



Birmingham Science Fiction Group

(HONORARY PRESIDENTS - BRIAN ALDISS & HARRY HARRISON)

newsletter - 163

march 1985

THIS MONTH'S SPEAKER IS THE CREATOR OF DUNE ----

FRANK HERBERT

THE MEETING WILL BEGIN AT 8PM PROMPT, ON FRIDAY THE 15TH OF MARCH, IN THE CONNAUGHT.

PLEASE NOTE: THIS MEETING IS BEING HEAVILY PUBLICIZED, SO YOU ARE ADVISED TO ARRIVE AS EARLY AS POSSIBLE TO GUARANTEE YOUR SEAT.

Frank Herbert's first published SF story, *Looking for Something?*, appeared in 1952. But it was not until the publication in 1963-4 of *Dune World* that he began to emerge as a major writer. *Dune World* was the first part of his DUNE series, and was followed in 1965 by *The Prophet of Dune*. These two stories were amalgamated into *Dune*, which won the first Nebula award for best novel, shared the Hugo, and went on to become one of the most famous of all SF novels...and a major film. Several sequels have followed - *Dune Messiah*; *Children of Dune*; *God Emperor of Dune*; *Heretics of Dune* and most recently *Chapter House Dune*. (See Book Review section of this Newsletter.)

THE BSFG MEETS ON THE THIRD FRIDAY OF EACH MONTH IN THE NEW IMPERIAL HOTEL, TEMPLE STREET, IN THE CITY CENTRE OF BIRMINGHAM.

DETAILS OF SOME FORTHCOMING MEETINGS ARE GIVEN BELOW.

MEMBERSHIP OF THE GROUP COSTS A MERE £5.00 PER YEAR FOR ONE PERSON

(£7.50 FOR TWO PEOPLE AT THE SAME ADDRESS) OR £2.50 FOR SIX MONTHS (£3.75 FOR TWO PEOPLE AT THE SAME ADDRESS). ALL

CHEQUES & POS PAYABLE TO BSFG AND SENT TO THE TREASURER CHRIS CHIVERS AT 51, BOUNDARY ROAD, STREETLY, SUTTON COLDFIELD, WEST MIDLANDS. THE COST OF ENTRY TO THIS MONTHS MEETING WILL BE £1.25 FOR BSFG MEMBERS & £1.50 FOR NON-MEMBERS.

THIS NEWSLETTER IS PRODUCED BY MARTIN TUDOR OF 845 ALUM ROCK ROAD, WARD END, BIRMINGHAM. THE DEADLINE FOR NEXT MONTHS NEWSLETTER IS - MARCH 29TH.

IF THERE IS AN 'X' IN THIS BOX YOUR MEMBERSHIP IS DUE FOR RENEWAL!



Group News



FORTHCOMING MEETINGS.

APRIL:- BRIAN ALDISS.

MAY:- MAXIM JAKUBOWSKI.

LAST MONTH'S MEETING.

If you were one of the few people who missed last month's meeting I'm sure you will be pleased to hear that you missed a real treat! ROBERT RANKIN proved to be just as witty and entertaining in person as you would imagine from

reading his books. He regaled us with tales of his home suburb of Brentford, revealing that it is famous for far more than a mere nylon factory. The Brentford Institute of Runic Studies for instance, is famous for its continuation of the work of its founder Rune. (Who was a good friend of Einstein who shopped at the store where Rune worked - well at least until Einstein stole Rune's encoded grocery list and published it as a Theory of Relatively or some such nonsense.) Rune was also the discoverer of the Brentford Scrolls, and conclusively proved the world was flat merely by cutting out the pages from an atlas and attempting to wrap them around a football. Unfortunately the powers that be did not take too kindly to Rune's attempts to expose their grand hoaxes, and so he has remained ridiculed and persecuted until now. There was of course much more, all superbly presented on slides - without the aid of a slideprojector!

HITCH-HIKER'S GUIDE TO THE GALAXY.

The Group's trip to the Crescent Theatre to see their stage presentation of HHGTG on Friday the 1st of March, proved to be most successful and enjoyable. With the aid of the Birmingham University SF Society we filled over eighty seats at the theatre, and witnessed a very slick performance. The only slight problem was that occasionally the Narrator (played with real style by Janet Grant) was drowned out by the movement of props, but on the whole the sets were changed with quite remarkable speed and with a minimum of fuss. Ken Simpson as Ford Prefect and Alan Fraser as the Ark Captain also put in excellent performances.

The second half of the play was particularly impressive with some quite stunning pyrotechnics produced by Peter Laver and an abundance of special effects. The Ravenous Bug Blatter Beast is also deserving of mention, it was provided by Theatr Clwyd. All in all a most enjoyable night's entertainment.

BOOK REVIEWS.

If you are interested in reviewing for the Newsletter please tell me - I can usually be found propping up the bar at the meeting. Or if you have recently read a book which you thought particularly good or bad why not write a review on that? I'm willing to publish any such pieces that are suitable.

BIRMINGHAM SF WRITERS' MEETINGS.

--- CHRIS MORGAN.

Another galaxy, another time...

Well, four and a half years ago in Selly Oak, to be precise. On a fateful Sunday in September 1980 a small group of would-be science fiction writers (who had travelled long and arduously from the farthest corners of Birmingham) met together in a house in Selly Oak to read and criticise each other's stories. Among those original seven were Pauline and myself (who were hosting the meeting), Dave Hardy and Alan Cash.

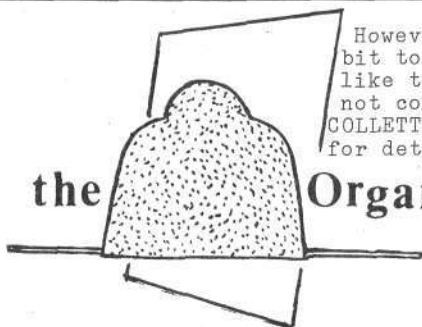
It's a well-known fact that writers can rarely see the faults in their own writing. They need somebody else to offer a bit of constructive criticism, pointing out weaknesses and suggesting remedies. That somebody else is often another writer, who is in a good position to be helpful. Hence writers have always tended to get together in groups and show or read their work to each other, establishing a tradition which has led to the Birmingham SF Writers' Meetings. Achieving just the right tone and degree of criticism at these meetings is never easy. Criticism must never be destructive or aimed at the writer rather than at the piece of writing; nor must all the comments be congratulatory, or else you get what Greg Benford once so graphically described to me as a mutual masturbation session.

We do our best to avoid these problems by insisting that all attendees bring along a story (or chunk of novel) of their own, and by trying always to be objective about other people's efforts. You don't help a friend to improve his writing if you let him get away with bad style or a hackneyed plot.

Four and a half years on we've had thirteen meetings. We try to persuade different people to act as hosts, but we are always limited to seven or eight attendees, that being the maximum number of stories we can get read and discussed in a day. Even though some attendees have dropped out, most find the system extremely helpful, and we usually have a slight excess of interested people.

The Birmingham SF Writers' Meetings aren't a formal part of the BSFG, and have never received any financial support from it, though most attendees have been BSFG members. Although we can't offer space at the moment to any more would-be writers of SF, fantasy or horror who might be reading this, please come up and chat to me about this at any BSFG meeting or phone me on 777 2777.

Oh, and just in case you're sceptical about the value of this kind of writers' meeting, let me mention that since September 1980 Pauline, Dave Hardy and Alan Cash have all managed to make their first sales of SF or fantasy stories. If it's a coincidence it's a pretty good one.



However, if you feel that the BSFG are a bit too serious for you, but you would still like to do something vaguely creative why not contact EUNICE PEARSON, at 32 DIGBY HOUSE, COLLETT'S GROVE, KINGSHURST, BIRMINGHAM B37 6JE, for details about the Organisation - the BSFG's

Amateur Press Association. I'm sure she'll make you an offer you can't refuse!



The Jophan Report

PAGE FOUR

--- MARTIN TUDOR.

(With a little help from Science Fiction Chronicle; David Hardy; Dave Holmes; Ahrvud Engholm and 'various others').

This months report begins with a bit of news about yet another Fan Fund - SEFF, The Scandinavian-European Fan Fund, which aims to facilitate contacts between Scandinavia and the rest of Europe, by the means of sending fans across the borders. In 1985 the Fund will pay to send a European (or British for you jingoists) to SWECON'85 in Stockholm. Now we come to the good bit for a mere 50p you can help rid Birmingham of Steve Green...for a while at least, because Steve is one of two candidates for SEFF this year. The other being Hans-Juergen Mader a German fan-editor. So if you were active in fandom prior to the 30th of June 1984 send 50p or more to Colin Fine, 205 Coldham's Lane, Cambridge, CBI 3MY, along with your name and a fannish contact, and vote for Steve Green. Go on do the Second City a favour let the Swedes have him for a bit....

Now for something entirely different, on CBS TV last week, Stephen King finally admitted that he also wrote under the name of Richard Bachman. Apparently the photograph of Bachman in his latest novel *Thinner* is in fact a photo of an accountant from Maine! Interesting that in King's last contract with New English Library he stated that if NEL said he was Bachman he would sue....

Members who have bought or looked at the film-art book, *The World of the Neverending Story*, and who remember Dave Hardy's sojourn in Germany at the end of 1982 to do production art on that film may wonder where his work is. The answer is, on pages 37, 38 and 98 - they just don't mention the fact. When Dave asked Earnie Kollar, the other production artist (he's an American living in Munich) if he had seen the book, he replied: "What book?"....

'Mr. Sci-Fi', the man who coined the term back in the fifties, Forrest J. Ackerman is reportedly (by SFC) incensed by those who now use the term 'Sci-Fi' to refer to terrible SF films - "I coined 'sci-fi' 30 years ago," he says, "as a simple substitute for science fiction, and nothing else. I don't appreciate others appropriating my term and giving it 'their meaning'." Ackerman is now offering a reward of \$100 to anyone who creates a new term to describe "drecky pseudo-science fictional films."....

I should just like to state publically at this point that I am greatly honoured to be serving on the committee of the Birmingham Science Fiction Group with such illustrious people as Roger Peyton, Christopher Chivers and David A. Hardy. All of whom are regular contributors to Britain's most renowned Science Fiction magazine - *SPACE VOYAGER* (available for a mere £1.50 from all good newsagents and *ANDROMEDA BOOKSHOP*). I am sure the members of the BSFG will join me in applauding the enterprise of these three who.....hey! Who are you calling a "Sarky b*****" Chivers?

REVIEWS THIS MONTH ARE BY:--
PAULINE MORGAN; DAVE PACKWOOD;
CHRIS MORGAN and BOB VERNON.
MANY THANKS TO THEM ONE
AND ALL.



BOOK REVIEWS

IN HONOUR OF THIS MONTH'S
SPEAKER WE START THE
REVIEWS WITH.....

CHAPTER HOUSE DUNE by FRANK HERBERT.
Gollancz £8.95
374 Pages.

REVIEW BY PAULINE MORGAN.

Once upon a time, an author wrote a book called *DUNE*. It caught the imagination of the readers. Nineteen years, five books and a film later, the saga continues. The planet Dune, once a

desert world inhabited by Sandworms and Fremen, has been destroyed. The Honoured Matres, have driven the Bene Gesserit back, destroying as they go, and searching for the location of Chapter House, the planet that is the centre of the Bene Gesserit organisation. From a group that were despicable manipulators in *DUNE* the Bene Gesserit have become a sympathetic order fighting for survival. They have a few aces up their sleeves; a ghola of military genius Miles Teg, the offspring of the last Sandworm, ghola Duncan Idaho (the only character to survive the series) and a captive Honoured Matre.

Although in the beginning of *CHAPTER HOUSE DUNE* I had the feeling of being preached at, this receded as the characters became solid. The interactions between them are admirable. I was thoroughly absorbed by this book but would have found much of it incomprehensible without having previously read earlier novels, particularly *DUNE*. Yet there is this nagging thought in my mind: is it possible to convert a fertile planet to a complete, sandblown desert within a generation? This is what the Bene Gesserit are doing to Chapter House.

THE FURIES by KEITH ROBERTS. Penguin £1.95. 220 Pages.

REVIEW BY DAVE PACKWOOD.

Keith Roberts has written many fine and memorable books. Titles such as *PAVANE*; *THE BOAT OF FATE*; *THE GRAIN KINGS*, etc come to mind. I'm sure readers will be familiar with his unwavering penchant for original concepts.

However, this reissue of his 1966 first novel surely won't help his reputation as a craftsman of intricately constructed prose works. It is quite simply a lacklustre work; a journeyman novel peppered with wooden characters, a protracted narrative and, dare I say, an awful sting in the tail.

H-Bombs are exploded and the geology of the earth is altered drastically. Monstrous and malevolent wasps attack innocent citizens and destroy cities. Only a group of 'resistance' fighters struggle manfully to restore civilisation to rights.

Re-issuing *THE FURIES* won't win Keith Roberts many new readers. If you are coming to Roberts' work for the first time, I would advise you to leave *THE FURIES* to their own devices and read *PAVANE* or *THE GRAIN KINGS* instead.

LORD OF DARKNESS by ROBERT SILVERBERG. Bantam distributed by Corgi. £2.95. 611 Pages.

REVIEW BY CHRIS MORGAN.

Silverberg's latest novel - and his largest offering to date - is not SF or fantasy but an historical adventure. Freely adapted and much enlarged from a true account (published in 1625 and available in Birmingham's Central Library), it is the autobiography of Andrew Battell, an Englishman who was captured by the Portuguese in 1589, and who spent twenty years in Africa. Silverberg has made a grand job of it, suggesting the 16th century idiom without being cumbersome, and creating a truly exciting story out of Battell's sufferings and triumphs, loves and wars. Many of the episodes are unusual, especially those featuring the cannibal Jaqqas, with whom Battell lives for a while and whose king, Calandola, is presented as the devil incarnate. Most interesting is Battell's philosophy of life, which combines "when in Rome..." with a brand of fatalism; it makes him into a professional survivor as almost all his companions are killed by disease, war or being eaten. The setting is believable and the writing has more passion than most of Silverberg's novels. Though a little longwinded at times it is, on the whole, highly entertaining.

EMPIRE OF THE SUN by J.G. BALLARD. Gollancz. £8.95.

REVIEW BY BOB VERNON.

Gaunt figures in a bizarre landscape strewn with wrecked machinery, American cars and military aircraft abandoned amid go-downs and bunkers, airfields and nightclubs. Corpses and captives striking ambiguous attitudes in the flash of an atomic bomb.

Mention these images to a science fiction reader and he will tell you that we are in 'Ballard country'. For over twenty years sf fans have admired Ballard's short stories and novels, in which he dissects 'inner space' in nightmarish detail. His titles suggest something of their surrealistic content, *THE WAITING GROUND*; *THE VOICES OF TIME*; *VERMILION SANDS*; *THE CRYTAL WORLD*; *THE TERMINAL BEACH* and *THE ATROCITY EXHIBITION*. Ballard's themes and images have fascinated and oftentimes shocked readers and I am sure I have not been alone in speculating what prompted this painful and perceptive odyssey. Now we have the key.

Ballard's own internment as a child by the Japanese in a camp near his birth city, Shanghai, is fictionalized in *EMPIRE OF THE SUN*, a document that may well rank alongside *ONE DAY IN THE LIFE OF IVAN DENISOVICH*; *THE NAKED AND THE DEAD* and *THE DIARY OF ANNE FRANK*. His limpid prose draws us unflinchingly into the eviscerating horror of war where man treats man with careless callous cynical cruelty and nature feeds impartially on both victim's and victor's running sores and weeping wounds. As British, Chinese, Japanese and American cultures collide on the banks of the Yangtse we begin to see why Ballard believes that 'the only truly alien planet is Earth' and understand why he has used science fiction for previous reconnaissance of this devastated inhuman landscape. Heart surgery is dangerous, especially when you are opening the heart of darkness.

May this awesome savage beautiful compassionate scalpel penetrate all our hearts and minds to cut out the insane

inhumane immoral man o'war and all its bastard tumours that feed on our vainglory, violence and viciousness.

It has taken Jim Ballard forty years to say it. I do not think it has been better said.

THE WORLD OF THE NEVERENDING STORY

Paper Tiger. £6.95. 126 Pages.

REVIEW BY CHRIS MORGAN.

This rather strange illustrated book had been produced as part of the publicity for the German fantasy film *THE NEVERENDING STORY*. In large part it consists of pictures: original concept sketches and storyboard cartoons (neither of which, the captions admit, resemble the finished film image), film stills and behind-the-scenes photos. It's an interesting though chaotic mixture. The accompanying text (which has no named author, an unforgivable sin) is, as one would expect, pure propaganda for the film. Unfortunately, the film is obviously intended mainly for children while the text is overloaded with long words and pretentious concepts. It also suffers from a lack of proofreading. It's noticeable that nowhere in this book (and despite a 4-page list of those who worked on the film) is there a mention of Michael Ende, the author of the original novel, *THE NEVERENDING STORY*, on which the film was based. The question which must be asked of any book of this kind is, does it make one want to go and see the film? The answer is that it does, but only just.

ASIMOV ON SCIENCE FICTION by ISAAC ASIMOV. Granada £2.50. 380 Pages

REVIEW BY PAULINE MORGAN.

This is a collection of essays and editorials written by Asimov mainly between 1977 and 1980 with a few earlier ones thrown in for good measure. They are of interest only to the collector (two are previously unpublished) or the newcomer to science fiction. I learnt nothing new from them. They are easy to read, but with few exceptions I was not particularly interested in their content, many others may be.

DINOSAUR PLANET 2: THE SURVIVORS by ANNE McCAFFREY. Futura. £1.95.

REVIEW BY PAULINE MORGAN.

281 Pages.

When the author complains that the title is wrong, the blurb has nothing to do with the contents and that she doesn't like the cover, a book gets off to a bad start. It is better than *DINOSAUR PLANET*, the book that preceded it, but it still has its problems. After forty-three years of cryogenic sleep the normal human part of the scientific expedition to Ireta are revived. Soon they find the planet over-run by a large number of the enigmatic Thek, a long-lived siliceous race. Then the military arrive. There are too many new characters to cope with, as well as a shift in emphasis of the leadership amongst those we already know, and I found the final resolution unsatisfactory. It will, however, be bought by Anne McCaffrey fans everywhere.

DAYBREAK ON A DIFFERENT MOUNTAIN by COLIN GREENLAND. Allen & Unwin.

REVIEW BY PAULINE MORGAN.

£8.95. 246 Pages.

This is the story of a going out and a coming back. Force of circumstance drives Dubilier, a dull and rejected lover, and Lupio, a licentious reprobate, to escape the

walled city of Gomath. It then chronicles their adventures and tends to be divided into segments reminiscent of other styles and other worlds. The first part is interesting, and I liked the characterisation, particularly of Lupio, and the interweaving of the tapestry of events, but as soon as they were on the other side of the wall they became less interesting. A reasonable attempt at a first novel.

NIGHTHUNTER 4: THE SHRINE (219pages), NIGHTHUNTER 5: THE HEXING (207pages)

Both by ROBERT FAULCON. ARROW. £1.75 each.

REVIEW BY PAULINE MORGAN.

In the first volume of this occult-horror series Dan Brady's family were snatched by the agents of Arachne, a sinister organisation with dealings in Black Magic. He has since waged war on Arachne in the hope of finding them. In each volume Brady gets a little closer and learns a little more about Arachne's purposes.

In THE SHRINE, a failed attempt to collect another family leads Brady to the village of Anerley on the Welsh borders. There, the powerful guardian of a shrine set up by his enemies has been disturbed by a professional Ghost-hunter. The information he gains at the end of the book makes him turn his attention to London in THE HEXING where he believes his wife Alison is hidden. A trail of death leads Brady underground and presents him with an unlikely ally, a voodoo priest resident in the Black community of London.

Robert Faulcon is a pseudonym of Robert Holdstock and if you look closely you may see your friends walk across the pages of this series.

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THE ANDROMEDA TOP TEN SELLERS

AS COMPILED BY DAVE HOLMES.

- 1) ENCHANTER'S ENDGAME - David Eddings.
- 2) DR WHO, PLANET OF FIRE - Peter Grimwade.
- 3) NULL A THREE - A.E. Van Vogt.
- 4) THE COLOUR OF MAGIC - Terry Pratchett.
- 5) THE ANTIPOPE - Robert Rankin.
- 6) LADYHAWKE - Joan D. Vinge.
- 7) THE BRENTFORD TRIANGLE - Robert Rankin.
- 8) PET SEMATARY - Stephen King.
- =9) EAST OF EALING - Robert Rankin.
- =9) H.P. LOVECRAFT OMNIBUS 1.



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Many thanks to all the contributors this month especial thanks to Atom for the front cover logo and also for the headings on pages 2;3 & 5. The illo on page 4 is by Lucy Huntzinger and the alien above by Bill Rotsler. Belated thanks to Tim Stannard for the use of his copier last ish.