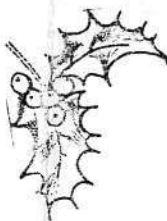


Birmingham Science Fiction Group

NEWSLETTER 183

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



Christmas Party

This month's meeting is on 12th December at 8.00pm and is our Christmas Party. The event will take place in THE AVON ROOM at the LADBROKE INTERNATIONAL HOTEL (the Avon Room is on the ninth floor). Directions to the hotel are on page 2.

The party will begin around 8.00pm the food will be served at approx. 9.00pm, after which we will have some quizzes, puzzles and games lined up for you.

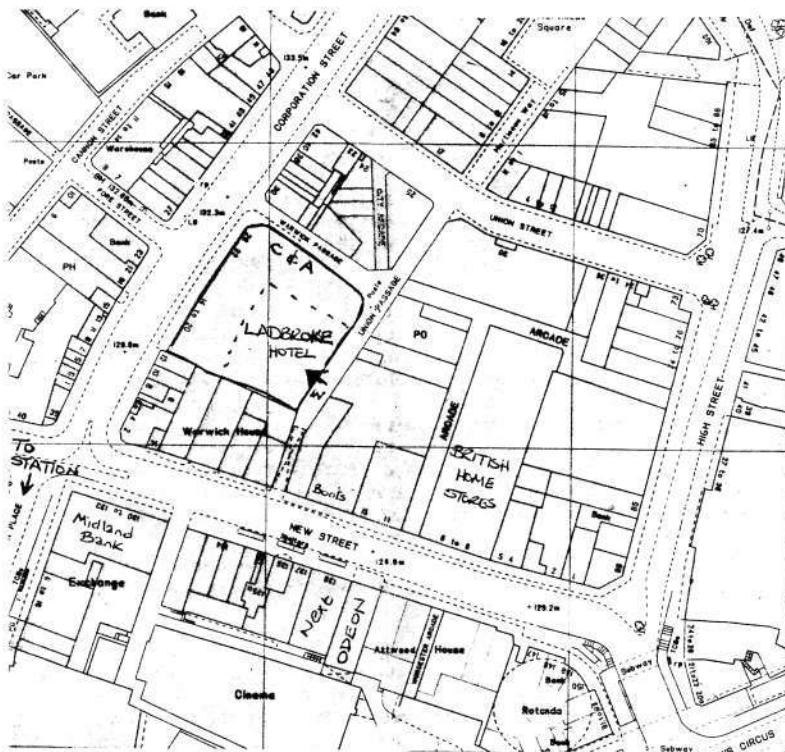
Future Meetings

January 16th AGM and Auction.

As usual after the AGM we will be having our auction. Do you have any books, posters etc. that you wish to be rid of? Well now's your chance. See if you can challenge Rog's skills at auctioneering. Do you have a copy of Battlefield Earth and want to get rid of it? See if Rog can auction that - no on second thoughts that would be asking too much even for Rog !!

THE BIRMINGHAM SCIENCE FICTION GROUP MEETS ON THE THIRD FRIDAY OF EACH MONTH AT THE LADBROKE INTERNATIONAL HOTEL, NEW STREET, IN THE CENTRE OF BIRMINGHAM. DETAILS OF THIS MONTH'S MEETING 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). ALL CHEQUES AND POSTAL ORDERS SHOULD BE MADE PAYABLE TO BSFG AND SENT TO THE TREASURER CHRIS CHIVERS AT 51, BOUNDARY ROAD, STREETLY, SUTTON COLDFIELD, WEST MIDLANDS.



WE HAVE MOVED (see Rog's letter over page). The location is outlined in red above.

Andromeda's Top Ten for November.

1. Silverthorn by Raymond E. Feist.
2. Dr. Who and the Celestial Toy Maker by Davis and Bingermann.
3. Golem in the Gears by Piers Anthony.
4. The Cat Who Walks Through Walls by Robert Heinlein.
5. Artifact by Greg Benford.
6. Colour Of Magic by Terry Pratchett.
7. Wild Shore by Kim Stanley Robinson.
8. Startide Rising by David Brin.
8. Voyage to the City of the Dead by Alan Dean Foster.
10. Practice Effect by David Brin.



IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT

As from this month the Group will no longer be meeting at the Imperial Hotel. Our new meeting place will be the Ladbroke International Hotel in New Street.

The Birmingham SF Group began meeting at the Imperial way back in 1971 and spent many happy years there until an unsympathetic new management caused us to look elsewhere. For a few years we met at the Ivy Bush pub - the perfect meeting place, actually managed by one of our own members, Ray Bradbury! We could even stay the night when we'd drunk too much to find our way home! When Ray left we discovered we were no longer welcome at the Ivy Bush - and after the rude treatment we got at one particular meeting we decided that we could do without the Ivy Bush. So we returned to the Imperial Hotel where we found another new management who actually wanted us back. Unfortunately, this year the Imperial's attitude has changed somewhat. Earlier in the summer we lost the use of our own bar - apparently it was uneconomic because "we don't drink enough". This upset the committee - we have the Group's reputation to think of! Then, on more than one occasion we have been refused the use of the downstairs bar after 10.30pm, even though we have written permission from the management allowing us to drink till 11.00pm. Of course, at 10.30 at night, the management were never around to argue with. For six months now we have tried to meet the manager at the Imperial. To this day, we still have never met him. Some might say that what the Imperial needs is a manager. Always we are fobbed off on some assistant who is never the same person two months running.

After one of our monthly committee meetings a few months back, three or four of us went for a drink at the Ladbroke International where our Treasurer 'knew' some of the girls who served in the bar. Somehow we got talking to the manager and ended up being shown their meeting rooms. The Avon Suite is on the 9th floor of the hotel and one wall is a window looking out over the rooftops of Brum. It has its own inbuilt screen, blackboard, etc., and is as modern as the Imperial is Victorian. The manager was quite happy for us to drink until 11.00pm, offered us special room rates for guest speakers and anyone else who wishes to stay overnight after the meeting (£20 including full English breakfast) and is quite happy for us to stay drinking after 11.00 providing that one of us (or guest speaker) is resident in the hotel and only the resident orders the drinks. The rest of the committee saw the room, agreed that it was what we needed, and negotiations were finalised.

So, from January we will hold all our meetings at the Ladbroke. It's only about 200 yards from the Imperial so it still has all the advantages of a central meeting place (yes, and still most of the disadvantages, but there's little we can do about parking in the city centre). Most of our meetings will be in the Avon Suite, but we will be able to use other function rooms to suit the size of meeting we expect. In January, for the AGM, we will be using the Malvern Suite on the second (or maybe it's the third) floor - full details in next month's newsletter.

We are confident that you will enjoy meetings at the Ladbroke - it's a modern hotel with a good atmosphere, and the staff are friendly (yes, honest!). If you have any comments/criticisms/etc., about the hotel in the next few months, please see one of the committee. There's always a possibility of teething troubles - we'd like to get them sorted out as soon as possible.

Reg Peyton
Chairman



You may remember some four years ago in number one hundred of this august gazette, we did there feature an article on the relationship between Father Christmas and Relativity, an extract from the then forthcoming work 'The Rarest Complaint'. Regrettably, we have to report that the MS of this undescribable opusculum has all but entirely disappeared, and a thorough enquiry has begun. However, we did only say all but, the good news is that a fragment of this remarkable libretto, never before seen between any sort of covers does infact survive. By mere chance this too has a bearing upon the now fast approaching festivities; here then without more ado and absolutely no apologies is the only known remains of 'The Rarest Complaint'..

..... makes sense, and so having cleared away the more difficult points we can proceed to a lighter study. Max Planck, the father of Quantum Theory was born on Shakespeare's birthday but surely this must have been a mistake, it were far better he be born on Sir Isaac Newton's birthday, for his connections with Christmas are so manifold. As everyone knows he was the first to suggest that radiation consisted of small packets or parcels of energy - and what do we get at Christmas? Why packets and parcels! Further, the word quantum is taken from the Latin for 'how much?', just think how often we use those two words at this time of year, then take his famous constant h which is said (and I quote the text book) to give the proportional relation between Quantum (how much) and frequency, need I say more? Now please do not feel intimidated, remember we are all in this together. Planck's constant is very important, in fact it is indispensable, I for one just could not imagine Christmas without it, and most of our theories for understanding the universe would become meaningless also if it were to go, so let's just keep it happy for a while yet or at least until we do not mind if certain theories become meaningless.

Now seeing no way of putting it off any longer, I must here deal briefly with pixilated particles, "what?" you may say, well J.J. Thomson (the discoverer of the electron) said he did not mind if their movement was due to red nosed pixies, what interested him was their behavior. I looked pixilated up in my dictionary and it means slightly crazy, drunk; well I think that is how we all hope to be at Christmas, so here again we are in good company.

I don't think myself that there is any connection between Planck and the Yule Log, I just mention it for others to research if they feel the need.

But what has all this to do with SF I hear you say? That is of course the nub of the question and not so easy to answer as you may think. To begin though let us go back to 1845, this year saw the birth of Wilhelm Roentgen the father of X-Rays. Now it states in all the books that he named them X-Rays for the mathematical unknown, but I ask you, he submitted his paper on X-Rays on the 28th December, right in the midst of 12 days of Xmas and while still working his way through that year's turkey and plum pudding no doubt.....

And there the fragment ends.



ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Notice is hereby given of the Annual General Meeting of the Birmingham Science Fiction group on Friday January 18th. Proceedings will start at 8.30pm prompt. As usual, all the committee members are resigning: some may be persuaded to stand for re-election, but if you are interested in helping to run the BSFG during 1987 have a look at these job specifications, and if you are still interested send your nominations to David A. Hardy, 99 Southam Road, Hall Green, Birmingham, B28 0AB. You should include a nominator's name and you must find someone to second you at the AGM.

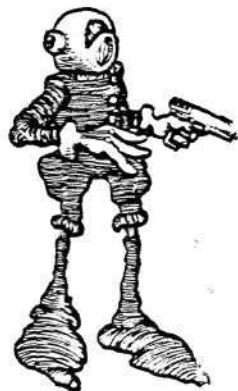
CHAIRMAN: Must introduce and try to keep order at all BSFG and Committee meetings. Should preferably be a good public speaker. Is usually responsible for contacting prospective speakers and arranging the future programme. Must have previously served on the committee in another position.

TREASURER: Must be honest and reliable, keeping track of all the group's receipts and payments. Needs to get to every BSFG meeting early in order to take money at the door. Must also attend each committee meeting to report on the state of the group's finances. Has to produce end-year accounts. Ability to add figures a distinct asset.

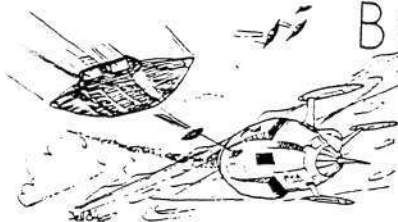
SECRETARY: Needs to attend monthly committee meetings take notes, and produce several copies of the minutes, typed. Also required to do other occasional bits of typing on behalf of BSFG. Ability to type and access to a typewriter essential.

NEWSLETTER EDITOR : Has to attend committee meetings gather news, beg articles and artwork; (especially artwork) obtain review copies from publishers and distribute them to reviewers; compose most of the newsletter type and paste up all of it; get the whole thing photocopied, collated and mailed off. This has to be done every month to a deadline. At the moment this takes 4 to 5 days a month. Access to a decent typewriter and an ability to type are essential.


PUBLICITY OFFICER: He/She must produce and distribute posters each month advertising forthcoming events. Ought to get the BSFG mentioned in newspapers or on local radio several times a year. Dynamism is an advantage, also the ability to think up crazy ideas.



BOOK REVIEWS



THE LIGHT FANTASTIC by Terry Pratchett,
Corgi, £1.95, 217 pages reviewed by Carol
Morton.



This is of course the sequel to THE COLOUR OF MAGIC which told of the adventures of Twoflower, a tourist and Ricewind an inept and cowardly magician. In this, the sequel, the Discworld (which travels on the backs of four giant elephants, who are in turn perched on the shell of Great A'Tuin a Giant Turtle), is heading for a collision with a red star. The only person who can save the Discworld is Ricewind, unfortunately he was last seen - at the end of THE COLOUR OF MAGIC falling off the edge of the Discworld and plunging into space.

This is probably not as amusing as the original but non-the-less I recommend it.

SANTIAGO by Mike Resnick, Arrow, £2.95, 376 Pages,
reviewed by Chris Morgan.

This is one of the best SF novels of the year.

Imagine a Clint Eastwood bounty-hunter western which is set in the far future, with outlaws and bounty hunters speeding from planet to planet. That's just what this is. Sebastian Cain is hunting for the legendary Santiago (the Galaxy's most notorious criminal, with an astronomical price on his head.) He follows a chain of people who have encountered or dealt with Santiago—usually at one remove. But he isn't alone. Only just behind him is the Angel, the best bounty hunter of them all, who is also after Santiago. And hovering on the sidelines is Black Orpheus, a poet, who writes excruciating doggerel about these events, converting them instantly into myths.

It's a fast-moving novel, often very funny, full of memorable, larger-than-life characters. It even makes you think as it entertains you. There are similarities with Jack Vance's SF, but this novel is just a little bit better. Do yourself a favour and buy a copy.

WOLVES AT THE DOOR by Tabitha King, Grafton, £2.95, 367 pages reviewed by Glyn Jackson.

This is Tabitha King's third novel - SMALL WORLD and CARETAKERS being the previous two. Here, she attempts to examine the problems involved in a marriage dominated by a career-minded, macho-moviemaker. Patrick Russell makes the type of "Rambo-style" war movies which illustrate America's present mood of self-deception with respect to who were the proverbial "good guys" of the Vietnam War.

As a result of their problems, Pat and Liv (their children Sarah and Travis), move to the family's secluded summer house in Nodd's Ridge, California in an attempt to reconcile their situation. However, all is not well, as Liv unfortunately encounters three of the local yobs; Rand and Ricky Nightswander, and a half-wit by the name of Gordy Teed; who are about to bestow terminal brain damage on a cat.

As you might guess, the book then goes on to portray Liv's various conflicts with these devious, if not too intellectual characters. So without giving too much away, the book appears to succeed adequately as a thriller-cum-horror story, although Tabitha King's novels still lack the type of in-depth characterisation which is the trademark of her more famous husband.

CHANUR'S VENTURE by C.J. Cherrh, Methuen, £2.50, 293 pages, reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

Pyanfar Chanur is female, feline, and arrogant. To hold her position in Hani society she has to be. She is also Captain of a space-faring merchant ship and has an attitude to life that attracts trouble. Spitting in the face of convention, she has taken a male aboard her ship---her now landless mate. To compound matters the human, Tully, who caused her so many problems in THE PRIDE OF CHANUR, reappears in Hani space requesting her help. The Hani and the other alien races are excellently portrayed, though Tully comes over as a bit of a wimp. My only objection to this novel is the fact that it stops just as the excitement reaches its peak. I would recommend readers to wait for the sequel (and second half) then read both together.

THE DOOR IN THE HEDGE By Robin McKinley, Orbit, £2.50, 216 pages, reviewed by Carol Morton.

Enchanting is the only possible way of describing this collection of short stories. They are in fact reworkings of four well known fairy stories. I particularly liked "The Twelve Dancing Princesses" and "The Princess and the Frog." Fairy stories for grown-ups. If you - like me - are a sucker for fairy stories you will love this one.

A Further Adventure of Capt. Red Flame, a sort of mathematical puzzle.

By Stan Eling.



Capt. Red Flame had been marooned on Rocaratbonicalor for fifteen months and the provisions left in his forty-eight hours emergency ration pack were getting decidedly low. On the morn when our little saga begins however Red's luck changed, for hardly had he finished picking the meat off his second Rocaratbonicularian snuft, (a sort of millipede rabbit with which he was want to eke out his meagre supplies) when over the horizon came an unmanned transport of the latest design, which belonged to the Sewer-Space Organization. The Dimat, a type of computer-controller with which this class of vehicle were fitted, had picked up Red's distress signal and was homing in to the rescue.

By the time the ship had landed, on a little plane some two hundred yards from Red's camp, he had packed all that he desired to take away and was moving at a steady trot toward the vessel. On reaching the craft he found the access ladder already extended, and raced up it two rungs at a time. On arriving at the outer lock door however he was surprised to find it still closed. "Open the door" he said into the comgrille, "How do I know you will not come in and smash the place up?" came the soft voice of the Dimat. "What are you talking about?" said Red irritably, "It's part of you function to rescue waifs, you have landed for that very purpose, now open the door and we can be on our way". There was a pause of about one second, then "I know what we'll do" came the Dimat's voice, "we'll play a game". "I don't want to play a game" said Red, almost falling off the ladder in his rage, "I want to come aboard this emit (a term of abuse among space personnel) ship, now open the emit door". This time the pause was all of four seconds, then Dimat spoke again in a measured, no nonsense tone. "You must understand human that since the trouble on Bithaleft, the top people in Sewer-Space have warned us to be very circumspect in allowing entrance to vagrants, HOWEVER" Dimat raised its voice to prevent Red interrupting, "I have devised a test which I believe will determine if you are rational, pass the test and in you come.". "Oh very well" said Red, "I suppose they have good reason to be cautious what with your valuable cargo and all. Let's hear the questions then".

"First" said Dimat "What is the second perfect number?".

"That's easy, the answer is Twenty-Eight" answered Red.

"Good" said the Dimat, "Now this one is not quite so simple, tell me, what is unique about the number 8,549,176,320 ?".

This one stumped Red for a good two minutes, could you have done better? First person to give the correct answer to Stan Eling at this month's meeting gets a pint.

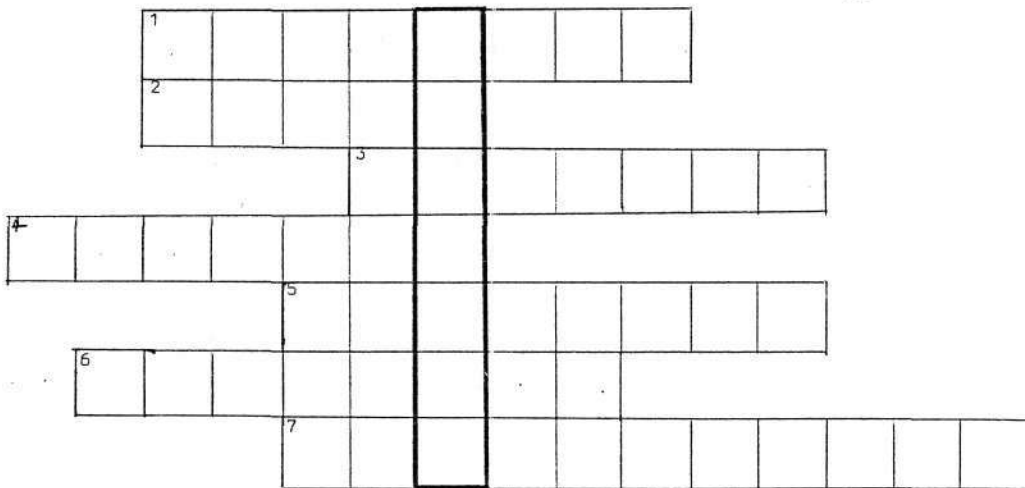
PRIZE PUZZLE.

Once again this is YOUR chance to win a £2.50 voucher for Andromeda. All you have to do is fill in the puzzle below using the following clues and tell us

1. The name of the character outlined on the centre boxes.
2. The nature of the character.
3. What book (or books) this character has featured in.
4. Who wrote the books.

First person to hand me the correct answer at this month's meeting (after the 8.00 pm start) gets the voucher. Goodluck.

1. "Chtorran" Hero.
2. Cooper's Walker.
3. Tarod's Brother?
4. Jenny Waynest's Lord and Lover
5. Bester's Tiger's Destination.
6. Biggle's musical instruments.
7. Gramayre's Warlock.



Thankyous this month go to :-

Stan Eling for his article and puzzle.

Chris and Pauline Morgan, Glyn Jackson for their reviews

Tim Stannard for letting us use his photocopier to print this

Finally we would like to wish you all a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

Deadline for next month's newsletter is 3rd January. Editorial address is Carol & Tony Morton, 45, Grosvenor Way, Quarry Bank, Brierley Hill, W. Mids