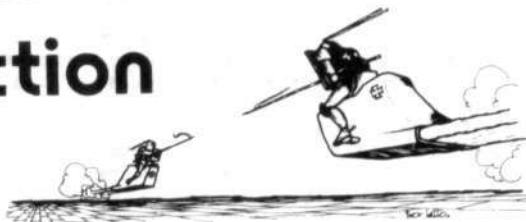


Birmingham Science Fiction Group

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



NEWS LETTER 103

MARCH 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, Edgbaston, Birmingham 16. This month's meeting is on Friday 21st March at 8.00pm. New members are always welcome. Our treasurer is Margaret Thorpe, 36 Twyford Road, Ward End, Birmingham B8 2NJ.

MARCH MEETING - Friday 21st March 1980

This month we're having a quiz based very closely on ITV's University Challenge (except that all the questions will be on science fiction). We can promise you that the questions will be very easy, though some of the answers may be more tricky. We had a practice session of this quiz format at last year's Novacon, just to make sure that it would work properly for this month's meeting. So come along and display your knowledge. All contestants will receive a book prize, and members of the winning team will get several books each.

During the evening there will also be a raffle for a copy of the brand new Robert A. Heinlein novel, Number of the Beast, the world first edition of which is published in hardcover this month by NEL.

FEBRUARY MEETING

Dr John Barker's talk on "The Bio-Chip" went down well. He gave a very lucid explanation of present research and future possibilities in the field of micro-electronics. The fact that there was a small group of people standing round him, asking questions, long after the bar had closed, speaks for itself.

DON'T FORGET to bring your membership card with you each month. It must be shown at the door. Otherwise you may be charged non-member's rate.

THE USED SPACESHIP COLUMN

This is an opportunity to advertise your science fiction "wants" or "for sale" items free of charge (members only). Just send your advert along to me (Chris Morgan) at the address on the back page. The column will appear every two or three months (space permitting).



WANTED

* Gordon R. Dickson: The Pritcher Mass, Star Road; Dickson & Anderson: Earthman's Burden; James White: Tomorrow is too Far. Any editions. Contact Margaret Thorpe, (021) 359-3611 ext 763.

* Allen Drury: Throne of Saturn. Contact Stan Eling, (021) 420-1369.

* George O. Smith: Nomad. Contact Roger Peyton (021) 236-1112.

* Wanted: one used spaceship (or help in building a new one) for the Lord Mayor's Procession. See page 7 of this newsletter for more details.

* Philip Wylie: Gladiator. Contact Chris Smith at this month's meeting.

* Thorne Smith: Dream's End, The Glorious Pool, Topper, Lazy Bear Lane, Rain in the Doorway, Skin and Bones, The Bishop's Jaegers. Contact Dave Holmes (021) 236-1112.

* Charles Beaumont: Yonder; Ron Goulart: Death Cell, Nutzenbolts, Odd Job 101, Shaggy Planet, The Hellhound Project, Plunder, When the Waker Sleeps. Contact Chris Morgan (021) 476-0458.

DRILKJIS 5

I'm not going to make a habit of reviewing fanzines in this newsletter, partly because there isn't room, partly because most of them are not very interesting except to the contributors, and partly because very few people send me copies of their fanzines, but... But I just happen to have a bit of space left over, and Drilkjis 5 is an exceptionally fine and amusing zine. Of course, fanzines are only as good as their contents, and Drilkjis 5 has been lucky enough to acquire transcripts of two of the best items from Novacon 9, Chris Priest's Guest-of-Honour speech and the Formal Debate on characterization in SF. Then there's an article full of wit and self-pity (not to mention lust) by Peter Nicholls (who is responsible for the best of the many volumes entitled The Encyclopaedia of Science Fiction) on the subject of Seacon. Also included are a letter column, a cartoon strip and a variety of book reviews, some hilarious, some disguised as articles, by Joseph Nicholas, Dave Langford and Kev Smith. The aforementioned Langford and Smith are, in fact, responsible for putting together Drilkjis 5, and a remarkably good job they've made of it.

You can obtain a copy for 50 pence (or even for a sufficiently witty begging letter) from Dave Langford, 22 Northumberland Av, Reading, Berks, RG2 7PW.

THE BIRMINGHAM SCIENCE FICTION FILM SOCIETY

This has now been formed as an offshoot of the B.S.F.G. Film programmes will be shown on one Sunday morning each month at the Arts Lab cinema, Holt Street, Birmingham 7. This will start on Sunday 4th May.

The first programme will consist of two feature films and a short: Forbidden Planet, Dr Strangelove and Hardware Wars. Future programmes will be the choice of members.

Membership forms should be enclosed with this newsletter. Otherwise, contact Chris Smith at this month's meeting or at 49 Humber Tower, Francis St, Nechells, B'ham 7.

JOIN
NOW!



Art Credits This Issue:

Ivor Latto pages 1, 4
David Hardy page 2
Mik page 3
Ian Aldridge page 5



C O N V E N T I O N S

ALBACON 4th-7th April at the Albany Hotel, Glasgow. Guest of Honour is Colin Kapp. If you haven't already registered for this you're probably a bit too late. For details write today (or sooner) to Gerry Gillin, 9 Dunnottar Street, Ruchazie, Glasgow G33.

EAGLECON '80 12th-13th April at the Y-Hotel, London W1. This is for all those who enjoyed Eagle comic as it used to be in the 1950s and 1960s. Attending will be many of the artists and writers, including Dan Dare artist Frank Hampson, editor Marcus Morris and writer Charles Chilton. Details from The Eaglecon '80 Secretariat, 4 Grasmere Road, Bromley, Kent BR1 4BA.

U.F.P.CON 1980 24th-25th May at the De Vere Hotel, Coventry. This is a Star Trek convention. For details send an s.a.e. to Kim Knight, 135 Greensted Road, Loughton, Essex.

UNICON'80 4th-7th July at the University of Keele. Guest of Honour is Harry Harrison. Details from Unicon '80, University of Keele, Staffs, ST5 5BJ.

TERRACON '80 20th-21st September at the Dragonara Hotel, Leeds. This is another Star Trek convention. For details send an s.a.e. to Mrs Dot Owens, 51 Furniss Drive, Illingworth, Halifax, West Yorkshire.

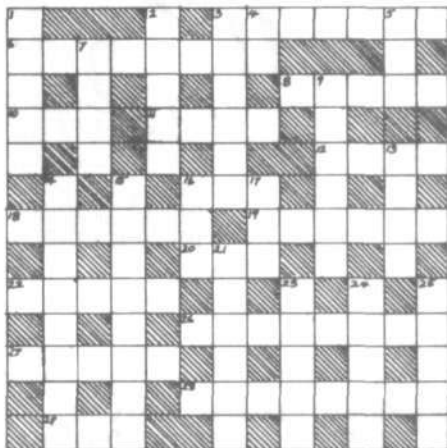
NOVACON 10 October 31st-November 2nd at the Royal Angus Hotel, Birmingham. Guest of Honour is Brian Aldiss. Details from Krystyna Bula c/o Nurseryland, 183 Shenley Road, Boreham Wood, Herts. The first Progress Report will be going out real soon now to all those who have registered or were members of Novacon 9.

COMPETITION

This month we have a prize crossword laboriously compiled by Malcolm Thorpe. (Thanks for all the hard work you put in, Malcolm.) It is difficult, and we're offering a prize of a free choice of SF books to the value of £3 for the first correct solution. Solutions to me (Chris Morgan) either at this month's meeting or by post. (My address is on the back page.) I'll print the solution next month.

CROSSWORD

by MAC



Clues Across

- 3. The Robinsons' 'Stardance' won this Hugo.
- 6. Briton on Pern ? (anag)
- 8. Graywand.
- 10. The Sun.
- 11. In Gods eye ?
- 12. His "Precious" ?
- 16. see 28.
- 18. see 28.
- 19. Lads is scrambled ?
- 20. You, presumably ?
- 22. Required finale for Vampires.
- 26. 15 collaborated with Harry Harrison for this.
- 27. His voice caused panic in New York with his namesake's writing
- 28. Dr. ? Whites short stories. (8,3,6)
- 29. Roger Dean illustrated their songs

Clues Down

- 1. The Dreamsnake.
- 2. Vance novel sounds like one electrical unit.
- 3. Alias Andrew North.
- 4. ? the beach.
- 5. M. A. Foster created race.
- 7. 2000-1 writer ?
- 9. New ? magazine.
- 13. A Loch that has 28 ?
- 14. Early fantastic weapon. (5,3)
- 15. His Childe cycle.
- 16. Magazine (abb.)
- 17. Daring and desperate.
- 21. Lucky Starr's writer.
- 23. John Thomas Stuart's star friend LummoX.
- 24. Art editor of Visions of Tomorrow.
- 25. Sounds as if it agrees that Mashad is one of honour on Dune. (1,4)

.....
LAST MONTH'S COMPETITION asked you to name the four Hugo-winning novels whose first lines were quoted. The answers were:

- (a) Lord of Light by Roger Zelazny
- (b) The Forever War by Joe Haldeman
- (c) The Forever Machine (also known as They'd Rather Be Right) by Mark Clifton and Frank Riley
- (d) Starship Troopers by Robert A. Heinlein

LORD MAYOR'S PROCESSION

This year's procession through Birmingham will be on Saturday 24th May, and its theme will be "The Future". The B.S.F.G. will have a float in the procession, and we need YOUR help to build it and ride along in it on the day. The basic idea is to build a spaceship (possibly with aliens and ray-guns, too). If you'd like to help in the designing, construction and painting, please contact Peter Weston. He should be at this month's meeting. Otherwise you can phone him on (021) 373-0998 or write to him at 72 Beeches Drive, Erdington, Birmingham B24.

THIS IS A TEAM EFFORT. WE NEED YOUR HELP NOW.

BOOK REVIEWS

SS-GB by Len Deighton, Panther 1980, £1.25, 367 pages

Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

It is 1941, a few months after the Germans have won the war and occupied Britain. This setting makes Len Deighton's latest offering a form of science fiction, an alternate world fantasy if you like. Churchill has been executed, the King is imprisoned in the Tower of London and the remnants of the British army are in German labour camps, but life must go on. At Scotland Yard Detective Superintendent Douglas Archer tries to do his job of solving crimes. A murder investigation becomes something much deeper, and he is dragged unwillingly into conflict with the British resistance movement and into the middle of a political power struggle between the different German military and police services. Two of the items at stake are the possession of atomic research secrets and the custody of the King.

SS-GB is a complex spy thriller with a great many twists and an extremely bitter ending. The excitement never flags, and the grim picture of a Britain-that-might-have-been is horrifyingly believable in every detail. It is, deservedly, the top-selling paperback in Britain at the moment.

C.M.

MIRACLE VISITORS by Ian Watson, Panther 1980, £1.00, 256 pages

Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

In this novel Ian Watson attempts the enormously difficult task of coming to terms with UFOs, not as invading or observing aliens but as subjective phenomena, self-induced by ourselves. Nearly all regular readers of SF seem to groan and look the other way when they come upon UFO-based stories, and justifiably so, but Miracle Visitors is the exception---a highly original piece of work which I found compulsive reading. The main trio who are subject to the visitations of UFOs are greatly contrasting types: a teenager who is very susceptible to suggestions, a sceptical research psychologist and an American who is convinced that flying saucers have really landed. The main point which the author is making is that whether or not UFO sightings are purely subjective phenomena they can still have profound effects upon our lives. There are some highly amusing passages, too, like the one where a Ford Thunderbird is driven all the way to the Moon---or is it all imagination? Ian Watson is not the easiest of authors to understand, but this book is probably his most enjoyable to date.

C.M.

ROGUE MOON by Algis Budrys, Fontana 1980, 90 pence, 158 pages

Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

This is Budrys's masterwork and one of the most critically acclaimed science fiction novels of the last thirty years. First published in 1960, it has been out of print for much of the time since. At one level it is the crisply-written tale of a project to investigate a strange construction on the Moon. Men can get into it but they die, horribly. By a trick of matter transmission (this is the means of sending men to the Moon) they don't have to stay dead, though the experience of dying tends to send the victims mad. Project head Dr Edward Hawks needs to find a man who can adjust to dying as a way of life. Al Barker may be that man. At a deeper, more symbolic level, the alien construction on the Moon is a test of manhood, or even an analogue of the human mind. To conquer it will be a triumph for the man who does so, for the project, and for the human race as a whole. The book is full of strong, immensely memorable characters. Everybody should read it. C.M.

THE IRON THORN by Algis Budrys, Fontana 1980, 90 pence 157 pages

Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

On an alien planet a group of humans have apparently regressed to a kind of barbarism. They hunt, kill and eat a race of intelligent aliens, the Amsirs. Yet both sides possess some technology and live in large metal constructions called iron thorns. This is a concealed environment story, in which the setting and explanation have to be guessed at (for the first hundred pages, anyway). For the most part there is plenty of exciting action, though the whole thing tails off into unbelievability towards the end. C.M.

THE IRON CLOG by Judith Buffery, Dobson 1980, £4.95, 185 pages

Reviewed by Pauline E.Morgan.

This is the third volume of the Star Lord saga by a Birmingham housewife. Set five years after the end of Saffron, the second volume, it follows Amaal, the Star Lord's younger son, after the destruction of Department K19. There are many basic flaws here. The plot has been rehashed from other authors' ideas, too much potentially interesting action happens off stage, the far future technology is highly implausible and characterisation is wishy-washy. In addition the writing style is clumsy and unprofessional. This book is not worth the consideration of the discerning SF reader but it may have some interest for those who are too young to have learnt discrimination. P.E.M.



EDITORIAL NOTES

Everything in this newsletter has been committed to paper by me unless otherwise attributed. In other words, you can blame me for it.

Within the next month the final nominations for this year's Hugo and Nebula awards should become known, and I hope to include reviews of all the nominated novels.

If any of you have news or opinions on any aspect of science fiction, please let me know. I'm always interested in receiving material for use in future newsletters.

Chris Morgan, 39 Hollybrow, Selly Oak, Birmingham B29 4LX.
Tel: (021) 476-0458.