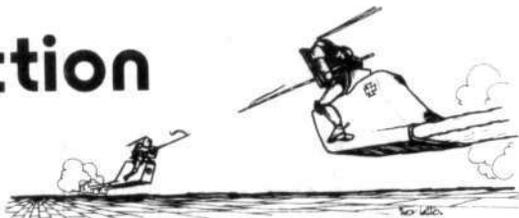


Birmingham Science Fiction Group

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



NEWSLETTER 102

FEBRUARY 1980

The Birmingham Science Fiction Group meets on the third Friday of each month at THE IVY BUSH pub on the corner of Hagley Road and Monument Road. This month's meeting is on Friday 15th February at 8.00pm. New members are always welcome. Our treasurer is Margaret Thorpe, 36 Twyford Road, Ward End, Birmingham B8 2NJ.

FEBRUARY MEETING - Friday 15th February 1980

Dr John Barker will be speaking on "The Bio-Chip and its Implications".

The next generation of micro-electronic chips will be so much smaller and more capable as to approach artificial intelligence. It may very soon be possible to implant these into the human body to replace or enhance our existing control systems. This implant is known as a bio-chip. This is an exceptional opportunity to hear about an area of research where science is ahead of SF, from a world expert.

Bio-chips will probably be the gimmick in next year's SF novels. Come along and hear all about them now.

THE REST OF THE YEAR

We have a lot of good things lined up for you, including a Dan Dare evening, a barge trip and talks by writer Robert Holdstock, agent Les Flood and publisher Anthony Cheetham. There should also be visits from several world famous authors. Watch this space for further details.

THE BIRMINGHAM SCIENCE FICTION FILM SOCIETY

The B.S.F.F.S. is being formed as an offshoot of the B.S.F.G. The intention is to show a programme of SF films once a month at the Arts Lab cinema, on Sunday mornings, hopefully starting in May. Chris Smith is putting together an organising committee now. See him at this month's meeting if you're interested in joining or helping to organise.

JANUARY MEETING

As usual, the first meeting of the year included elections to the committee. Your committee is now: CHAIRMAN - David Hardy; TREASURER - Margaret Thorpe; SECRETARY - Arline Peyton; NEWSLETTER EDITOR - Chris Morgan; PUBLICITY OFFICER - Pauline Morgan; NOVACON CHAIRMAN - Rog Peyton.

DON'T FORGET that your subscriptions for 1980 are due. £2 per person or £3 for two members at the same address.

NEWS

FANCON was held at Cambridge over the weekend of 1st to 3rd of February. This was a small, friendly convention without a fixed programme. The venue was the Helen Hotel, and about forty people attended including half a dozen from the Brum Group. The only complaints were over the lack of draught beer at the hotel. It was organised by Celia Parsons of the C.U.S.F.S., who put in occasional appearances during the weekend.

MAICOLM EDWARDS has resigned as Administrator of the Science Fiction Foundation, based at the North East London Polytechnic, with effect from April 1980. He has held the post since January 1978 and intends to divide his time between dealing in rare second-hand SF books and advising Gollancz on their new SF titles. He is not being replaced due to a shortage of money. Presumably the journal Foundation will become defunct. It is not known what will happen to the large library of SF books at the Foundation, many of which belong to the BSPA.

ROBERT A. HEINLEIN'S new novel Number of the Beast will be published by New English Library on March 27th. This will be the world first edition.

LARRY NIVEN'S new novel The Ringworld Engineers (the sequel to Ringworld) has already appeared in the U.S.A. and will be published in Britain by Gollancz in June.

LIONEL FANTHORPE and his wife, Patricia, ran a Weekend Workshop and Mini-Convention in Norwich on 9-10th February for would-be writers of SF, fantasy, ghost stories and gothic horror. Information on this came too late for anybody from the Brum Group to attend, but there's another workshop planned for 7-8th June. If you're interested send an s.a.e. to Lionel at 30 Boverton Street, Roath Park, Cardiff, CF2 5ES, asking for details.

TAFF, the TransAtlantic Fan Fund, will be paying for a lucky British fan to visit Boston, Mass. for the 38th World SF Convention at the end of August this year. It's a straight fight between Jim Barker and Dave Langford, and voting forms will be available very shortly.



C O M P E T I T I O N

Yes, it's competition time, and a chance for you to win yourself a free drink. Below are the first lines of four Hugo-winning novels. All you have to do is to remember (or look up) the title and author of each. The first person to give me (Chris Morgan) the correct answers at this month's meeting will win a free drink.

- (a) "His followers called him Mahasamatman and said he was a god."
- (b) "Tonight we're going to show you eight silent ways to kill a man."
- (c) "Just ahead, on Third Street, the massive facade of San Francisco's Southern Pacific Depot loomed, half hidden in the swirling fog and January twilight."
- (d) "I always get the shakes before a drop."

There you are. That was easy, wasn't it? Answers to me on Friday.

BOOK REVIEWS

First, a review which should have appeared in the Novacon 9 programme book but was omitted due to lack of space.

AN INFINITE SUMMER by Christopher Priest, Faber 1979, £5.25, 208 pages. Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

This is Christopher Priest's second collection and his best book to date. The five stories are separate in terms of plot and characters but share themes and treatments. They are clever, subtle and beautifully written. In the title story a man from Edwardian England is displaced in time by mysterious visitors from the future, while in "Palely Loitering" a boy discovers how to travel several decades into the future. Another theme is the passive observer; in each story somebody is watching somebody else. This is particularly so in "The Watched", the enigmatic final story in which the protagonist secretly observes a strange native tribe who hate to be watched. This is in a technologically advanced future (or alternative present) where nobody can escape being watched because the world has been seeded with tiny surveillance lenses (scintillas) smaller than a grain of sugar. In another story, "Whores", the narrator (an army officer) has had his senses permanently damaged by a battlefield gas so that he often watches spectacular surrealistic effects which involve sight, sound and feeling.

There is love in these stories, too. In "An Infinite Summer", "Palely Loitering" and "The Negation" it is a pure feeling, though in each case that purity is eroded away by time or education. In "Whores" and "The Watched" it is a more sexual emotion. Additionally, three of the stories are part of the author's "Dream Archipelago" series. It is impossible to do justice to this collection in a review, because these are stories which were not written to be analysed (close analysis causes them to fall apart and reveal inconsistencies) but to be enjoyed. I enjoyed them very much and I hope you will, too.

C.M.

THE WORD FOR WORLD IS FOREST by Ursula K. Le Guin, Panther 1980, 95 pence, 128 pages. Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

Technologically advanced humans are the villains here, as they try to colonise an alien world, and the native aliens, who put up with oppression and slavery for a while before revolting, are the good guys. Ursula Le Guin won a Hugo for this (not as a novel but as a novella in the Ellison anthology Again Dangerous Visions). It's strongly told, with atrocities committed by both sides, though there's no doubt as to where the author's sympathy lies. The humans, with a single exception, are portrayed either as chauvinistic sadists or unthinking incompetents; they use the aliens (who are three feet tall and covered in green fur but otherwise fairly human) as slave labour, believing them to be no more than semi-intelligent aborigines and considering it quite acceptable to kill them or rape their females without feeling guilty about it. In fact the aliens possess a highly-developed culture which just happens to be non-technological; they come across as being nicer and more refined than the humans. This is all highly unbelievable as it stands, but it isn't intended that way. The Word For World is Forest is a satire; it has analogies with the Vietnam War and the ecology movement. The humans are not only cast in the role of military aggressors but also that of despoilers of the planetary ecology. The result is a strongly anti-war and pro-ecology story: too black and white, perhaps, but well detailed and absorbing. C.M.

TIME AFTER TIME by Karl Alexander, Panther 1980, £1.25, 320 pages

Reviewed by Pauline E. Morgan.

This is the book of the current film in which H.G. Wells pursues Jack the Ripper through time to San Francisco in 1979. The first part, set in 1893, manages to get facts wrong about Wells' early life and about the Ripper murders. Once in the future bother of them adapt fairly quickly. The Ripper continues to slit his way through society while Wells, inflamed by copies of Penthouse, takes time off from the chase to make passionate love to Amy Robbins (who, as all students of H.G. Wells know, became his second wife). Of course, it all ends happily with Wells taking Amy back to 1893, though for a man who had seen the future Wells managed to get an awful lot of it wrong in subsequent novels. This is not the first time Jack the Ripper has taken to time travelling. (There are stories by Robert Bloch and Harlan Ellison, not to mention a Star Trek episode.) Time After Time would have been better if the Ripper's pursuer had been a less well documented person. P.E.M.

A HANDFUL OF DARKNESS by Philip K. Dick, Panther 1980, 95 pence, 186 pages.

Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

Paranoia, problems of reality, robots taking over, humour with a razor edge---this is the nightmare world of Philip K. Dick as presented in a collection of 13 early stories which originally appeared in magazines in 1952-4. In fact this is the "rare" first collection which was originally published in Britain in 1955 but was unavailable in the U.S.A. until 1978. The themes on which Dick's novels are based are all here in embryo, not fully formed but recognisable for what they were to become. Most archetypal is "Imposter" in which a man---just an ordinary guy with a wife and a job---is arrested as an alien spy. He is told he is a bomb, a construct built to take the place of a human. He doesn't believe it and is determined to prove the authorities wrong before they kill him. Then there is "Upon the Dull Earth" about angels which drink blood, and "Exhibit Piece", where a man must decide which is the real world and which is just imagination. Even after twenty-five years these are remarkably good stories. C.M.

TOMORROW AND TOMORROW by Ed McBain, Sphere 1979, 95 pence, 190 pages.

Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

The society of 2174 is split into Rees and Vikes. Rees (Realists) are not too different from a lot of people today, trying to impose morality onto the mass media while privately enjoying pornography and indulging in adultery. Vikes (Vicarious) are all hooked on hard drugs, wear provocative clothes (both sexes go bare above the waist; the women wear transparent briefs and skirts slit to the crotch) but they obtain all their sexual kicks vicariously, from pornographic books and films. The two groups are violently opposed, and the plot deals with an attempt by the Rees to stamp out the Vike culture.

This situation is never quite believable. In particular it seems unreasonable that a population should be split into two opposed camps without anybody occupying the middle ground. But the book is intended as a satire on our own generation- and culture-gaps. It shows that neither side is wholly right or wrong, and that there must be compromise if society is to be able to operate at all. There is no great depth to the book, yet it is a lot of fun to read.

I'd better mention that it was first published in 1956 under the pseudonym "Hunt Collins". This is the first U.K. edition and the first under the author's "Ed McBain" pseudonym. C.M.