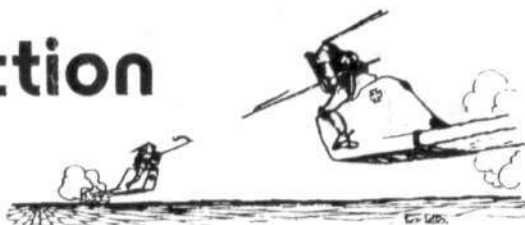


Birmingham Science Fiction Group

(Honorary Presidents: Brian W. Aldiss and Harry Harrison)



NEWSLETTER 119

JULY 1981

The Birmingham Science Fiction Group has its formal meeting on the third Friday of each month in the upstairs room of THE IVY BUSH pub on the corner of Hagley Road and Monument Road, Edgbaston, Birmingham 16. There is also an informal meeting on the first Tuesday of each month at THE GAIETY pub, on the corner of Church Street and Barwick Street, Birmingham 3 (just round the corner from the Grand Hotel). New members are always welcome. Our treasurer is Margaret Thorpe, 36 Twyford Road, Ward End, Birmingham 8. The 12-month subscription is £3.50.

JULY MEETING - Friday 17th July 1981 at 7.45 pm

ASK THE EXPERTS - a panel of experts (most of whom may be fairly well known to you) will answer questions on any aspect of SF or fantasy. We hope this will be informative and entertaining and will give you a chance to participate by putting questions or arguing your point of view. (And because we won't have to pay expenses to a speaker it'll only cost you 30p to get in, and 60p for non-members.) Come along with the questions you've always wanted to know the answers to, but have been afraid to ask! Also at this month's meeting we'll be dividing up the remains of the 10th Anniversary birthday cake. Come along and have a bit.

JUNE MEETING

Hugh Walters gave us a very polished and amusing talk about the way in which he came to start writing SF. For more details see the article on page 3. The meeting made a healthy profit (for once). Expenses were: Room Hire £15.00, Speaker's Expenses £2.50, Raffle Prize £1.50 = £19.00. Income was: Entrance Money £21.60, Raffle Ticket Sales £7.30 = £28.90.

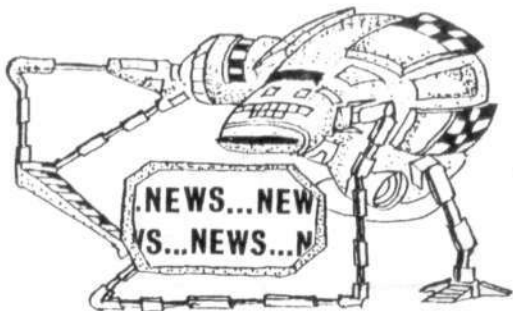
FORTHCOMING

* On Friday 21st August at 7.45 pm (at The Ivy Bush) there will be a fairly brief Extraordinary General Meeting of the BSFG. This will be to discuss and vote on the proposal that: "That part of the Birmingham Science Fiction Group known as the Birmingham Science Fiction Film Society be disbanded, its debts (if any) paid off by the BSFG and its accounts closed." Proposed by: Pauline E. Morgan. Seconded by: Malcolm Thorpe. Following the vote we will proceed with our August speaker - Diana Reed on radio science fiction, illustrated by tape recordings.

* September - Bob Shaw and Dave Hardy talking about their galactic summer holiday.

* October - a speaker from The Aetherius Society.

* November - the very first weekend of the month (Oct 30th-Nov 1st) brings yet another Novacon, the eleventh annual beanfeast of that name. If you've been before you'll want to go again. If you haven't been, ask for details at any Brum Group meeting or at Andromeda Bookshop. Guest-of-honour is Bob Shaw. The place is Birmingham's Royal ^{Angus} Hotel. Attending membership will cost you only £5.50. Contact Jean Frost, 49 Humber Tower, Francis Street, Birmingham B7 4JX.



ISAAC ASIMOV has been persuaded to write a fourth novel in the Foundation series, and he has actually signed a contract with US publishers Doubleday to produce the book. Its working title is reported to be Lightning Rod.

DARK THEY WERE..., London's oldest established SF bookshop, run by "Bram" Stokes, has got into financial difficulties and will be closing down at the end of July.

BABEICON has been cancelled. It will be replaced by a one-day Hitch Hiker's gathering in London on 8th August, entitled Slartibart Day. I'd like to be able to tell you all how to get in touch with the organisers, but despite a couple of phone calls I've been unable to find out.

ANDROMEDA SIGNING SESSIONS: Frank Herbert rushed along to Willie's Wine Bar on 3rd July, signed large piles of assorted Dunes, and rushed away again. Just like his photographs, he was heavily bearded and didn't say much. He has the interesting habit of crossing out his printed name before scrawling his signature inside a book. John Norman, who was to have been signing Gor books on 11th July, has had to cancel.

ANDROMEDA BOOKSHOP's top ten best selling paperbacks for June were:
1. The Ringworld Engineers - Larry Niven, 2. The Snow Queen - Joan D. Vinge, 3. Wheelworld - Harry Harrison, 4. Songmaster - Orson Scott Card, 4. One Step From Earth - Harry Harrison, 6. Master of the Five Magics - Lyndon Hardy, 7. The Face - Jack Vance, 7. Homeworld - Harry Harrison, 9. Who Goes Here? - Bob Shaw, 10. Black Easter / The Day After Judgement - James Blish, 10. The Space Machine - Christopher Priest, 10. The Stainless Steel Rat Wants You - Harry Harrison.

SOLIHULL SF GROUP still meets on the second Friday of each month at the Mason's Arms pub in High Street, Solihull. Will the plug for them in a recent issue of the Solihull News bring a rush of new members? Go along and find out.



BRUM GROUP INFORMAL MEETINGS are now firmly established at The Gaiety pub on the corner of Church Street and Barwick Street, just round the corner from Birmingham's Grand Hotel. That's on the first Tuesday of every month. Any time from 6.00pm onwards.

BRUM GROUP 10TH ANNIVERSARY PARTY

Just in case you're one of the two or three Brum Group members who didn't attend, you'll be glad to know that everything went well. Just over 160 people attended, from all over the country, including some who hadn't attended a Brum Group meeting or a Novacon for several years. The high point of the evening was Brian Aldiss's unmasking of the group's former and current chairmen. The ambience was close to that of the early Novacons, and by Sunday morning people were beginning to ask if they could book up for the group's 11th Anniversary party!

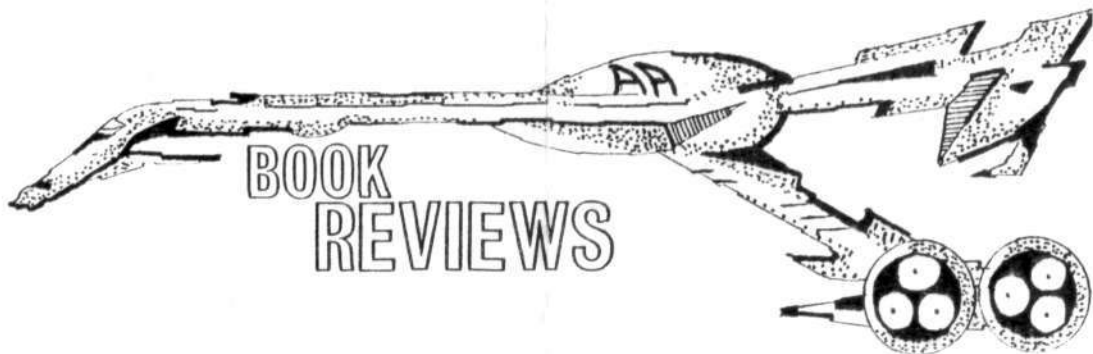
HUGH WALTERS an article by Pauline E.Morgan

Walter Hughes was born in Bilston, West Midlands, in 1910. Hugh Walters came into existence only about twenty-five years ago.

Walter Hughes had an urge to write while still very young, but his early attempts were held up to ridicule, a process which "cured" him of wanting to be a writer---at least for a while. Instead he became an engineer, a husband and a father. A relapse occurred after he, as a member of the British Interplanetary Society, was persuaded to give a talk on space travel to his fellow Rotarians. The talk was not a success, because 26 years ago most of his audience considered his predictions mere flights of fancy. However, a local librarian, after reading a write-up of the talk in the local newspaper, thought Walter Hughes must be an expert on science fiction, and he was invited to talk to children at the library.

Thinking that as an "expert" he ought to know something about the subject, Walter Hughes did some research. Then he wrote an SF novel for children. He did this secretly. His earlier experiences had made him wary of writing in public, so he did it at breakfast time when no-one was looking, and worked on his plot while out walking the dog. He even had all correspondence connected with the novel sent to him at work. With the help of a literary agent and of a director at the publishers Faber & Faber---who made him rewrite it---that novel, Blast-Off at Woomera, was published in 1957. Not until the book was in print did Walter Hughes confess to his family.

The career of Hugh Walters, SF author, was thus launched, and he has now had about twenty juvenile SF novels published. One of the tasks he had quite early in that career was to translate Blast-Off at Woomera into American. It was published in the U.S.A. as Blast-Off at 0300, set not in Australia but in America. Hugh Walters does not like SF that is set too far in the future or which breaks current physical laws. He goes to a lot of trouble to make his books technically accurate. He sees two main reasons for writing SF: firstly to get children reading and to hold their interest so that they will read more, and secondly to give them scientific information in an entertaining way. He often talks to children in schools and libraries, and he gave an excellent talk to the Brum Group at our June meeting. He was to have ended the evening with a slide show, but the projector bulb failed at the last moment and instead he gave us an impromptu account of his trip to Cape Kennedy to see one of the Apollo launches.



THE BLOODY CHAMBER by Angela Carter, Penguin £1.95, 126 pages

Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

Angela Carter's second volume of stories is set in that ill-defined hinterland of horrific fantasy, though their outrageous brilliance causes them to transcend the exercise of labelling and the limitations of genres. What the author has done is to take certain familiar fairy tales and rewrite them for our own times in a manner which is at once menacing, touching, bawdy and, above all, redolent with decadence and decay. She imbues the tired cliches of poor but honest young girls, rich princes, talking cats and wolves in forests with a vitality they never previously possessed. The cruelly moral world of the fairy tale is opened up to display vampires, werewolves and other monsters, frequently motivated by lust.

HEROES AND VILLAINS by Angela Carter, Penguin £1.95, 151 pages

Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

The difference between heroes and villains is one of perspective. In this poetic post-holocaust novel Angela Carter most delicately twists the reader's sympathies. Teenaged Marianne, bored at living with professors and soldiers in a walled camp where some technology has been retained, escapes to live the simple life with Jewel and other barbarians in the mutated forests. She is an innocent, though an intelligent and highly articulate one. Angela Carter is possibly the most original and gifted of all contemporary writers. Most of the characters in Heroes and Villains (as in her other works) are believable unpleasant, and their interactions manage to achieve both a dreamlike quality and a brutal realism. Heroes and Villains is an irresistible book.

THE SAILOR ON THE SEAS OF FATE by Michael Moorcock, Granada 95p, 190pp

Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

Elric, more melancholy than ever, undergoes three adventures in linked novelettes, the volume having been published earlier by Quartet. The first story is notable for bringing together all four of Moorcock's great heroes---Elric, Erekoze, Corum and Hawkmoon. The third story was, in slightly different form, originally entitled The Jade Man's Eyes. Not the best of the Elric saga but still more intelligently written than most heroic fantasy.

THE WAR LORD OF THE AIR by Michael Moorcock, Granada 95p, 156 pages

Reviewed by Anne Gay.

John Carter meets Fu Manchu. More precisely, an officer of the Raj, mysteriously transported forward to another 1973, first abhors and then aids a Chinese warlord to overthrow arrant colonialism. Does he succeed? You'll have to wait for books 2 and 3. Moorcock mockery seeps through---aimed at his characters or his readers; it's difficult to tell. Grippingly told, richly described. Recommended.

HOTEL TRANSYLVANIA by Chelsea Quinn Yarbro, NEL £1.25, 279 pages

Reviewed by Pauline E. Morgan.

This book has a lot of charm. It is an historical romance set in the Paris of 1744, revolving around Le Comte de Saint-Germain, who was a real character but a mysterious one. He is portrayed as a wealthy, elegant courtier, as an alchemist who claims to have been old in Caesar's Rome. Ms Yarbro has built upon the rumours which surrounded Saint-Germain, and has introduced a fresh view of vampirism. This is not principally a horror novel despite some scenes being vividly horrific. The narrative is well told, being interspersed with letters written by several characters, giving greater insight into their personalities. This is the first of a series; I look forward very much to the next three volumes.

THE DOOR INTO FIRE by Diane Duane, Magnum £1.50, 304 pages

Reviewed by Margaret Thorpe.

Ignore the awful cover and even worse introduction, because this is an excellent first novel. The background is similar to Marion Zimmer Bradley's Darkover novels, but the psychic element is genuine sorcery. Herwie is the first male in centuries to possess magical talents, but he cannot use them until he finds a focus for his powers. His search leads him to an alliance with a Fire Elemental, and to a difficult choice between his quest and the interests of his friend and lover.

THE DRAGON PATHS and SKY FLEET OF ATLANTIS by Frena Bloomfield, Eel Pie £1.25 each, 118pp and 148pp

Reviewed by Margaret Thorpe.

There are refreshingly new ideas, involving fantasy and SF, in these books for the younger reader (though not just for children). The Dragon Paths, especially, is reminiscent of the fantasy novels of Abraham Merritt, but with an individual stamp of its own. The author appears to be widely travelled, and the oriental background seems very authentic. Tomi and his mother are so poor that he takes on a dangerous job as guide to two European knights who want to capture a dragon, and in so doing he finds both wealth and happiness. The telepathy aspect is particularly well handled, and the dragons are highly original. While The Dragon Paths is a fairly simple story for a mainly juvenile audience, Sky Fleet of Atlantis is aimed at older readers and provides faster-paced action in a more complex plot. Again, the ideas and style are refreshingly different. The fiercely loyal sky fleet is threatened by the evil Lord of Atlantis. Taula, a young man in the fleet, shows his strength and courage when he is caught up in the rebellion to overthrow the True Lord.

MASTER OF THE FIVE MAGICS by Lyndon Hardy, Ballantine distributed by Futura £1.50, 373 pages

Reviewed by Margaret Thorpe.

This should have been an interesting novel, but it became as dry as the dust on library shelves. After the first chapter the characters' faults become predictable and irritating as Alodar strives to become the magicians' equivalent of a Black Belt in order to win the fair lady. But by the end of the book who cares? Some incidental interest was provided by the definitions of the various disciplines and laws of magic.

VISITANTS by Randolph Stow, Picador £1.95, 183 pages

Reviewed by Ian Watson.

A prize-winning novel by an anthropological linguist, partly inspired by a UFO event in Papua? My cup of tea, I thought! Alas, it is dull and pretentious, aiming to be mutely arty but reading like a poor translation from the Papuan. Others have thought otherwise, describing it as "subtle, profound and exciting." I think the material is all wasted, in merely being clever with it. I gave up on the book. The cover is seductively beautiful.

THE IRISH LEPRECHAUN'S KINGDOM by Peter Haining, Granada £2.95, 128pp
Reviewed by Colm Maguire.

"Beyond all doubt, surely, Ireland is a place of the fantastic," says Peter Haining in his introduction to this large format paperback. He describes each of Ireland's little people, spirit creatures and mythical monsters in turn, introducing a story from fiction or folklore about each. So here are fairies of different kinds, and giants, and banshees. And even mermaids, vampires and werewolves, too. All of these (as well as some of the phantom parts of Ireland, such as Tir-Nan-Og) are well illustrated by black & white pictures from a variety of early sources. Another well researched volume from Peter Haining, and particularly good value.

THE ROAD OF COURAGE - The Story of Jesus of Nazareth illustrated by Frank Hampson, written by Marcus Morris, Dragon's Dream £3.95, 56 pp
Reviewed by Dave Hardy.

What, you may ask, is a bible story doing amongst the review pages? (One well-known committee member suggested that I should review it as fantasy...) The point is, of course, that the illustrator is Frank Hampson, better known for his Dan Dare strips in *Eagle*, where this strip also appeared. The story is highly fictionalised, with gratuitous incidents added, and Jesus (complete with blond beard) appears perhaps too human, with doubts and misgivings. But the illustrations are real works of art, well printed on good quality paper, and worthy of close study.

THE WORLD, THE FLESH, THE DEVIL: A BIOGRAPHICAL DICTIONARY OF WITCHES by Eric Ericson, NEL £6.95, 285 pages
Reviewed by Brian Wilson.

The title describes it adequately enough, and without a huge fund of personal knowledge it is rather difficult to assess it properly. The author either does not know, or chooses to ignore, the distinctions between witchcraft, satanism and magic, thus we find entries on Macgregor Mathers and Violet Firth (Dion Fortune) both of whom would have been astonished and offended to be described as "witches". The entry on Aleister Crowley is meticulously accurate but misleading in a way that would take several thousand words to explain. And does Jayne Mansfield really warrant a 4-page entry?? There are many better works for the serious student, but it might make interesting source material for a writer. In any case, wait for the paperback.

PARALLEL LINES - The Science Fiction Illustrations of Peter Elson and Chris Moore, Dragon's Dream £4.95, about 87pp
Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

The artwork here is nice, sometimes very nice. Spaceships predominate, yet there's plenty of variation in theme and approach. Both Elson and Moore have been influenced by Chris Foss in their portrayal of multi-windowed spaceships against airbrushed backgrounds, with Elson developing more exotic shapes and flamboyant colour combinations while Moore prefers more massive structures, restrained in tone and shape but with astonishing detail. All fans of technological SF should enjoy these pictures. Unfortunately there's no back-up information on the artists or their work. Who are Messrs Elson and Moore? Who wrote the books on which these illustrations first appeared? Who published them? When? There's a mercifully brief foreward from Roger Dean, whose comprehension of artistic style is infinitely greater than of literary style. There's also an overlong introduction by somebody called Pat Vincent, who comes across as a pretentious fool, combining a breath-taking ignorance of punctuation, spelling and syntax with an inability to develop reasoned argument. These written contributions are an insult to the reader and artists alike.

GEMINI GOD by Garry Kilworth, Faber £6.50, 240 pages

Reviewed by Pauline E.Morgan.

It is well known that there often appears to be a mental link between pairs of identical twins. Earth's government tries to develop this phenomenon as an early warning system between Earth and the planet New Carthage, in case of attack by the natives there. As the planet revolves very slowly these natives are nomadic, living in the twilight zone and keeping just on the night side of the terminator. Again, Garry Kilworth has evolved some beautiful aliens, and for the first time has included some of his excellent poetry in one of his novels. It's a good read.

WHERE TIME WINDS BLOW by Robert Holdstock, Faber £6.95, 286 pages

Reviewed by John Farr.

Here is an example of a novel full of good ideas inadequately developed. For what it does achieve it is overlong---padded out with boring discussions, particularly in the first half. Certainly Mr Holdstock has attempted much, intricately developing the different human societies on Kamelios, an extrasolar planet. There is the more normal, technological society, whose members are largely concerned with exploring a large and dangerous rift valley where time winds are supposed to blow, bringing and removing artefacts of different periods. The main characters are interesting but the motivation for their actions seems inadequate. Later, when Faulcon stays with the enigmatic "manchanged", the novel gains in stature. Kamelios has a rather strange retinue of six moons which, if one can believe the author's description, defy the laws of planetary motions.

ISLANDS IN THE SKY and OF TIME AND STARS by Arthur C. Clarke, Penguin £1.25 each, 208pp and 205pp

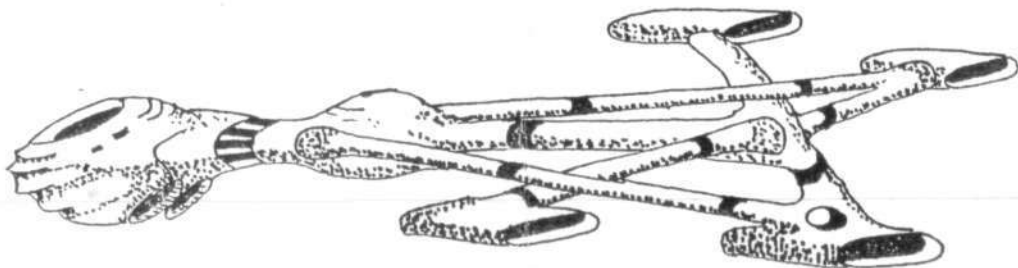
Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

Here are a juvenile space opera novel and a collection of stories specially chosen for younger readers, both of which have gone through several printings as Puffins but are now reclassified for adult reading by being reissued as Penguins. It's an inevitable move; with Star Wars and its many sequels and imitations being published as adult SF there seems little point in not following suit with Clarke's juvenile works. At least, Clarke always gets his scientific background correct.

CLONE by Richard Cowper, Pan £1.25, 168 pages

Reviewed by Dave Packwood.

This is a playful near-future satire with Cowper giving full rein to his bizarre and irreverent humour. Alvin---one of four clones---is sent to the metropolis because of his rising libido! With his chimpanzee companion, Norbert, Alvin becomes entangled in many hilarious incidents. He is kidnapped by the Universal Anthropoid Brotherhood and rescued from near death by the samaritan Cheryl, whose job is to administer euthanasia. SF buffoonery at its best, but ignore the cover illustration or you may be put off.



SONGMASTER by Orson Scott Card, Futura Orbit £1.75, 338 pages

Reviewed by Dave Packwood.

This extremely competent novel began life as a novelette---"Mikhal's Songbird"---which won justified critical acclaim. The Songhouse of Tew selects and encourages "singers" who have the ability to inspire in the listener a variety of moods ranging from euphoria to misery. They are taught "control"---a way of inhibiting their own feelings---and their voices are kept pure by the use of drugs which defer puberty. Ansett, a "songbird" of outstanding talent, is given to Mikhal, the emperor of the galaxy. The songbird is selfless to the point of absurdity, and it is this very quality which ensures his own destruction. Songmaster is poignant, in that it inspires sympathy for its characters. If you appreciate the importance of the human element in fiction you should certainly read this.

DEATH WATCH by D.G.Compton, Magnum £1.50, 256 pages

Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

Formerly published as The Continuous Katherine Mortenhoe, but now retitled to tie in with a highly-regarded film, this is Compton's finest novel. It's the story of a dying woman (in a future where death from natural causes is rare) being filmed for TV by a man with cameras surgically implanted behind his eyes. The cameraman, who narrates most of the book, is no better off than his "victim": he can never switch off the cameras, can never have privacy. As always from Compton, this is a mature novel about believable people. Recommended.

OPERATION MALACCA by Joe Poyer, Sphere £1.25, 160 pages

Reviewed by Malcolm Thorpe.

Reissue of a borderline SF story which achieves its place here by the underlying study of dolphin intelligence and their relationship with mankind. An American-speaking dolphin and his human mentor help the Allies destroy several 'A' bombs with which the Communists hope to control the Far East. The characters are handled well, but several paragraphs of pseudo-science and a jerky storyline mar an otherwise good read.

THE RIM OF SPACE by A.Bertram Chandler, Sphere £1.25, 127 pages

Reviewed by Dave Hardy.

This probably seemed a good yarn---in 1958 when it was first published. Derek Calver, after an unhappy marriage, leaves the Interstellar Transport Commission and joins the Rim Runners. He rises from Second Officer to Captain of a decrepit, leaky old freighter plying the outer (bleak?) stars of the Galaxy, finding love and adventure... you know. But at a penny a page it can't be called good value.

MICRONAUT WORLD by Gordon Williams, NEL £1.50, 221 pages

Reviewed by Vernon Brown.

A standard, rather superficial, story of a human colony establishing itself in an alien environment, the difference being that the colonists are two-inch-high clones in a deserted and overgrown garden. My basic criticism however is that while the author has fulfilled the first requirement of an SF novel---a suspension of disbelief in the production of the clones---he has not satisfied the second---that the story should thereafter be internally consistent. Such clones could not survive any more than one-hundred-foot-high spiders in cheapo B films, and for similar reasons. The author is therefore, even using his own premises, describing impossibilities.

EDITORIAL NOTES

Thanks again to Locust and to all contributors. Art credits this issue: Ivor Iatto (p.1), Phill Probert (p.2 top, p.4, p.7) and Euan Smith (p.2 bottom). Produced & edited for the BSFG in July 1981 by Chris Morgan, 39 Hollybrow, Selly Oak, Birmingham B29 4EX.