Birmingham Science Fiction Group

NEWSLETTER 112

DECEMBER 1980

The Birmingham Science Fiction Group meets on the third Friday of each month at The Ivy Bush pub in Hagley Road, BUT everything is different this month, with Christmas looming, so see below for details. Our treasurer is Margaret Thorpe, 36 Twyford Road, Ward End, Birmingham 8.

DECEMBER MEETING - Friday 12th December from 7.30 pm until 12.30

- At the WHITE SWAN pub in Harborne Road, Edgbaston.

- This is our XMAS PARTY, a BEER & SKITTLES evening in the White Swan's own skittle alley, which we've hired for the evening. There will be a large and filling BUFFET. The cost is £3.00 per person, and entry is by ticket only. If you haven't already got your ticket you can do so from Andromeda Bookshop. Phone up and reserve your ticket <u>NOW</u>. Because final numbers for the buffet need to be known by Wednesday 10th December, no more tickets can be sold after that.

- Remember it's the SECOND Friday from 7.30 pm, with a bar extension until 12.30.

COME ALONG: AND ENJOY YOURSELVES !!

PLEASE NOTE: there WON'T be a meeting on the THIRD Friday of December.

NOVEMBER MEETING

Julian Isaacs turned up with a great deal of impressive technical equipment designed to show electronically if anybody present had the slightest psycho-kinetic ability. He got us all to try spoon-bending, and three spoons were indeed bent during the evening --- two apparently by the mental power of ladies and one by the persuasive fingers of the Brum Group's solicitor! A fascinating evening was had by all.

FORTHCOMING.

* From January we'll be back at our regular meeting-place, THE IVY BUSH, on the corner of Hagley Road and Monument Road, Edgbaston, Birmingham 16, which has been completely renovated and redecorated.

* In mid-January Philip Jose Farmer will be in Britain for a few days, and we are trying to get him to come and speak to us.

* On Friday 16th January will be our ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING, including the election of committee members for 1981. (See page 3 for details of the committee jobs.) Nominations are required now. There will also be an AUCTION that evening, so start sorting out your unwanted books, magazines, etc. This is the one meeting of the year with FREE ENTRY.

* In February our speaker will be KEN SLATER, who's been selling SF books for 30 years and involved with SF fandom for even longer.

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 WORLD FANTASY AWARD winners for 1980 were announced
at the recent World Fantasy Convention in Baltimore, Maryland. These were: Life Achievement - Manly Wade

Wellman; Best Novel - Watchtower by Elizabeth A.Lynn; Best Short Story -(tie) "The Woman Who Loved the Moon" by Elizabeth A.Lynn; Best Short Story tosh Willy" by Ramsey Campbell; Best Anthology / Collection - Amazons edited by Jessica Amanda Salmonson; Best Artist - Don Maitz; Special Award (professional) - Donald M.Grant; Special Award (non-professional) - Paul Allen.

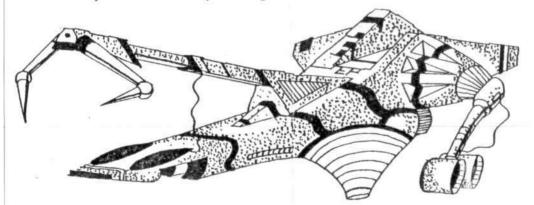
GALAXY magazine has folded after thirty years of existence. The publisher doesn't even have enough money to mail out copies of the last issue to subscribers. It is hoped that the magazine can be sold to another publisher. Galileo magazine, owned by the same publisher, has also folded.

DOUGLAS ADAMS will be signing copies of his new book <u>The Restaurant at</u> the End of the Universe in Birmingham on Tuesday 9th December. The signing session will be at Willie's Wine Bar in Summer Row, next door to the Andromeda Bookshop, between 5.30 and 7.30 pm. Andromeda will be open until at least 7.30 to allow you to buy a copy of the book that evening. <u>The Restaurant at the End of the Universe</u> is reviewed later in this month's newsletter.

PETER JONES will be signing copies of his magnificent new book <u>Solar</u> Wind (a large-format paperback of full-colour artwork) at the same time and place as Douglas Adams. <u>Solar Wind</u> is reviewed later in this issue.

BIRTHS: we had hoped to be able to announce in this issue that your treasurer had given birth to a litter of kittens. However, much to Malcolm's relief, Margaret Thorpe produced a 71b 15oz girl on 1st December. She'll be called Helen. Mother, baby and father all seem to be doing well. Congratulations from the whole Brum Group. (Those of yow who attended the November meeting may recall that Michael Guest dowsed the baby as a girl. ESP rides again!)

BIRMINGHAM SCIENCE FICTION FILM SOCIETY's December programme will be om the SECOND Sunday of the month. That's December 14th, at 11.00 am at the Arts Lab cinema in Holt Street. The films are <u>Dark Star</u>, Flash <u>Gordon's Rocket Ship</u> and <u>Hardware Wars</u>. In January there won't be a film programme but there will be a Film Society A.G.M., on the evening of Friday 9th January at The Ivy Bush, Hagley Road. In just under a year's time the Film Society are putting on FILMCON 81, a convention dedicated to SF, fantasy and horror films. That will be over the weekend of 27-29th November 1981, at Birmingham's Grand Hotel. There'll be more films than you could possibly want to see over a single weekend, plus speeches, displays, a famous guest-of-honour and many other attractions. Attending membership is only £10. Details available from Chris Smith, 49 Humber Tower, Francis Street, Birmingham B7 4JX.



... Nellis

The Birmingham Science Fiction Group has the following vacancies:

1. Dynamic, artistic person wanted to act as CHAIRMAN. Must have a sufficiently forceful personality to whip the committee into life and to keep order at meetings. Must be willing to write hundreds of begging letters each year to authors, publishers and scientists, urging them to come and speak to the group.

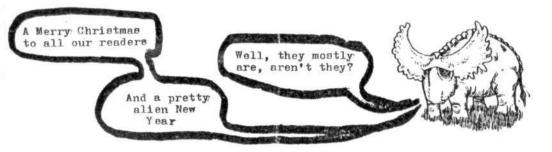
2. Energetic incomniac with strong fingers required for post of NEWS-LETTER EDITOR. Ability to read and write an advantage. Duties include personal delivery of all newsletters simultaneously.

3. Shorthanded typist, preferably male or female, wanted as SECRETARY. Ability to stay awake during committee meeting is a considerable advantage. Responsibilities include addressing hundreds of envelopes each month (most of them as "sir") and similar boring things.

4. Person able to count above ten needed to fill post of TREASURER. Successful applicants are not necessarily required to reproduce themselves during the year, though any such gimmicks aimed at increasing the number of members are encouraged. Must be able to keep the group solvent.

5. Male or female of great organisational ability wanted to pose nearly naked on a float in the Lord Mayor's Procession and act as PUBLICITY OFFICER. Must be willing to bully the media and to provide maximum exposure (for the group, of course).

This is <u>not</u> a subtle way of informing you that your committee is resigning en bloc, but just a reminder that at our A.G.M. in January there will be free and fair elections for all committee posts. If YOU are interested in filling any of these posts during 1981 please make your intentions known to any current committee member, preferably (though not essentially) in writing, with a named proposer. A little bit of competition at election time makes things more exciting and prevents people like me from becoming complacent about re-election.



ANDROMEDA BOOKSHOP's top ten best selling paperbacks for November were: 1. The Road to Science Fiction vol 3 From Heinlein to Here edited by James Gunn, 2. The Wounded Land - Stephen Donaldson, 3. Profundis - Richard Cowper, 4. Prison of Night (Dumarest 17) - E.C. Tubb, 5. Wyst: Alastor 1716 - Jack Vance, 5. Homeworld - Harry Harrison, 7. Star Rigger's Way -Teffrey A.Carver, 8. Superfolks - Robert Meyer, 9. The Sword and the Satchel - Elizabeth Boyer, IO. Dragonworld - Byron Preiss & J. Michael Reaves. The top seller for December must be (from advance orders alone) The Restaurant at the End of the Universe - Douglas Adams.

KATHERINE KURTZ

an article by Pauline E.Morgan

On Monday 17th November members of the Brum Group and customers of Andromeda Bookshop were invited to meet Katherine Kurtz, author of the Deryni books. Katherine is a charming blonde who, until two months ago, worked for the Los Angeles Police Department as a technical writer. Because of the success of her books her accountant advised her to resign from the police and write fiction full time. Hopefully this decision will give us less of a wait between her books.

At present she has five volumes in print (published by Ballantine Del Rey and distributed in Britain by Futura). The first three, <u>Deryni</u> <u>Rising, Deryni Checkmate and High Deryni</u>, are a trilogy set against a background of religion and forbidden magic, in a fantasy world analogous to 13th century Europe. <u>Camber of Culdi</u> and <u>Saint Camber</u> are set against the same background two centuries earlier, when the Deryni magic was more openly used. The third volume in this trilogy, <u>Camber the Heretic</u>, is due for publication in Spring 1981.

is due for publication in Spring 1981. Katherine was brought up as a Presbyterian, but after having allowed this side of her life to lapse during her college years was drawn, first by the aesthetic and ritual side, and later by the philosophy, to Roman Catholicism. She is now a Catholic, and her deep understanding of her faith shows in the brilliant ordination scenes of <u>Saint Camber</u>. Her books are richer for this.

Katherine is planning a third Deryni trilogy, but is currently researching for a non-fantasy novel set against the background of World War II. She says there will be an occult twist at the end, though. Her editor insists that it must be published under a male pseudonym, because war books written by women---especially by women fantasy-writers---don't sell well. (I'll let you know what the pseudonym is as soon as I hear.)

When she is at home, Katherine lives with three cats and two dogs, and has a horse in her back yard. Her present house is haunted by the ghost of a small black Scottie dog, which she has glimpsed several times at the edge of her field of view. This and several other strange experiences have given her a great interest in the supernatural.

Unfortunately, Katherine's schedule ruled out the possibility of her speaking to us all at a regular Brum Group meeting, but I am sure that those who met her will agree that her brief visit to Birmingham was worthwhile. She will be very welcome whenever she can return.

CONVENTION NEWS

FANDERSONCON 81 Mar 27-29 at the Dragonara Hotel, Leeds. This is mainly concerned with all the Gerry Anderson puppet SF series made for TV. Attending membership £6. Contact Pamela Barnes, 88A Thornton Avenue, Chiswick, London W4 199.

- YORCON II Apr 17-20 at the Dragonara Hotel, Leeds. G-o-h Ian Watson, Thomas M.Disch. Fan g-o-h Dave Langford. This is the BSFA Easter convention: Britain's oldest and biggest. Membership: supporting £3, attending £6. Contact Graham James, 12 Fearnville Terrace, Oakwood, Leeds IS8 3DU.
- FAIRCON '81 Jul 24-27 at the Ingram Hotel, Glasgow. G-o-h John Brunner. Membership: supporting £4, attending £6. Contact Faircon c/o 200 Woodlands Road, Glasgow G3 6IN.
- BECCON 81 Jul 31-Aug 2 at the Essex Centre Hotel, Basildon. G-o-h Barrington J.Bayley. Membership: supporting £2, attending £5. Contact The Beccon Committee, c/o 191 The Heights, Northolt, Middlesex UB5 4BU.

- STUCON Aug 14-16 in Stuttgart, West Germany. G-o-h Marion Zimmer Bradley, artist g-o-h David Hardy. Attending membership DM20 until Jan 31, DM30 thereafter. If anybody's interested in going to this one, please get in touch with Brum Group chairman David Hardy at a meeting or at 99 Southam Road, Hall Green, Birmingham B28 OAB.
- AUCON 81 Aug 29-31 at the De Vere Hotel, Coventry. A Star Trek convention with guests including Nichelle Nicholls, Mark Lenard, George Takei and Grace Lee Whitney. Attending membership £12.50. Contact Janet Hunt, 54 Foxhunter Drive, Oadby, Leics.
- UNICON 2 Sep 11-14 at Keele University. G-o-h John Sladek. Membership: supporting £3, attending £5.50. Contact Chris Davenport, Bridge End, Shawbury, Shrewsbury, Salop.
- NOVACON: 11 There will be one. Details will be announced shortly, and a copy of the first progress report will be sent to all those who registered for Novacon 10.
- FILMCON 81 Nov 27-29 at the Grand Hotel, Birmingham. This is being run by the Birmingham Science Fiction Film Society, and the accent is on SF, fantasy and horror films. Various people named Dave Holmes are, at this very minute, trying to persuade a Famous Film Star to become g-o-h. Membership: supporting £5, attending £10. Contact Chris Smith, 49 Humber Tower, Francis Street, Birmingham B7 4JX.



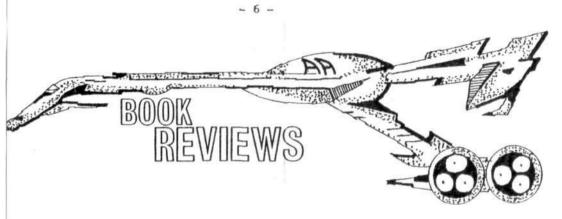
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a view from Alan Cash

The best way to get a drink out of a Vogon is to stick your fingers down his throat, and perhaps one of the best ways to attract the eye of a barmaid at Novacon 10 was to walk a clockwork R2D2 along the top of the bar, that's if it didn't slide in the wash of upset beerl I have heard that the success of a convention is judged not only on the guests and programme but on the amount of booze gulped down during the course of the proceedings. Most of the time the world and his green-skinned wife seemed to be clustered round the bar.

This was my first convention of any kind. It was remarkably well run (what was I expecting?). One grouse, though. A new (?) game called "Hunt the Art Room" was in full swing. Have you ever tried carrying an alien microbe, one spacecraft and two halves of a spaceship control room through two lots of double doors, into a very small lift which has cannibalistic tendencies, up a short flight of stairs, through a packed bar with bodies already underfoot, through a restaurant and down two floors in another cannibalistic lift? It's FUN, isn't it? However, the greeting at the end of the journey was courteous and helpful to say the least, especially that of a Fine "Gopher" (yes, there is a pun in there somewhere)----marvellous invention, the "Gopher". There were some magnificent paintings on show, not least those of our home-grown David Hardy.

The thing that impressed me the most was how friendly everyone was (the beer, perhaps?). I'd better grind to a halt here. I expect the editor will trim it a bit so that it ends up "mostly harmless". One final word---to all self-appointed critics and Frank Hampson aficionados: I do know how many words in this are not mine. You want a bibliography yet?



SOLAR WIND by Peter Jones, Paper Tiger £5.25, 92 pages

Reviewed by Chris Morgan. Over the last seven years Peter Jones has produced some of the most startling and original cover art to appear on British SF books. Almost 100 pieces are reproduced here in full colour. His most familiar trademark is the exaggerated human figure---either male or female----which parodies older SF artwork. His range of subjects seems limitless; he tackles heroic fantasy scenes, aliens, planetscapes and space hardware with equal success and attention to detail. A flair for futuristic design combines with an imaginative use of colour to produce complex, exciting pictures. Stephen Bayley's introduction is both pretentious and ignorant, but the artwork is superb.

THE RESTAURANT AT THE END OF THE UNIVERSE by Douglas Adams, Pan 95 pence, Reviewed by Pauline E.Morgan. This continues the narrative of the radio series <u>The Hitch-Hiker's</u> <u>Guide to the Galaxy</u>, begun in the book of that name. The outrageous wit carries an almost non-existent plot as the main characters ricochet across time and space. The humour dies away towards the end. It should, like the radio show, be taken in small weekly doses.

THE MIGHTY MICRO by Christopher Evans, Coronet £1.50, 255 pages Reviewed by Malcolm Thorpe. Read this TV series tie-in if you want to know all about the silicon chip revolution. It covers the history and present trends of computing, then extrapolates a future society featuring micro-computers in many forms. The computer buff will also find it useful, as it attempts to clarify the issue of artificial intelligence. I found the author overenthusiastic, and some of his ideas contradictory, though the silicom chip's importance cannot be over-emphasised.

THE AWAKENING by Ronald Chetwynd-Hayes, Magnum £1.25, 224 pages Reviewed by David C.Holmes. Based on Bram Stoker's <u>The Jewel of the Seven Stars</u>, this story was used by Hammer for the film <u>Blood From the Mummy's Tomb</u> in 1971. Each adaptation gets worse. By the time we get to this film novelisation it has become utter rubbish.

LADY OF THE HAVEN by Graham Diamond, Magnum £1.50, 382 pages Reviewed by Margaret Thorpe. A well-written fantasy novel with credible characters and a fastmoving storyline. Stacy, Princess of the Empire (for a change, the heroine is <u>not</u> a busty sword-wielding female Conan) leads an expedition overseas to increase the Empire's territories. She is accompanied by allies of the Empire, including the leader of a pack of intelligent wolves. Note that the cover blurb is totally inaccurate. THE GREY MANE OF MORNING by Joy Chant, Bantam distributed by Corgi £4.95, 332 pages Reviewed by Pauline E.Morgan.

This mature fantasy novel is compulsive reading, set quite some time before <u>Red Moon and Black Mountain</u> (Joy Chant's earlier, juvenile novel), but in the same fantasy world. She tells of the events that lead to the change in relationship between the Horse People and the Golden People, the former having always willingly given tribute to the latter. Their contrasting societies and mores are interwoven delicately with the plot. The characters are all real people, and the storytelling is superb. Well worth reading.

AMBULANCE SHIP by James White, Corgi £1.25, 224 pages

Reviewed by Chris Morgan. Once more the familiar, good-hearted medics (some human, some alien) of James White's hospital in space embark upon a series of adventures. The mixture is as before, with the plots being exercises in medical detection. The object each time is to identify increasingly bizarre sentient aliens and cure them of their ailments. Collectors should note that this edition includes one story more than the US paperback.

THE EARTH BOOK OF STORMGATE - 2 by Poul Anderson, NEL £1.00, 159 pages Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

Don't let the title confuse you: this is <u>War of the Wing-Men</u>, Anderson's often-reprinted novel from 1958 in which Nicholas van Rijn sorts out some uppity flying aliens. It's a good story, and is already in print as a British paperback from Sphere Books.

GALACTIC WARLORD by Douglas Hill, Piccolo 80 pence, 127 pages Reviewed by Chris Smith.

Keill Randor is out on his own, with a bad case of radiation poisoning. Life is hard for this legionary as his hunt for the person who destroyed his home world takes him from one end of the galaxy to the other. This is intended for children, and brings to mind a certain Perry Rhodan. Good stuff for kids.

GALACTIC CLUSTER by James Blish, Granada £1.25, 255 pages; MISSION TO THE HEART STARS by James Blish, Granada 95 pence, 127 pages

Reviewed by Chris & Pauline Morgan. <u>Galactic Cluster</u> is an importent collection of 6 hard-science stories, including "Common Time" (about relativity), "Beep" (about interstellar communication, and Later expanded into the novel <u>The Quincunx of Time</u>) and the novella "Beanstalk" (about artificially bred giant humans, this is half of the novel <u>Titan's Daughter</u>). Recommended. <u>Mission to the</u> <u>Heart Stars</u> (the sequel to <u>The Star Dwellers</u>) is a short novel for young people, with the message that the human way of life is best if we work at it. The main characters travel to the centre of the galaxy, but nothing really happens.

"No, officer. I'm just hanging around until Douglas Adams gets here."



NOT TO MENTION CAMEIS by R.A.Lafferty, Dobson £5.25, 215 pages Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

"But there are no other people!... There are a dozen or so people. That is all. And they are repeated billions and billions of times." And to prove it R.A.Lafferty follows a chain of deaths and reincarnations across several worlds. Superhuman archetypes reappear; only their names have been slightly changed. In his typical, inimitable fashion Lafferty depicts cult-creation and apocalypse. There is truly exciting writing here; there is torture and dismemberment; there are also over-long discussions of dismaying depth. Recommended if you enjoy a difficult read.

THE ALTORAN CREED by Terrence Cockburn, Dobson £5.25, 233 pages Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

A colony planet is populated by rampant feminists who treat men as second-class citizens and are disgusted by the mention of heterosexuality. But a young, strong, handsome, amazingly intelligent hero (who even has flashes of psi power) upsets the system. There's quite a lot of action in this wish fulfilment fantasy, but a conspicuous lack of subtlety.

RODERICK by John Sladek, Granada £6.95, 348 pages

Reviewed by Chris Morgan. John Sladek attempts to show that a robot can (despite its metal body) grow up mentally and go to school like a human boy. The attempt is never wholly successful, yet the novel is intricate and brilliant, with superb examples of black comedy as the author satirises everything in sight. Too many zany characters reappear briefly every fifty pages or so, fragmenting the narration and defying the reader to remember where they fit in. This is a novel full of snippets: individually they are mostly very good; in such profusion they eventually become tiresome.

THE STAR-CROSSED by Ben Bova, Magnum £1.25, 224 pages

Reviewed by Vernon Brown. To restore the sagging ratings of his 3D TV network, Bernard Finger decides to produce "Romeo & Juliet in Outer Space"---which precis sets the tone of a novel about a society with earthquake-avoiding rocket skyscrapers, perfumed pink smog and new bodies for old. Not straight enough to grip or comic enough to amuse, this is definitely not one of Bova's best.

ONCE UPON A GALAXY: A Journal of the Making of THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK by Alan Arnold, Sphere £1.25, 277 pages Reviewed by Dave Hardy. There is so much 'spin-off' from STAR WARS (and other big SF movies); from Production Art Portfolios to Yoda's Book of Yoga (?). What can ome say about yet another addition except that if you are one of the many people who thirst after every intimate detail of the making of this film and its actors, you can't miss this one...

Editorial Notes

As another year prepares to bite the dust I'd like to thank all those who've helped to make my task a little easier: reviewers, articlewriters, artists and, not least, the twenty-two publishers who have been good enough to send review copies. Artwork this issue is by Ivor Latto (p.1), Phill Probert (pp.2 & 6) and Euan Smith (pp.3 & 7). The fancy titling was done by Rog Peyton. News items were, as usual, culled from Locus. My "Nelson" reference last month foxed you all. It referred to the newsletter number, 111. That, as all those who've ever listened to cricket commentaries on the radio should know, is known as "Nelson"----a dreaded score at which England traditionally loses a wicket. You're lucky I can't think of anything equally erudite and boring about the number 112. Season's greetings from Chris Morgan, 39 Hollybrow, Selly Oak, B'ham 29.