

BRUM GROUP NEWS

June 1992

Issue 249

The monthly newsletter of the Birmingham Science Fiction Group
(Honorary Presidents: Brian W Aldiss & Harry Harrison)

GROUP CHAIRMAN - TONY MORTON, SECRETARY - CAROL MORTON, NEWSLETTER EDITOR - MARTIN TUDOR,
TREASURER - RICHARD STANDAGE, REVIEWS EDITOR - BERNIE EVANS, PUBLICITY OFFICER - AL JOHNSTON,
ORDINARY MEMBER - MICK EVANS, NOVACON 22 CHAIRMAN - HELENA BOWLES.

THIS MONTH'S PROGRAMME

"DOES THE TEAM THINK...?"

Friday 19th June 1992, 7.30pm for 7.45pm

Admittance: Members 1.25 Visitors 2.25

A panel game where members of the audience can ask a panel of "experts"
(or, in this case a small, ~~stupid~~ brave group of ~~fools~~ volunteers)
questions about sf, fantasy, fandom, conventions etc.

Your questions can be as serious or silly as you like.

Answers will, without doubt, contain the usual mixture appalling
ignorance, blind prejudice and sheer stupidity we have come to expect
from these sessions - but hopefully it will be entertaining!

At about 9pm, when the above "formal" part of the meeting has
finished and glasses have been refilled, Carol Morton will
be co-ordinating a game of Charades for all who wish to take part.

The BSFG meets at 7.45pm on the 3rd Friday of every month (unless other-wise notified) in the upstairs function room of the White Lion, corner of Thorp Street and Horsefair/Bristol Street in Birmingham city centre. The annual subscription rates (which include twelve copies of this newsletter and reduced price entry to meetings) are nine pounds per person, or twelve pounds for 2 members at the same address. Cheques etc. payable to "the Birmingham Science Fiction Group", via the treasurer Richard Standage at meetings or by post c/o Bernie Evans (address below). Book reviews and review copies should be sent to the reviews editor Bernie Evans, 121 Cape Hill, Smethwick, Warley, West Midlands, B66 4SH (tel: 021 558 0997). All other contributions and enquiries regarding the Brum Group News to Martin Tudor, 845 Alum Rock Road, Birmingham, B8 2AG (tel: 021 327 3023).

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

UNTIL 17 JUNE: CYCLOPS.A 3D computer programmed hologram by Caius Hawkins, only to be seen after dark, at the Mead Gallery, WAC, Warwick University, Coventry, tel: (0203) 524524.

17 JULY 1992: IAN STEWART will be addressing the BSFG on Chaos Theory at the White Lion.

18-26 JULY 1992: MINEHEAD SPACE AGE FESTIVAL. Not actually a convention, but sounds interesting. Being held at the Exhibition Centre, Market House Lane, Minehead. Costs only £1.00 per day. Expected guests include Arthur C Clarke, Patrick Moore, John Brunner and Terry Pratchett. Contact the Town Clerk, Town Hall, The Parade, Minehead, TA24 5NB.

8-9 AUG 1992: FAB 1. THUNDERBIRDS con at Wolverhampton Civic Hall. Full details from 15 Fullers Court, Exeter, Devon, EX2 4DZ.

21 AUG 1992: PAM WELLS TAFF winner and this year's Eastercon fan guest of honour will be speaking to the BSFG at the White Lion.

16 OCT 1992: IAN WATSON will be speaking to the BSFG at the White Lion.

6-8 NOV 1992: NOVACON 22 the Brum Group's own sf con returns to the Royal Angus hotel in the city centre. Guest of Honour Storm Constantine. Attending membership costs £20 until one month before con after which only on the door memberships available at £25. Details: Bernie Evans, 121 Cape Hill, Smethwick, Warley, West Midlands, B66 4SH.

20 NOV 1992: DEBATE against the Birmingham University SF & Fantasy Society, at White Lion.

8-12 APR 1993: HELICON '93. 44th British national sf con, Hotel de France, St. Helier, Jersey. Guests of honour George RR Martin & John Brunner. Attending £20. Supporting / Family Membership / Children 8-14 are all £10 each. Details: 63 Drake Road, Chessington, Surrey, KT9 1LQ.

28-31 MAY 1993: MEXICON V. "Straight" sf con, venue to be announced. Attending £18 until Novacon 22. Details from: Bernie Evans, 121 Cape Hill, Smethwick, Warley, West Midlands, B66 4SH (tel: 558 0997).

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INCONSEQUENTIAL

22-25 May, Derby

a report by Al Johnston

When the con chairman gets thrown into the GoH's Jacuzzi, you have the makings of a damn good convention. Inconsequential was such a convention. The bye-line was "Be there - or don't" and if you didn't you missed out on a really good time. Run by Octarine the theme was humour in sf, and the spirit of the con reflected this in full.

Guests of Honour included Robert Rankin and Dave Hardy, although the list expanded as the con went on with the addition of Steven Marley and possibly others. Top marks go to Terry "He's not a GoH, he actually *paid* to come here voluntarily" Pratchett, for being such a good sport: his trial formed the centrepiece of the programme. The indictment included such diverse charges as: Writing Novels Without Due Care and Attention; Grievous Bodily Pratchetting; Taking and Signing Without the Owner's Consent; and Possession of Inordinately Large Sums of Cash. The completely impartial and unbiased jury (NOT !) duly found him Guilty As Hell! on all counts by means of that purest of democratic techniques: the clapometer. The witnesses performed creditably, although Terry's habit of asking unrehearsed questions disconcerted a few. One might almost suspect he thought he had a chance of acquittal.

Other highlights of an excellent programme included fan-dom's first Sumo Basho, won by a certain Nintendofuji (modesty forbids me revealing his real name); the live action spelling bee (Neil Mittenshaw-Hodge is going to be very wet when I catch him); 28-to-1 and the impossible multi-media quiz. The anti-pratchetting workshop was held under a table, togas were worn and silliness prevailed.

The hotel was great, with friendly and helpful staff, although demand for the video programme occasionally overwhelmed the facilities. The various programme rooms were a bit spread out, but this was no problem really, and as a finale, the hotel won the spelling bee prize for their car park sign.

All in all a tremendous success, particularly for a first-time committee. If Inconsequential II is run, I for one will be there.

[Reports on conventions, BSFG meetings or any other genre related events are always welcome.]

The Jophan Report by Martin Tudor

The 52nd Jophan Report

Magicon, the 50th world sf convention, received 498 nominating ballots for the 1992 Hugo Awards, a heartening increase from 1991's total of 352. As usual North American voters dominated the balloting, casting 478 ballots (457 USA, 21 Canada). The 20 non-North American votes were, however, quadruple the number received last year.

The 1992 Hugo nominees appear in full below, ballots must be postmarked no later than 31 July and received by 6 August. The results will be announced at Magicon in Orlando, Florida over the weekend 3-7 Sept.

Best Novel: *BARRAYAR*, Lois McMaster Bujold (Bantam/serialized in *ANALOG*, July-Oct 1991); *BONE DANCE*, Emma Bull (Ace); *XENOCIDE*, Orson Scott Card (Tor); *ALL THE WEYRS OF PERM*, Anne McCaffrey (Del Rey/Bantam UK); *STATIONS OF THE TIDE*, Michael Swanwick (Morrow/serialized in *ISAAC ASIMOV'S SCIENCE FICTION MAGAZINE*, mid-Dec 1990 - Jan 1991); *THE SUMMER QUEEN*, Joan D Vinge (Warner Questar).

Best Novella: "And Wild For To Hold", Nancy Kress (*ALTERNATE WARS*, Bantam Spectra & *IASFM*, July 1991); "Beggars in Spain", Nancy Kress (*IASFM*, Apr 1991 & Axolotl Press); "The Gallery of His Dreams", Kristine Kathryn Rusch, (*IASFM*, Sept 1991 & Axolotl Press); "Griffin's Egg", Michael Swanwick (Legend UK & St Martins); "Jack", Connie Willis (*IASFM*, Oct 1991).

Best Novelette: "Gold", Isaac Asimov (*ANALOG*, Sept 1991); "Dispatches from the Revolution", Pat Cadigan (*IASFM*, July 1991); "Understand", Ted Chiang (*IASFM*, Aug 1991); "Fin de Cycle" (*NIGHT OF THE COOTERS*, Ursus Press & *IASFM*, mid-Dec 1991); "Miricle", Connie Willis (*IASFM*, Dec 1991).

Best Short Story: "Press Ann", Terry Bisson (*IASFM*, Aug 1991); "Buffalo" (*THE MAZAZINE OF FANTASY & SCIENCE FICTION*, Jan 1991 & *FIRES OF THE PAST*, St Martins); "A Walk in the Sun", Geoffrey A Landis (*IASFM*, Oct 1991); "One Perfect Morning, With Jackals", Mike Resnick (*IASFM*, Mar 1991); "Winter Solstice" (*F&SF*, Oct/Nov 1991); "Dog's Life", Martha Soukup (*AMAZING*, Mar 1991); "In the Late Cretaceous", Connie Willis (*IASFM*, mid-Dec 1991).

Best Non-Fiction Book: *THE WORLD OF CHARLES ADDAMS*, Charles Adams (Knopf); *SCIENCE FICTION: THE EARLY YEARS*, Everett Bleiler (Kent State University Press); *THE SCIENCE-FANTASY PUBLISHERS: A CRITICAL AND BIBLIOGRAPHIC HISTORY*, 3rd ed., Jack L Chalker & Mark Owings (Mirage Press); *THE BAKERY MEN DON'T SEE COOKBOOK*, Jeanne Gomoll, Diane Martin et al. (SF²); *CLIVE BARKER'S SHADOWS IN EDEN*, Stephen Jones, ed. (Underwood-Miller).

Best Original Artwork: cover of *WHITE MISTS OF POWER*, Thomas Canty (Roc Fantasy); cover of *LUNAR DESCENT*, Bob Eggleton (Ace); cover of *IASFM*, Jan 1991, Bob Eggleton (illustrating *STATIONS OF THE TIDE*); cover of *HEAVY TIME*, Don Maitz (Warner Questar); cover of *THE SUMMER QUEEN*, Michael Whelan (Warner Questar).

Best Dramatic Presentation: *THE ADDAMS FAMILY* (Paramount); *BEAUTY AND THE BEAST* (Disney); *THE ROCKETEER* (Disney); *STAR TREK VI: THE UNDISCOVERED COUNTRY* (Paramount); *TERMINATOR 2* (Carolco).

Best Professional Editor: Ellen Datlow; Gardner Dozois; Edward Lerman; Kristine Kathryn Rusch; Stanley Schmidt.

Best Professional Artist: Thomas Canty; David Cherry; Bob Eggleton; Don Maitz; Michael Whelan.

Best Semiprozine: *INTERZONE*, David Pringle; *LOCUS*, Charles N Brown; *NEW YORK REVIEW OF SCIENCE FICTION*, David G Hartwell, Kathryn Kramer, Gordon van Gelder, Robert K J Killheffer; *PULPHOUSE*, Dean Wesley Smith; *SCIENCE FICTION CHRONICLE*, Andrew I Porter.

Best Fanzine: *FILE 770*, Mike Glycer; *FOSFAX*, Janice Moore & Timothy Lane; *LAN'S LANTERN*, George ("Lan") Laskowski; *MIMOSA*, Dick & Nicki Lynch; *TRAPDOOR*, Robert Lichtman.

Best Fan Writer: Avedon Carol; Mike Glycer; Andrew Hooper; Dave Langford; Evelyn Leeper; Harry Warner, Jr.

Best Fan Artist: Brad Foster; Diana Harlan Stein; Teddy Harvia; Peggy Ranson; Stu Shiffman.

John W Campbell Award (not a Hugo, sponsored by Davis Publications): Ted Chiang; Barbara Delaplace; Greer Ilene Gilman; Laura Resnick; Michelle Sagara.

David Hardy will be delivering a slide-talk at the Minehead Space Age Festival, being held on 18-26 July to celebrate Arthur C Clarke's 75th birthday.

The South Hants SF Group's Wincon III committee held its first meeting in March; the site is still under discussion, but the event is likely to be held in August, 1994. Although the programme is obviously still on

the drawing board, the committee plans to build upon the success of Wincon II's multi-stream structure, one of which will emphasize sf's science element.

NEW WORLDS #2, due from Gollancz in July, features three extracts from the hard-sf novel *CORSAIRS OF THE SECOND ETHER* by Warwick Colvin Jr, described as the is the nephew of the late James Colvin. Fans of the original *NEW WORLDS* will recognize the latter name as the magazine's house pseudonym, primarily used by Michael Moorcock for book reviews.

Also included is Jack Deighton's first published story, "The Face of the Waters", a critique of recent sf by David Langford, two novel "outlines" which Philip K Dick sold but never actually wrote (with an introduction by Paul Williams and illustrations by Jim Burns), "Innocents" by Ian McDonald, "Brain Wars" by Paul Di Filippo, "Ratbird" by Brian W Aldiss, "Candy Buds" by Peter F Hamilton, "Great Breakthroughs in Darkness" by Marc Laidlaw, "Bruised Time" by Simon Ings, "Virtually Lucid Lucy" by Ian Watson, "Inherit the Earth" by Stephen Baxter and "The Last Word" by Michael Moorcock.

NEW WORLDS #3, already in the pipeline, will feature John Clute's assessment of the sf novels of 1991.

Following the publication of *DREAMSIDE*, Graham Joyce has switched publishers from Pan to Headline. His second novel *DARK SISTER* will be published in November.

Headline's Caroline Oakley reportedly had to beat off stiff competition from Penguin / ROC, also interested in buying the new book. Her offer included a two-book deal, hardback publication and, apparently, a more supportive financial arrangement than Pan could come up with.

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Thanks for the news this time goes for the most part, to *CRITICAL WAVE*, which is still Europe's only independent sf, fantasy and horror news and reviews magazine. Regular features include publishing news, extensive club and convention listings, interviews with prominent authors and editors, video, film and comics reviews, fiction market reports, fanzine and small press reviews, convention reports and theatre reviews.

CRITICAL WAVE #25 is currently available for £1.95, or a six issue subscription costs only £7.50, cheques payable to "Critical Wave Publications" should be sent to Martin Tudor at the address on the cover of this newsletter.

PHANNISH FIZZICKS

by Al Johnston

All you ever wanted to know about Life, the Universe and Everything.

At school, you probably spent a physics lesson or so staring down a microscope at some jiggling specks of light. These, you were told, were smoke particles in a light box; jiggling because of random collisions with the surrounding gas molecules. This phenomenon is known as Brownian Motion, it is used in schools to introduce the Kinetic Theory of Ideal Gases.

After school, in a pub, you probably had more opportunity to study the motion of smoke particles. You very likely noticed that any interaction between the smoke and the air was decidedly not random. It is in fact well established that particles of cigarette smoke in a room are rapidly and efficiently propelled toward the non-smoker who most vehemently objects to their presence. This phenomenon is known as Vernon Brownian Motion, it is used here to introduce the Paranoid Theory of Gases with Attitude.

According to this theory the explanation of VBM is simple: the oxygen molecules are doing it deliberately. With all the complexities of electron orbital fine structure and nucleon interactions revealed by Quantum Mechanics, it is evident that oxygen molecules are far from the dull, lifeless billiard balls envisaged by the Kinetic Theory. They are insulted by this image. They have more serious grievances.

Given what Mankind is doing to their brothers in the ozone layer, it is obvious why oxygen molecules *really hate* Homo sapiens. Since the automotive and manipulative abilities of a sub-nanometric sized object are obviously limited, they are doing what they can. In an atmosphere crowded with apathetic nitrogen they cannot run away from us. They cannot elude the rapacious clutches of carbon and haemoglobin. But they can work in concert to spread carcinogenic smoke particles. And they do.

Your physics teacher was blissfully unaware of this. After all, his smoke particles were sealed in their container, the oxygen molecules would not reveal their capabilities in vain; but in the pub...

NEXT TIME: Bowlesian Motion. Physicists have abandoned experiments near absolute zero where Helium II crawls up and over the side of a glass, after discovering that Helena Bowles can do the same thing with real ale at normal temperatures.

LETTERS

DAVE HARDY, 99 Southam Road, Birmingham, B28 0AB,

I've been sorting out old issues of the *BRUM GROUP NEWS*, from the era when I used to edit it. Almost exactly 2 years ago, in the July 1990 issue to be precise, I found a letter from Vernon Brown entitled *THE LONG AND SHORT OF BRUM GROUP MEETINGS*. Vernon claimed that David Brin's talk was far too long at 2 hours plus, even with a break. He went on to suggest that a speaker's talk should last no more than 50 minutes, bemoans the lack of time for general chat and socialising afterwards, and so on - it's worth digging this out and re-reading it.

This was followed in August by a Debate about the Group and the way meetings were run. The report on this in the September *BGN* says: "... the Committee has decided to tighten up the agenda. In future, speakers will be asked to restrict themselves to a 40-50-minute talk. There will then be a beer break of no more than 15 minutes, followed by a formal Question-and-Answer session of about the same length. This pattern is intended to leave more time for casual discussion after the meeting."

Now I'm not suggesting that the current committee has taken a deliberate decision to overturn this agreement, without informing the membership (have they?), but how short memories are! In less than 2 years this 'rule' has been relaxed until at the last meeting Terry Pratchett had to wind up his own Q-&A session because it began to look endless as the audience scratched around for another question. (It is the Chairman's job to control a meeting. One will not offend a speaker by telling him / her it's time to finish. On the contrary, they're probably only too glad to take a rest, I speak as a four-term Chairman - three year's consecutively - so I do understand the problem!)

Finally, our current room, while better than some we've had lately, is somewhat airless. I don't know whether anything can be done at this time of year to get more windows to open (?), but I would plead on behalf of the majority of members who are non-smokers for more 'NO SMOKING' notices to be placed prominently around the room. Thanks!

Reply from the Chairman: Sorry Dave, but your "speculation" on the committee overturning previous agreements seems a little confused. If you wish to take the Terry Pratchett meeting as an example, this was the format (and it is pretty accurate - I kept referring to my watch): The meeting started just after 8.00 with Terry speaking until around 8.55. After a break I re-started the meeting at 9.25 for the Q-&A session. This finished slightly before 10.20. Now by my reckoning the 'formal speech' lasted about 55 minutes and the 10.20 finish left a good 40 minutes until closing time (not counting another 20 minutes of

'drinking up time') for people to chat.

As for Terry 'winding up' the meeting; at about 10.10 there were AT LEAST four people waiting to ask questions and Terry seemed 'on a roll'. Two questions from the end, Terry paused to ask me what time he should finish, he then went on to answer those questions; I feel further input from me was unnecessary. I would also like to add that there is the 'value for money factor' - at around £2 /£3 per head admittance I feel people should be given every opportunity to ask as many questions as they like, as long as the speaker doesn't object. Terry didn't seem to mind and he spoke eloquently throughout. I thought it was an excellent meeting. I don't recall previous meetings this year over-running by more than 5 minutes or so, and would be interested to hear other member's views on this.

As to the other issues raised; Yes, ALL the windows that could open, WERE opened. Weather conditions and the number of bodies conspired against us - but I'm not complaining about warm weather or lots of bodies boosting the Group's coffers.

Finally, your point about smoking is quite valid, I admit it is something I tend to forget to mention at the start of meetings, and at the last meeting fewer notices than normal were put up. We will endeavour to improve on this in future.

STOP PRESS

DAVE HOLMES, manager of Andromeda Bookshop, handed over his keys and parted company with Messrs Peyton and Milner on Saturday 6 June. After working at Andromeda for nigh on 18 years it was an emotive departure - there wasn't a dry throat in the shop - as a parting gift Rod & Rog presented Dave with a bottle of Bell's whisky - a gallon sized bottle!

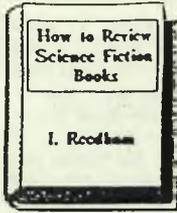
Dave has quit Andromeda to go into business for him-self dealing in the usual mixture of sf, fantasy & horror books, but with the addition of comics, movie memorabilia, games and models (helping Dave with the final 2 items will be Steph Mortimer).

His shop *MAGIC LABYRINTH*, 34/36 Rutland Street, Leicester, LE1 1RD, should open in early July - watch this space for details of the grand opening.

TOM HOLT bestselling author of *FLYING DUTCH & YE GODS!* will be signing at Andromeda on 20 June at noon.

To win a copy of Terry Pratchett's *SMALL GOODS* & £40 worth of Dillon's book vouchers, tell *WHAT'S ON* 'the name of the world in which most of Terry's tales are set.' Entries by 26 June to: Off the Shelf, What's On, Enterprise Magazines, 28 Colmore Circus, Queensway, Birmingham, B4 6AX.

On 20 June Gerry Anderson will present *THE HISTORY OF SUPERMARIONATION* at the Grand Theatre, Wolverhampton, call 0902 29212.



Book Reviews

POLAR CITY BLUES by Katherine Kerr
Grafton, 347 pp, £3.99, p/b

Reviewed by Carol Morton.

Katherine Kerr is probably best known for her fantasy *DEVERRY* tales, but this is a new departure for her, sf and a detective story.

Polar City is the capital of the human world Hagar, which finds itself squeezed between two powerful alien systems, and continually in danger of being annexed by one or the other of them. The precarious political balance is disrupted when a suspected spy from one of the systems, the Coreward Alliance, is murdered, and evidence suggests the Interstellar Confederation, the opposing faction. The Chief of Police is under extreme pressure to solve this case so he brings in Mulligan, once an extremely talented psychic, to find any echoes of the murderer. But the murderer is also a psychic and has laid booby traps against such an investigation. These traps send Mulligan into amnesiac shock. When he comes round he has no memory of the scene, and in order to trap the murderer he teams up with Lacey, a streetwise lady of all trades, her AI computer Buddy, and Nunk, an alien he can communicate with telepathically.

Just as they seem to be getting on top of the case they discover that the murderer is not only still murdering, but also spreading a voracious alien bacteria that gruesomely eats away a human body. They not only have to find the murderer before the two alliances use Hagar as a battleground, they have to find a cure for the bacteria.

It is surprising to me that more authors have not combined sf and the detective story, because they do seem to go well together, and this tale is no exception. It has all the elements of a good detective story but set in an sf scenario. It is a cracking good yarn.

(It's not often we print two reviews of the same book, but when a book appeals to two such divergent characters as Andy Wright and Pauline Morgan it has to be a little special. Besides, Andy raises an interesting warning for advertising copy-writers! - Bernie)

THE BLACK COMPANY by Glen Cook
RoC, 319 pp, £4.99, p/b

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

It is difficult to know what to say about this book without giving a false impression. In some respects it is an ordinary fantasy novel, the first of another trilogy. Yet it isn't. The Black Company of the title is a band of mercenaries, a little like the French Foreign Legion, where nobody has a past. When their current employer "dies" they are hired by Soulcatcher, one of the ten wizards (known as the Ten Who Were Taken) who have been resurrected. The Taken are fighting a war against the Rebel and it seems that they may well be on what the reader might consider to be the wrong side. This gives the novel realism because this is what mercenaries do - fight for whoever pays them. Although many of the chapters deal with the capture and discomfiture of Rebel generals there are other undercurrents. These have to remain undercurrents because the story is told by Croaker, the CVompany's field surgeon, and Annalist (he writes the Annals). This aspect helps to keep the book interesting as you are never quite sure what will happen next, or who is on the same side as whom, even when you think you are.

The battle scenes are described well, but without the excitement and immediacy that David Gemell imparts to his - there is no real sense of being there. Also, there is no real characterisation, yet there is something racy about the prose that draws the reader along, albeit reluctantly. At the end it was certainly far more memorable than many other fantasy novels around at present and I will probably read volume two. It is slightly addictive.

THE BLACK COMPANY by Glen Cook
RoC, 319 pp, £4.99, p/b

Reviewed by Andy Wright.

Croaker is the medic and annalist to the Black Company, a band of mercenaries in the standard medieval-type fantasy world. As usual there is a prophecy that the "Lady" and her husband, the "Dominator", will escape from their prison to once more forge an empire, and that a saviour, the White Rose, will lead an army to defeat them (look for the kid with the weird birthmark).

So far you've got the standard "magical camping holiday" ingredients. However, the Black Company has been hired by the "Taken", the strange minions of the Lady, and it seems that she has plans in mind for Croaker. This

gives an interesting perspective as Croaker, who relates the story, is coerced into working for the forces of darkness, a role he is not at all happy with.

The book has still more depths than the average fantasy novel, as it develops that the forces of evil are divided amongst themselves, scoring political points off each other in a complex power struggle. There are vast battles waged, with the role of magic neatly interwoven in an internally consistent and convincing manner. The story unfolds in tidbits as the entire conflict is viewed from the standpoint of one soldier who, at least initially, can only watch the activities of the major players in the war.

It is up to the reader to piece together the history of the world, which I found to be one of the greatest pleasures in reading this book. Consequently, in my opinion the moron who wrote the plug for the next two volumes in the series (in the back of the book) should be taken out and shot. One of the greatest questions left unresolved is how the main characters are going to come to terms with their own internal conflict in working for an evil power. This idiot blows it in two paragraphs. My annoyance at this is a good indication of how much I liked this book. It is a superior fantasy novel in which, for once, the reader is never quite sure of what is going to happen next. The characters are complex, the descriptions of an unusual form of warfare satisfyingly detailed. If you read this and like it, then avoid reading the inside back cover.

DAWN'S UNCERTAIN LIGHT by Neal Barrett Jr
Grafton, 252 pp, £3.99, p/b

Reviewed by Carol Morton.

Set in America centuries after "the ultimate war" (when, why and with whom is not explained), this story tells of Howie Ryder and his search for his young sister Carolee. Carolee was "chosen" and taken to Silver Island, a place where, the populace believes, the brightest and best young people are taken by the government to build a new and better nation from the ashes of the war-ravaged land. But in this post-holocaust America there are no cattle, and the meat hungry Americans find a substitute, genetically engineered humans. Howie discovers that Silver Island is not a place of hope for the future, but a research facility in which further experimentation takes place on the young people sent there. When Howie finds Silver Island it is a burned out shell, its guards having been told by the government to destroy all evidence, including

the chosen. Howie will not believe Carolee is dead and goes on searching for her.

This novel, while thought provoking, is disturbing and distasteful, something of a cross between Piers Anthony's short story "In the Barn" and David Brin's *THE POSTMAN*, a much better post-holocaust novel. All round an unpleasant and unoriginal story, and not one I'd recommend.

VILLAINS! Edited by Mary Gentle & Ros Kaveny
RoC, 337 pp, £4.99, p/b

Reviewed by Tony Morton.

An anthology created by Mary Gentle and Neil Gaiman, putting the "other" point of view, that of the villains. Baddies get a bad press and this attempts to balance things. The stories all occur within the world delineated by the prologue tale. Each gives a unique perspective on the issue of bad press.

All the stories are excellent, with not a duff one in the book. Superb ideas squeezed into a short story format leave the reader breathless and dizzy from the experience. Worthy of any bookshelf and an excellent read, *VILLAINS!* captures an essence which permeates through the collective of writers, producing a compelling anthology.

Whilst all are noteworthy tales, for me Storm Constantine's "The Deliveress", Alex Stewart's "Doing Business", James Wallis' "A Knight at the Races" and Paula Wakefield's "The Fur Boot" all had that mysterious added ingredient - a different element in each - that produces memorable stories. Read for yourself and see if you agree. As an ardent "hard" sf fan, I really enjoyed this departure into fantasy, I may even read it again.

BAD DREAMS by Kim Newman
Grafton, 317 pp, £4.99, p/b

Reviewed by Al Johnston.

I'm not a great horror fan myself, I tend to find the gory bits distasteful rather than frightening, and the characterisation seldom provides the depth required for empathy with the victims. Both of these failings make the genre more comic than horrifying. That said, I very much enjoyed this book. Mr Newman has not entirely avoided the pitfalls of the genre but he has a strong central protagonist and has kept a judicious rein on the gross-out stuff. (The carrot scene is probably the most unpleasant, page 125 if you like that sort of thing.) On the plus side, the tension is handled well and the background is an interesting combination of dream imagery and some vampire mythology.

The story is set in the demi-monde of London and is essentially a conflict between Anne Neilson, a journalist, and Skinner, one of the last of the Kind. Along the way there is some good historical detail, particularly in the alternate dreamscapes, and some pointed jabs at 80's morality and behaviour. All in all an entertaining and stimulating read.

REAPER MAN by Terry Pratchett
Corgi, 285 pp, £3.99, p/b

Reviewed by Michael Jones.

The latest *DISCWORLD* novel is built around the surrealist character of Death, who has built up something of a personality in previous stories. Therein lies the basis for this one for, in becoming a personality, he has offended the powers that be and they give him the sack, which leads to the kind of chaos you always get when an important public service is withdrawn. The trouble is that people and animals go on dying but there is nothing to collect them, so they continue to hang around, animating their dead bodies and being a general nuisance to the living. Meanwhile Death enters the real world and learns something about life and living, prompting a re-evaluation of its purpose and a chance to return things back to normal.

A summary like this can hardly do justice to a Pratchett novel, especially this one. There is a great deal more in it than one is at first led to expect, including quite a few well-drawn characters and the usual quotient of satire. Above all, it would be a serious error to dismiss Terry Pratchett as a writer of lightweight comic fantasy. This may be the vehicle he has chosen for his talents, but he is a writer of considerable merit and a Science Fiction Writer besides. This book contains ideas which, far from being lightweight, are very heavy indeed - concepts of great depth concerning life and death, the nature of time and the purpose of the Universe. A reader who comes to it with an open mind and a willingness to be entertained will not be disappointed.

DRACULA UNBOUND by Brian Aldiss
Grafton, 250 pp, £4.99, p/b

Reviewed by William McCabe.

The blurb on the back reads "When life, death, past and future are at stake" - if there are any more jokes this bad concealed inside I confess to missing them. I wish I could say the same for the clichés. The idea of the scientific explanation of vampires is getting a little old hat now, I thought the idea of

the time traveller who goes back to save himself from certain (or a fate worse than) death had been overdone already, and I'm pretty sure I've heard somewhere before of the gardener who accompanies his master on a quest to save the world. OK, so maybe they're supposed to be funny, but I didn't think they were that good.

Now the story. In the far distant future (to begin with) the world is ruled by vampires who are draining energy from the sun to drive a train that travels back to the Cretaceous so that they can slowly take over even more (well something like that).

Meanwhile in 1999 Joe Bodenland is busy inventing a time displacement device to dispose of nuclear waste. Not so busy that he doesn't have time to take a side trip to the desert, where a friend is digging up two coffins from the Cretaceous. And every evening the time train runs through that very desert. This time the train has just one more stop - a special agent is being despatched to deal with Bram Stoker in the 19th century - and Joe crashes onto the train.

This is a fair adventure with probably a lot more humour than I give it credit for. There seems to be a lot of science co-opted in despite very little relevance, but then this is SCIENCE Fiction.

A few points about the cover before I quit. The plot given on the back cover has enough errors in it to make me believe that its writer was paying less attention than I was. I got the feeling that the reviewers quoted were reading different books (both from me and each other).

HOUSES WITHOUT DOORS by Peter Straub
Grafton, 448 pp, £4.99, p/b

Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

You have to read half way through this one to be sure that it's a collection of stories and snippets. They aren't really horror stories, either, just odd stories about odd people. There's William Standish, a young American academic, who comes over to England to do literary research in an old country house, in the story "Mrs God". As you enjoy the subtle contest between man and house, you can try to spot Straub's influences. He admits (in an afterword) to Robert Aickman, but there are lots of Ramsey Campbell's trademarks in there, too.

All the other pieces are very American. Only one of the snippets, "The Veteran", seems to have any meaning, and a couple of the stories left me in some doubt, though three longer stories are pretty good. "The Buffalo

Hunter" is about a computer operator whose only talent is a very vivid imagination. "The Juniper Tree" and "Blue Rose" are chunks of American childhood, written both sharply and nostalgically, with shocks. Although I'm a fan of Straub's writing, I can't honestly say that this collection shows him at his best. It's better writing than almost all other writers of horror are capable of, yet it is occasionally too wordy and too subtle, and it left me only partially satisfied at the end.

STAR TREK VI: THE UNDISCOVERED COUNTRY by J M Dillard
Grafton, 301 pp, £3.99, p/b

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

It is difficult to be brilliant with both hands tied behind your back and writing the novelisation of a film must be a little like that. Vision does not always convert easily into prose. An image flashed for a second onto a screen might require ten pages of words to do it justice. Similarly, characterisation. In a film small gestures, familiar facial expressions convey a vast amount. Character development on the page involves revealing the thoughts of the actors. J M Dillard has started with one advantage - the people he is trying to portray will be well known to the majority of his readers. He also has the plot already provided.

The ageing crew of the Enterprise have one last mission before they retire - to escort the Klingon Chancellor to the peace negotiations. But there are problems as emotions run high on both sides. When deadly enemies face each other it is not easy to follow the logical path. Revenge is a satisfying dish and to a culture that considers vengeance honorable it is hard to abstain. Not all Klingons can. And Kirk has a similar problem. Not only is he forced to see the race that murdered his son as potential allies and friends but they have come very close to robbing him of Carol Marcus, the woman he hopes to spend his retirement with. He finds forgiveness almost impossible. Then the Chancellor is assassinated and the finger of suspicion points to the Enterprise and her crew as the perpetrators.

The problems this book are twofold and stem from the media crossover. First, there is insufficient insight into the motivations of the characters, though the dénouement might well have been revealed too early if Dillard had had a free hand in this direction, he had to stick to the scenes in order of appearance. Where he does try to overcome this there is far too much emphasis on Kirk's

involvement with Carol Marcus to a point of goodness. The other difficulty is that a film has a much shorter running time than a book and even when all the background descriptions have been added, and all the internal conversations exposed, the content is still extremely condensed. What in film is closely cut action, on the page can seem very brief. A novel using only the same plot outline would have been able to develop relationships denied to this format.

These reservations will apply to any book of this kind and Dillard has done a fair job within his constraints. As the only people likely to read this book are Star Trek fans and those who have seen the film and like books any failings will be forgiven. This volume is not for anyone with no knowledge of the Star Trek phenomenon.

MAGIC'S PAWN by Mercedes Lackey
RoC, 349 pp, £4.99, p/b

Reviewed by Carol Morton.

Vanyel is heir to Lord Withen, who will not allow any of the gentler feelings in himself or his heir. Vanyel has been pampered and spoiled by his mother, and is so alienated from his father that Withen sickens of him and sends him to be educated by his Aunt Savil, a Herald Mage. His aunt has the talent for bringing out the best in those who have recently come into their Herald Mage powers, and so has several young people living in her quarters, including Tylendel, the twin brother of a ruling Lord. Tylendel and Vanyel dislike each other initially, but eventually enter into a relationship that has to be kept secret from Withen, or Vanyel would be taken home.

Tylendel introduces Vanyel to Gala, an equine, one of a species known as the companions who, when mature, choose a human life-partner. That person is destined to become a Herald Mage. This situation goes on until Tylendel's twin brother is murdered by magic and he swears vengeance for his brother's death. Gala prevents him using magic for this end, but the backlash forces out Vanyel's latent powers. Vanyel is powerful but untutored, and neither Savil nor his own companion Yfandes can control him. Nor can the other Mages, so who will train him?

An above average fantasy yarn, not entirely original but well written nonetheless. While the plot falters in places, the characterisation is excellent and makes this a book well worth reading. A series to watch out for.

THEY CAME AND ATE US by Robert Rankin
Corgi, 336 pp, £3.99, p/b

Reviewed by Tony Morton.

Sub-titled *ARMAGEDDON II - THE B MOVIE*, this sequel to *ARMAGEDDON - THE MUSICAL* has Rex Mindi and Elvis Presley again fighting the forces of evil. Together with a loony kid called Crawford (a computer genius taking over the world - yawn) and, of course, the Antichrist, Rex and Elvis battle to "Save the World". Several subplots meander through the story, and frankly just confuse the whole thing, despite a manic attempt to tie up all the loose ends. Perhaps this is just Rankin's devious, warped sense of humour, and it's supposed to be like this? Compared to *THE MUSICAL* this does not seem to work, perhaps because of the numerous plots.

While the ideas are not bad, and some work well, there's just too much chaos to make any real sense of what's going on. I did enjoy the Antichrist's, (Wormwood), becoming President of the US of A, and initiating a World Government with himself at its head; and the weird beings "running" Earth with their problem is pure farce. However, the package as a whole falls short and fails to ignite into a full firework extravaganza. Points for trying, reduced for over complexity.

THE LAND BEYOND by Gill Alderman
Grafton, 306 pp, £4.99, p/b

Reviewed by Al Johnston.

I'm afraid I could barely finish this one. This, I feel, is a shame as there is a sense of great potential. The background of an ice-bound culture saved from extinction by conservationists is a good one, with plenty of scope for the development of a thoughtful story. The combination of Inuit and Gypsy mythology is also fertile ground for novelty and interest.

Somehow, however, the book fails to gel. The characters do not provoke any interest, the pace is slow and the plot does not generate excitement. This could be forgiven if more was made of the back-ground material, but here too there is a lack of depth. All in all it is a disappointing book, meandering and pointless.

CHIMERAS by Christopher Evans
Grafton, 173 pp, £5.99, "B" format p/b

Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

Imagine that the world is populated by hordes of spirit creatures, which are invisible but may be sensed by some people. Artists can use the spirits as raw material for their

creations (the chimeras of the title), employing the power of the mind to sculpt 3-dimensional images, colourful, capable of movement, but gradually turning to stone - geometrical shapes, animals, people.

This is the fantasy world that Chris Evans has created, reminiscent of Europe in the pre-renaissance period, except for the addition of chimera art. In an episodic novel he presents scenes from the life of Venvado, the most talented of all chimera artists. Here are moving stories of crisis points in the life of an enigmatic genius, viewed mainly from the outside, by some of the women who have come into contact with him.

More than that, this is a book about artistic creativity, and about the immense burden that it places on the artist's family. The characters are expertly brought to life, and the high quality of the writing shows a clear picture of a complex and totally believable world. Although it is something less than a novel, *CHIMERAS* is a masterly piece of fantasy writing, bursting with originality and full of surprises.

JIZZ by Jihn Hart

Black Swan, 285 pp, £5.99, p/b

Reviewed by Tony Morton.

My initial reaction to this one was "some clever-dick writer being cerebral and smug". I am (partly) wrong. Hart is a clever-dick writer being cerebral, but doing it in such a way as to cause the reader to stop, ponder the situation and reassess. While the standard pun is quite remorselessly overdone, the more subtle gag sneaks past.

Based in Brighton in the early 21st century we have a hero (?), Hayden a freelance scholar, and his attempts to produce a "device to further human understanding" in a dubious challenge. With help, and hindrance, from other characters Hayden stumbles through the novel towards his goal with some interesting and explosive (literally) results. Some lovely characterisation / caricatures in here which allow for super interaction between the cast.

I can see this as a play, typical English farce updated and overplayed. A notable story and well told, not only funny but intelligently so. Great fun.

EXPATRIA by Keith Brooke

Corgi, 318 pp, £3.99, p/b

Reviewed by Sally-Ann Melia.

Do you remember Science Fiction? Having so far this year reviewed seven fantasy novels, I had almost forgotten how good it feels to

YARROW by Charles De Lint
Pan, 244 pp, £7.99, "C" format p/b

Reviewed by Carol Morton.

read sf. From its cover to its contents *EXPATRIA* has all the components that characterise a preferred wine. I hope you'll stay and enjoy a glass with me.

The first pleasure if wine is the label you know well. *EXPATRIA*'s first impact is the wonder of its cover. A Brian Waugh painting, it depicts the Ark ships hovering above the planet *Expatria* and its two moons, Dum and Dee. It's all very reminiscent of George Lucas's fantasies. Select this small volume from the shelves, better things are to come.

Have you found the corkscrew yet? The author eases you into the plot with the introduction of maverick Mathias who, despite his best endeavours, cannot do anything wrong, as he is the Prime's son. All is not entirely rosy since there is a bastard half-brother vying for the succession, and a beautiful fiancée exasperated by Mathias' continued refusal to take his responsibilities seriously. A nice easy opening, the cork itself is stained a reassuringly deep mauve.

Let us pause a moment to savour the bouquet of this vintage. Hmmmm, by page 38 the Prime is dead, the bastard half-brother is the new Prime, the fiancée is the ex-fiancée and Mathias himself is charged with murder. Shall I pour?

If some of the names and titles above sound familiar, that's because *EXPATRIA* tells the tale of a colony sent from our own Earth to a distant planet. That the trip was so long that it took several generations to complete is an abhorrent idea in our age of immediate self-gratification, but Keith Brooke weaves this concept into a believable reality.

He has also built an alternate world with a 14-hour day (seven hours each, day-time and night-time). Having slept through the first seven hour night, what would you do during the second night? From the first colonists, several different states have been formed, with different religions and conflicting values. The scent of war hangs thick in the air, with all its attendant destruction, pillage, disease, refugees, innocent death and economic disaster. Mathias, first in flight from his home state, has become a scientist, one of a team fighting to find a technological solution that will save the day.

I am hoping you will all rush out and buy this book, which will sit comfortably on your shelves between Iain M Banks and C J Cherryh. As for me, I'm just hoping someone will let me review the sequel, *EXPATRIA INCORPORATED*. Please. And can anyone lend me *KEEPERS OF THE PEACE*?, that sounds good too!

Cat Midhir is a writer living in contemporary Ottawa. She writes down the experiences she has when she passes over into the Otherworld when dreaming. Kothelen the harper and Tiddy Munn the gnome are her suppliers of tales of Mynfel, the antlered goddess. Her books are labelled fantasy and sell well, but for three months Cat has not dreamed of the Otherworld. She has not dreamed at all. She puts it down to writer's block when in reality the creature *Lysistratus*, a dream thief, has been stalking her and stealing her dreams. *Lysistratus* is an ancient creature, a parasite who reaches into the minds of sleepers and feeds on their dreams. It can drain the whole of its victim's life-force, or soul, leaving an empty dying husk.

Distressed at her lack of writing, Cat turns to Peter Baird, the owner of an sf bookshop. Peter, whilst not totally believing her stories of the Otherworld, gives her a shoulder to cry on and a bed for the night on his couch. This night she dreams of the Otherworld and finds that Kothelen is dead, murdered. Tiddy Munn is in hiding and Mynfel has vanished. Cat finds Tiddy Munn, who tells her what is happening and who *Lysistratus* is. Cat, together with Peter and Ben Summerfield, a fan of hers, have to find, catch and stop *Lysistratus* before his greed overcomes him and he drains Cat of her soul.

De Lint's stories are all set in Canada, Ottawa in particular, and all involve modern characters getting mixed up with folk from mystical otherworlds. His previous two novels, *MOONHEART* and *GREENMANTLE*, had much the same basis as *YARROW*, but I have to say I liked this one even more than the other two. Perhaps it is the references to sf/fantasy novels and writers that makes it easy to identify with the characters, or maybe just that this is a superb story.

It wouldn't be fair to say De Lint is just a storyteller - he is more of a bard in that his tales are so lyrical and evoke memories of ancient folklore. Buy, read and be delighted - I was.

THE DOOR INTO SUNSET by Diane Duane
Corgi, 383 pp, £3.99, p/b

Reviewed by Martin Stallard.

This is the third book in a four book series. The first *THE DOOR INTO FIRE*, was the author's first book, and was very good. The second, *THE DOOR INTO SHADOW*, was even better. This

one, *THE DOOR INTO FIRE*, is the best yet.

The the heroes' and heroines' characters are well-developed. The dragons have an interesting way of avoiding death, which the heroine finds out personally. There is even a Goddess, who visits each person sometime in their life.

A gentle humour is woven through the book, with a love of life and living, and reverence of the goddess who made them. It has an imaginative and absorbing world which puts it a step above most fantasy books.

So go out and buy this book, and the others in the series. They are wonderful fantasy and are fully recommended.

VALENTINE PONTIFEX by Robert Silverberg
Pan, 367 pp, £4.99, p/b

Reviewed by Mick Evans.

This is the third book in Silverberg's *Majipoor Trilogy*, and *Valentine* is established again as Coronal. The shape-changing metamorphs are plotting to turn *Majipoor* upside down by sabotaging the crops on which the populace depends. *Valentine* is slowly handing over to his more ruthless heir apparent, *Hissune*, and takes on an almost saintly air as he tries to heal the ancient rifts between the humans and metamorphs. The *Sea Dragons* begin to play a large part as the events begun in *LORD VALENTINE'S CASTLE* come to their conclusion. This is Silverberg at his best. An extremely enjoyable book, and although it does stand alone, it may spoil your enjoyment of the others unless you read them first.

HELLBURNER by C J Cherryh
NEL, 359 pp, £14.99, h/b

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

Cherryh has an extraordinary mind and a hugely inventive imagination. Sometimes she is in danger of leaving us mere mortals behind.

HELLBURNER is the sequel to *HEAVY TIME* and slips into the sequence of Merchanter novels very near the beginning. The survivors from *HEAVY TIME* have scattered. Ben Pollard has joined the UDC and after intensive training is expecting a posting to Earth itself, preferably Stockholm. He has a desire to stand under blue sky on the shores of the sea, something he has never had the chance to experience before as he was born and raised in the (asteroid) Belt. Dekker, the man who precipitated the events of *HEAVY TIME*, is a Fleet pilot training to fly an experimental combat ship, the *Hellburner*. The girls, Sal and Meg, have stayed out in the Belt.

Then Ben finds himself yanked from the comfort of Sol One into the relative spartanness of Sol Two. Protesting every inch of the way he is dragged back into Dekker's life. Dekker has named Ben as next-of-kin and is in the hospital with no recollection of how he got the injuries that put him there. The authorities need to know. Dekker's crew are dead, killed when the *Hellburner* test run went wrong. Dekker survived only because he had been substituted at the last minute. Then he was found doped up and injured in a training simulator. The question is, was it attempted suicide (possible considering his past record) or attempted murder. If Ben can get Dekker to remember, then he can go back to Sol One and Stockholm. But they are only small cogs in a huge machinery of interconnecting wheels. Ben gets sucked in. Then Sal and Meg arrive. They, too, have been snatched up and drafted.

Within the station itself there are undercurrents and hostilities. Ostensibly under UDC command, Colonel Tanzer naturally wants all the kudos he can get for his pilots, but Wilhelmsen, the man who replaced Dekker, was UDC and he fouled up. Lieutenant Graaf has been left as the senior officer representing the Fleet on the station while his commanding officers are not only elsewhere but not communicating. UDC and Fleet personnel do not mix. They do not like each other and have no intention of bridging their cultural differences - UDC are blue-skyers, Fleet are Belters.

Beyond this there is the friction between different factions within the Solar System, mostly involving the big business corporations. Their circling becomes centred on the events inside Sol Two. Then there is the external threat of Union, the people who have gone beyond the solar system and settled other planets. In particular they seem frightened of Cyteen. The *Hellburner* ship is the stone at the centre of the concentric circles. What happens to it causes ripples.

If analysed closely, the plot of this novel is very small, but like so many events, the ramifications are incalculable. Strip away the politics to leave the action and there would be an excellent novella but Cherryh has taken a much broader view and added the complexities of real life at the cutting edge of scientific, military and political advance. If you are looking for straight SF adventure this is not the book for you. It is a volume that needs concentration and effort to understand and to get the most out of it it probably should be read twice.