

HONORARY PRESIDENTS:- BRIAN W. ALDISS
AND HARRY HARRISON.

the
Birmingham
SF Group
NEWSLETTER

OCTOBER 1985. No. 169



THIS MONTH'S SPEAKER IS — SNOO WILSON

THIS MONTH'S MEETING WILL BE ON FRIDAY 18TH OCTOBER AT 7.45
IN THE NEW IMPERIAL HOTEL, TEMPLE STREET.

SNOO WILSON -

FORMER DRAMATURGE TO THE ROYAL SHAKESPEARE COMPANY,
EDITOR OF TELEVISION'S PLAY FOR THE DAY AND SUCCESSFUL PLAYWRIGHT
SNOO WILSON HAS JUST HAD HIS SECON SCIENCE FICTION NOVEL PUBLISHED.
WITH SUCH A VARIED CAREER BEHIND HIM HIS TALK SHOULD BE ONE OF THE
MOST INTERESTING WE HAVE HEARD THIS YEAR.

THIS NEWSLETTER HAS BEEN PRODUCED BY MARTIN TUDOR,
121 CAPE HILL, SMETHWICK, WARLEY, WEST MIDLANDS,
B66 4SH...PLEASE NOTE CHANGE OF ADDRESS.

BIRMINGHAM SCIENCE FICTION GROUP CHRISTMAS PARTY
FULL DETAILS ON BACK PAGE.

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 A
YEAR FOR ONE
PERSON (£7.50
FOR 2 PEOPLE AT
THE SAME PLACE)
OR £2.50 FOR 6
MONTHS (£3.75
FOR TWO AT THE
SAME ADDRESS).
ALL CHEQUES 3
POs, PAYABLE TO
BSFG, AND SENT
TO TREASURER,
CHRIS CHIVERS,
51 BOUNDARY RD,
STREETLY, SUTTON
GOLDFIELD, WEST
MIDLANDS.

ENTERPRISE I 20th Official Star Trek Convention.

By Paranoid Android.

Liverpool after reeling under the repeated body blows of its Communist, ahem, Labour Council, under its deputy council leader Derek Hatton, had to contend with another assault on its nerves by ENTERPRISE I, its second Star Trek convention in six months.

The Crest Hotel braced itself once again for the hundreds of Star Trek fans that have made the hotel unique; it is still standing and Rog Peyton hasn't sold it yet!! I think? August 23-26 proved to be a very enjoyable convention as the majority of Star Trek conventions usually are.

Jimmy Doohan at his second Star Trek convention in this country was enjoying himself as much as the attendees, who had a double dose of pleasure with the unexpected arrival of D.C. Fontana. To give an even balance to the main guests were John Shackley of Tripods fame, Gerry Webb of Commercial Space Technologies Ltd and Wendy Graham freelance writer and ex-editor of Space Voyager.

The general program was a pot prri of guest speakers, videos and films; not forgetting Jim Pauley and China Town at the Ambassadors Ball and the unbelievable Scumbag University team (who have to be seen to be disbelieved) on Starfleet Academy Challenge. With the dealers room and specialist events a great three days.

THE FIRST BRENTFORD INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL OF SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY:-
alias WONDERFEST:- alias? ROBERT RANKIN STRIKES...AGAIN.

BY Paranoid Android.

For those who have heard or even read Bob Shaw's story of the Bermondsey Triangle Mystery, fear not. A black hole for SF fandom appeared by courtesy of Robert Rankin esquire, at the Watermans Arts Centre on 12-14 July 1985. Originally billed as a three day mini con, WONDERFEST turned out to be a gathering of UFO fans, Earth mysteries, Phantom Hitch Hikers (sorry Douglas) Paranormal and even a talk on the Brentford Gryphon. But of SCIENCE FICTION or FANTASY nothing. This was definitely an interesting side to SF fandom that I had never come across, now I know where R. Rankin's books Antipope, Brentford Triangle and East of Ealing came from.

I felt that lack of attendees came from the mislabelling of the 'con' (?) and even Lionel Fanthorpe on a bad day could prove more interesting than some of the speakers, as some of the subjects dealt with were so esoteric that even a nuclear physicist would have wondered if 1+1=2, and if the Flat Earthers weren't right.

No doubt Robert Rankin was using the weekend as research material for his next book? and if si I hope that I don't appear in it unless I'm blind drunk.

If anyone is interested in attending a Star Trek convention there will be another one this year taking place in Birmingham. GENESIS II CON, a small Star Trek con, will take place at the Royal Angus Hotel, St.Chads Queensway over the weekend of Nov, 8-10th. Registration £8 for the weekend or £5 for one day. Further details from Kathy Yates, 167 Kingshurst Road, Northfield, Birmingham, B31 2LL.

BECCON '85. 26-28th July 1985. A REPORT BY MAURLEN PORTEE.

I enjoyed Beccon '85 immensely, regarding it as a highlight of my summer, but equally I must be honest and say that the organised event actually contributed very little to this in comparison with the pleasure of spending time with a group of my friends in relatively pleasant and comfortable surroundings. I might as easily have been at Novacon or Albacon for all the impact that Beccon had upon me. As a convention I found it competently organised but, on the whole, remarkably unimaginative as if the committee, having hit upon a winning formula, is willing to stick by it without any alteration. As they apparently did in this case. I was plagued, all weekend, by a curious feeling of *deja-vu*, not simply attributable to it being the same hotel, the same familiar faces, and checking my 1983 Beccon programme book later, I was only mildly surprised to find that the 1985 programme was almost identical to its predecessor, given the transposition of a game and panel, ^{sections} and with similar subject matter in panels two years apart, in which case it puzzles me that the committee has taken two years to organise what amounts to the same convention, with little evidence of fresh creative input, an influx of new or original ideas, at the very least a novel approach to hoary programme standards. Beccon is acknowledged to be a well-organised con, held only biennially in order to give ample ^{time} to the details, but I would argue that the smoothest run con is of no use at all, no matter how well the programme runs to time, no matter how few technical hitches occur, if the programme offered is basically dull, unadventurous and available at any number of other conventions. Whilst I don't deny that lots of hard work may have gone into individual items this is wasted if all it achieves is to keep a group speculating the meaning of an item title without feeling the slightest inclination to actually see it.

Presumably the creative input must be regarded as embodied by the production of Spock in Manacles, apparently a roaring success from all I heard. I didn't go, mainly because I was already very tired of the way in which the whole convention was starting to revolve around this one item, even to rumours, so far unconfirmed, that some people had come specifically for this and nothing else, which is not something a con should be proud of. And anyway, by Sunday I was half-convicted I'd seen it already, I'd become so accustomed to watching the cast trail to and fro from apparently endless rehearsals. They worked really hard, that lot - the organisation was again superb - but I wonder how much spontaneity was lost in the endless grind for perfection. Spontaneity is something that Beccon lacks, with even the charades organised into a programme event instead of being conducted in corners of the bar and other inconvenient places, half the fun as I used to understand it, and Beccon is surely the only con where all mealtimes are programmed into the schedule. Luckily there was a sufficiency of birthdays and anniversaries to be celebrated for those of us who like our fun a little more impromptu.

Despite this, it cannot be denied that Beccon works, and I'd be the first to admit that it does. Its most loyal followers are vociferous in their praise and will hear no word against it, witness the person who seemed ready to flatten me when I voiced dissatisfaction recently. What Beccon does succeed in is achieving that elusive relaxed and informal atmosphere so many cons strive for, and too frequently fail to find, except that Beccon seem to manage it more by accident, though the intention is undoubtedly built into the Beccon charter. 'Informality - that's an order' it said in the 1983 programme book, a joke I think, but perilously near the truth, despite which people relax, get on with enjoying themselves whilst the committee get on with organising the con. It's a pity they couldn't have done something about the food, however, which underlined the problems of having a con in a hotel which is miles from shops or restaurants. For a con run by a committee renowned for its love of good food, to the extent of producing its own cookery book, what was on offer during the weekend was little short of disgraceful, not to mention inedible. The 'cheap' food downstairs, for which we paid grossly inflated prices, was mostly overcooked and not to be faced on a weak stomach, whilst for those who could afford the hotel restaurant there was the small problem of the restaurant manager who seemed more inclined to commit financial suicide rather than let in members of the con, bearing in mind that many of them were hotel residents. In the normal way, we would have headed for the nearest takeaway but as the hotel is inconveniently situated in the middle of an industrial estate some way from the town centre, and Basildon is not exactly overburdened with eating places anyway, it was starvation or indigestion. This is simply not good enough. We should not be held to ransom by hunger and forced to eat such culinary horrors at such appalling physical and financial cost. It is frankly intolerable. Perhaps the committee should start working on the menu for

next time now.

Which brings me to the matter of the Beccon bid for 1987's Eastercon. At a risk of repeating Pam Wells' comments on Albacon I have to ask whether Beccon is in a position to make this bid. At present it's a convivial but undemanding little summer convention, and with 300 attendees, it's comfortable, no one complaining about programming deficiencies as they're quite capable of making their own amusement, but an Eastercon is altogether a different proposition, with a much greater number of people, ranging from the most specialised media fan to the most fannish fanzine fan, and it is going to take much more than the usual Beccon programme to keep such a diversity of tastes happy, especially those who rely on a constant flow of organised entertainment to keep them ^{happy}. On their present showing Beccon will have to work hard to convince me they can do it, though I very much hope they will succeed in that.

A standard Beccon has one stream of programming with nothing in the way of extras, and I wonder whether they will be able to expand what is basically a diet of silly games into a multi-tracked programme designed to appeal to everyone, and including all those vital trimmings like video shows and a disco, indeed whether they have the creative expertise to do this, given the fact that the committee pool shows a remarkable homogeneity of taste in creaky films, bad SF and puns, something of limited appeal even to 300 people let alone perhaps 1500. Obviously they will have to employ outside assistance, and one hopes they are already doing so, in order to revitalise an apparently stale committee, and to create an attractive and viable Eastercon bid, though there is no other bid as yet, and to compete with the Worldcon later that year. And given the fact that they are planning this con for another out-of-town site, I hope that they liaise with the caterers well in advance. I am not at all happy with this idea of cons, especially one as large as the Eastercon, being held in isolated locations. I accept that a body of opinion believes that the con should fill all one's needs for a weekend but materially and spiritually it so frequently doesn't and I, for one, would welcome an opportunity to get away for a little while without undertaking a major expedition to find civilisation. BR will be laughing if Beccon get this bid.

Undoubtedly Beccon will succeed - it always does - seeming to lead a charmed existence, relying on incredible luck and the goodwill of those involved. I'd hate to see this proved otherwise simply because they are thinking too big without the appropriate resources, and I very much look forward to them proving me wrong about the Eastercon, though I promise not to say 'Told you so' should I be proved right. You see, I do like Beccon, I'll probably even sign up for the Eastercon, but I can't help the fact that the con itself does little for me, though I love the atmosphere.

NOVACON

Fifteen GUESTS OF HONOUR:

1ST- 3RD November 1985 Dave Langford
De Vere Hotel James White
Coventry

NOVACON IS AN ANNUAL SF CONVENTION FEATURING TALKS BY FAMOUS AUTHORS, FILMS, DISCOS COMPETITIONS, PARTIES, QUIZZES REAL ALE AND LATE, LATE BARS. NOVACON IS BRITAIN'S LONGEST RUNNING 'REGIONAL' CON & THE FIRST 'REGIONAL' CON TO 'GO NATIONAL' AS WELL AS BEING ONE OF THE LARGEST CONS IN EUROPE AND AS SUCH IT ATTRACTS NOT ONLY SF FANS FROM ALL OVER EUROPE, BUT ALSO A LARGE NUMBER OF WELL KNOWN AUTHORS. NOVACON REMAINS BRITAIN'S CHEAPEST FULLY PROGRAMMED SF CON AND HAS KEPT THE SAME £15 ROOM RATE SINCE 1983! (RATE PER PERSON IN TWIN ROOM WITH FULL ENGLISH BREAKFAST). NOVACON THIS YEAR CELEBRATES IT'S FIFTEENTH ANNIVERSARY AND WE INTEND TO CELEBRATE IN STYLE... IF YOU WANT TO FIND OUT JUST WHAT WE MEAN BY THAT YOU'D BEST REGISTER NOW!

REGISTER NOW! JUST BRING ALONG YOUR MEASLY £7.00 TO THIS MONTHLY BRUN GROUP MEETING AND GIVE IT TO MARTIN TUDOR --- THE OVERWEIGHT HAIRY CHAF AT THE DOOR --- AND YOU WILL RECEIVE IN RETURN NOVACON PR 2 AND YOUR HOTEL BOOKING FORM.



DEEPWATER - ALEX FINER.

REVIEWED BY CHIVERS,

237 Pages of a well paced excellent light read, very much in the mould of the Clive Cussler 'Dirk Pitt' stories, from GRANADA for £1.95. This was a well researched futuristic

fictional story about deep sea mining and the possible effects of a totally different environment on the human species. As a plot line I'm sure it would make an excellent film for the video market. Not really a SF novel, but a nice departure from the hard core of the genre.

The story centres around the mining of cobalt nodules from the sea floor and the unexpected find of a geothermal hot spot on the ocean bed with the associated flora and fauna surrounding the area.

As a sub plot the whole

mission is being tailed by a mysterious submarine, which later proves to be from the CIA, and as usual they are not averse to letting fellow Americans die to protect their anonymity. On board the mining exploration vessel Voyager the work recovering cobalt nodules continues until an unknown disease breaks out slowly killing the crew and gradually the submarine's crews are drawn into the decision of whether they should obey orders implicitly or help their fellow country men. The story unfolds in a well paced manner and I felt that the ending has been left so that a possible sequel could follow, but an enjoyable book never the less.

THINNER by Stephen King writing as Richard Bachman, NEL £9.95, 308pp

Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

The fifth "Richard Bachman" novel, but the first to admit King's authorship, Thinner is a gripping horror-thriller with fantasy elements. Overweight US lawyer Billy Halleck kills a gypsy woman in a car accident and is subjected to a gypsy curse. This is that he will get thinner. However much he eats he loses weight---several pounds a week, with no end in sight. While Thinner is a smaller novel, dealing with a smaller subject, than the normal Stephen King opus, it has all the King hallmarks: a main character coming wonderfully alive through his thoughts, a hard-hitting style which makes the most of horrific events, and long but absorbing descriptive passages. Included here are two of King's most fascinating characters---Taduz Lemke, the very old gypsy who imposes the curse, and Richard Ginelli, a tough Mafia boss to whom Halleck turns for help. Never mind that the plot is too contrived, this novel is already on the best-seller lists, deservedly so because it's a good fast read, unputdownable.



BOOK REVIEWS

THE LAST WARRIOR QUEEN by Mary Mackey, Unicorn £2.95, 240 pages

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

This book is not quite as bad as the cover illustration suggests although the author cannot quite make up her mind whether she is writing a fantasy novel or a historical romance. It is both, but the two elements don't quite mesh. If I had not been told that it was based on Sumerian myth I would never have guessed as there is no sense of historical time or place in the novel. It is the story of a tribeswoman, Inanna, who is left for dead after trying to prevent her brother from executing their sister for adultery and her subsequent adoption by the Queen of the City of the Dove whose life she saves. A competent first novel but lacking in grandeur.

BEARING AN HOURGLASS by Piers Anthony, Granada £2.50, 383 pages

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

A delightful read. It starts with Norton, a rootless wanderer, meeting a ghost who makes him an unusual offer. The ghost wants Norton to provide him with an heir. The events which follow lead Norton to take up the Hourglass and assume the role of the Incarnation of Time. As Chronos, he lives backwards, a confusing situation as while he is only finding out what powers he has, his new friends, the other Incarnations, have memories of him that he has yet to experience. Immediately he is opposed by Satan, who uses his ignorance to unwittingly help him in his struggle for power over the Earth. The second book in a series, this volume should not be taken seriously. Of interest also, is the author's note at the end which gives an insight into Piers Anthony's approach to his work.

THENDARA HOUSE by Marion Zimmer Bradley, Arrow £2.75, 414 pages

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

At the end of The Shattered Chain, Magdalen Lorne and Jaelle n'ha Melora agreed to changes places; Magda to enter the Renunciate House in Thendara as a Parkovan Free Amazon, Jaelle to live in the Terran zone as the wife of Peter Haldane. Written seven years later, Thendara House follows the attempts of both women to adapt to what is for each of them an alien society. For both the transition is more of a shock than they anticipated and each undergoes self-reassessment.

This Darkover novel is definitely slanted to the female point of view and most of the men that have important roles come off badly. Perhaps the message could have been delivered in fewer pages but the extra wordage adds detail of the two worlds, builds characters and is hardly noticeable in the easy flow of the prose.

THE POWER OF TIME by Josephine Saxton, Chatto & Windus £3.95, 222 pages

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

There is no doubt that Josephine Saxton is a skilled and imaginative writer but she is also an acquired taste. Much of her fiction is weird in that it is not easily accessible to the average reader. This collection of fourteen stories includes such as "Silence in Having Words: Purple" which I must confess I found almost incomprehensible, partly due to the style in which it is written. Is it significant that this is one of the three stories in this volume that have not been previously published? Many stories are macabre or touched with madness while others make their points very subtly, almost too subtly in some cases. The title story "The Power of Time" (involving the removal of the whole of Manhattan to the Midlands), although thin on plot, is fun. The volume contains a highly eccentric mixture ranging from magic in "Black Sabbatical" to auto-brain-surgery in "No Coward Soul" as well as Josephine Saxton's first published story "The Wall" which appeared in 1966.

News



APOLOGIES - Your beleaguered editor, apologises most sincerely for the non-appearance of the Sept. Newsletter. This was due to the combination of lack of time, moving house, an awfully busy month at work and absolute exhaustion. He also apologises for the lateness of this newsletter the reasons being very similar to the above - settling in and unpacking in new house, complete exhaustion etc etc etc. Sorry.

CONGRATULATIONS - to Pauline Morgan for her recent success in winning a national short story competition.

WORLDCON '87 - Britain has secured the right to host the 1987 World SF Con. It will be called CONSPIRACY '87, and attending registration is at the moment £19.50. Minus £2.00 if you're a pre-supporter. Minus another £10.00 if

you voted. The convention address is CONSPIRACY '87. PO BOX 43, CAMBRIDGE, CB1 3JJ.

MORE WORLDCONS - Bids for the 1988 Worldcon include New Orleans, St Louis, Cincinnati and the Bermuda Triangle! The BT bid started as a hoax but is now almost a contender with several luxury liners being considered.....

PIRATE RADIO - Doctor Who is apparently scheduled to appear on radio as part of something called 'PIRATE RADIO 4' on FM in stereo. The bad news is that PR4 will be broadcast on Thursdays (from 25th July) between 9 & 12 in the morning, so if you're one of the minority that actually work on Thursday mornings - forget it. (W.A. McCABE)

FILMS - Emilio Estevez (REPO MAN & BREAKFAST TRUCK, son of Martin Sheen) is to star in 'OVERDRIVE' directed by Stephen King (yes, that one!). (W.A. McCABE).

THE GOOD AND THE BAD NEWS FROM SPACE by Dave Hardy.

Earth 'phone E.T.? Steven Spielberg, creator of 'CEIIIK' and 'E.T.', has donated \$100,000 to the US Planetary Society to help build META - Megachannel ExtraTerrestrial Assay. To be installed at the SETI Headquarters, META will permit scanning of the sky on 8,4 million radio channels simultaneously - nearly 100 times more than current SETI radio telescope capabilities - in the search for extraterrestrial intelligence.

Over the next 10 years or so META will scan not only the 1420 megahertz hydrogen frequency but 6 to 10 other 'magic' frequencies. The Planetary Society is asking for donations to help meet Spielberg's challenge - to discover, in our lifetime, another civilization in space.

Space Shuttle - a financial bust? Virtually every Shuttle flight has had trouble with the landing gear, meaning that landings continue to be made on the desert runways of Edwards Air Force Base in California instead of at Kennedy Space Center in Florida as intended. The need to transport shuttles back across the States means that turnaround flight times have been longer than expected; each launch costs the US taxpayer \$250 million, of which they get back only a small part. Despite its potential, the Shuttle will remain a billion-dollar-a-year 'sink' indefinitely... However, a Houston-based company, Space Industries Inc., is planning the first industrial factory in space - a platform which will be leased to manufacturers needing a gravity-free environment. If others follow suit, space may yet pay for itself. And NASA is now accepting bids from movie companies who want to make the first space epic actually filmed in space!

- HUGO AWARDS 1985. -- Best Novel.....Neuromancer by William Gibson.
 Best Novella....."Press Enter" by John Varley.
 Best Novelette.....Bloodchild by O. E. Butler.
 Best Short Story....The Crystal Spheres by David Brin.
 Best Non-Fiction Book.....Wonder's Child: My life in Science Fiction
 by Jack Williamson.
 Best Dramatic Presentation.....2010.
 Best Professional Editor.....Terry Carr.
 Best Professional Artist.....Michael Whelan.
 Best Semi-Prozine.....LOCUS. Ed. by Charles Brown.
 Best Fanzine.....FILE 770. ED. Mike Glyer.
 Best Fanwriter.....DAVE LANGFORD.
 Best Fan Artist.....Alexis Gilliland.
 John W. Campbell Award.....Lucius Shepard.

NOVACON 16 - The BSFG Committee invite applications for the post of N16
 Chairman. Possible candidates should have worked on at least
 one previous NOVACON and should contact Rog Peyton at Andromeda Bookshop
 sometime before the next Committee meeting on Tuesday 22nd October. The only
 candidate to have come forward so far is Martin Tudor.

NEWSLETTER EDITOR - The Committee also invite applications for the post of
 Newsletter Editor, possible candidates should have a
 decent typer and the time and ability to do a damn sight better job than
 I have managed to do this year.

CHRISTMAS PARTY. -- This year's Christmas Party will be on Friday the 20th
 of December at the Bacchos Italian Restaurant in Marston
 Green. The BSFG will be arranging for a bus to collect people from outside
 Andromeda Bookshop at 7.45pm and drop them as near to their homes as possible
 after the meal. Tickets will be sold on a first come first served basis
 - as we are restricted to only 50 places. The meal will as usual be subsidised
 by the Group meaning tickets will cost only £7.00 (not including bus)
 or £7.50 (including bus)
 All monies must be received by Bernie Evans no later than November 1st.

NAME:-
 ADDRESS:-

Please send me ___ ticket(s) for the BSFG Christmas Party, I enclose £ ____.

TICK BOX AS APPROPRIATE -- BUS & MEAL JUST MEAL
 VEGETARIAN STANDARD MENU

Either this form or a reasonable facsimile should accompany your order.