

BRUM GROUP

NEWS

November
1991

Issue
242

The monthly Newsletter of the BIRMINGHAM SCIENCE FICTION GROUP

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

1991 Committee: Group Chairman - Chris Chivers Secretary & Twentycon Chair - Helena Bowles
Treasurer - Richard Standage Newsletter Editor - Martin Tudor Reviews Editor - Mick Evans
Ordinary Committee Member - Bernie Evans Publicity Officer - Al Johnston
Novacon 21 Chairman - Nick Mills

DAN SIMMONS

author of
HYPERION,
CARRION COMFORT,
THE FALL OF HYPERION,
and
SUMMER OF NIGHT
will be speaking to
THE
BIRMINGHAM SCIENCE
FICTION GROUP
on Tuesday 12th November
from 7.45pm at
THE AUSTRALIAN BAR

*In addition the regular BSFG meeting this month
will feature our annual debate with
the Birmingham University SF & Fantasy Society.
On Friday 15th November at 7.45pm
at THE AUSTRALIAN BAR,
on corner of Hurst Street
and Bromsgrove Street,
in Birmingham city centre.*

*The BSFG meets at 7.45pm on the third Friday of every month (unless
otherwise notified) at THE AUSTRALIAN BAR, corner of Hurst Street &
Bromsgrove Street, Birmingham city centre. Subscription rates:
£6.00 per person, or £9.00 for two members at the same address.
Cheques etc. payable to the BSFG, via the Treasurer RICHARD
STANDAGE at meetings or by post c/o MICK EVANS (address below).
Book Reviews to MICK EVANS at 121 Cape Hill, Smethwick, Warley,
West Midlands, B66 4SH (021 558 0997). All other contributions
and enquiries to: MARTIN TUDOR, 845 Alum Rock Road,
Ward End, Birmingham, B8 2AG (021 327 3023).*

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

12 NOVEMBER - Signing Session at Andromeda Bookshop, from 4.30pm DAN SIMMONS, author of *HYPERION* and *CARRION COMFORT* will be signing copies of the new paperback edition of *SUMMER OF NIGHT*.

12 NOVEMBER - A special meeting of the BSFG featuring DAN SIMMONS. Meeting begins at 7.45pm in the Australian Bar, Hurst St./ Bromsgrove St. in Birmingham city centre.

15 NOVEMBER - The BSFG's annual debate with a team from the Birmingham University SF & Fantasy Society. Meeting begins at 7.45pm in the Australian Bar, Hurst St./ Bromsgrove St. in Birmingham city centre.

16 NOVEMBER - Terry Pratchett will be signing copies of *WICHES ABROAD* and the paperback edition of *MOVING PICTURES* at Andromeda Bookshop. Forthcoming signing sessions at Andromeda include Josh Kirby; Denis Gifford; Stephen Donaldson and Robert Holdstock. Call Andromeda on 643 1999 for further details.

20 DECEMBER - No "formal" BSFG meeting this month, although there will be a Christmas meal at the Wagon & Horses in Oldbury. Space is limited so you will need to book early. Contact Martin Tudor ASAP. A £10 deposit is needed to reserve your place, the deposit will be deducted from the cost of your meal which will be £14.95. Deposits to Martin Tudor ASAP (address on cover, to arrive no later than the end of November). See menus (regular & vegetarian) elsewhere in this newsletter.

17 JANUARY 1992 - BSFG AGM and Auction to raise money for the Group. If you have any auction material please contact a committee member at one of the meetings in November.

6-8 NOVEMBER - NOVA CON 22, Forte Post House Hotel near Birmingham Airport (please note that both date and venue are subject to contract). GoH Storm Constantine.

The chairman, Helena Bowles, is interested in hearing what people think about the Forte Post House Hotel (previously known as the Excelsior). Complaints, suggestions etc should be sent care of Bernie Evans (address follows). Attending membership £18 until the end of Eastercon 1992, then £20 until 12

October 1992 (or four weeks before the con if the date changes) and £25 on the door. Further information from Bernie Evans, 121 Cape Hill, Smethwick, Warley, West Midlands, B66 4SH.

FEBRUARY 1993 - GREG BEAR has been in touch to say that he would like to speak to us this month. (Please note that this is a year later than previously stated.) Further details as they are confirmed.

ADVERTS

FOR SALE: ROMEO 750 ELECTRIC DUPLICATOR in working order (but can be fussy on paper feeding). Complete with spare drum, ink, instructions and cabinet holds spare drum and drawers). A straw poll indicates that this is worth £100-£175, but as buyer must collect from Bristol, first offer over £70 will be accepted. Any reasonable offer considered. All proceeds to TAFF (the Trans-Atlantic Fan Fund). Contact PAM WELLS, 24A Beech Road, Bowes Park, London, N11 2DA (081 889 0401) for full details.

BIRMINGHAM SF GROUP 20th ANNIVERSARY SOUVENIR BOOKS: Articles by BRIAN ALDESS, HARRY HARRISON and ANNE GAY, cover and cartoons by TIM GROOME, features covering the last five years of the BSFG. Numbered limited edition, A5, 28pp, laminated two-colour cover. Only £1.95 (inclusive of p&p), cheques payable to "THE BIRMINGHAM SF GROUP", to MARTIN TUDOR, 845 Alum Rock Road, Birmingham, B8 2AG.

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Thanks this time to DAVE HARDY for the DTP headings, MICK EVANS for typing up the book reviews, BERNIE EVANS for the labels and editing the book reviews, LYNN EDWARDS for her poem, HELENA BOWLES for her report on last month's meeting, TONY BERRY for putting up with me and the *CRITICAL WAVE* photocopier and to all of our book reviewers.]

A REMINDER

PLEASE DO NOT SMOKE
DURING THE FORMAL PART
OF THE MEETING !

POETRY

In September we had Anne Gay as our speaker. This poem is based on her talk to us that night.

TURN THE PAGE

Push back the edges -
Mind-curbs of darkness -
Using bright thoughts
To explore infinity
And challenge the concepts
Of normality
And rational behaviour.
Take flight
On a rocket tail of photons
Powering into
Unknownable universes
Held in a cranium
By time-bound walls of flash.
Turn the page.
-- Lynn M Edwards.

LAST MONTH - A PERSONAL VIEW by Helena Bowles

Fifteen people were late for the last BSFG meeting. They trailed in between ten past eight and half past nine. Upon entry the usual door banging, shuffling and soto (or not so) voce greetings to friends occurred along with the inevitable disturbances of squeezing into seats, treading on feet, apologies and 'excuse mes', all of which has sadly become fairly standard for BSFG meets. Normally it is no more than marginally disturbing, occurring as it does at the back of the room, so only the back rows are annoyed and who cares about them anyway?

However, the problem was highlighted last month when the usual seating plan was reversed and the merely irritating became a collective display of rudeness that should make us all ashamed. If you want concrete examples consider a couple (long standing members of the group) who had obviously made every effort to arrive on time but had been thwarted by the difficulty of finding street parking in the city centre. It IS difficult to park in Birmingham if you won't use an MCP and I too would have been in a bad mood after attempting to do that. However, there was no excuse for inflicting that bad mood onto the rest of the group. As the female half of the couple entered the room (allowing the door to bang) despite the fact that she could plainly see Dave Hardy was in the middle of his talk, she turned to explain to people sitting by the door why they were

late. Having had seats at the back of the room pointed out to her she proceeded to tell the story twice more on her way to them.

Although the rudest incident actually occurred during Anne Gay's talk (the loud arrival of a group of people who banged the door three times between four of them on the way in, bickered good naturedly about who was paying, announced proudly and loudly to the treasurer that they were "only here for the free booze" and banged the door another three times as - thankfully - they went downstairs again) that interlude was quite characteristic of those individuals, who could hardly be described as regular Brum Group members. It is not the spectacular examples of sheer ill-manners that concerns me it is the behaviour of regular BSFG members that is appalling.

I realise there must be some movement during meetings - for instance I'm sure there are several people who, like me, if they start drinking prior to the meeting need to visit a toilet before the end of it. And there are always accidents like one member heading to answer the aforementioned call of nature and falling headlong over a bag or somebody's feet. People may feel ill, faint or sick and have to leave the room. These are all justifiable reasons for causing a slight disturbance and heading quietly out of the room, easing the door shut behind you. This is not the way it usually happens.

The room at the Australian Bar has a heavy door but is it really necessary to let it bang behind you? Is it really necessary to leave the meeting during the formal part to replenish drinks? You know how fast you drink - buy an extra drink beforehand, it won't cost anymore. If you feel you will need to leave the meeting before the end, sit near the door and leave QUIETLY. If you arrive late, take the nearest seat, acknowledge friends with smiles and facial gestures, not words, buy your drink BEFORE entering the room and paying the treasurer, thus reducing the number of times the door opens and closes.

Over the last few monthly meetings I have been angered by and ashamed of the behaviour of Brum Group members. I feel that apologies are due to Anne Gay and David Hardy, particularly Dave who stepped into the breach at the last moment at the request of the committee. I know many of you had heard this talk before. I had not and whilst I thoroughly enjoyed the talk, I was frustrated at missing parts of it because of the distractions. The question that lingers in my mind is that if we are prepared to treat people whom we will encounter again and again as part of our social group with so little respect how will we treat visiting speakers we may never see again? And if we treat them this badly how long before word spreads and guests start being difficult to come by because of the BSFG's reputation of not caring about its speakers? People generally do us a favour by standing up and talking to us, we only pay expenses, the least we can do is provide a reasonable standard of behaviour.

The Jophan Report by Martin Tudor

The 47th Jophan Report

I'm sorry to have to begin the Jophan Report this time with news of the deaths of two giants of the sf field.

Arkady Strugatsky, one of the Soviet Union's most successful and influential writers died on the 13 October.

Gene Roddenberry, creator of the series *STAR TREK*, has died of an apparent heart attack, aged 70. He is survived by his wife, the actress Majel Barrett Roddenberry.

HarperCollins (Grafton) plan to publish a non-sf novel by Brian Aldiss next year. Entitled *REMEMBRANCE DAY*, Aldiss tells us that it is "something of a companion piece to *FORGOTTEN LIFE*. Later he hopes Grafton will publish a collection of short stories entitled *A TUPOLEV TOO FAR* - a first collection apart from retrospectives since *SEASONS IN FLIGHT* in 1984.

Christmas 1992 should see the publication of Aldiss' *HOME LIFE WITH CATS*, a collection of his cat poems, illustrated by Karin van Heerden, who does the cat greetings cards.

Stephen Baxter is currently working on a new novel, *TIMELIKE INFINITY*, which is due out next year.

This month sees Headline releasing the paperback of *SUMMER OF NIGHT* by Dan Simmons, the hardback edition of *THE DOOR TO DECEMBER* by Dean R Koontz and simultaneous hard and trade paperback editions of *DARKNESS, TELL US* by Richard Laymon, *A BAD DAY FOR ALI BABA* by Craig Shaw Gardner and *ALBION* by John Grant.

Iain Banks is currently working on his next "sf megatome, it's non-Culture and called *AGAINST A DARK BACKGROUND*."

Dragon's World will shortly be publishing a collection of Josh Kirby's paintings entitled *THE GARDEN OF HEAVENLY DELIGHTS*, with an introduction by Brian Aldiss.

Over the weekend 24-26 January 1992 the Edinburgh Film Guild will be holding "Bad Influence", a weekend of film screenings and discussions on the influence of the serial killer in the horror film.

Films to be screened will include: *PEEPING TOM*, (Michael Powell), *MANHUNTER* (Michael Mann's adaptation of Thomas Harris' novel), Alan Ormsby's film about mass murderer Ed Gein, *DERANGED*, John McNaughton's *HENRY...PORTRAIT OF A SERIAL KILLER* and a rare chance to see the feminist fantasy *BROKEN MIRROR*. In addition there will be film extracts, notes, talks and discussions, price £14.50. Contact The Edinburgh Film Guild, 88 Lothian Road, Edinburgh, EH3 9BZ.

Dr Theodor Geisel, known worldwide as "Dr Seuss", died in California on 24 September, aged 87. His classic sequence of rhyming fantasies began in 1957 with *THE CAT IN THE HAT*, and his work in film earned him three Academy Awards. Geisel's screenplays included *THE 5000 FINGERS OF DR T* (1953).

"Strip Search II: The New Breed of Comics", a sequel to last year's touring exhibition of comics art, which appeared at the Edinburgh Book Festival in August, is scheduled to appear at Bristol's Watershed Media Centre in December. The tour was launched at the Festival of Brent in February, moving on to Manchester Polytechnic's Right On Gallery in April.

This year's exhibition is divided into several thematic sections: "Classics", "2000AD and Counting", "Up From the Under-ground", "Stars and Strips", "The Brit Pack", "Women in Comics", "The French Revolution" and "On the News-Stand". Organised by Paul Gravett, the event has been sponsored by *ESCAPE* and Camden Arts & Entertainment.

Tentative plans have been announced for a combined *DOCTOR WHO / BLAKE'S 7* convention, to be held over the weekend of 30 October - 1 November, 1992. The organisers point to a "distinct lack" of such hybrid events at present and are currently holding negotiations with a hotel in Leeds.

Pre-registration memberships were advertised as available until 31 July for a deposit of £5.00; attending membership is estimated at £20.00, with a 10% discount available to those who pre-register. Cheques should be made payable to "Who's Seven" and forwarded to Henry Eggleton at "Valhalla", 137 High Street, Plaistow Broadway, London, E13 9HH. Refunds will be made if the convention does not proceed.

THE ORGANISATION née APA-B has just celebrated its 100th mailing. Anyone interested in joining should contact Tommy Ferguson, Flat 1, 33 Camden Street, Lisburn Road, Belfast.

Walt Disney's *FANTASIA* will be available for 99 days from 4 November, on video in two editions standard, £13.99 and collectors £49.99 (which includes two videos; the movie and *THE MAKING OF FANTASIA*, a double CD of the music a book and a limited edition print). Call Andromeda Bookshop on 643 1999 to order.

David Lynch's *TWIN PEAKS: THE MOVIE* has started shooting, with the original tv cast reunited in Washington. David Bowie, Kiefer Sutherland and Chris Isaak have all signed up in supporting roles.

Stephen King's *PET SEMATARY*, Wes Craven's *THE SERPENT AND THE RAINBOW* and *TALES FROM THE CRYPT* - based on the classic 40s and 50s comics - were released in time for Halloween by CIC Video. All three are 18 certificates, with *TALES FROM THE CRYPT* featuring three stories "to chill the soul" - "The Man Who Was Death", "All through the House" and "Dig that Cat...He's Real Gone".

The 1991 Eurocon Awards, presented at Cracon '91 by the Eurocon Committee, named the British imprint Unwin Hyman (now part of the multinational HarperCollins group) as best publisher and the British title *INTERZONE* as best magazine. Awards also went to the Polish writer Stanislaw Lem (best author), the Czech Kaja Saudek (best artist) and ConFiction's chair Kees van Thorn (best promoter).

The sixth annual Antigé Awards, presented to the best of short stories submitted on a given theme, were won by Jan "Jam" Oščádal (whose story will appear in the autumn edition of the Czech magazine *AF 167*), Jana Novotná and Václav Škvor. The theme this year was "It happened on the Moon"; next year's is "Good morning, it's 8.00 a.m., 1 April, 2096", entries should be forwarded to *AF 167*, Post Office Box 36, 612 00 Brno, Czechoslovakia.

Peter Crowther has sold two horror anthologies to Macdonald. The first *NARROW HOUSES* will contain a story by Pauline E Dungeate entitled "The Scent of Elder Flowers". All of the stories in the anthology are based on superstitions.

ALONE WITH THE HORRORS, a selection of Ramsey Campbell's short fiction, 1961-91, will

be published next year by Arkham House, with illustrations by J K Potter. Another collection, *WAKING NIGHTMARES*, will be published in November by Tor, the same month Macdonald releases his new "comic novel", *THE COUNT OF ELEVEN*. Macdonald publishes the UK edition of *WAKING NIGHTMARES* in May, along with reissues of *THE NAMELESS* and *CLAW*.

This year's World Fantasy Award for Best Novel was presented at to Carol Emshwiller for *THE START OF THE END OF IT ALL* (The Women's Press, 1990).

The full results of this year's Nova Awards presented at Novacon 21 are as follows:

BEST FANZINE

- 1 *SALIROMANIA* ed. Michael Ashley (50).
- 2 *HELICON DISCUSSION FANZINE* ed. Tim Illingworth (24).
- 3 *LIP* ed. Hazel Ashworth (23).
- 4 *READING MATTERS* ed. Tibs (22).
- 5 *DAISNAID* ed. D West (17).
- 6 *BOB?* ed. Ian Sorenson (16).
- 7 *CONRUNNER* ed. Ian Sorenson (10).
- 8 *PULP* ed. Avedon Carol, Rob Hansen & John Harvey (9).
- 9 *ANSIBLE* ed. Dave Langford (7).
- 10 *SISTERS* ed. Pam Wells (6).
- 11 *THINGY BOB* ed. Chuck Connor (6).
- 12 *SHIPYARD BLUES* ed. John D Owen (5).
- 13 *FTT* ed. Judith Hanna/Joseph Nicholas (5).
- 14 *ARROWS OF DESIRE* ed. S V O'Jay (4).
- 15 *SGLODION* ed. Dave Langford (4).
- 16 *SLURBERDEGULLION* ed. Nige Richardson (4).
- 17 *CONRUINER* ed. anon. (3).
- 18 *ELECTION SPECIAL* ed. Abigail Frost (3).
- 19 *THE LIGHT STUFF* ed. James.
- 20 *TTBA* ed. Steele (3).
- 21 *THIS NEVER HAPPENS* ed. Christina Lake & Lilian Edwards (3).
- 22 *FANS ACROSS THE WORLD NEWSLETTER* ed. Bridget Wilkinson (2).
- 23 *SMALL MAMMAL* ed. Martin Easterbrook & Margaret Austin (2).
- 24 *THEN* ed. Rob Hansen (2).
- 25 With 1 point each: *A CHILD'S GARDEN OF OLAF* ed. Ken Cheslin, *IT MUST BE THE 60s...* ed. Bernie Evans, *THE ORGANISM PAPERS* ed. 'fake' Bob Shaw.

BEST FAN WRITER

- 1 MICHAEL ASHLEY (49).
- 2 John Richards (25),
- 3 Dave Langford (23),
- 4 Abigail Frost (15),

FESTIVE LUNCH AND DINNER MENU

(See over for vegetarian menu)

Available Monday, 2nd December to Monday, 23rd December

Home-made Pea and Tarragon Soup

or

Goujons of Sole in a Crispy Herb Coating

or

Home-made Lasagne

or

Stilton Pears

(dessert pears filled with a savoury cheese stuffing)

* * *

Stuffed Mushroom

(a large open cap mushroom filled with herbed breadcrumbs, topped with cheese, and baked)

* * *

Fresh Roast Turkey and Stuffing

or

Escalope of Pork in a Brandy and Cream Sauce

or

Smoked Ham and Plaice Parcels with a Mushroom Sauce

or

Roast Topside of Beef with a Red Wine Sauce

All our meals will be served with a large selection of fresh vegetables and potato dishes

* * *

Home-made Brandied Mince Tart with Custard

or

Profiteroles with Chocolate Sauce

or

Home-made Sherry Trifle

or

Cheese and Biscuits

* * *

Coffee and Petit Fours

£14.95 per person

FESTIVE VEGETARIAN LUNCH AND DINNER

Home-made Pea and Tarragon Soup

or

Home-made Vegetarian Lasagne

or

Breaded Mushrooms with Blue Cheese or Garlic Dip

* * *

Stuffed Mushroom

(a large open cap mushroom filled with herbed breadcrumbs, and baked)

* * *

Celebration Roast with Herbed Tomato Sauce

(a cream nut mixture filled with mushrooms and walnuts)

or

Barley Bourguignon

(with mushrooms, leeks, tomatoes and red wine)

or

Spinach Roulade with Cheese Sauce

(a savoury swiss roll made with spinach and herbs, topped with cheese sauce, and baked)

All our meals will be served with a large selection of fresh vegetables and potato dishes

* * *

Home-made Brandied Mince Tart with Custard

or

Profiteroles with Chocolate Sauce

or

Home-made Sherry Trifle

or

Vegetarian Cheese and Biscuits

* * *

Coffee and Petit Fours

£14.95 per person

D West (15),
6 Nigel E Richardson (11),
7 Chuck Connor (9),
Judith Hanna (9),
Tibs (9),

10 Ian Sorenson (8),
11 Pam Wells (6),
12 Nic Farey "S V O'Jay" (5),
13 Steve Atty (3),

Tara Dyson (3),
Bernie Evans (3),
Gareth Rees (3),

17 "Ernie Barber" (2),
Lillian Edwards (2),
Chuch Harris (2),
Joseph Nicholas (2),
Chris Priest (2).

22 With 1 point each: Helena Bowles,
Terry Broome,
Steve Glover,
Rhodri James,
Caroline Mullan.

BEST FAN ARTIST

1 D WEST (48).

2 Dave Mooring (38),
3 Sue Mason (24),
4 Shep Kirkbride (15),
5 Sylvia Starshine (12),
6 Colin Johnson (8),
7 Harry Bell (7),
Lesley Ward (7),
James Steel (4),
Arthur Thomson (4),

11 Dave Carson (3),
12 Nigel E Richardson (2),
13 Jim Barker (1).

The figure in brackets following each entry is the number of points received according to how many first, second and third place votes received. A total of 43 ballots were returned.

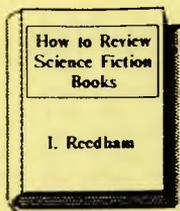
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The news in this issue's Jophan Report was supplied by Harry Bond, The Women's Press (through Bernie Evans), CRITICAL WAVE, ANSIBLE, LOCUS, SCIENCE FICTION CHRONICLE and THYME.

CRITICAL WAVE, Britain's only independent sf, fantasy and horror news and reviews magazine, is available for £1.95 per copy or six issues for £7.50 from: Martin Tudor, 845 Alum Rock Road, Ward End, Birmingham, B8 2AG. Cheques should be made payable to "CRITICAL WAVE PUBLICATIONS".

ANSIBLE is available by whim or for a stamped addressed envelope from Dave Langford, 94 London

Reading, Berkshire, RG1 5AU.



Book Reviews

THE UNSETTLED DUST by Robert Aickman
Mandarin, 302 pp, £3.99 p/b

Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

Aickman, who died in 1981, was a good writer of ghost and horror stories. His only flaw was one of over-subtlety, so that his pieces do not explain themselves, and the reader is left unsatisfied. The eight tales here are typical of his work, being unusual, atmospheric, threatening and even (in the case of "The Stains", the best and longest) terrifying. But I found, as usual, that when I reached the end of each one I was left wondering what had happened and what it all meant.

WOLFKING by Bridget Woods
Headline, 503 pp, £4.99 p/b

Reviewed by Carol Morton.

In a post apocalypse Ireland live the survivors of what they call the Great Devastation, a war that left most of the agricultural land contaminated and known as Glowing Lands. Two hundred years on and the people have built up a rigid society, any mutants born are outcast and sent to asylums, and women are bestowed as their families will with little or no consultation. One pair of lovers, Flynn and Joanna, are to be parted because Joanna's father has "sold" her to a repulsive pig farmer. Joanna flees, first to Flynn and then to the Glowing Lands, where she passes through a gateway to the ancient past, and to the Ireland of the High Kings of Tara. Flynn follows but cannot open that gateway. Together with Amairgen, a guardian of the Glowing Lands, and Portan, a mutant, he passes through another gateway and goes in search of Joanna. Joanna has been found by the servants of the exiled High King Cormac, the Wolfking who needs a pure blooded human to release him from imprisonment in Scathach, The Castle of Shadows.

Joanna frees Cormac but in return he takes away her memory of Flynn, so she becomes his lover and Queen. Flynn travels to Tara seat of the High Kings where, through the machinations of those who exiled Cormac, he is

set to be executed, but escapes and begins a rebellion against the usurper. Joanna and Cormac journey to Cormac's ally Cait Fian but are twice captured by Morrian and her sister, an evil triumvirate from the very blackest of Irish folklore. They finally end up as "guests" of the Erl-King, he who sucks his victims dry or dines on their flesh and drinks their blood.

Woods obviously knows her Irish mythology and has woven a credible tale of that place with a story based on what is possibly the cornerstone of much of the fantasy published these days. But, and it is a big but, the setting of post devastation Ireland is so reminiscent of one of my personal favourites John Wyndham's *THE CHRYSALIDS*, that for me the story falters, and as this takes up only the first fifty or so pages, it does take a little while to get into what turns out to be a grand tale of ancient Ireland.

A flawed novel but none-the-less an impressive debut and a book worth persevering with.

EARTH by David Brin
Futura, 751 pp, £4.99 p/b

Reviewed by Tony Morton.

Brin, in his usual optimistic way portrays the near future and the problems mankind must overcome to survive. That we will overcome such problems could in itself be deemed optimistic, but Brin's possible future goes further.

Here we have our children's-children's-children (50 years?) trying to cope with the polluted, pillaged world we will leave them. New "super" strains of cereal crops feed the population, sea cities travel the oceans, severe penalties are enforced for pollution crimes, with "natural" boundaries less important to a world view.

The crisis arises when scientists manufacture a black hole to power the cities but fail to "hold" it. Within the Earth's core the black hole begins to dissipate but examination reveals ANOTHER black hole in existence, this one capable of destroying the world. One particularly clever scientist devises a method of deflecting the black hole away from Earth, to save the world. Of course, not-all-goes-according-to-plan. This section provides an excellent character insight by Brin into the military mind.

In this story of an attempt to pull civilisation back from the brink (do we deserve it?), the ending is, perhaps, a little too pat. While Brin is an excellent storyteller, this does overstretch credibility in

places. There are some clever ideas on the attempt to save wildlife in Arks strategically located around the world, and the "Net" computer link taking over from phone/letter communications, as well as some impeccable characterisation. Although an enjoyable read, not wholly believable - but I suppose that's a characteristic of speculative fiction. Worth a read.

THE DARK DESCENT - A FABULOUS FORMLESS DARKNESS

Edited by David G Hartwell
HarperCollins, 422 pp, £8.99, "C" format p/b
Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

It always annoys me when I get to the end of a horror story and wonder what it was all about. It's not that I object to a certain amount of subtlety, but I do feel the meaning ought to be clear to the careful reader. And the main reason why I disliked this anthology is just that - an excess of subtlety. The line-up of authors is wonderful (Stephen King, Philip K Dick, Fritz Leiber, Thomas M Disch, Gene Wolfe) but too often the stories don't represent them at their best. Take Stephen King for example. Usually I enjoy his writing but this story "Crouch End" is set in London, which King clearly doesn't know much about. The Dick is SF, seeming out of place. The Leiber is a very early example of his work, "Smoke Ghost", which seems unpolished and dated today. And too many of the others are amazingly incomprehensible. Not an enjoyable read.

CREATURE)
HELL FIRE) all by John Saul
SECOND CHILD)
THE UNWANTED)

Bantam, £3.99 each, p/b
329 pp, 344 pp, 355pp, 339 pp, respectively
Reviewed by Bernie Evans.

Under the heading "About the Author", at the end of each book, is mentioned his "Trademark setting", of a "sleepy isolated town where suddenly no-one is safe" Add to this a pre- or just barely-pubescent child who has recently arrived in this setting, having lost one or both parents in tragic circumstances, or at the very least up-rooted from all that's familiar and comforting, and what you have is not a trademark but a formula. Credit where it's due, though, all these pubescents around and not a poltergeist to be seen, now THAT's willpower.

Read one at a time, with a reasonable interval in between, any one of these books would have been most enjoyable. Let's take

just one, HELL FIRE. Beth lived in a terraced house with her divorced mother, seeing her father regularly (mum and dad had remained friends). Then mum marries the man in the big house on the hill, a widower, whose own daughter Tracy resents, dislikes and looks down on Beth and her mother. Various nasty goings-on start to happen, centred on an old shoe factory owned by the Family.

Nothing is what it seems. The reader sees what the parents don't, but is led first one way then another as Beth starts talking to a ghost, or is she talking to her other self? Is there truly a ghost, or is Tracy manipulating Beth's insecurities for her own ends, and WHO is responsible for the nasty goings-on? The ending is not a happy one, but is entirely satisfactory and quite in keeping with the rest of the story.

Four at a time is a little much, but if you like to be kept wondering, if you like a little mystery, a little gore, a little misdirection, do try one of these. Not very demanding (John Clute would probably hate them), but a better way to pass an hour or so on the train than a lot of the blood and guts rubbish that get's put on station bookstands.

THE RUBY KNIGHT by David Eddings
Grafton, 444 pp, £4.99 p/b

THE SAPPHIRE ROSE by David Eddings
HarperCollins, 525pp. £14.99 h/b

Reviewed by Carol Morton.

These are the second and third tales in the "Elenium" trilogy. They concern the quest to restore to health Ehlana the Queen of Elenia, but the only way to do this is to the lost magical jewel, the Bheiliom.

THE RUBY KNIGHT has Sparhawk the Queen's Champion and Serephenia the Sorceress, with assorted others, traipsing back and forth across country (as Eddings' protagonists always seem to do) in search of this elusive jewel. However, the God Azash also wants the jewel, which will free him from the prison he was cast into by the other Gods. Once he is free doom, gloom and despondence will reign, so our heroes must also combat his minions during their quest.

In THE SAPPHIRE ROSE the motley crew, less one who turns out to be a Goddess in disguise, must get the newly recovered Bheiliom to Ehlana and cure her. On the way they must avoid the minions of both Azash and The Regent, who are trying to delay their return because Ehlana's suspended animation will only last twelve months, so our heroes

have a deadline. Once Ehlana is cured Sparhawk now has to deal with Azash, but how can you destroy a God?.....

This tale started promisingly with *THE DIAMOND THRONE*, but has retreated into pretty standard (and in places substandard) formulaic fantasy. Some of the characters are almost carbon copies of those in the "Belgariad" and the "Mallorean". For Serephina read Polgara, for Sparhawk read Belgarion. There are more than hints of Silk, Durnik et al in the other characters, and some of the plotlines and situations are lifted almost verbatim from Eddings' aforementioned previous works.

I suppose a writer whose tales are so popular as Eddings' are might be thought foolish to change a winning formula, but the Fantasy and SF genre is so rich and full of possibilities that a writer as talented as Eddings obviously is (see the "Belgariad") should be pushing the boundaries ever outward, not sticking to a money-making formula. Sorry to be so cynical, but when a trilogy starts out so promisingly, then goes downhill so disappointingly, it makes you wonder if it is worth bothering to read any more of this writer's work.

FEAR by L Ron Hubbard
New Era, 188 pp, £12.99, h/b

Reviewed by Michael Jones.

With the reputation Hubbard has today, it is easy to forget that in the 1940's he was a respected author, regularly published by John Campbell in the pages of *ASTOUNDING*. *FEAR* dates from that period, having first seen the light of day in the July 1940 issue of *UNKNOWN*, the fantasy magazine which Campbell also edited. It is presented here in a distinctive binding, with nicely laid out page headings, clear well spaced print and illustrated title pages for each chapter - artifices helping to disguise the fact that what we really have is a long novella masquerading as a full-size book.

Briefly, the story concerns one James Lowry, who has just published a kind of popular science article in which he decries all forms of superstition, ridiculing ancient beliefs that all sickness and woe are caused by inimical supernatural forces. His best friend predicts that the evil spirits will have their revenge and, sure enough, strange and unsettling things begin to happen to him. During the course of a weekend these things get progressively worse, and Lowry becomes increasingly haunted and spook-ridden while his familiar world disintegrates around him. He tries to make sense of it all but finds

the same friend becoming the embodiment and focus of the powers arrayed against him. Is it hallucination, imagination or illusion? As the story ends he makes the breakthrough, back into a reality which is even worse than the reader suspected.

The story of one man's descent into guilt and despair has possibilities which, however, remain largely unfulfilled. Partly, this is because the writing is dull and flat, failing to convey any feeling of drama or suspense as the story plods along to its conclusion. Also, like so much SF of those far-off days fifty and sixty years ago, it has for a hero a one-dimensional non-character, an inconvenient necessity that has to be there to provide something for the story to happen to. Lacking any kind of shape or substance, Lowry offers nothing with which the reader can identify, with the resultant lack of involvement nullifying the impact the story should have. It may have created more of an impression back in 1940, but SF and horror writing have progressed since then and *FEAR*, I fear, has not withstood the test of time.

THE LEGEND BOOK OF SCIENCE FICTION

Edited by Gardner Dozois
Legend, 622 pp, £8.99, "C" format

Reviewed by Tony Morton.

Essentially a retrospective anthology of Dozois' choice of best stories from the last thirty years. The preface sets out his aims and ambition, as well as his indicators of what NOT to expect.

Some excellent stories are included with a brief history/writer biography critique as aid. Dozois made interesting choices as to which he includes or excludes by each author, which are reasoned out in his brief introduction. While the usual favourites are here (Night, De Camp, Sturgeon, Aldiss, Tiptree et al) he extends his choices to include "new" favourites (Gibson, Sterling etc), but notable authors fail to appear - not at all to the detriment of the anthology.

For me, this type of book provides a chance to read and find out about authors I have little opportunity to "catch up" on. From Richard McKenna, Joanna Russ, Howard Waldrop, Jack Dann, Pat Cadigan, John Kessel and Michael Swanwick I picked up creative and well-written stories previously missed, with the added bonus of a bibliography as pointers to other work by each. I don't envy Dozois his task of selection, having to cut stories to create a manageable volume. He did it well, a worthwhile anthology, recommended.

NEEDFUL THINGS by Stephen King
Hodder & Stoughton, 698 pp, £15.99 h/b
Reviewed by Martin Tudor.

As a great fan of the prolific (but verbose) Stephen King I'm sorry to say that I found this, his latest 'doorstop' of a novel, extremely disappointing. Although NEEDFUL THINGS features all of the usual King trademarks - a cast of a million and one carefully introduced background characters, ten or so even more carefully developed central characters, a very nasty bad guy (who is also the 'embodiment of evil'), several minor bad guys (who've 'gone bad' for various reasons), lots of action and vast amounts of background detail illustrating contemporary American lifestyles. NEEDFUL THINGS even has the added advantage of being set in King's best known location; Castle Rock, Maine, scene of a large number of his novels (*IT*, *THE DARK HALF* etc) and featuring familiar characters such as Sheriff Alan Pangborn and Ace Merrill. Unfortunately, what NEEDFUL THINGS really NEEDS is a rationale, some explanation for all the very nasty things that happen...

Leland Gaunt, a stranger to Castle Rock, is charismatic but vaguely unpleasant, and his newly opened, "curio-and-collectibles shop", which he calls 'Needful Things' soon becomes the centre of attraction in Castle Rock. Needful Things has something for everybody whether it be a 1956 Sandy Koufax baseball card, a picture of 'the King', a Bazun ("the best damned lake-and-stream fishing rod in the world"), a splinter of wood (from the Ark) or a cure for arthritis. All very reasonably priced, in fact they're incredibly cheap - as long as you don't mind playing a little prank on someone for Mr Gaunt as well. But whatever price you agree to pay don't forget that "the dealing isn't done until Mr Gaunt SAYS the dealing's done..."

Slowly the plot unfolds, the tension building nicely, as Mr Gaunt arranges for a number of nasty (but of themselves relatively harmless) pranks on a large number of the residents of Castle Rock. The plot is excellent, as the pieces begin to fall into place its sheer complexity will take your breath away. Each little prank adds to the tension in the town until eventually Castle Rock is torn apart in an orgy of violence, as the victims of the pranks, themselves involuntary pranksters, wreak awful vengeance on each other. The climax of NEEDFUL THINGS needs to be read to be believed, but I can well believe that this will be the last work of King's to be set in Castle Rock - there really isn't a lot left of the town after this.

But who IS Leland Gaunt? And why does he do what he does? The vague, mysterious, hints which are scattered throughout the book never develop into anything resembling a satisfactory explanation. Unless you count the banal "bag of souls" at the end.

Essentially NEEDFUL THINGS is a novel about the petty greed of mankind and, like many of King's works, its main concern is with the evil that lurks just below the surface in everyone. If it wasn't for the annoyingly weak motivation on the part of Leland Gaunt and the frustrating *Deus ex machina* at the end, this could have been one of King's best novels. As it stands though, NEEDFUL THINGS is a reasonable story with a lousy ending.

WOLF KING by Bridget Wood
Headline, 503 pp, £4.99 'A' format p/b
Reviewed by Martin Tudor.

This is an immensely satisfying novel, set both in post-Apocalypse and Ancient Ireland it tells of the adventures of Joanna and Flynn as they travel back to the time of Cormac mac Airt - the Wolfking of Tara.

Joanna and Flynn have grown up in a harsh, stark, stark world all but destroyed through the incomprehensible actions of the Letheans (the Forgotten Ones, named after the River of the Underworld - the Lethe). In this post-Devastation world, sometime in our near future, the survivors scratch a living from the soil and dreams and stories of other times our frowned upon. But Joanna and Flynn, deeply in love, share their dreams of Ireland's legendary, magical past so when Joanna runs away from the loathsome pig farmer her father has tried to marry her to, she runs to Flynn.

Scattered around this world are the Glowing Lands which appear to be areas of land which are still radioactive, but also prove to be gateways to the past. When trying to escape her father and would-be husband, Joanna stumbles through the gateway and finds herself in Ireland's glorious past. Flynn, who's father is one of the secret guardians of the gateways, follows her...

Simply, but beautifully told, this is a moving and invocative tale of heroes and kings, magic and adventure, glory and despair. If you have even the slightest interest in the legends of Ireland I urge you to read it, if you haven't read it anyway - you soon will have.

NB: Book reviews should be handed to Mick Evans the month after receipt of the review copy, thank you.

