

BCSFA NEWSLETTER #16

September 1974

This newsletter is produced by Mike "Sore Back" Bailey on behalf of the British Columbia Science Fiction Association (P.O. Box 35577, Station E, Vancouver B.C. V6M 4G9). It is mailed or handed to members (\$3.00 PA), subscribers (\$1.50 PA) and others with some discretion. Rick Mikkelsen helped with the last issue and Gary Walker read an advance copy. Advertising rates upon request. Copyright 1974 by Mike Bailey on behalf of the BCSFA. A Mad Dog Publication.

PREFACE TO HUGO AWARDS (Sorry about that)

We had a reporter at the Worldcon in Washington D.C. And right after the banquet, she (Vera Johnson) telephoned Fran Skene with the results so we would be able to scoop LOCUS with the announcement. I forgot about Dan Say.

Meanwhile, I moved all my possessions on the Labour Day weekend and was thoroughly exhausted. My telephone was also disconnected. Consequently, it wasn't until the September 7 weekend that I found the time and energy necessary to produce the newsletter. But Dan Say had already produced his with the Hugo Awards announced in it.

Sorry about that.

1974 HUGO AWARDS

Best Novel: Rendezvous With Rama by Arthur C. Clarke
Best Novella: "The Girl Who Was Plugged In" by James Tiptree, Jr.
Best Novelet: "Deathbird" by Harlan Ellison
Best Short Story: "The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas" by Ursula K. Le Guin
Best Editor: Ben Bova (ANALOG)
Best Dramatic Presentation: "Sleeper" (Woody Allen)
Best Professional Artist: Kelly Freas
John W. Campbell Award (best new author): Spider Robinson and Lisa Tuttle (tie)
Best Fanzine: ALGOL (Porter) and THE ALIEN CRITIC (Geis) (tie)
Best Fan Writer: Susan Wood (Glicksohn)
Best Fan Artist: Tim Kirk
Special Award: Chesley Bonestall (illustrator)
Gandolf Award (for fantasy): J.R.R. Tolkien (posthumously)

Dan Say's newsletter has a written account of the convention including mention of a special award to Harlan Ellison "for human and emotional writing and being able to convey these emotions in his writing."

I wonder if James Tiptree was present.

I wonder who won the site selection for the 1976 Worldcon.

MEETING REPORT AND ANNOUNCEMENT

The August meeting of the BCSFA was held at Mike and Sue Walsh's house on west 11th. About 25-30 persons attended and while most people brought a beverage, not everyone brought food. The club may have to start paying people hosting meetings for food they supply.

Among the attendees was our far-eastern correspondent, Claire Hogg. One of the founding members locally, she now lives in Japan and visits North America once yearly as a kind of sabbatical. (Maybe she'll contribute an article on Japanese SF.) Diana Keswick announced that she also is moving east (although in the opposite direction in which Claire moved) to Osoyoos, B.C.

A potential new member, Wayne MacLeod, attended. Wayne expressed an interest in drawing and we can always use artists.

The September meeting will take place at Fran Skene's house, 207 W. 21st Avenue, on Saturday, September 21st at 8:00 PM. As usual, it is expected that attendees bring their own beverage and snack.

As a change of pace, a panel on "Religion in SF" will be presented. The panelists will include Mike Coney, John Park, David George, and Sue Walsh, and Chuck Davis will be moderator. The word, "religion" will have a broad meaning. For example, isn't "sense of wonder" a religious experience?

Fran's house has several rooms available, so people who don't wish to attend the panel can go elsewhere and do their thing.

MISCELLANEOUS NEWS

Ian and Betty Ballantine, who founded Bantam Books in 1940, severed their relations with Ballantine Books on August 2. They had previously sold the company to Random House.

Charles Platt (Garbage World) has resigned as SF consultant to Avon Books.

The Science Fiction Bookshop of New York is sponsoring a SF convention at sea aboard "Cunard's luxurious Ambassador". Guests include Ben Bova, Fred Pohl, Gordon Dickson, Kelly Freas, and Sonya Dorman. Rates start at \$447 for double occupancy. The ship will cruise the West Indies from October 26 - November 2, 1974.

F.M. Busby has sold a sequel to Cage a Man to Berkley.

~~Robert Silverberg's new novel is entitled The Stochastic Man and will appear in F & SF.~~

For Jack Vance enthusiasts, The Grey Prince has been announced for December. (The fourth of the Star King series?)

Mike Coney's anthology, Monitor Found In Orbit, should be available from DAW books in a couple of months

NEW AT THE VANCOUVER PUBLIC LIBRARY

Watership Down by Richard Adams Puffin Books 1973 \$1.65

MacMillan, New York, 1974 \$6.95

At V.P.L., this novel is in both the adult and juvenile collections, shelved in the regular fiction areas.

This book had been described as a cross between Wind in the Willows and Lord of the Rings in style, theme, and writing quality and rightly so. It seems incredible that a novel of this calibre could be a first effort but, until Watership Down hit England like a bombshell (never before have I seen such ecstatic reviews), Richard Adams toiled as the head of England's pollution department and was unknown in literary circles. In fact, he had a hard time in having his book published. Introduced as a children's book, Watership Down was regarded by the publishers who turned it down as rather too daunting for any child. Later, though, when Penguin obtained it, they put it in their line of ~~children's books. When award time came around Watership Down was the winner of both the Carnegie Medal for best children's fiction and the Guardian Award for best novel.~~ As might be expected, Richard Adams is now writing full time.

When the American edition came out, this time flogged as an adult novel (and which became a best seller immediately), the reviewers on this side of the Atlantic were not quite as worshipful but all agreed that Watership Down is an impressive book. I too feel that it is flawed (more on that later), but impressive. As the blurb in the Penguin paperback claims, it is "a very special book--exciting, frightening, beautiful, sad, funny and much more besides".

Watership Down is about a group of wild rabbits who, persuaded that their warren is in danger, set out to find a new home. Fiver, who had been the runt of his litter but had survived because of his ability to foresee danger, had visions in which he sees their warren covered with blood. He and his brother Hazel have no luck convincing the leaders of the danger but persuade nine more (male) rabbits to join them on the dangerous journey. After various adventures they arrive at Watership Down (a real place as are all places in the story) and--literally--dig in. But this is only the beginning: in order to stop their new warren from dying out they must find some females and this turns out to be difficult. They release two tame females from a nearby farm but the male rabbits, now fifteen strong after various additions, start fighting over them. Finally, with the help of a seagull whose life they had saved, they find some wild does in a warren run

by the formidable General Woundwort.

And here we come to my one reservation about Watership Down. Released from the jail-like conditions of Woundwort's warren are almost a dozen females plus one male who had been attacked and seriously injured from attempting to run away a previous time. This rabbit is depicted as being at death's door yet he is promptly assigned to look after the dozen healthy females during the escape. And it turns out to be necessary, as the females tend to freeze in fear, run in the wrong direction, and do other stupid rabbit-like things. The author does try to have the characters in Watership Down behave like real rabbits as much as possible but sometimes he says: this is how real rabbits behave but these particular rabbits did such and such brave or intelligent thing; however this is only in the case of the males. The message that males can transcend biology, but females are bound by it, is of course a refrain of male chauvinists everywhere. One doe, Hyzanthlay, had been the leader of an abortive revolt in the past and helped to arrange the escape but as soon as the rabbits get into action she behaves as stupidly as the rest of the females, and when they get to Watership Down she settles down to accomplish her one goal in life: reproduction (I guess we just need to be reminded).

However, faults such as the above, which would ruin an ordinary book, become unimportant when the book is as excellently written as this one. In fact, may I go so far as to say, if you decide not to read Watership Down, perhaps because you don't dig animal fantasies or, like one woman I talked to recently, because of the male chauvinism, you are depriving yourself of an enriching experience. It's well worth it to persevere past the first 30-40 pages. Like The Hobbit, it takes a while to sink into this very different fantasy world.

The climax of the story occurs when General Woundwort comes with his army to lay siege and is defeated, thanks partly to a dog which three of the rabbits lure to the vicinity of the warren. In one scene, Hazel goes to General Woundwort and suggests that, instead of fighting, they set up a new warren intermediate in distance between his and Woundwort's warrens. What follows is typical of the author's style:

"At that moment, in the sunset on Watership Down, there was offered to General Woundwort the opportunity to show whether he was really the leader of vision and genius which he believed himself to be, or whether he was no more than a tyrant with the courage and cunning of a pirate. For one beat of his pulse the lame rabbit's idea shone clearly before him. He grasped it and realized what it meant. The next, he had pushed it away from him. The sun dipped into the cloud-bank and now he could see clearly the track along the ridge, leading to the beech hanger and the bloodshed for which he had prepared with so much energy and care.

"I haven't time to sit here talking nonsense," said Woundwort. "You're in no position to bargain with us. There's nothing more to be said..."

These rabbits even have a prophet, El-ahrairah, who they visualize as being the head of a warren who is very concerned with the welfare of the other rabbits but also as a wily trickster who enjoys stealing vegetables from gardens and outwitting Frith (God). The story teller of the group is Dandelion, who keeps his frere's spirits up during bad times with his tales (which had been passed down from generation to generation) of El-ahrairah's adventures. These are so entertaining in themselves that I'm sure it's only a matter of time before some of those excellent English picture book author/illustrators see the possibilities in turning them into separate books.

The rabbits' language is not shown on any chart but, rather, introduced gradually. What is really interesting is that these words became part of my real life vocabulary and I ^{have} visions of letting them slip out in conversation, then seeing blank looks on people's faces.

As you would expect there is an epilogue in which we are told that leader Hazel, now called Hazel-rah, lived to a great old age. Finally a rabbit who looks remarkable like El-ahrairah comes for him and Hazel follows, leaving his body behind in a ditch.

Other Books

Asimov, Isaac Before the Golden Age

A massive volume, containing 25 SF stories from the thirties

Brunner, John From this Day Forward

Short stories, mostly from the sixties; some good, some fair.

Brunner, John Total Eclipse reviewed in GOSP #14

Caidin, Martin Cyborg origin of "The Six Million Dollar Man"

Carr, Terry, ed. Universe 3 Original anthology

Carr, Terry, ed. Universe 4

Cooper, Edmund The Cloud Walker SF thriller-cum-medieval romance

Cooper, Edmund The Slaves of Heaven

SF adventure in an after-the-bomb world, reminiscent of Zardoz.

Cordell, Alexander If You Believe the Soldiers Orwellian SF

Dann, Jack, ed. Wandering Stars Original anthology of Jewish SF

Dick, Philip K. Flow My Tears, the Policeman Said To be reviewed in full, later.

Dickson, Gordon The R-master Hero takes drug, becomes genius, and sets out to save world

Ferman, E. and B. Malzberg, eds. Final Stage The "ultimate", butchered anthology.

Gawron, Jean Mark An Apology For Rain

Harrison, Harry Star Smashers of the Galaxy Rangers

Le Guin, Ursula The Dispossessed By all reports, next year's award winning novel.

Lem, Stanislaw The Cyberiad; Fables for the Cybernetic Age

Lichtenberg, Jacqueline House of Zeor Original variation of the vampire theme.

Marden, William The Exile of Ellendon Fast-moving fantasy

Nebula Award Stories 7 Ed. by Lloyd Biggle

Nebula Award Stories 8 Ed. by Isaac Asimov

Silverberg, Robert Born With the Dead; Three Novellas

Silverberg, Robert Other Dimensions Anthology of oldies

Silverberg, Robert A Time of Changes Nebula winner of 1971.

Tate, Peter Moon on an Iron Meadow Eclectic novel.

These books represent two months additions
to the Vancouver Public Library. Fran Skene

PLEA

I can use material: reviews, articles,
artwork, etc. And Feedback. What do you
want to know about the SF world?

