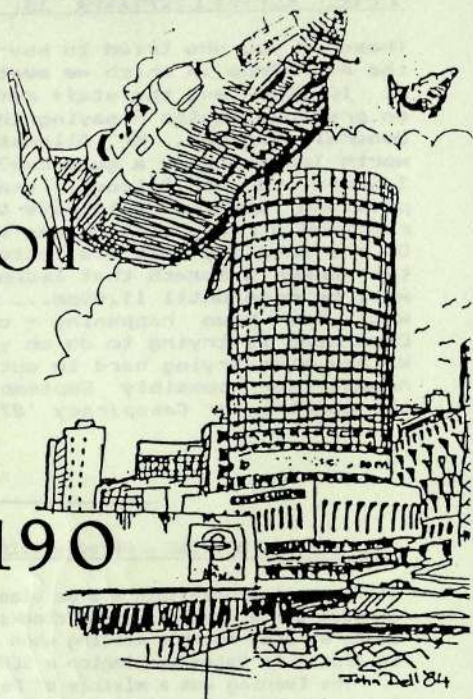


Birmingham Science Fiction Group

Honorary Presidents : Brian W. Aldiss
and Harry Harrison

NEWSLETTER 190



THE BSFG MEETS ON THE
THIRD FRIDAY OF EACH
MONTH IN THE LADBROKE
INTERNATIONAL HOTEL,
NEW STREET, IN THE
CENTRE OF BIRMINGHAM.
DETAILS OF THIS MONTH'S
MEETING ARE GIVEN
OPPOSITE.
MEMBERSHIP OF THE
GROUP COSTS A MERE £5.50
PER YEAR FOR ONE PERSON
£8.00 FOR TWO PEOPLE
AT THE SAME ADDRESS.
ALL CHEQUES AND POSTAL
ORDERS PAYABLE TO BSFG
AND SENT TO THE
TREASURER CHRIS CHIVERS
AT 51 BOUNDARY ROAD
STREETLY SUTTON
COLDFIELD WEST MID'S.

THIS MONTH'S MEETING: FRIDAY 17 JULY

FLASHBACK!!
TO THE MARCH NEWSLETTER:

"Once upon a time... a young lady walked into Andromeda and enquired unto Holmes where to send her newly finished manuscript". Well, you can read the rest for yourself - but please note that the name of the young lady is Storm Constantine (it's her real name, too), not Jamieson.

Toby Roxburgh says she is Britain's answer to Ursula K. LeGuin. Storm says she hopes not: she could only read 6 pages of the latest LeGuin...

Storm comes to the Group this month, to talk about her new novel *Enchantments of the Flesh and Spirit* (the first in a trilogy - surprise), her interest in the occult, cats, painting, and photography. She adds that she is not 58 (apparently she thinks that most female SF writers are!)

All aspiring authors MUST come along and see how it's done. It promises to be interesting for the rest of us too; see you there!


P.S. There will be a signing session by Storm at Andromeda on Saturday 18th.

THE CHAIRMAN'S BIT

Those of you who tried to buy a drink in the Cocktail Bar (next to the Avon Room in which we meet) last month will know that it closed at 10.30pm and the staff refused to re-open it - as they had done on previous months - saying that they had a directive from the new General Manager, Mr Allcoat, and it was more than their job was worth (anyone have a gold cap?).

I wrote to Mr Allcoat, explaining that his predecessors had promised that we could have the use of that Bar until 11.00pm, and received a reply that he was instructing his staff accordingly. On the same day that his letter arrived, Mrs Thatcher announced in the Queen's Speech that licensing hours would be relaxed, and pubs will be open until 11.00pm... So I thought I had better tell you what has been happening - otherwise you will never know what the Committee is trying to do on your behalf!

We are also trying hard to obtain a Big Name US Author for the August (or possibly September) meeting, since several will be in the country for *Conspiracy '87*. Watch this space for more news.



LAST MONTH'S MEETING - Peter Warrington.

SF fans, I've been told are as biased as anyone else; they defend the 'pure' SF book while dismissing the 'cranks' such as UFOlogists. Well, this was proved wrong at last month's meeting when the biggest turnout of the year came to listen to Peter Warrington a SERIOUS UFOlogist.

The Evening was a mixture of Peter's comments on UFO 'sightings' and 'photographs' interspersed with slides to emphasise points. Basically he outlined two types of events (rather than 'Sightings').

Firstly, observations : That the phenomena of UFO's is possibly a natural phenomenon - a not yet recognised atmospheric or geophysical phenomenon.

Secondly, Experiences : The person who "sees" a UFO has the senses 'indisposed' and misinterpret the sighting due to an induction of neurophysiology. An example of this is electrical interference, the field strength necessary to "cloud the senses" is low and it is known electricity is found in nature (electrical storms/ electromagnetic smog) hence, a person in such a field could possibly 'confuse' say, the full moon for a UFO due to this effect.

Interestingly, humanoids are almost always present at the end of a sequence in UFO phenomenon (Close Encounters) and some work has been done on people who have claimed close encounters which resulted in a theory being forwarded that such events are nothing but memories of birth trauma.

There is no evidence that UFO's exist; people seem to accept without question the evidence of photographs which are at best ambiguous. Most photographs or films of UFO's can easily be explained. Also the close encounter cases tend to occur with one witness and so are unconfirmable. On this not only is it strange that humanoids form most of the alien lifeforms but that UFO's themselves look much like they would be expected to look.

The UFO phenomena benefits from scientist and psychiatrists as well as physicists. Jung's article "Flying Saucers" refers to the symbology deeply rooted in peoples psychological make-up,

To conclude, Peter referred to the need for more experienced investigation of the UFO phenomena. At present "enthusiastic amateurs" are involved in investigations and most of these seem more concerned with perpetuating the event rather than explaining it. They should not only be concerned with the event but council the witness as well.

Until a time when the phenomenon can be rationally explained (or perhaps a UFO lands at Westminster or the Whitehouse) Peter Warrington along with most (sensible) people will remain sceptical.

*A BRIEF GUIDE TO RECENT FANZINES
BY MARTIN TUDOR.*

Before the guide to fanzines I suppose a quick explanation of the terms used might be useful.
'THE USUAL' - means contribution, letter of comment, trade, or initially, a large stamped, self-addressed envelope with a suitably grovelling letter. (In the case of overseas fanzines SEVERAL international reply coupons are necessary.)
'GENZINE' - fanzine covering a variety of subjects, with contributions by a number of different writers.
'FANNISH GENZINE' - as above but covering only topics of a fannish nature.
'FANNISH' - about fans.
'PERSONALZINE' - a fanzine written solely by (and usually about) the editor.
'SERCON' - *serious and constructive*.
Any other terms should be self-explanatory.

ABBATOIR - Lots of scurrilous fannish gossip including, in the first issue, a list of 'available' male and female fans from both sides of the Atlantic who'll be attending the Worldcon. Last year's Novacon Chairman Mr Berry gets a mention, which includes his best and worst features (!) - "Tony Berry...Squeaky Clean (Anal Retentive)...Terminally Boring (Pompous)" - Yeah, I got a mention as well... but you'll have to get an issue to find out what they said. Possibly available for the usual from Bryan Barrett, PO BOX 6202, Hayward, CA 94540, USA or Lucy Huntzinger, 2215-R Market Street, San Francisco, CA 94114, USA.

ANSIBLE # 48 - Irregular newszine, now mainly available by editorial whim (after the current subscriptions run out) but you might try the usual. Always worth a read - featuring both fannish and professional news presented in Langford's inimitable style. Dave Langford, 94 London Road, Reading, Berkshire, RG1 5AU.

ANVIL #'s 41-43 - One of the best clubzines around and by far the most regular, it was nominated for the Fanzine Hugo last year. Issue 41 features a lengthy report of last year's Worldcon - Confederation. Issues 42 and 43 are more typical, featuring a wide selection of articles. Available for the usual (or \$6 a year) from Charlotte Proctor, 8325 7th Avenue So., Birmingham, AL 35206, USA.

CONCATEINATION #1 - I'm not really sure how to describe this, it's a peculiar mixture of sercon fanzine and 'professional' magazine. Worth a look if you've nothing better to do. Try sending an A4 sized S.A.E to 44 Brook Street, Erith, Kent, DA8 1JQ.

CONRUNNER # 6 - As the title suggests this is a fanzine written by, and for fans interested in running conventions. Try the usual, from Ian Sorenson, 304A Main Street, High Blantyre, Glasgow, G72 0DH.

FAN'TOONS #16 - A minizine comprised mostly of cartoons and illustrations by a wide selection of fanartists, quite interesting. Available for the usual or \$1 and two IRCs, from Edd Vick, PO BOX 3008, Richardson, TX 75083-3008, USA

FILE 770 - Newszine available for subscriptions (\$4.00 for 5 issues mailed surface printed matter rate. \$1.25 per copy mailed AIR printed matter rate) and ARRANGED trades - primarily with other newszines and clubzines. "Issues may also be earned for significant news, sufficiently scandalous DFQs, and the ever popular long-distance phone call". - Mike Glycer, 5828 Woodman Ave., #2, Van Nuys, CA 91401, USA.

FLOATIN' CHEESE - A personalzine which Steve still threatens to turn into a genzine - if he ever gets around to it. Available for the usual from Steve Hubbard, c/o 42 Langdale Road, Stourport-on-Severn, Worcs.

FUCK THE TORIES # 4 - A 'tri-continental' genzine with, as you may've guessed from the title, socialist overtones. Makes interesting reading. Available for the usual from Judith Hanna & Joseph Nicholas, 22 Denbigh Street, Pimlico, London, SW1V 2ER.

LARRIKIN #4 - Small but frequent fannish fanzine with a readable 'chatty' style. Available for the usual from Irwin Hirsh, 2/416 Dandenong Rd., Caulfield North, Victoria 3161, Australia or Perry Middlemiss, GPO BOX 2708X, Melbourne, Victoria 3001, Australia.

LIGHT IN THE BUSHEL #4 - Interesting personalzine wherein Richard chats about almost anything and frequently science fiction. Available for the usual from Richard Brandt, 4740 N. Mesa #111, El Paso, TX 79912, USA.

MAD DOG - Comixzine featuring some very high quality strips. Around 85p per issue + p&p from Simon Meacock, ODDMAGS, 78 Oxford Avenue, Southampton, Hampshire, SO2 0DN.

MAD MAR #3 - Very irregularly published genzine, quite interesting reading. Available for the usual from Hans Mader and Eckhard Marwitz, POSTFACH 1524, D-2070, Ahrensburg, West Germany.

NEW TOY #2 - Excellent genzine/personalzine well worth the \$4, but also available for the usual, from Taral Wayne, 1812-415 Willowdale Ave., Willowdale, Ontario, M2N 5B4, Canada.

PREVERT #15 - Past Nova Award winner and still one of the most interesting British genzines around. Issue 15 features articles by Dave Langford, Stu Schiffman, "Vincent Omniaveritas" and an excellent ALBACON report by D West. Possibly still available - try the usual. - John Jarrold, 31 Dukes Way, West Wickham, Kent, BR4 9AU.

PULP #4 - A quarterly fannish genzine, issue 4 was the last one to be edited by Pam Wells - reducing the editorial team to Avedon Carol/Rob Hansen and Vinc Clarke who will presumably continue to alternate. Available for the usual from Vinc Clarke, 16 Wendover Way, Welling, Kent, DA16 2BN.

RUNF #75 - Minnesota Science Fiction Society Inc.'s Clubzine. Mildly interesting. Available for the usual from PO BOX 8297, Lake Street Station, Minneapolis, MN 55408, USA.

SAT'D'Y BARFLY #1 - Fannish personalzine available for the usual from John Harvey, 43 Harrow Road, Carshalton, Surrey, SM5 3QH.

SCATTERSHOT #3 - "The frequent fanzine in which fannish fans talk about fandom" - is the way Linda describes this latest issue, a fairly accurate description. General comments about such subjects as the 'fanzine Hugo Debate', Greg Pickersgill and fanzines. Available for the usual from Linda Blanchard, 605 Ballard Road, SEAGOVILLE, TX 75159, USA.

6.5 - Very much a personalzine, as Dave chats about his new life in the States. Available for the usual, I would imagine, from - Dave Bridges, address the same as Linda Blanchard.

SHARDS OF BABEL #32 - Reliable European Newszine well worth \$10 (US) for 12 issues (\$5 for 6) from Roelof Goudriaan & Lynne Ann Morse, Noordwal 2, 2513 EA Den Haag, the Netherlands.

STICKY QUARTERS #16 - Pretty good fannish genzine, published on a (very nearly) quarterly basis. Available for the usual from Brian Earl Brown, 11675 Beaconsfield, Detroit, MI 48224, USA.

TIGGER #23 - Quite small but quite frequent genzine, available for the usual from Marc Ortlieb, PO BOX 215, Forest Hill, Vict 3131, Australia.

WAD OF IZZARD - The best damn fanzine I've seen this year, depressingly impressive, well worth \$5 a copy (or the usual if you try VERY hard) from Patrick & Teresa Nielsen Hayden, 75, Fairview 2D, New York, NY10040, USA.

WORMS - "An internal memo" is how Bob describes this short fanzine, which in graphic (but quite amusing) detail tells the story of his recent bout of... you guessed! Not for the squeemish. Probably available for the usual from Bob ('fake') Shaw, 3/2 226 Woodlands Road, Glasgow, G3 6LN.



BOOK REVIEWS

IRON MASTER, book 3 of The Amtrak Wars, by Patrick Tilley, Sphere £3.50, 405 pages, reviewed by Anne Gay.

Steve Brickman is playing both ends against the middle. As a Tracker being blackmailed by his own commanders, he is to infiltrate the Iron Masters to prevent their developing an airforce like the Trackers' own. As a semi-convert to the freedom-loving Mutes - tribal surface-dwellers in post-holocaust America - he is to infiltrate the Iron Masters and rescue two Mute prisoners. Not so easy, since the Iron Masters are Japanese overlords of a chunk of the Eastern Seaboard, who treat all other races as inferior. And big, blond Brickman stands out like a sore thumb. Unfortunately, all three sides have hidden plans for him....

This complex novel is a vivid tapestry of the future. It is credible and detailed; much of it would be fun to experience. Steve Brickman is a likeable hero, and his lover is an attractive candidate for fantasy too. Strong plot, psi and a pinch of magic make the book even more worth reading. I'M very much looking forward to the next volume.

A word of warning, though. It takes time to wade through the initial setting up of the Iron Masters' society, but it's worth it to make sense of the involved ending.

The entertaining Mr. Tilley has obviously produced another winner.

WIZARD OF THE PIGEONS by Megan Lindholm, Corgi, £2.50, 254 pages, reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

This is the best fantasy novel I have read for a long time and one of the most original.

There are wizards on the streets of Seattle. If you notice them at all they will appear as just another dropout, bum or misfit. The young man, known just as Wizard, is one of them. He has an affinity with the city's pigeons and is happy squatting in an old warehouse until Lynda and Grey Mir find him. Lynda is a woman who decides to protect him, who gradually peels away his protective colouring. Mir is an entity that threatens not just him but the whole of Seattle.

This is a marvelous book, just missing being shortlisted for the Nebula, but read it and see for yourself.

WIZARD OF THE PIGEONS by Megan Lindholm, Corgi, £2.50, 254 pages, reviewed by Tina Hewett.

This book is set in Seattle a few years after the Vietnam War, it is certainly not a run of the mill fantasy story. Though the book is based on good versus evil, it is well written with an unusual storyline, and a set of interesting characters covering a wide section of the population. The book shows great insight into human characteristics, with comparisons that are skillfully used. There are several references to the Vietnam War which are more potent, for the subtlety with which they are used and the bits that are left out. The book is well worth a read.

Greenhill have (obligingly) dusted off several out of print SF novels and reprinted them in a Science Fiction and Fantasy collection as they say 'from the days when writers were first setting out to explore a new wonderland of possibilities'. TOURMALIN'S TIME CHEQUES was first printed in 1885 and is steeped in Victorian values but is regardless of this an entertaining tale. Well worked out sequences follow as Tourmalin is persuaded to deposit his 'idle' time in a 'time bank' with withdrawal on demand. Lovely idea and well handled. Enjoyable as a period piece though I felt the ending a little trite; on this point I was chastened by consulting editor Brian Stableford's afterword, rightly stressing that at the time of writing the ending is not the literal cliché of today and therefore to forgive the author. This I do, suggesting to consider the boo in its era and reading in this context. Recommended as an 'historic' background to the beginnings of SF.

EARTHDOOM! by David Langford & John Grant, Grafton £2.95, 303 pages
Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

SF writers are getting too damned clever. There was a time when the scathing reviewer wielding his double-edged pen could cut their prose into Mr Spock headbands, castigating them for purple patches, for idiot plotting, for scientific impossibilities, for clichés of all kinds and, worst of all, for said bookisms. Unfortunately, while Langford and Grant indulge themselves liberally in all these solecisms, they clearly show that they know what they are doing and intend it all. They are playing literary games in the cause of increased humour and, at the same time, succeed in kicking the reviewer's legs out from under him.

The plot (which leaps pacily from one group of improbable characters in this book's astonishingly large cast to another, until most of them are drawn together by peculiarly unbelievable circumstances) concerns a large number of simultaneous threats to the Earth's existence. Which will succeed in exterminating humanity first---a new Ice Age, invading aliens, rabid lemmings, or Hitler with an instant cloning machine? The authors barely miss a trick: few of SF's clichés are left unturned in this hilarious parody of all end-of-the-world novels ever written.

For the cognoscenti there are lots of aliens bearing the (only slightly disguised) names of prominent SF authors, while in the White House is a certain President Heinlein...

HEART OF THE COMET by Gregory Benford and David Brin: Bantam Books, £2.95,
477 pages. Reviewed by Dave Hardy

Do you remember that, some years ago, our own Professor Fred Hoyle came up with a theory that diseases are brought to Earth by comets? That could well have been the seed from which this book grew - though the theory gets only a passing reference, and Hoyle is not named. It starts in 2061, when Halley's Comet makes its next close approach. Hundreds of men and women of all nationalities, spending much of their time in deep-sleep 'slots', burrow their way into the core of the comet, making living-quarters for their 76-year journey round the Sun. Apart from scientific exploration, their mission is to change its orbit, placing it where mankind can use its volatiles as propellants and biospheres for space colonies. The humans are of two types: normal ('Orthos'), and genetically altered ('Percells', after the scientist who perfected the technique.) This difference has almost catastrophic consequences, later, as the colonists fragment into 'clans'. The book follows three main characters: Carl, who starts out as an engineer but is forced by circumstances to become much more; Virginia, a computer wizard who dreams of producing true artificial intelligence - and succeeds in ways she never imagined; and Paul, a protégé of Simon Percell, whose brilliance at genetic manipulation eventually saves the expedition...

I found this book just a little difficult to get into, and wondered where it was going. For a while it seemed almost like an attempt to bring up-to-date the old pulp stories where explorers on alien planets discover voracious aliens. But I shouldn't have worried: Benford's scientific expertise and Brin's poetry explain all - with much conflict before the satisfying finale, of which I am sure Clarke will approve.

Colonists from a long-ago Earth ship watch wistfully for one last glimpse of the alien Vail. For others, though, the past is dead and probably just a myth, like their off-world origins. They don't even believe stories coming in about a meteor-shower and would prefer, like Voltaire, just to cultivate their gardens, but the tides of time are turning...

This is possibly the best book I have ever read. The beginning is confusing until you realise the prologue is written from an alien point of view, but that is just one of the unique features of SECOND NATURE. Skillful writing, realistic characterisation where nobody's perfect or sure of themselves all the time, an intriguing planet emerging from stasis into evolvement - it would be a wonderful place to escape to. Plot-strands cross and recross in varied texture against a background that's entrancingly different, with whole avenues of originality still to be explored. If I'm lucky, there'll be at least one sequel of equal calibre.

In view of all the schisms and pamphleteering going on in the Brum group, I'd like to stress that this is just my personal opinion. Nor is there any reason for other people to share my taste.

Even so, I don't feel any amount of eulogising from me can do this novel justice. I just wish I'd never read SECOND NATURE. Then I could taste again the pleasure of reading it for the first time.

ANDROMEDA'S TOP TEN FOR JUNE.

PAPERBACKS

1. Speaking of Dinosaurs
by Philip E. High.
2. Quest for Saint Camber
by Katherine Kurtz.
3. Dr. Who - Space Museum
by G. Jones.
4. Wordsmiths and the Warguild
by Hugh Cook.
5. Wandering Fire
by Guy Gavriel Kay.
6. The Iron Master
by Patrick Tilley.
6. Earthdoom!
by D. Langford and J. Grant.
8. War of the Twins
by Weis and Hickman
9. Flowers for Algernon
by Daniel Keyes.
9. Fool's Run
by Patricia McKillip

HARDCOVERS

1. Dirk Gently's Holistic Detective
Agency
by Douglas Adams
2. Replay
by Ken Grimwood.
3. Guardians of the West
by David Eddings.
4. Consider Phlebas
by Iain Banks.
5. Gabriel
by Lisa Tuttle.

30 October - 1 November 1987

The ROYAL ANGUS HOTEL, Birmingham

NOVEMBER 1987

The Annual Convention of the Birmingham Science Fiction Group

GUEST OF HONOUR IAIN BANKS



A SCENE FROM "WALKING ON GLASS"

IMPORTANT NOTICE

MEMBERSHIPS WILL BE LIMITED TO 350

JOIN EARLY TO AVOID DISAPPOINTMENT

Membership is £10

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For registration contact:

Mick Evans

7, Grove Avenue,

Acocks Green, Birmingham

B27 7UY

Thankyous this month go to

Dave Hardy, Martin Tudor, Anne Gay, Pauline Morgan, Tina Hewett and Chris Morgan.

There is no members' forum this month as we received nothing to go in it.

This newsletter was produced by Tony and Carol Morton, 45, Grosvenor Way, Quarry Bank, Brierly Hill, West Midlands, DY5 2LJ.

Deadline for next month's newsletter is 3rd August.