's superior, Childress (John Cassavetes). The powers locked within young Robin Sandza (Andrew Stevens) intrigue Childress who sees Peter as the only obstacle between him and the acquisition of Robin's psychic weaponry.



A fair script indeed - frequently improved by flashes of humour and characterisation...so where does THE FURY fall short? In one word: meaning. Significance. A sense of 'it should happen this way, therefore it did'...something lacking all through the film. Action, especially death, is indiscriminate and sudden leaving the viewer constantly asking themselves "why?" Without a strong link to the structure of the plot, such 'thrills' merely come off as a deliberate attempt to make the film exciting rather than actually doing so.

The film does have its many good points, however - the standard of acting throughout the cast is high, and DePalma's direction is frequently effective (especially so in the scenes where Gillian telepathically links with Robin's mind and memories) if a little unsuited.

Summing up, THE FURY is certainly worth seeing, although more as a gory horror film with elements of parapsychology than as a fully-fledged psychic thriller. More than anything else it contains vague signs of some future DePalma masterpiece (his forthcoming THE DEMOLISHED MAN perhaps?), which sadly this film is not.
(THE FURY opens in London next month)

KIRK DOUGLAS
AS
"PETER"
"THE FURY"



RED FLAME: PART 3 BY STAN ELING

Once again Red's eidetic memory saved him - he remembered looking through an ancient tome entitled CYCLOPEDIA OF PUZZLES by a Sam Loyd, in an antiquarian book shop, one time when on Earth furlough. The image of the answer to this very puzzle now came before his mind's eye and he read it off as follows, much to the crab's chagrin.

"When the ferryboats meet the first time the combined distance travelled by the boats is equal to the width of the river. When they reach the opposite shore, the combined distance is twice the width of the river; and when they meet the second time the total distance is three times the river's width. Since the boats have been moving at a constant speed for the same period of time, it follows that each boat has gone three times as far as when they first met and had travelled a combined distance of one river-width. Since the slower boat had travelled 714 yards when the first meeting occurred, its total distance at the time of the second meeting must be 3 x 714, or 2142 yards. As this distance is made up by the slower boat crossing the river once plus the 111 yards of its return trip, all we have to do is subtract the 111 yards from the total of 2142 yards to get the width of the river which is 2031 yards."

With the crab off his back, Red was able to relax and pursue his hobby of psychoceramic dating for the next couple of days till the spare part arrived. On its arrival, Red breathed a sigh of relief, fitted the part and lifted off Quata 5.

He had been in space about 6 hours when he returned to the control room after having a shower and a meal, to find that the co-ordinates on the print-out were not those which he had keyed into the system shortly after lift-off. He turned to the computer keyboard and asked why this was so - the answer which began to appear on the print-out made Red realise that his troubles so far were minor compared to what he now had to face. The fact was that there was another intelligent being on board the ship. Invisible to Red's eyes, she had boarded at Quata 5 where she had been stranded for many years. While Red had been eating she had re-set the co-ordinates and they were now bound for her home planet Ybxon.

on the other side of the galaxy. These co-ordinates were now locked into the guidance system in such a way that the computer could not alter them without a special code instruction from the Ybxonite. She could only communicate with Red via the computer, because she made no sound that was audible to a human being. Through this link she challenged him to a contest for the ownership of the vessel. She already had control and could just sit back until they got to Ybxon if she so wished, but her people were an old and honorable race and she would not take the ship unless she won it fairly. So she set a problem in the computer, the correct answer to which would unlock the co-ordinates she'd set. To gain back control of his ship, Red simply had to solve a problem (by this time he was getting used to them!). He typed his agreement into the computer and immediately the problem appeared in front of him:-

In the multiplication problem right, each P stands for a prime digit (2,3,5 or 7).
Reconstruct the problem numerically. (The answer is unique)

PPP
PP
PPPP
PPPP
PPPP

Can Red solve yet another problem and win back his ship? Is the alien really from an old and honorable race? Is there in fact an alien at all, or is it merely a computer malfunction? And if there really is an invisible alien, how does Red know it is female? Or is it in fact a female malfunction? Could it merely be Stan Eling in drag? Look out next month for further problematical female malfunctions.

BOOK REVIEWS by STEVE GREEN

THE GENESIS MACHINE by James P Hogan (Del Rey/Futura 80p) - in much the same cast as his earlier INHERIT THE STARS, although a great deal more care over characterisation and human relationships is in evidence on this occasion. Hogan's science, the core of this novel, is elaborate, overly so in some sections, though nearly always believable. He succeeds with the basic aim of the book in as much as the reader is left with the thought that even though the technology doesn't exist as yet, if it did, this would be the way that it would be used. Several sub-themes flow throughout: political use of science, paranoia doubling for security, the image of man (in this case, two men) versus the system...and winning.
Rating: 4/5

IN THE OCEAN OF NIGHT by Gregory Benford (Orbit 95p) - one of the new 'Quantum' series (each novel selected and edited by Ben Bova and Isaac Asimov). This novel centres around one scientist's fight to prevent Mankind losing - destroying - its one chance to make contact with an alien civilisation. Benford's plotting is tight, although the structure of the novel is full of clues as to its origins - short stories published between 1972 and 1977. Despite the inherent difficulties such a combination involves, he has managed the re-writing quite well, with few noticeable endings and re-beginnings evident to the average reader. The final part of the novel seems to hold more promise than the rest, making its forced imagery even more disappointing. In this particular case it appears that the searching for contact with the aliens is infinitely more interesting than the contact itself.
Rating: 3/5

STAR OF DANGER by Marion Zimmer Bradley (Arrow 80p) - another in the 'Darkover' series, this time concerning itself with star-crossing teenager Larry Bontray, who discovers his half-alien heritage while stationed on Darkover. Although never actually degenerating into format space opera, the novel rarely seems able to shake off its 'Earth kid makes good' style and dated outlook, drastically limiting its appeal.
Rating: 2/5