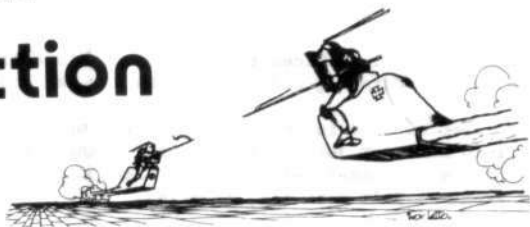


Birmingham Science Fiction Group



JULY 1979

NEWSLETTER

95

The Birmingham Science Fiction Group meet on the third Friday of every month at 8.00 p.m. The meeting this month is at the New Imperial Hotel, Temple Street, Birmingham City Centre.

New members rate now £1 till December.

Treasurer: Dave Holmes, 75 Willow Crescent,
Cannon Hill, Birmingham B12 9NE

NON MEMBERS ALWAYS WELCOME

JULY MEETING

A special meeting to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the first manned moon landing.

This will include films - the moon landing as it was done by Appolo XI and how it should have been - snippets of films strung together in an interesting and amusing manner plus complete shorts to complement film of the actual landing.

There will be a giant raffle with prizes including:-
A bottle of whisky (and some cavorite if we can get it) and of course books.

Tickets for this meeting can be reserved by giving Roger Peyton a ring at Andromeda (021) 236 - 1112 - Tickets are 75p for members and £1.00 for non-members (you may be able to get tickets on the door - but don't bank on it).

Now for the important bit

A bar extension till 12.30 p.m. has been applied for.

AUGUST MEETING

From August we are moving (sounds of cheering, boos and reminders of Imperial Hotel pork pies, sorry pie)

To

Fanfare of Trumpets

Ray Bradbury's (no not that Ray Bradbury) fine British pub THE IVY BUSH in Edgbaston.

The pub is situated on the corner of Hagley Road and Monument Road. We will have our own bar so there is no excuse not to buy the Committee a drink.

No author is decided yet, However with Seacon not too far away names have been named - more next month.

Now we come to the boring bit.

As you have probably noticed this is the combined efforts of two new editors (one working, one ~~stupidly~~ correcting) who are mad enough to try this.

However, what we need is help, your help! For reviews, hints, news, illustrations anything to make our job easier and this thing more readable. Please send them to either of the addresses below or hand them to a Committee member. (Send all complaints to our agent at Salt Mine 'A', Siberia).

Ian Warner,
65 Bewdley Road,
Kidderminster,
Worcs.

Eddie Stachelski,
54 Woodfield Street,
Kidderminster,
Worcs.

BOOK REVIEWS

DREAMSNAKE by Vonda McIntyre, Gollancz 1978, £4.95, 313 pages.
Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

This is Vonda McIntyre's second novel; three months ago it won her a Nebula award. But don't jump to the conclusion that it's a really good novel, because it isn't. It's a competently written but ultimately boring tale, with a noticeable absence of credibility. Ms McIntyre has obviously tried very hard to write an Important, Meaningful Novel; you can see how she has polished every sentence with loving care. Yet all the polish in the world won't make something good if its design and structure are unsound.

Four years ago Ms McIntyre won a Nebula award for her novelette, "Of Mist and Grass and Sand", which was an excellent story. She has used that story as the first chapter of Dreamsnake, though, a purpose for which it was never designed and never suitable. The main character, Snake, is a young woman who uses snakes to heal people. Mist, the cobra, and Sand, the rattlesnake, will produce anti-toxins to fight human infections, but Grass, the dreamsnake, can do less---and more---by bringing dreams to ease pain; dreamsnakes are alien and rare. In that opening chapter/earlier story Grass is killed, and for the rest of the book Snake travels around the country in silent anguish, trying to atone for her loss. The importance of dreamsnakes comes through to the reader, but the whole background of an after-the-bomb future becomes less believable the more it unfolds.

There's very little plot here. In strong contrast to her first novel, The Exile Waiting, there is an aimless progression of occurrences, with Snake still trying to heal the sick in a very moral fashion. She comes into contact with many characters, but (also in contrast to The Exile Waiting) none of them are interesting; most are caricatures. The entire presentation of the action is at a low level of sophistication. There are no twists or surprises, and complexity is absent from situation and character alike. And there's no humour; Ms McIntyre takes everything far too seriously.

This is a simple book which demands nothing more of the reader than that he should turn over the pages. At the end it leaves one with a clean, sterile, moral feeling, but not much else. Perhaps that's what people want from their SF this year.

C.M.

THE WHITE DRAGON by Anne McCaffrey, Sidgwick & Jackson 1979,
£5.95, 497 pages. Reviewed by Pauline E.Morgan.

The sequel to Dragonflight and Dragonquest, but the fifth book set on Pern, The White Dragon is the story of a youth caught between two traditions, those of Weyr and Hold. Raised as a Lord Holder but, by accident, rider of Ruth, the white dragon, the adolescent Jaxom refuses to be reconciled to his heritage; he feels he must fly Ruth and be a dragon-rider.

In the beginning the stress laid on Ruth's uniqueness rings false, even though he is outwardly unique and the circumstances of his impressing are highly unusual. It is not until much later that Jaxom realises Ruth's special attributes—his ability to talk to the fire-lizards that clutter the pages (turn over and a few more fly out), his memory (fire-lizards remember, but not real dragons), and the ability to know exactly "when" he is. This last, although playing an important part in the story, is suppressed in favour of the others, something that hopefully will be remedied if the saga is continued into a further volume, for this time-sense is Ruth's true unique quality.

This book lacks the power of its predecessors, centring too narrowly on Jaxom's problems rather than on the greater underlying tensions between the land-hungry sons of the Lord Holders and the dragon-riders to whom they grudgingly look for protection. Anne McCaffrey has tried to do too much too fast, resulting in a lack of depth to the characters, especially Menolly and Piemur, perhaps because they feature strongly in the juveniles Dragonsong and Dragonsinger, which are not strictly part of the series. There is also a tendency to rub the reader's nose in the fact that this is Science Fiction, not fantasy.

In spite of its shortcomings The White Dragon will be enjoyed by all Dragon-fen. P.E.M.

JUNE MEETING

Well, it finally happened. Robert Lionel Fanthorpe arrived. After TWO cancellations we finally met the man behind Badger Books who gave an interesting and amusing talk on the struggles of a young man who finally made fame and fortune as chief, (sole) author of that esteemed house Badger. The trials, hard work and patience needed to reach his level of fame were all revealed on that Friday night.

Seriously though, it was a good night, alternating between the humour of his past work and the seriousness of his present writing. Strangely enough it is with his present work that he has so much difficulty in getting published, even though he thinks it cannot be compared with his earlier mass produced work.

The first half of his talk dealt mainly with his days at Badger, giving the impression of pure fun and not really hard work that made him write so many books (and the money some 10 shillings per thousand words might have had something to do with it), but as he kept on telling us, never again.

The second half was mainly concerning his research into a mystery in France which he thinks he is somewhere near solving. All in all a most amusing night.

I hope he comes again.

SPECIAL JUNE MEETING

We had another special meeting, not for an author, but to get together socially and play skittles at the White Swan, Harbourne Rd.

The night went well, people were enjoying themselves to the full. So much so that it was proposed by the committee to make this an annual event, however there is no need book your tickets yet, although it might be advisable to book them early when you get the chance.

The wine was good, the food was good, the company excellent and to round off the perfect evening the match was won by yours faithfully, the editor. And it was't even fixed. So next year, if you get the chance, buy your ticket and spend an enjoyable night.

SEACON '79

37TH WORLD SCIENCE FICTION CONVENTION
METROPOLE HOTEL, BRIGHTON, ENGLAND
23 - 27 AUGUST 1979

SEACON '79 will be Britain's biggest-ever science fiction event, with over 2,000 attendees from all corners of the world. Among the attractions will be:

- * Speeches and panels featuring Guests of Honour BRIAN ALDISS and FRITZ LEIBER, plus DOUGLAS ADAMS, POUL ANDERSON, GREGORY BENFORD, ALFRED BESTER, BEN BOVA, MARION ZIMMER BRADLEY, JOHN BRUNNER, TERRY CARR, C.J. CHERRYH, ARTHUR C. CLARKE, L. SPRAGUE DE CAMP, PETER DICKINSON, CHRISTOPHER EVANS, JOE HALDEMAN, HARRY HARRISON, NIGEL KNEALE, R.A. LAFFERTY, TANITH LEE, ANNE McCAFFREY, LARRY NIVEN, FREDERIK POHL, BOB SHAW, ROBERT SHECKLEY, ROBERT SILVERBERG, NORMAN SPINRAD, THEODORE STURGEON, WILSON TUCKER, IAN WATSON, JAMES WHITE and many others.
- * 16 hour a day film programme, including special showings of new films, obscure classics, and old favourites. Also video and radio features.
- * Large art exhibits, featuring paintings by CHRIS ACHILLEOS, JIM BURNS, ROGER DEAN, JIM FITZPATRICK, CHRIS FOSS, BOB FOWKE, EDDIE JONES, PETER JONES, JOSH KIRBY, ANGUS McKIE, BRUCE PENNINGTON, MICHAEL WHELAN, PATRICK WOODROFFE and many more.
- * Huge huckster room, with over 50 dealers.
- * 1979 Hugo Award presentations.
- * Special exhibits of film sets and models (sorry, we've promised not to name the films in advance).
- * Science Fiction Theatre of Liverpool
- * Signing sessions; author readings; fancy dress parade; banquet; disco; late night bars ... five days of continuous entertainment!

* * * * *

The last British Worldcon was in 1965; the next one isn't likely to happen until the 1990s -- so if you miss SEACON '79 you may spend the next decade kicking yourself! Don't delay -- send in your registration now. The attendance fee is £11.00, until 1st August 1979. No advance registrations can be accepted after this date. When you register you will receive all available convention information, including Brighton accommodation lists. Registration on the door will cost £13.00 for the whole convention, or £5.00 for one day membership.

TO REGISTER, COMPLETE THIS SLIP AND RETURN IT TO: SEACON '79, 28 DUCKETT ROAD, LONDON N4 1BN (Postal address only: no callers, please.)

I wish to register for SEACON '79,
and enclose £11.00 membership fee.

Name:

Address:

Signed:

(For additional memberships use a separate sheet. You must give full name and address for each member. Cheques etc. payable to SEACON '79 LTD.)