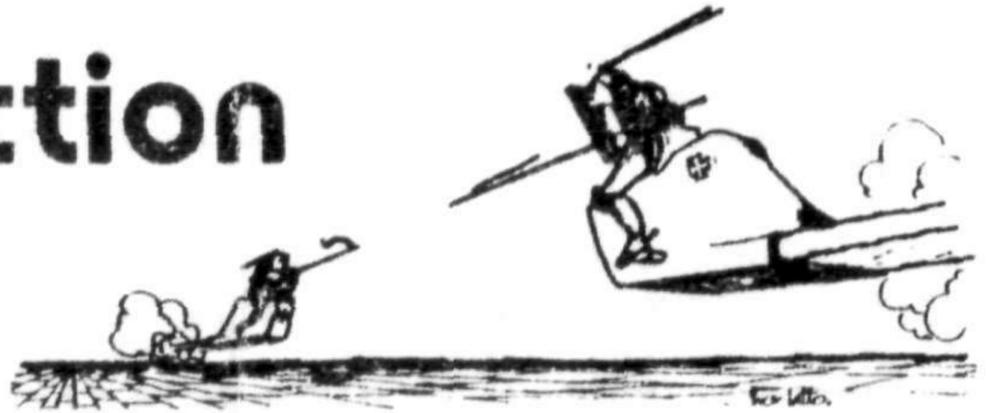


# Birmingham Science Fiction Group

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



NEWSLETTER 128

APRIL 1982

The Birmingham Science Fiction Group has its formal meeting on the third Friday of each month in the upstairs room of THE IVY BUSH pub on the corner of Hagley Road and Monument Road, Edgbaston, Birmingham 16. There is also an informal meeting on the first Tuesday of each month at THE OLD ROYAL pub, on the corner of Church Street and Cornwall Street, Birmingham 3. (Church Street is off Colmore Row.) New members are always welcome. Our treasurer is Margaret Thorpe, 36 Twyford Road, Ward End, Birmingham 8. The 12-month subscription is £3.50.

APRIL MEETING - Friday 16th April 1982 at 7.45 pm

Our speaker this month will be er... to be perfectly honest, we aren't quite sure who, at the moment. But it may be a very important, very well known author, so keep on reading! Between the time this issue of the newsletter is sent out and the actual meeting on Friday 16th April approximately 67% of your committee will be attending the British annual Easter convention (this year it's in Brighton). While there we hope to persuade one of the big-name authors attending (there are always lots of big-name authors attending Eastercons) to pay us a visit. It's a system which worked very well last year, bringing us Tom Disch, who gave us a sparkingly witty speech. This year we hope to do just as well. For more information ask at Andromeda Bookshop on April 14th, 15th or 16th, or phone them on 643-1999. Whatever you do, don't miss this meeting; it could be an author you've admired for years!

MARCH MEETING

The speaker was Colin Kapp whose latest novels are reviewed later in this issue. He regaled us with an account of how he came to write the Cageworld series, and the problems he encountered. In the second half of the evening he was interviewed by Chris Morgan about other aspects of his writing career.

FORTHCOMING

- \* May - Ken Bulmer has agreed to come and talk to us.
- \* June - Dave Langford will use us as targets for his wit.
- \* July - Beer and Skittles evening at the White Swan, Harbourne. As soon as details of the accompanying buffet are finalised you will be able to book your tickets. They will be on sale at meetings and direct from Margaret Thorpe.
- \* Later - BSFA National Mastermind Quiz, regional heat. We will be asking for volunteers to show off their knowledge of SF.

# ...NEWS...

## Edmund COOPER

died during March at the regrettably early age of 55. He was British, the author of over twenty SF novels (four using the pseudonym Richard Avery) and several collections. His best known books are probably Seed of Light (1959), Transit (1964), and The Cloud Walker (1973). For many years he was one of the panel who selected choices for the Science Fiction Book Club. The fact that he reviewed SF for The Sunday Times for quite a few years had made his name known to many non-SF readers. He came and spoke to the BSFG in July 1976.

SALMAN RUSHDIE, 1981 Booker Prize winner and author of the fantasy novel Grimus (reviewed on page 6), will be giving a public reading at Cannon Hill Arts Centre, Edgbaston, at 7.45 pm on Wednesday 7th April, to launch the paperback edition of Midnight's Children (Pan). Tickets are £1.50, available on the door.

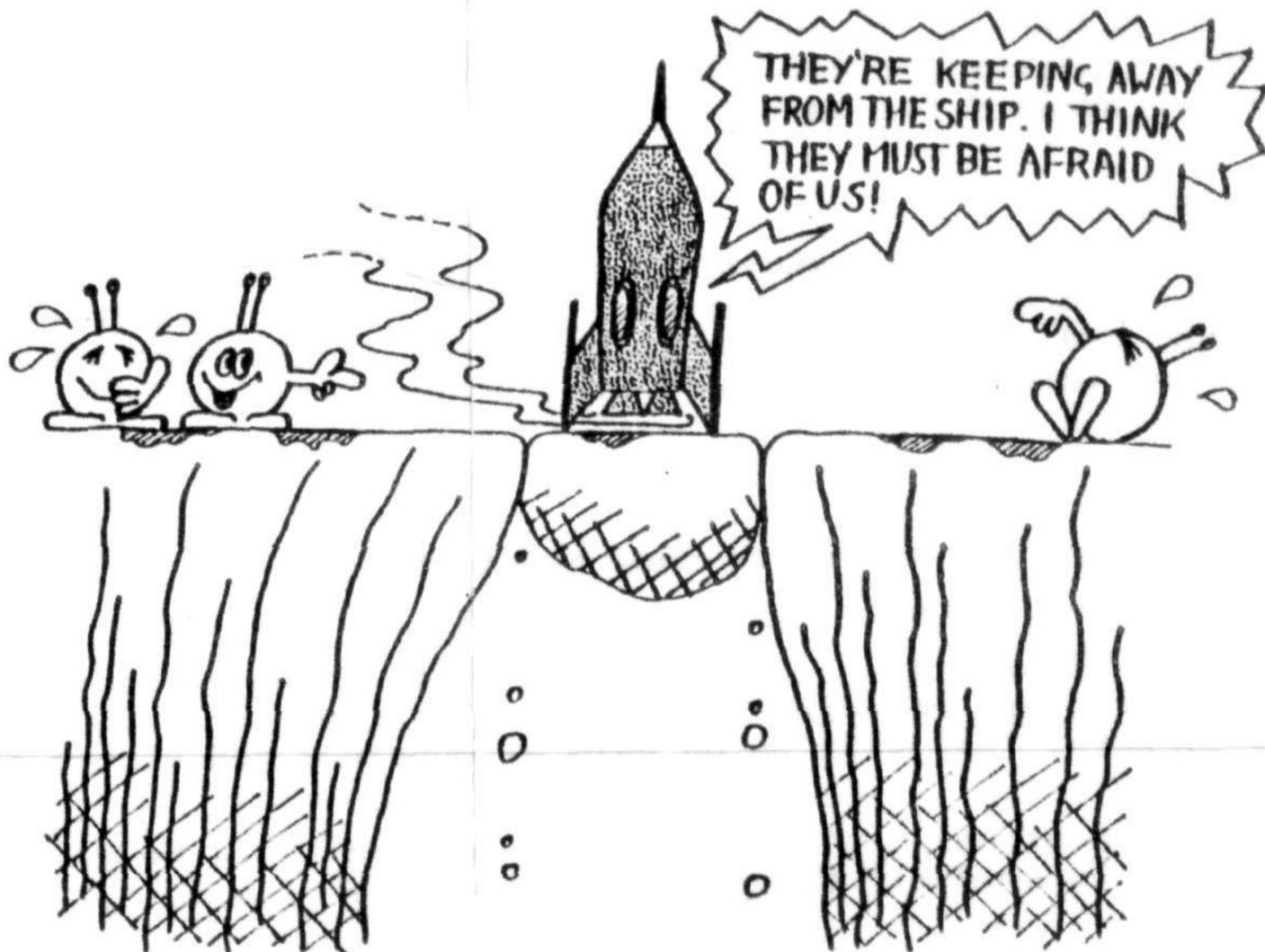
EAGLE comic was disinterred on 22nd March 1982. In a more modern format (mainly photostrips instead of drawings) than the original it retains only Dan Dare as a familiar feature. Price 20p every Monday.

FRANK HERBERT has signed a contract to write a fifth Dune novel. Its working title is Dune 5. How do they think 'em up?

BRIAN ALDISS' latest novel Helliconia Spring has recently spent two weeks in The Sunday Times bestselling hardcover list (at no.3 and no.4). Congratulations Brian.

ANDROMEDA BOOKSHOP's top ten best selling paperbacks for March were: 1.The Claw of the Conciliator - Gene Wolfe (Arrow), 2.Oath of Fealty - Larry Niven & Jerry Pournelle (Futura), 3.Search for the Sun! - Colin Kapp (NEL), 4.The Lost Worlds of Cronus - Colin Kapp (NEL), 5.The Shadow of the Torturer - Gene Wolfe (Arrow), 6.Windhaven - George R.R.Martin & Lisa Tuttle (NEL), 7.The Many-Coloured Land - Julian May (Pan), 8.Camber the Heretic - Katherine Kurtz (Ballantine dist. Futura), 9.Cruiser Dreams - Janet E.Morris (Fontana), 10=The Divine Invasion - Philip K.Dick (Corgi), 10=The Guns of Avalon - Roger Zelazny (Sphere).

SOLIHULL GROUP meets on the fourth Sunday of the month at Red House, Hermitage Road, (off Lode Lane) from 7pm onwards.





# Philip K Dick

..... an appreciation by Dave Packwood

Philip K. Dick, who died on March 2nd following a succession of strokes, was not just an SF writer. He was a genius endowed with great intellectual powers, and comparisons with Kafka and Dickens are fully justified.

His achievements speak for themselves---forty books published, including sixteen between the years 1964 and 1969. Among the highlights of his career was the publication of The Man in the High Castle (1962), which received a coveted Hugo award for the best novel of the year, and also the publication of four good novels all in the same year, in 1964: Ciars of the Alphane Moon, Martian Time-Slip, The Simulacra and The Penultimate Truth.

Dick's unique view of the world, his Weltanschauung, was the result of his fears which were of the totalitarian state and the loss of a moral code and a spiritual direction. Yet Dick's characters, entangled in cold systems of logic and ersatz realities, would always fight back to resist the flow of entropy. The maxim in Dick's universe was "Get by... however much it hurts".

Dick's relationship with a variety of illegal or habit-forming drugs is well known. Many of his novels feature or resemble drug trips, most notably The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch (1965). In real life he was a regular user of amphetamines, and his earlier use of drugs had resulted in permanent pancreatic damage, quite likely contributing to his death. As Dick says in an Author's Note at the back of A Scanner Darkly (1977), "Drug misuse is not a disease, it is a decision, like the decision to step out in front of a moving car."

Valis and The Divine Invasion, both published in 1981, showed Dick becoming increasingly prophetic. It is both tragic and ironic that he was taken from us at this time. His death comes to me personally as a cruel blow. He still had much to say, doubtless of great importance. He was often belittled and underrated in his country of origin, the USA. Let us hope that with his death his books will be more widely appreciated, and that he will reach future generations of readers.

THE DIVINE INVASION by Philip K. Dick, Corgi £1.50, 243 pages

Reviewed by Dave Packwood.

This comes hard on the heels of Dick's quasi-autobiographical Valis. As with all of Dick's novels, the two are linked, but the link is subtle and oblique. True, there is a thematic concern running throughout Dick's works, namely the distortion of objective reality. In Dick's universe each individual inhabits a private domain, an "ideos Kosmos". Uniqueness prevails until another force impinges upon it. Valis dealt specifically with this, being a revelatory agent, political, religious or psychological by nature, which could manipulate the lives of others. The Divine Invasion retains this theme but transposes it to a quasi-biblical frame of reference. Young Manny is conceived in the womb of Rybys Rommey on the planet CY30-CY30B by the will of God. A mysterious voice in Herb Asher's tape system tells him that Rybys needs help. So the nativity according to Dick begins. The Divine Invasion is arguably Dick's most metaphysical novel, both wacky and profound. If you read your SF for ideas, buy this.

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## BOOK REVIEWS

DRAGONQUEST by Anne McCaffrey, Corgi £1.75, 304 pages plus Dragondex

Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

Next month's newsletter should contain a review of Anne McCaffrey's brand new novel, The Crystal Singer. Until then here's a new edition of Dragonquest from Corgi, who've recently acquired the British paperback rights to it. It's beautifully packaged. Also it happens to be my personal favourite among Anne McCaffrey's novels. The second book set on Pern, it's a fast-moving and very adult (what do those male dragonriders do while their dragons are mating?) adventure. Buy it.

BEYOND THE BLUE EVENT HORIZON by Frederik Pohl, Futura £1.95, 327 pages

Reviewed by John Farr.

Defying the unwritten rule that sequels must be worse than the original novels which precede them, this continues the story of Man's use of the advanced technology developed by the alien (and now absent) Heechee---a story begun in Gateway. Gateway won both a Hugo and a Nebula (undeservedly in my opinion) while Beyond the Blue Event Horizon, which is clearly a better novel, didn't win anything. Not that Beyond the Blue Event Horizon is the sequel one would expect; it doesn't pick up the loose plot threads of Gateway, it doesn't explain very much more about the enigmatic Heechee, and it features the sorry protagonist of Gateway in a new role, that of hero. Beyond the Blue Event Horizon is an original and exciting re-arrangement of aliens-and-spaceships plot elements, well planned and well told. This is very good SF, confirming Pohl as one of the top half dozen SF writers of today.

SEARCH FOR THE SUN! (172 pages), THE LOST WORLDS OF CRONUS (170 pages),

both by Colin Kapp, NEL £1.25 each

Reviewed by Malcolm Thorpe.

A major new series featuring not one, but several concentric Dyson Spheres, all with ball-bearing-like "cageworlds" studding the equators. The vast Solarian system is controlled by an autonomous computer named Zeus, which extends out through force field spokes between the shells. In Search for the Sun! a mysterious benefactor hires a team of explorers---a master assassin, a temptress who can kill with electric shocks, and a hologram projectionist. They start from the Mars Shell, and journey via the Cageworlds through the Earth Shell to the Venus Shell. The journey is full of drama, especially when they discover that Zeus is opposed to their mission. On Venus, they find a massive mutation farm, and are forced to play "chicken" with Zeus for the right to shape Man's future. The Lost Worlds of Cronus starts when an anomaly in the outer Shells is discovered, and the search team is sent to investigate. They pass the Asteroid Shell, find the Jupiter Shell horribly over-populated, and pass on to the enigmatic Bosca Shell. Zeus opposes this mission also, and traps our heroes on an apparently lifeless Shell with no luminaries. Underground, however, a Zeus-mutated species of human is thriving. This mutation is more economical of energy than present man, who is threatened with extinction unless our intrepid team return to foil the computer's plan. Everything here is on a huge scale with vast numbers of people, so much so that it seems unreal. If meant to emphasise population pressure, it fails, because the mechanism used to form the Shells is not made clear. The engineering has been handled creditably, though, inevitably, some compromises have been made. The heroes are well-chosen, with good characterisation, and the stories are packed with drama. Altogether, an enjoyable and mind-boggling space opera.

CAPELLA'S GOLDEN EYES by Christopher Evans, Granada £1.50, 220 pages

Reviewed by John Farr.

Here's a promising first novel by a young British author. The different customs which have arisen among human colonists on an alien world are fascinatingly portrayed through the eyes of a youth maturing into adulthood. The characters and background are firmly established, but not enough plot use is made of them, and the second half of the book is a little disappointing. Aliens and spaceships are included, though these are merely incidental. Worth trying.

BROTHERS OF THE HEAD by Brian Aldiss, Granada £1.25, 156 pages

Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

In telling the marginally futuristic story of physical freaks who are exploited by the pop music industry, Aldiss employs first person narrations by several of the participants. This approach illuminates the different ways in which people perceive the same thing, and the hypocrisy which governs their choice of what to omit. Although the subject matter is sometimes outrageous and horrific, its impact has been diminished by the subsequent rise of punk rock, whose practitioners seem to be far nastier and less musical than Aldiss could have imagined. Even so, it's an impressive mixture of horror and humour. Because Brothers of the Head is only a short novel this reissued volume includes "Where the Lines Converge", an intriguing novelette which resembles Report on Probability A.

GRIMUS by Salman Rushdie, Granada £1.95, 271 pages

Reviewed by Anne Gay.

Before pickling India in Midnight's Children, Salman Rushdie embalmed various myths of immortality in Grimus. Flapping Eagle, accursed and out-cast from birth, depends on his sister Bird-Dog for everything. They are both given immortality, whereupon she follows the giver and Flapping Eagle spends centuries searching for her. At last on Calf Island, where the will of the people is everything---almost---he discovers where she is. His struggle for her freedom is earth-shaking. Among many other themes, Rushdie explores society, consciousness and predestination, not to mention the nature of the Universe. Richly atmospheric, fascinating and rampant with symbolism, Grimus holds many surprises. But the reader must pay for the gift of ideas; you probably need a degree in mythology to make the best of this.

THE KING OF ELFLAND'S DAUGHTER by Lord Dunsany, Unwin £2.50, 182 pages

Reviewed by John Farr.

First published in 1924, this is an extremely important fantasy novel because of its influence upon later writers such as Robert E. Howard, Fritz Leiber, L. Sprague de Camp and even J.R.R. Tolkien. Both the plot elements (royalty, elves, trolls, unicorns, magic, unknown lands) and the uniquely mannered style have been extensively copied and built upon to form the present-day sub-genre of heroic fantasy. Generally Dunsany's stories, characteristically brief, were of a higher quality than his novels, but The King of Elfland's Daughter is an exception to that rule and is worth reading.

THE GUNS OF AVALON (203 pages), SIGN OF THE UNICORN (186 pages) both by Roger Zelazny, Sphere £1.50 each

Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

If you're a Zelazny fan you'll know that these are volumes 2 and 3 of his five Amber books. If you're not a Zelazny fan you're missing a treat. Within an exciting fantasy frame-work a large group of brothers and sisters (highly talented, long lived, able to control worlds) fight each other for personal power. The Guns of Avalon shows the narrator, Corwin, organising an assault on the family home of Amber. Sign of the Unicorn is the volume in which all the siblings show themselves and declare their alliances. There's plenty of action and good descriptive writing. I recommend the whole series.

DEEP SPACE PROCESSIONAL by R. Snowdon Ficks & Roger Beaumont, Hale £6.25, 190 pages

Reviewed by Peter Day.

By the 25th century the Second British Empire rules half the galaxy. In a sealed crypt aboard HMS Gloriana Manoeuvre Admiral the Viscount Northumberland lies in crypto-biosis, to be revived only during times of crisis. Now he must defend Earth against attack from the slimy aliens of the Vronovian Empire. Amid a welter of noble titles, double-barrelled names and fatuous dialogue this outpouring of naive, confused notions progresses towards its anticlimax with the sure sense of direction of a drunken stevedore. Characterisation is non-existent and the aliens never pose a real threat, not even with the Archbishop of Canterbury on their side. By no means a good book, yet I hesitate to dignify it by categorising it as bad. It's merely silly.

BROTHERS OF EARTH by C.J. Cherryh, Futura 80 pence, 254 pages

Reviewed by Margaret Thorpe.

This is totally different from Gate of Ivrel, her first novel, although the alien culture does bear several similarities to her Faded Sun trilogy. Ms. Cherryh always depicts her aliens with conviction, although her human characters tend to be a little stereotyped, often diametrically opposed to one another. Brothers of Earth is no exception. Also, as typical in a Cherryh novel, the story is complex, involving four different cultures; two opposing human and two alien. The feudal-style alien cultures are involved in a civil war, which is used as a background to show that the humans, whatever their differences, have a high standard of honour to uphold. It's a highly entertaining novel.

GHOST STORY by Peter Straub, Futura £1.95, 507 pages

Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

Milburn is an ordinary enough small town in present-day New York state. Over a harsh autumn and winter it becomes the scene of ever-more-frequent, ever-more-horrible atrocities as a terrible revenge is taken against its inhabitants. That précis sounds crude and unsubtle; Ghost Story is far better than that, far more than just another horror novel. It delves deeply into its characters' lives and backgrounds and innermost feelings. Straub is a more literary writer than Stephen King, being more conscious of atmosphere and style. Although Straub builds up slowly he alternates present and past and varies the point of view with such skill that the novel is totally absorbing, its events terrifyingly believable. It's an experience not to be missed (unless you have a weak heart). This reprint has been issued to coincide with the film version. Strongly recommended.

HEX by Robert Curry Ford, Sphere £1.50, 288 pages

Reviewed by Pauline E. Morgan.

Not the book of the excellent 70s horror film, this is a thriller with a supernatural bent. Someone has put a hex on five people; they will all die unless the dashing doctor hero (who knows all about these things) can find the dastardly villain. The peaks are the witchcraft at beginning and end; the plateau between is sprinkled with unnecessary lust. As sensational horror it fails, as a thriller... Fredric Brown could have done better with his eyes closed.

SPACE OPERA by Jack Vance, Coronet £1.25, 168 pages

Reviewed by Anne Gay.

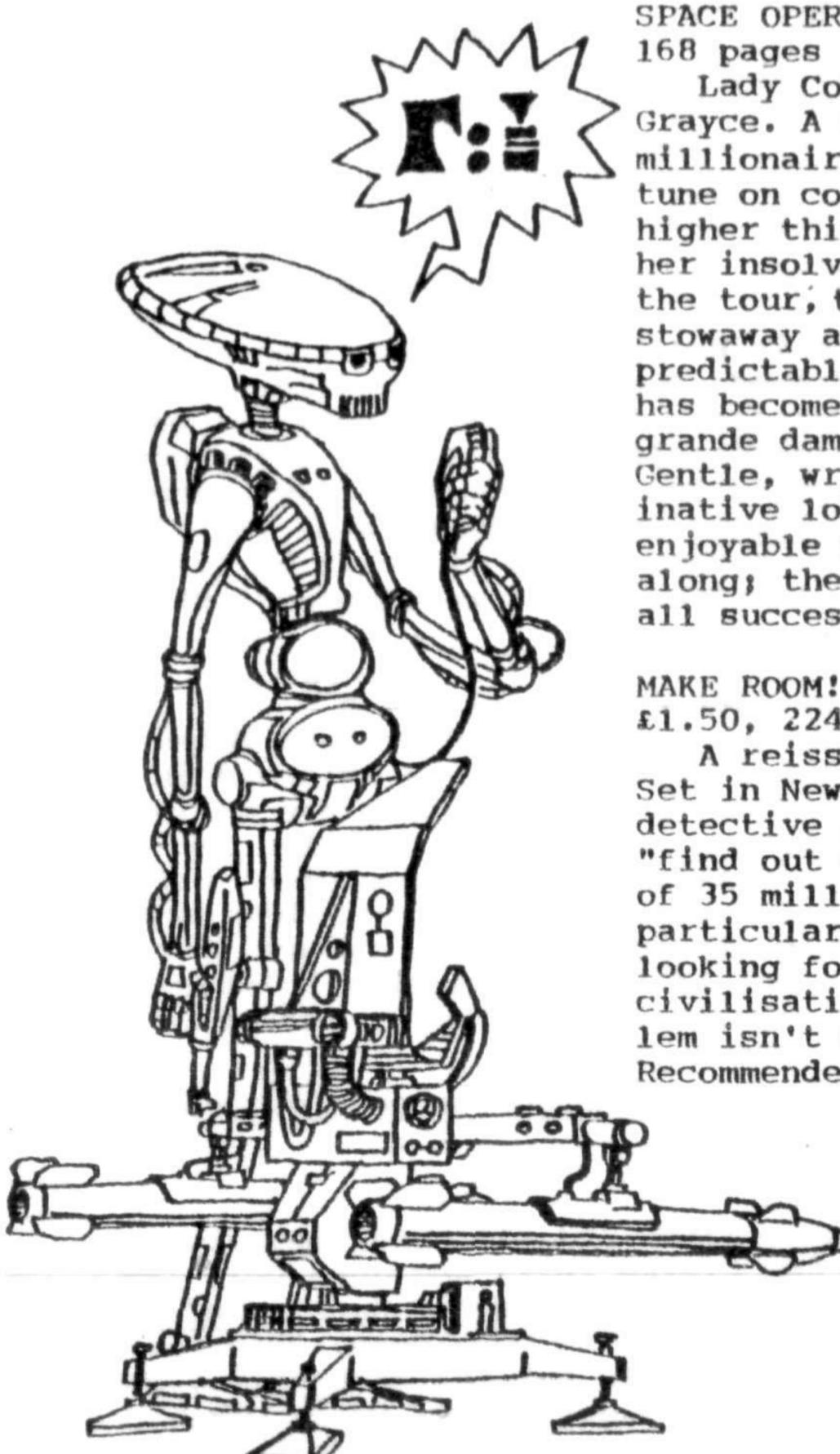
Lady Constance had nothing on Dame Isabel Grayce. A culture vulture and an eccentric millionaire, she decides to squander her fortune on converting poor benighted aliens to higher things---viz.: classical opera---much to her insolvent nephew Roger's chagrin. During the tour, temperamental artistes, a beautiful stowaway and alien audiences interreact in unpredictable ways, until the unlikeable Roger has become a resourceful hero, to whom the grande dame has reluctantly to be grateful. Gentle, wry humour and hearty tastes of imaginative local colour make this a pleasant, enjoyable read. Space Opera improves as it goes along; the twists in the tail crown its overall success.

MAKE ROOM! MAKE ROOM! by Harry Harrison, Penguin £1.50, 224 pages

Reviewed by Chris Suslowicz.

A reissued novel by one of our presidents. Set in New York in 1999 A.D., it's the story of detective Andy Rusch, and his assignment, to "find out who killed Mike Grady". But, in a city of 35 million people, how do you find one particular person even if you know who you're looking for? It's a frightening look at how civilisation might end if the population problem isn't solved---and solved soon.

Recommended.



VOTE  
 ROG PEYTON  
 FOR TAFF  
 (Voting deadline: April 17th)

