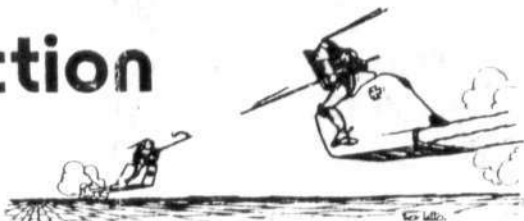


# Birmingham Science Fiction Group

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



NEWSLETTER 125

JANUARY 1982

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 OLD ROYAL pub, on the corner of Church Street and Cornwall Street, Birmingham 3. (Church Street is off Colmore Row.) New members are always welcome. Our treasurer is Margaret Thorpe, 36 Twyford Road, Ward End, Birmingham 8. The 12-month subscription is £3.50.

JANUARY MEETING - Friday 15th January 1982 at 7.45 pm

This is our Annual General Meeting, followed by an Auction, and it has the considerable attraction of being our only meeting of the year at which entrance is free. The AGM will include the election of officers for 1982.

Nominations so far are:

Treasurer - Margaret Thorpe

Newsletter editor - Pauline Morgan

Further nominations may be made at the meeting.

Chairman - Vernon Brown

Secretary - Chris Suslowicz

Publicity officer - Alan Cash

Afterwards there will be a  
by Rog Peyton.

FOR SALE will be SF books, paperbacks, magazines, fanzines, posters, etc. For this we depend upon you---all of you---to bring along a few items that you no longer need, to donate to the auction. There should be some great bargains.

**GRAND AUCTION** conducted

DECEMBER MEETING

The Christmas Party was a great success, with good food and several kinds of SF-oriented competitions of varying degrees of silliness. Some prizes went to Dave Holmes (for unscrambling some authors), to Helen Eling (for pinning antennae onto Dave Hardy) and to a charades team which might have been captained by Bob Vernon (or possibly by Tim Stannard).

FORTHCOMING

\* February - Brian Aldiss will be our guest speaker. His new novel, Heliconia Spring, will be published by Faber the same day.

\* February special meeting - Anne McCaffrey may be able to come to Birmingham some time during the month. More details later.

\* Spring - Marion Zimmer Bradley should be visiting us in March or April.

\*\*\*\*\* VOTE ROG PEYTON FOR TAFF \*\*\*\*\*



# CLOSE ENCOUNTERS OF THE FURRED KIND

CATS IN SF SURVEYED BY MARGARET THORPE

These aliens that live among us have their own peculiar brand of logic and ethics. It takes a twisted mind to properly appreciate their subtle sense of humour, and perhaps this is the reason why so many SF writers have included them in novels and short stories.

A good example is the cat called Petronius the Arbiter, in The Door Into Summer by Robert Heinlein. How many cat owners among you have waited patiently while your cat has looked out into the pouring rain, and then decided to try the back door to see if it's raining out there, too? If Petronius was normal, then Fritz Leiber's cat, Gummidge, was a little more weird as cats go. In a group of stories, Leiber traces Gummidge's career from kittenhood, in "Cat's Cradle", where he saves his owner's baby from a mentally retarded older child only to have her spirit possess his mind, through "Spacetime for Springers" (which introduces a feline character very much like Tigerishka in Leiber's The Wanderer, who offers to take Gummidge and any discontented cats off to a happier life in her spacecraft), and "Kreativity for Kats", which covers Gummidge's search for a new art form. A variety of cats---some with special talents---feature in many of Leiber's other works, notably in The Green Millennium, "Ship of Shadows" and Our Lady of Darkness. (Should he be called Fritz "the cat" Leiber?)

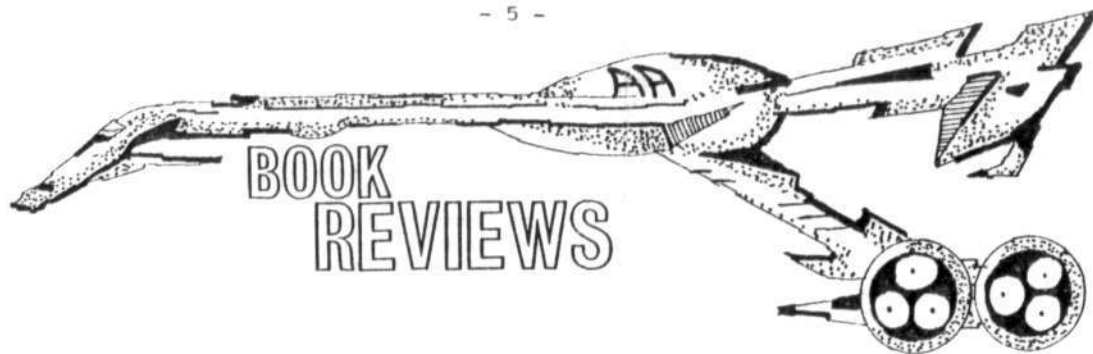
Andre Norton, well known for her love of cats, includes them in many of her stories, although only a few, such as Zarsthor's Bane, Here Abide Monsters and "All Cats Are Gray", have normal cats in them (if cats are ever normal) as companions to the human characters. Uta, in Zarsthor's Bane, plays an important role in helping Brixia, the heroine, to escape the mental domination of an evil force. One of the few writers who misinforms readers about normal cats is Manly Wade Wellman, who uses the popular misconception that cats become attached to places rather than people as the theme of "The Witch's Cat", an amusing tale of witchcraft and just rewards.

Moving on to supercats, two very similar stories by different authors explore the effects of increased intelligence in cats on board a spaceship. Gordon R. Dickson, in "F.I.D.O.", and James White, in "The Conspirators", explore the idea from slightly different viewpoints, with Dickson's story having a sting in the tail (pun on purrpose), while James White's builds the suspense to a satisfying climax.

The basic idea of having cats as companions is extended by many writers, who endow their felines with rudimentary, or even advanced, telepathic powers, sometimes as a result of a cataclysmic war (a catastrophe, even). A couple of examples of this are Andre Norton's Daybreak 2250 AD, which has Lura, a housecat the size of a puma, who chooses one of the humans to be her hunting companion, and Tomorrow's Yesterday, by John Gloag, where a race of large, intelligent cats is shown to have evolved to replace mankind.

The giant plains cats in Robert Adams' Horsecians novels definitely have a feline sense of fair play, and a barbed sense of humour, as in the instance where Old-Cat is sent to arrest a child-molester, and says, "Child-raper, if your hand does not depart from your saber hilt quickly, it will depart from your arm immediately!" Despite increased intelligence, the big cats all retain a cat's sense of independence. Sura, in The Beast Master (Norton again), is part of an animal/human team of commandoes sabotaging alien installations, but Storm, the team leader, never knows whether or not she will agree to his telepathic commands.





SHIP OF SHADOWS by Fritz Leiber, Granada £1.50, 256 pages

Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

"His award-winning stories" says the cover blurb. "Some of his award-winning stories" would be more accurate, since "Ill Met in Lankmar" has been omitted. (It was in the Gollancz hardcover edition.) But I mustn't complain. The five surviving stories (one of them the shortish novel The Big Time) have all deservedly won major awards. Conveniently, they form a microcosm of Leiber's fiction, covering SF, fantasy and horror. The title story is my personal favourite, just, in a high quality collection. Strongly recommended.

THE DARK LIGHT YEARS by Brian Aldiss, Granada £1.25, 159 pages

Reviewed by Dave Langford.

This lightweight 1964 satire pokes fun at our assumption that cleanliness is next to sapience. With quips about "law and ordure", the repulsive and coprophiliac (but gentle, intelligent and spacefaring) utods are treated as dirty animals by intolerant humanity. Their almost complete extermination fails to convince, now our eco-awareness extends even to the preservation of smallpox virus... Also unconvincing is the speed with which 'sympathetic' characters start yearning to blow holes in utods. Questions like 'what is intelligence?' and 'what's the matter with killing creatures who don't mind being killed?' are toyed with but abandoned. Fun, with some sharp points, but minor Aldiss.

HAN SOLO AND THE LOST LEGACY by Brian Daley, Sphere £1.00, 184 pages

Reviewed by Vernon Brown.

Han Solo and Chewbacca, having left Star Wars behind, are back to their old trade of moving anything from A to B for adequate recompense. After a couple of comic episodes they meet an old partner in crime---Badure---who has information indicating the whereabouts of (fanfare of trumpets) the Legendary Treasure of Xim the Despot. The wealth of Empires for the finding! Of course, things are not that easy as sundry individuals try to stop our heroes reaching their goal. Good updated traditional space opera; if you enjoyed Star Wars you should like this.

THE INSIDER by Christopher Evans, Faber £6.95, 215 pages

Reviewed by Mike Meara.

During the Blitz a dying alien in a disabled spacecraft crashes onto a recently-bombed house, and in order to survive, takes over the body of an orphaned boy it finds there. The action then moves forward to a near-future Britain, whose economic, racial and political problems are extrapolations of today's. The ageing, reclusive 'George Blair' dies suddenly, forcing the alien to transfer once more. However, the new host's life-style conflicts with the alien's desire for uninvolvedness with a human race for which it cares little. As the alien is drawn unwillingly into the affairs of 'Stephen Marsh' it begins to doubt its alien origins; the detached self-interest essential for survival fades, with disastrous consequences. The book is clearly intended as an exploration of a theme quoted from Pascal's Pensees: "All our reasoning in the end gives way to feeling". Unfortunately, I found the exploration rather superficial and unrevealing. A laudably ambitious second novel, but ultimately unsatisfying.

FOREIGN BODIES by Brian Aldiss, Chopmen (Singapore) £3.00, 99 pages

Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

At the BSFG 10th Anniversary Party back in June I remember Brian Aldiss proudly saying that the first edition of one of his forthcoming collections was going to be published in a Third World country---and this is it. His enthusiasm for the Far East is well known; several of his SF stories are set there, as are the latter two of his Horatio Stubbs novels. That enthusiasm comes across strongly in the stories here, all except one having a south east Asian setting. One, "A Romance of the Equator" was specially written for Novacon 10; most of the others are original, though one is a fictionalised version of Aldiss's guest-of-honour speech at the 1979 World Science Fiction Convention at Brighton. My favourites are the two satires, "Boat Animals" and "Frontiers", but all are stylish, unusual (how many SF books have you seen that were published in Singapore?) and worth reading.

STARSWARM by Brian Aldiss, Granada £1.25, 190 pages

Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

Now available with a new cover is this linked collection of Aldiss's aliens-and-spaceships stories from the late fifties and early sixties. Among many other bizarre planets described are the matriarchal Abrogun, where animals become fish, and fish birds; Dansson, where everybody is inoculated against unhappiness; and Glumpalt, where the Black Sun rises. It's all much more science fictional than his later work---but more subtle than most other writers' science fiction.

JANISSARIES by Jerry Pournelle, Futura £1.65, 255 pages

Reviewed by Alan Cash.

Hijacked in the midst of battle by money hungry aliens, a group of American mercenaries are taken to subdue part of a planet where a highly lucrative drug can be grown only once every 600 years. Removed from command by mutiny the commander of the group goes his own way, turning out to be a military historian and uniting the tribes which have come from various stages of the Earth's history---but only up to a certain stage. The denouement is well rehearsed but it's more fun getting there. The set piece battles are a well researched treat. Excellent.

COSMIC ENCOUNTER by A.E. van Vogt, NEL £1.50, 213 pages

Reviewed by Vernon Brown.

A standard van Vogt, who never hesitates to use ten slightly out of context synonyms where one will do. Time has collapsed, and in 1704 a spaceship of paranoid robots is fighting another, somewhat indescribable, spaceship while a pirate captain, a good friend of England's queen, looks on. A girl, drowned by the captain, is revived by an 83rd century machine, which makes her unstable and therefore---what?! Need I go on?

CONQUESTS by Poul Anderson, Granada £1.50, 250 pages

Reviewed by Dave Hardy.

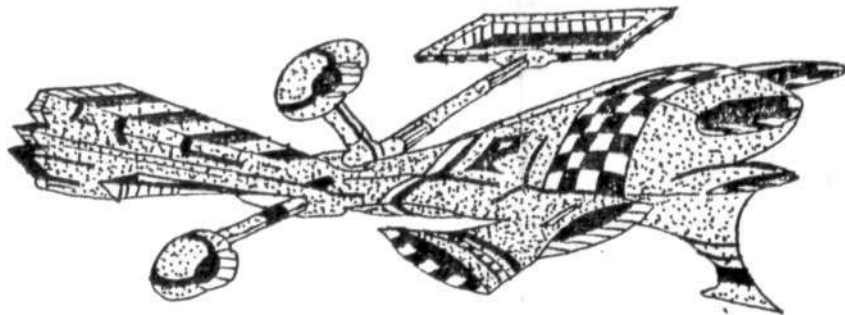
This is a collection of seven short stories, first published in the USA as Seven Conquests but originally written between 1955 and 1969, appearing mainly in magazines like F & SF or Worlds of If. The theme of each is future conflict of some sort, from out-and-out space war beyond Mars ("Kings Who Die") to a base set up in the Jurassic era ("Wildcat"), and from planets of other stars ("Inside Straight") to a Solar System in which Venus, Mars and the Moon are terraformed and inhabited ("Strange Bedfellows"---quite an 'action' yarn, this). It's good, meaty, thoughtful SF, often extrapolating on today's trends. Recommended.

THE SWORD AND THE STALLION by Michael Moorcock, Mayflower £1.25, 171 pages

Reviewed by Margaret Thorpe.

A breathless helter-skelter of battles, murder and mayhem in the Corum series. For those who haven't read the previous five novels, there is a synopsis which makes it unnecessary to do so. Corum leads his forces in the last great war against the Phoi Myore, and discovers the truth in the ancient prophecy that he must fear three things---beauty, a harp and a brother. Packed with magic, action and predictability.





BRING BACK YESTERDAY by A.Bertram Chandler, Allison & Busby £5.95, 153pp

Reviewed by Vernon Brown.

Written in 1961, this novel has a Rim World background. Petersen, a spaceship officer, misses his ship and, rather than rely on 'charity', takes a job as private investigator. His first assignment is to investigate the inventor (and beautiful daughter, of course) of some sort of time travel device, an invention in which sundry others are interested. With some difficulty, Petersen meets up with scientist and daughter, and they employ the "timetravel" machine to evade their pursuers. I'm not quite certain of the logic behind the timetravel described, but that's a minor point---the book is well worth reading and its detailing is worthy of more than this short review.

TONGUES OF THE MOON by Philip Jose Farmer, Corgi £1.00, 160 pages

Reviewed by Vernon Brown.

Although not one of Farmer's best, this novel is well worth its cover price. The plot is simple and the characters clearcut, but although slightly space-opera-ish it's a good read. After the final war Man is left with major bases on the Moon and Mars, plus a couple of smaller ones elsewhere. A power struggle between the surviving factions (political, religious and otherwise) continues the process of genocide. Throw in a Planetbuster bomb and the going becomes fast and furious. Incidentally, although written in 1964 a neutron bomb is used---a rewrite or another SF first?

THE REIGN OF WIZARDRY by Jack Williamson, Sphere £1.50, 174 pages

Reviewed by Margaret Thorpe.

A classic sword and sorcery novel that is well worth the money. It was written as long ago as 1939 but is not at all dated. Nor is it full of the gratuitous sex and violence which is now a necessary ingredient of so many fantasy novels. It is a new twist on the Theseus legend, with Theseus arranging his own capture by the Minoans in order to take part in the Minoan games which determine the ruler of Crete. In his attempt to overcome and destroy the evil magic of Daedalus and Minos he is aided by a rather inept magician and by the goddess Ariadne.

THE STEEL TSAR by Michael Moorcock, Granada £1.25, 153 pages

Reviewed by Anne Gay.

As many narrow escapes as Houdini. In the last of the Bastable trilogy (now available for the first time) our Victorian hero and chrononaut (Moorcock's word, not mine) is captured in turn by Malay pirates, Japs, Russians, and Birchington, a crashing bore. In this replay of the Second World War in Yet Another Timestream, Bastable meets his counterpart, who dropped the first Bomb on Japan as Bastable did in The War Lord of the Air. Moorcock explores socialism, the cult of personalities, and individual responsibility. He is obsessed with Man's destructive genius and finds the Answer (not 42) in an adventure which is lit by neat touches of humour. Well-written, thoughtful and clever, The Steel Tsar may be unpronounceable but is worth reading. And thinking about.

THE MARRIAGES BETWEEN ZONES THREE, FOUR AND FIVE by Doris Lessing, Granada  
£1.95, 299 pages  
Reviewed by Pauline E.Morgan.

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THE MANY-COLOURED LAND by Julien May. Pan £1.75, 411 pages

Reviewed by Pauline E. Morgan.

GUARDIANS OF THE UNIVERSE? by Ronald Story, NEL £1.75, 207 pages, illustrated  
Reviewed by Chris Morgan

Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

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As I sink slowly in the west after 24 issues of this newsletter I'd like to wish lots of luck to my successor. Sincere thanks to all publishers, artists, reviewers, etc who've helped over the months; I hope you'll give my successor the cooperation you've given me. Art credits this issue: Ivor Latto (p1), Phill Probert (p2 top, p5, p7), John Dell (p2 bottom). This January 1982 issue has been produced and edited for the BSFG by Chris Morgan, 39 Hollybrow, Selly Oak, Birmingham B29 4LX.